

***COUNTRY REPORTS***

***FABC 50 GENERAL CONFERENCE***

Compiled by the FABC Central Secretariat

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# **I. CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE OF TIMOR LESTE (CET)**

## **Conferencia Episcopal Timorensis**

This report will be divided in three parts: firstly, a general introduction and description on Timor Leste. Secondly, a description of each Diocese which is a member of Conferencia Episcopal Timorensis; and the last, thirdly, the analysis of the situation and some proposals following the proposal from the commission.

### **1. A GENERAL DESCRIPTION ON TIMOR-LESTE**

The island of Timor, one of the islands of the Sunda Archipelago, in Southeast Asia, is currently divided into two parts: the western part belongs to Indonesia, a heritage of Dutch colonization and the eastern part belonged to Portugal, now known as East Timor. Former Portuguese colony from 1515 to 1975, occupied by Indonesia from 1975 to 1999. On 30 August 1999, East Timor gained its independence through a referendum under UN auspices. Territory with a surface of 14,954.44km<sup>2</sup>, including 2 small islands called Ataúro, Jaco and a small enclave, known as the Oe-Cusse enclave in Indonesian territory.

With a population currently of 1,261,470 inhabitants, 97% of them Catholics, the population is composed of 11 ethno-linguistic groups, speaking an almost common language, and 33 dialects. It has two official languages, Portuguese as the language of administration and the local language Tetum as the working language, especially given the proximity of Australia and Indonesia, since East Timor is located precisely between these two enormous neighbours. The most spoken language is Tetum (22%), followed by Mambae (20%), Makasai (13%), Búnak (7%) and less than 5% Baiqueno, Kêmak, Fataluku, and Todede, Uaimua, Tetum-teric and Galolen. Between 1961 and 1975, Mambae was spoken by almost 30% of the population.

The other religious denominations present in the country are divided between Muslims, Protestants, Hindus and Buddhists.

Timor-Leste today lives under a parliamentary democracy regime, operating with all sovereign organs independent of each other. Learning to live democratically took its toll, but today Timor-Leste is at peace. Small country, with immense possibilities, with a sub-soil very rich in oil and other minerals such as gold, silver, manganese, marble, etc., but it struggles

at this moment with the lack of personnel that can manage the Nation's destinies well.

The official currency is the US dollar while the possibility of using a national currency is being studied.

Young population, very young, with a national average of 18 years. It is Timor-Leste's greatest wealth and could also be the greatest danger to the Nation. With an education rate of around 58%, Timor-Leste struggles, however, with the lack of employment, which causes an exodus of the young population to countries such as South Korea, Indonesia, Portugal, Australia, Ireland, England, etc. On the one hand, it is a benefit on several levels, but on the other hand it also involves many risks of various kinds.

The relationship between the Church and the State of East Timor can be said to be very good. In addition to the institutional recognition of the existence of the Catholic Church, which is enshrined in the preamble of the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of East Timor-RDTL. On August 14, 2015, the "Concordata" (Agreement) between the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste and the Holy See was signed and ratified by the National Parliament through National Parliament Resolution No. 18/2015.

In implementing the Agreement, each fiscal year the Government of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste grants the Catholic Church, according to its financial availability, an annual financial contribution for its educational (50%) and social activities (25%) and for purposes of ecclesial government (25%). The amount and modalities of this concession are regulated by specific agreements between the Government of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste and the Timorese Episcopal Conference.

## **2. THE PROFILE OF THE DIOCESES OF THE CONFERENCIA EPISCOPAL TIMORENSE**

The Conference of Bishops of Timor-Leste is consisting of three dioceses, namely Archdiocese of Dili, with two suffragans: Diocese of Baucau and Diocese of Maliana.

### **2.1. ARCHDIOCESE OF DILI: ARCHBISHOP VIRIGILIO DO CARMO DA SILVA, SDB**

The Archdiocese of Dili is an ecclesiastical constituency of the Catholic Church located in Dili, East Timor, with area 4,755km<sup>2</sup> and its populations are 617,898 habitants with 94% Catholics. The Cathedral of

Archdiocese of Dili is the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. It has 30 parishes and 2 quasi-parishes.

It is the oldest Diocese of Timor-Leste, was erected on September 4th, 1940 by Pope Pius XII's *Bulla Papa Sallemnibus Conventionibus*, embracing the entire territory of then Timor Portuguese. Before the erection, it was as territorio that included in a Catholic Vicariate supervised by the Diocese of Macau. On January 1st, 1976, by virtue of Pope Paul VI's *Bulla Ad nominum*, it became a diocese that subject to the Holy See. On November 30th, 1996, Pope John Paul II erected Diocese of Baucau, and on January 30th, 2010, followed the erection of Diocese of Maliana by Pope Benedict XVI. On September 11, 2019, Pope Francis elevated the Diocese to the Metropolitan Archdiocese, receiving the Diocese of Baucau and Malaian as suffragans.

The Archdiocese of Dili is served by an archbishop, 75 diocesan priests and 88 religious priests that consisting of a number of religious order and congregations, such as: OP (4), OFM (10), OFM Conv (2) and O Carm (7), SVD (15), CMF (4), SDB (22), FdCC (5), SJ (14), and BKM (3). There are also 32 persons from male religious who are not priest serving in the area of the Archdiocese of Dili. Beside male religious order and congregations, there are also 47 female congregations that serve the people of God in the same Archdiocese. Total of the members of 47 female congregations in Timor-Leste is 144 that consist of 137 sisters with pontifical statute and 7 sisters with diocesan statute.

There is a good relationship and collaboration between hierarchy, pastors and lay. It appears in the role of catechist who are more than religious and priest. They play an extraordinary role in the new-evangelization. The Archdiocese itself has 955 catechists who are 305 permanent catechists and 650 volunteer catechists.

The Archdiocese of Dili is located on the north coast and has six municipalities, which are: Aileu, Ainaro, Dili, Ermera, Oe-cusse and Same. The populations speak several languages or dialects, which are: Tetum, Mambae, Tetum-teric, Baequeno, Bunak, Kemak, Lakalei, Isni, and Adabe.

Regarding to the growth of the faithful, there is a significant addition of Catholics from 2015 to late 2019, with totaled 57,732 who were baptized. Even though, there are also some other Christian denominations with a significant percentage up. In 2015 there were 18,268 persons increase to 25,390 persons in 2019. These churches and sects that exist in the territory

of the Archdiocese of Dili have been growing in numbers due to immigrants from abroad, namely who are doing business and work as non-governmental organizations' staffs. These churches are: Assembly of God, Pentecostal churches and the sects are: Jehovah, Christian Vision and others. There are still some "pagan Christian" syncretistic groups; that most are linked to Timorese culture.

There are also some non-Christian Religious Confessions, such as: Islam (1,870 people), Buddhist (447 people), Hindu (230 people), animists (3201 people), and others (1365 people). These group are only small percentage. The existence of these religions because of are traders are coming from Indonesia, China, Thailand, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and etc. In the beginning they come for trading, business, but step by step they also bring their own cultural and religious identities. Some of these married an East Timorese and therefore obtained a permanent stay and temporary residence in the territory of Timor.

Besides those groups the mentioned above, there are some Timorese who still practicing the traditional faith, like animism and dynamism. This is also a challenge to Catholic Church because it is danger of being syncretistic.

## **2.2. DIOCESE OF BAUCAU: BISHOP BASILIO DO NASCIMENTO**

The Diocese of Baucau, canonically erected on November 30, 1996, by the Bull *Quo Ipsius* of the Holy Pope John Paul II. It has an area of 6,987.40 km<sup>2</sup>, and a population at the height of 336,302 inhabitants. It currently has 393,359 inhabitants, (this population corresponds to 31.7% of the total population of Timor-Leste. From the total of populations, there are 390,634 Catholics who spread over 22 parishes.

The Diocese of Baucau is the second diocese established in 1996 with the first bishop is Dom Basilio do Nascimento. The populations speak Makasai and Uaimua (Baucau), Fataluku (Losplaos), Galole (Manatuto), Tetum Terik (Viqueque and Barique) and Nauti (Viqueque Uatocarbau). But there are some small tribes have their own lokal language like Idate , Makalero, and Habu.

This Diocese is served by a diocesan bishop, 43 diocesan priests and 38 religious priests. Apart from priests, both diocesan priests and religious priests, there are also a number of 30 male members of the congregation for cons crated life and 184 members of the female congregations. Apart from priests, religious who serve in the diocese, there are also catechist who play

an extraordinary role in preparing simple evangelization through catechesis. In that context, the Diocese of Baucau has 516 catechists.

In this context, there is a significant progress of Catholics grows in this diocese. Only in a year, 2020, there are 5.418 new Catholics who were baptized. Even though, there are also a number of Christian sects and other religions, such as the following: around 1,134 non-Catholic Christians and 1,287 followers of other religions (Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and animism).

The fundamental point that deserves appreciation is that the important role of catechists is truly extraordinary. It can be seen from the number of catechists in this diocese of about 516 people when compared to the number of priests and religious who serve there. This shows that the role for the laity that cannot be underestimated.

### **2.3. DIOCESE OF MALIANA: BISHOP NORBERTO DO AMARAL**

The Diocese of Maliana is one of the dioceses of the local Church in Timor-leste that was erected on January 30, 2010. It is located in the western part of Timor-leste, along the border area between East Timor and Indonesia. It accumulates three Municipalities, such are: Bobonaro, Liquiça and Suai Covalima.

The diocese, with area of 3,141Km<sup>2</sup> has population 277,515 habitants with 272,664 Catholics (last data 2019). The populations speak several languages or dialects, which are: Tetum terik (28.434 speakers), Bunak (55.839 speakers), Kemak (46.582 speakers), Tocodeden (45.957 speakers), Bekais (3.954 speakers) and Mambae (13.436 speakers). But the predominant ethnolinguistic groups are: Kemak, Bunak and Tocodeden.

During 5 years, from 2015-2019, there are 31,449 new Catholics who have been baptized. This shows a good growth of Catholics in this diocese. Although Catholic is the majority, there are also some Christian denominations that show a growing number of members, especially the Evangelical Protestant Church and other sects with total number of these denominations is 14,036 (last data December 2019). The members are, mostly, those who are doing business and NGO's staffs. These Church denominations are: Assembly of God, Baptist Church, Pentecostal Church and others. There also some sects: Jehovah, Christian Vision, and some sects of Christian confessions of Timorese origin. There are also some local groups that we call sects, which are Christians but have fallen away from

communion with the Catholic Church. There are still some “Christian-Pagan” syncretistic groups; which most are linked to Timorese culture.

There are some non-Christian Religious Confessions too, such as: Moslems (247 people), Buddhist (50 people), Hinduists (7 people), animists or traditional religion (3594 people). These groups are only small percentage. Almost of them come from outside like Indonesia, China, Thailand and India. All of them are businessmen and NGO’s staff.

Diocese of Maliana is served by one diocesan bishop, 24 diocesan priests and 25 religious priests, consisting of SVD (10), CMF (8), O Carm (3), SDB (2), OFM Cap (20) and SJ (3). There are also some lay brothers of some religious congregation who serve in the same diocese: SVD (3), O Carm (1) and Missionaries of the Poor (4). They collaborate in pastoral and social services in the parishes where their houses of formation and mission are located. There is a big number of female religious community who are in pastoral and serve in this diocese. There are 144 sisters. Among them, 137 of them has pontifical right and 7 has the diocesan right.

Beside priests, religious who serve in the Diocese of Malian, there is also a good collaboration between bishop, pastors and lay person, here is catechist who play an extraordinary role in preparing simple evangelization through catechesis. And the Diocese of Maliana itself has 295 catechists of which 103 permanent catechists, 183 volunteer catechists and already reform 9 catechist.

### 3. THE SITUATIONS

#### 3.1. SITUATION

##### a) *Social*

- Timor-Leste already restored its independence for 22 years, but still struggling to solve the social problems that plague the country. The first, is how to eradicate poverty which is still a major social problem as it is stated in the Preamble of the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Timor Leste. This problem become crucial in this pandemic period, that is, exist a big gap between rich and poor. This condition triggers the spirit of individualism, egoism and indifference that is globalized (Pope Francis, Apot. Exort. *Evangelii Gaudium*, n.). The other is seen as unimportant and useless.

- Second, there is also a gap that separates the leaders or government from the people. The people are only as shields or steppingstones to reach

power. It does mean that are only a political commodity whose existence becomes instrumentalized for the interests of some politician and political party. They are important at any time when there is a need, but if they are not needed, they will be discarded or ignored. In this case, people are only medium to reach the goal, that is, their dream of power and positions. Thus, the promised during the time of campaign is only a political propaganda that is not profitable for the people.

- Pope Francis also in his call to fight and stop the covid-19 virus. According to Pope, there is a big virus that is bigger than the current one, that we have to settle. It is inequality or social injustice is more danger that is shown by the economy that will be controlled by a few people who “has” more than the rest of mankind. The Pope addressed this in his catechesis in General Audience on Healing the World on August 19, 2020 ([www.vaticannews.com](http://www.vaticannews.com)).

- Third, it is necessary to solve the problem of ethnic conflicts which are remnants of past conflicts. Thus, it is necessary to foster reconciliation at the grassroots level and also at the top level, that is, at the level of the country’s historical leaders.

- Another horizontal conflict that requires a lot of attention is the tension between martial arts groups that involve many young people. The existence of these uncontrolled groups can threaten social stability and are often used for political ends by certain political parties.

- Fourth, urban culture that began to permeate the city. There is a massive exodus from villages to cities in search for a better life, to earn money for improving their lives by setting up small businesses such as kiosks in the capital. However, they has left behind the agricultural life in the villages. This urbanization also has impact on ecological problems in the capital, especially flooding; beside that, full of people also makes the capital become crowded and populous.

#### *b) Economic*

- Covid-19 has had a tremendous impact. This small virus not only kills human being but also makes all aspects of life come to a standstill; all activities become completely paralyzed. When each government in world decided to enforce their citizens to stay at home, the lockdown has an impact on social life and also the survival of families, specially, those who have been depending on the income of odd jobs have to lose their



livelihoods. They can't do anything else. Indeed, the government provides subsidies for its citizens, but it is not enough.

- The government does have a good planned strategy but it seems that there is still a lack of good and holistic development in various sector. There should be recognized that our economic life isn't increase. The increase of immigrant worker cause another problem to the existence of Timorese worker. Therefore, in order to improve their lives, many young people and some families decide to go abroad as immigrant workers. Economically, there is another injustice decision from the government to the lesser-people. The Timorese cannot compete with the strangers because does not have good facility.

- Timor-Leste dependent on oil production which has made other sectors neglected or abandoned. In fact, for now, a comprehensive, well-planned and organized development plan is needed and is more comprehensive and more holistic. During this pandemic period, many Timorese have experienced the most negative impacts, especially small or street vendors and public transport drivers whose livelihoods depend on how they run the transport to get \$ 0,50.

- Timor-Leste has a wide and a very rich sea but no yet professional person who can treat and produce it for the life of many people. The practice so far depends on the traditional fishing model. Therefore, continuous assistance, formation and training are needed so that people or small communities are able to stand on their own feet and abilities to fulfill their lives.

- The presence of traders from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and China can affect human interaction with one another. They don't come only for business purpose, but also bring with them cultural and religious identities. This is also a new challenge for Catholic Church in Timor Leste, as pastor, to keep his flocks from the strangers (cf. Jo, 10,1-10). these are all consequences of democracy and free markets.

- The unemployment rate is very high. To be honest, yes. The politic to build a creative economy based on National Strategic Development Plan has not yet been implemented. People are not well-prepared, well-educated or formatted to enter to the field of work, industry because of lack of experience and skills. The consequence of lack of field of work cause pessimism in the heart of young people for their own future. Because, if young people are not taken care of, are well organized, of course this

becomes an obstacle to social stability, which is mostly caused by teenage brawls, buying and selling and the use of illegal drugs, violence against other young people, bullying, sexual harassment and so on.

- This situation challenges the Church to really think about her vocation to be with those who suffer, sick, homeless, poor and the needy. This is the concretization of the option for the poor; to be man or woman for others.

### *c) Politic*

- Timor Leste is still in process to mature its democracy and political life. Certainly, this is not easy and cost a lot. As we have seen during these five years. There is unstable political situation since 2017 up to recent time. A small nation, the population is only 1,2 million, has adopted a multi-party system. This is a good sign for the development of a more advanced modern democracy. However, it is also a danger of remaining crushed. There are some fundamental reasons: lack of political education for political leaders, politician from parties and also the people, the legal voters. People choose a representative not because of his program is good or the track record is good but more based on a certain sentimentality towards the chosen figure, not because the program is good or the track record is good. There are no rational voters yet. Therefore, that is what causes the emergence of black campaigns and the spread of hoaxes both on social media, mainstream media and during public debates.

- It appears that the politicians, some government members have less concern for the national interest than the interests of the party. In other words, there is a lack of sense of belonging. Inevitably that the corruption, collusion and nepotism are rampant. This spirit then destroys the government system and makes it unable to concretize its program of development as it was plan need, that is, to free the people from poverty, educate the people's lives and bring prosperity to the nation and state.

### *d) Religious Situation*

- As we have seen, the majority of Timorese are Catholics. But there are also some denomination Christian Protestants, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, etc; there are some other religions who arrived after Timor Leste got its independence. The government itself does not have or create yet a law that can regulate the entry of others new religions to this country. In the end, the government itself was overwhelmed. There is also a tendency where traditional seity groups, religions and cultures, certain martial arts

are transformed into political parties. This is dangerous for the rational and progressive development of democracy.

- There are two important beliefs in Timorese life in relation to culture: first, respect for the traditional house. That the traditional house is sacred and therefore possesses magical powers that, if they do not carry out the orders given by the elders, will cause a danger to human life. Second, excessive belief and respect for the spirits of the dead. A common phenomenon that occurs in Timor-Leste is that people are more afraid of the spirits or souls of their ancestors than of God. People can choose not to participate in the Sunday Eucharist; but be afraid to perform the offering rite to honor the spirits of your ancestors. Therefore, the celebration of the Feast of Spirits on November 2nd has more people than the celebration of the Feast of Souls on November 1st.

- Freedom. This freedom influence very much young Timorese people. Freedom is actually a gift that is only given by God to human being with the aim that human being can choose between good and right. This freedom is also guaranteed by the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Timor Leste. But sometimes it is understood as an arbitrary free will; free for doing everything; for example, freely to use illegal drugs, to kill other person, or to destroy the things of others, and so on. This shows that there is immaturity of the Timorese to accept it and practice it in life. Like something that comes suddenly without adequate preparation. This is reaffirmed by the situation of having just been released or out of oppression.

#### *e) Cultural*

- Dowry customs (Berlaque in Tetum). There are many young people who well-not prepared for their marriage properly. This is caused by dowry customs that as a barrier for them to receive the sacrament of marriage. In addition, there is also a permissive cultural model, namely a culture that allows couples to live together before the sacrament of marriage (concubinatus). This is a challenge for Catholic marriage preparation courses.

- Barriers to sacramental marriage also occur because of cultural lines, namely patrilineal and matrilineal cultures. The discussion about the two is very related to the belis mentioned above.

- There are also cultural celebrations, especially the inauguration of traditional houses which usually cost a lot of money. Nevertheless, this was an opportunity to present oneself despite being poor. The problem is that

people are concerned with the traditional ritual celebration than for preparing good education for the future of their children in the family. There is money for feast but no money for education.

#### f) *Ecological Challenges*

- Timor-Leste has two seasons, namely summer and rainy season. In recent times the summer is longer than the rainy season. This condition causes drought everywhere; especially the soil conditions that are difficult to store water. A new problem arose because of limited water sources, there was a struggle for water and there were claims of water privatization from parties, especially certain cultural elders and even worse was the involvement of a number of water companies who tried to label it by making it their own company. This requires the government to intervene, especially in order to make strong laws that can regulate this so that there is no competition or killing each other due to lack of water.

- On the other hand, even though the dry season is so long, there is still a traditional paradigm or logic in society, namely that by burning the forest, it will grow new shoots of life that can be used for domesticated animals.

- Pope Francis has re-awakened our awareness or conscience, both believers and non-believers who have good will on the problem of the ecological crisis of our beloved planet through two important documents, namely the encyclical letter *Laudato Si'* and the Appeal to the beloved Sister Amazonia. In these two documents the Pope reminds us of these words, that are: "cure and take care" for the common house. He reminds us that Amazon is the green heart of our world. As in the chapter III of *Laudato Si'* the Pope describes some main problems that caused the dominance of the absolute anthropocentrism paradigm.

- According to him, the human activities which are dominated by globalized individualism, egoism and indifference are the causes of environmental crisis and damage. These spirits are seen in the practice of illegal logging (economic interests), urbanization and development projects that do not consider the environmental impacts. This causes rain and floods which have destructed houses, bridges, streets and public infrastructure. The government itself does not yet have an integrated program in order to seek socialization and awareness to all parties and everyone (LS, 214 & 232).

## 4. ANALYSIS

### 4.1. CHURCH RESPONSE

a) The process of building people's awareness and formation through homily, seminars, pastoral catechesis, ecumenism and interfaith dialogue. There is a necessary to socialize *Laudato Si'* to all faithful, to institutions, universities and schools, and those who have good will to save our common house, our mother planet. We need an ecological conversion (LS 216-221).

b) The Church gives her attention for the good governance with justice and love through pastoral letter from the Conference of Bishops of Timor Leste. The pastoral letter also dedicate to society and to the people of God. So, there is a necessity to socialize the Catholic Social Teaching relatively to the items that we have seen.

c) Social-charity: Helping to reconstruct people's house, especially those who suffered from natural disaster like flooding, etc. Build a new Credit Union – small cooperation, through Caritas of the Diocese; as a sign of solidarity with the poor. The Church not only has options for the poor but the Church herself must be poor and live among the poor.

d) Politic: There is necessary to make a formation for political leaders through Jornada da Paz; Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (LS 214, 228). In relation to ecological issues, the Catholic Church collaborates with government institutions, national and international NGOs to conduct reforestation as an effort to raise public awareness about the importance of having an integral and healthy ecology. The goal is to maintain our common home.

### 4.2. CHALLENGES

#### a) *Internal*

- There is a need for Basic Directions for a common movement as a Catholic Church of Timor Leste. The Church must have a clear program to respond to the signs of the times through real and contextual pastoral action.

- Foster a good cooperation and collaboration between hierarchy and the laity that manifest the Church as a communion of people of God.

- There is a need for continuous formation to train pastoral agents and also to educate the faithful in order that they can understand their faith well. This is needed so that his faith is more mature and mature.

- There concerns that the Catholic Church still is not yet incarnated in culture of Timorese. That's why, there is necessary to help the Timorese "own" the Church. Because there still some says that Catholic Church is an outsider, means that, a stranger that comes from Europe (there is a fear of eurocentrism).

*b) External: Dialogo Fraternidade*

- Immediate concern: Encouraging the Church to plan, to be in process, to evaluate and to achieve the results.

- Strength: The Church is highly respected and loved by the people; still entrusted as a protector; life guide; the mother who embrace all.

- People Faith: The faith of the people is simple but enjoyed and lived through the sacraments: baptism, the Eucharist, and devotions: devotion through the rosary to the Virgin Mary; Sacred Heart of Jesus; Timorese youth Easter cross; the novenas of the saints, and so on.

**4.3. NEW PATHS**

a) A church that has a clear vision, mission, pastoral movement

b) To develop a participatory, involve and transformative, and dialogical model of the Church.

c) A church that is compassionate, in solidarity with suffering people, the small and the poor.

d) For A better Asia: Dialogue with the poor, dialogue with the religions, and dialogue with the culture.

e) There (3) important point need to be done:

- Solidarity and Empowerment of the poor.

- Fraternal and life Dialogue

- Formation and on-going formation for internal Church.



## **II. CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE OF THAILAND (CBCT)**

### **1. SOCIAL REALITIES IN THAILAND**

Thailand is situated in Southeast Asia bordering Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and Malaysia, with the population of 67 million. It has now fully become an old age society. It has been classified as upper middle-income country by World Bank. National income is from 3 major sectors, namely industry and exports (40%), transports and tourism (52%) and agriculture (8%). Since it has only 38.5% of working population, which is not enough for its economic activities, therefore, it is necessary to depend on foreign migrants of about 3-4 million people. It welcomes about 38 million foreign tourists per year. It has quite high household debts at about 80% of its GDP.<sup>i</sup> There is a wide gap between the rich and the poor. With regards to religion, most people are Buddhist (93.5%), followed by Muslim (5.4%) and Christian (1.1%).

#### **1.1 SOCIAL ASPECT**

In Thai social reality, people have longer life expectancy with fewer children. It has the tendency of being urbanized with a high rate of internal migration, resulting in cultural change and diversity caused by the new borderless phenomenon. Being an old age society, more complex threats to human security have emerged. Furthermore, there is an increased generation gap arising from the different values between new and older generations, which partly contributed to the current political conflict (Lert Chusakul 2021). All these factors are a mixture which leads to another significant vulnerability of Thai society, namely social vulnerability, particularly conflict and lack of solidarity<sup>ii</sup>. Because society has high inequality, it might contribute to increasing conflict and distrust in society.

#### **1.2 ECONOMIC ASPECT**

Thailand drives its economy according to the development model of liberal economy and capitalism to achieve economic growth following the theory of free competition. The impact of this model is the income gap between the rich and the poor which is ever-widening. The monopoly of large economic enterprises results in a higher cost of living, rate of unemployment, household debts and migration. Besides, Covid-19 has inflicted deep wounds to Thai economy. An important indication is the vulnerability of Thai household debt, which has become more severe in this

crisis.”

### **1.3 AGRICULTURAL SECTOR AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

The agricultural sector is engaged by more than 20 million Thai people. Most Thai farmers are poor with debts and lack farmland. The Thai agricultural sector is still uncompetitive with no sustainable development.” Global warming has driven climate change which further causes more frequent natural disasters yielding negative impacts on agriculture and food security.

### **1.4 RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL ASPECTS**

The current society is significantly influenced by media through on-line technology, which has challenged religion and culture. New media has strongly influenced the behaviors of people, especially the young generation. Such social situation challenges religious values. It has reduced these values to mere religious rituals that have no dynamics to instill religious and moral values in society. Therefore, religion is challenged to come up with a new direction or vision on more proactive work to effectively and efficiently respond to the challenges faced by religious, moral and ethical values in society.

## **2. ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL REALITIES AND THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES**

In general, Thai society is influenced by the main development discourse which stresses modernization through globalization as a mechanism for spreading capitalism driven by the monopoly of large enterprises. The primary emphasis on material economic development has caused inequality in income caused by the opportunity gap that adversely affects the quality of life of the poorer people.

Globalization facilitates easier communication among people. Nonetheless, the influence of the mainstream discourse still plays a significant role in this changing situation. It commoditizes cultures and way of life that are the roots of the people by collaborating with modern media like TV, Internet and various applications in mobile phones and through marketing mechanisms.<sup>v</sup>

Regarding cultural diversity, Thai society is predominantly Buddhist with the majority professing this belief. Christianity and other regions are only minorities as compared to Buddhist. However, there is still great diversity of ethnicity, local cultures, traditions and way of life that are



attached to traditional values, beliefs and religions. This reality makes Thai society very diverse that is highly “multicultural”. The term “multicultural” in Thai language might refer to two different, but related, English terms, i.e. “cultural diversity” and “multiculturalism”<sup>vi</sup>, which reflects religious values that are still quite influential in Thai society.

Thai society also still experiences conflict resulted from Thai style political, economic, social and cultural factors, which are inseparably interconnected. Political monopoly of power by a particular group leads to concentration of political power with economic and personal vested interest. The consequence of this reality is uneven development and inequality with the unjust distribution of benefits that are perceived by some groups of people. It also results in unequal access to resources, conflict of interest and capital that is driven by unequal distribution of resources as it is concentrated in the hands of a few. As a result, the relationship among various groups is negative which is conducive to distrust in democratic and judicial processes, while media is the mechanism accelerating more serious conflict.<sup>vii</sup>

### *Signs of the Times*

Given the current situation, there are new challenges in various areas arising in Thai society that can be considered the “signs of times” which occur in the time that the Church is moving towards the third millennium, namely the weakening family institution and kinship relations in Thai society, situation of children and youth in the current society influenced by social media through on-line communication, aging society and generation gap.

The situation of “Beyond border” leads to massive migration where more people from Vietnam, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, Philippines, etc. They bring with them more diverse customs and cultures. At the same time, there are more violations and abuses of human dignity and rights.

Nonetheless, Thai society still possesses many good values, which make it peaceful where people can live together amid this diversity. For example, Thai society still respects the elderly, attaches to religious teachings and living guidelines. It still maintains good social customs, traditions and cultures, and tries to pass them on to their children. In particular, when there are different activities, Thai society has shown the phenomenon of sharing and mutual aid, as seen during the peak of Covid-19 pandemic when assistance was given and shared by the better-off to

those in difficulties, as many were seriously affected. This practice is the sharing in cultural and religious diversity according to the Kingdom's values.

### **3. CHURCH RESPONSE**

#### **3.1 WHAT HAS BEEN THE CHURCH'S RESPONSE TO THESE REALITIES?**

Looking at the current realities of Thai society, we found that it focuses on material development and progress. This development model has yielded negative impacts that weaken the way of life, morality and ethics of the people. As a result, they lose attention toward religious and cultural aspects. The Catholic Church is living amidst multiculturalism in the global mainstream<sup>viii</sup> Therefore, it is necessary to renew herself in order to support Thai Catholics to grow with mature faith through genuine living witness toward communion with Christ as the center, and becoming real salt of the earth and light of Christ amidst the society (cf. Mt. 5: 14)<sup>ix</sup>

In A.D. 2015, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Thailand had a unanimous decision to organize a Plenary Council to commemorate an important event of the Council of Ayutthaya held in A.D. 1664, to thank God that the result of this Council helped the Church in Thailand to take root, progress and grow until the present day<sup>x</sup>.

The Decree of the Plenary Council A.D. 2015 has adopted the vision to build the "Community of Disciples of Christ, Living and Proclaiming the Good News" using the parish community or "Christian Community" as the main model of living that focuses on being "community". It has the following essential characteristics: 1) to be a community with Christ as the center by living with the Word and the Eucharist (thanksgiving Holy Mass); 2) living in a community with relationship and communion, sharing faith experiences with one another, sharing responsibility, serving, helping, sharing, showing interest and concern for one another; and 3) living a basic Christian community to carry on Christ's mission in proclaiming the Good News. This means to be the Church of the poor, widely open to all who wish to receive the Good News of Christ.

The Decree of the Plenary Council has essential contents conforming to the "Synodal Church". It supports Catholics to be the people of God called to journey in this world through the guidance of the Holy Spirit who enabled them to share the life of communion with the Holy Trinity, in union with the mystical body of Christ by journeying with Him who is the "Way" and who lives among the people of God, walking together

through synodality in the life and mission of the Church. This is a special way of living and participation of the people of God at every level in a practical term.

## **3.2 HOW HAS THE CHURCH CONTRIBUTED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIETY IN GENERAL?**

### ***3.2.1. Pastoral Care of Parish Community***

The Catholic Church in Thailand supports every Catholic to dedicate him/herself to be a disciple of Christ and missionary disciple by living in communion with Christ as a community that respects human value and dignity, cares for the creation, bears witness in Thai society, and carries on the good way of life and cultures, dialogues with brothers and sisters of other faiths in order to mutually contribute to building the Kingdom of God (Mission: Decree of the Plenary Council).

Therefore, every parish community lives the “parish community life” or “Basic Christian Communities” (Decree: Plenary Council, n. 23), which is the way of the community of faith with the Word and Christ as its center, so that the family will be model of being domestic Church that lives their lives in conformity with their faith expressed by love and charity toward their neighbors through sharing, assistance and visitation.

Each parish community encourages and supports Catholics in the community to join various charismatic groups of various kinds, such as the Legion of Mary, SERRA and different social groups, such as St. Vincent de Paul, the Catholic physician guild, the elderly group, youth group, women’s group, etc. *Laudato Si* encyclical is applied by the community as a direction for the campaign to care for nature and the environment in the community.

Most of the Catholic communities in Thailand are small amongst the people of other faiths. Thus, Catholics should focus on building relationships with brothers and sisters who profess other beliefs through interreligious relationships, such as participation in activities of Buddhist temples, dialogue (religious conversation) with people of other religions, and participation in common social activities to help the poor in their communities. These are strongly recommended.

### ***3.2.2. Catholic education***

The Catholic Church in Thailand gives importance to educational development following the Catholic direction by holding to Catholic educational identity to make the Catholic educational institute the field and

foundation for the proclamation of the Good News. This is done by supporting all its personnel to gain knowledge and understanding of the spirit of Catholic education through integrating the values of the Gospel in their curriculum<sup>xi</sup>.

Currently, there are 367 Catholic educational institutions spreading across the country in all dioceses. The total number of students in all these Catholic educational institutions is 514,645 students (277,300 girls and 257,439 boys). They have a total number of personnel of 33,792 people (26,395 women and 7,948 men).<sup>xii</sup>

The Catholic Church in Thailand has the process of educational management that promotes and develops her educational institutions as Christian moral spaces by offering education with the principle of good and moral governance and giving importance to the campaign on child protection and child safeguarding, as well as facilitating appropriate environment so that these educational institutions will be suitable for formation and nourishment of the Gospel Values, which is the starting point in building the culture of love and evangelization.

Management of Catholic education in Thailand yields good results to Thai society in the aspect of awareness of the value and dignity of the human being according to the values of the Gospel. It aims at supporting its personnel and students to live the spirit of sharing, helping the poor through various activities, such as promoting the spirit of being young missionaries, volunteerism, Lenten campaign in schools, assistance to the poor, the elderly, the sick and people with disabilities in their communities. It also applies the Papal encyclical '*Laudato Si*' in campaigning on the environment in schools and in communities.

Besides, Catholic education also helps children and young people who lack access to education through various Catholic centers run by various religious congregations, such as sisters of St, Paul de Chartre, Lasalle Brothers, Camillians, Salesians of Don Bosco, Marist, etc., which spread all over the country.

### **3.2.3. Social Aspect**

The Catholic Church in Thailand is aware of the value and dignity of human beings with a preferential option for the poor. Hence, the Church focuses on giving a living witness with the mission of love and service in social works, such as the development of quality of life and human dignity, campaign on and promotion of human rights of family, children, women

and special vulnerable groups in Thailand. These include a response with services to new vulnerable groups affected by poverty, such as refugees, migrants, displaced people, ethnic people, homeless people, urban poor, drug addicts, people living with HIV, people living with disabilities, detainees, etc. The Church also raises awareness of the care of the creation which is our common home (cf. Gn. 1; see *Laudato Si*).<sup>xiii</sup>

The social work of the Catholic Church in Thailand is carried out by various desks of the episcopal commission for Social Ministries (Caritas Thailand) under the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Thailand, namely; the Desk for Human and social development, Desk for indigenous Peoples, Desk for Women, Desk for Justice and Peace, Catholic Office for Emergency Relief and Refugees (COERR), Desk for Tourism and Seafarers, and National Catholic Commission for Migrants. All work closely with the network of 11 diocesan social action centers (DISACs-diocesan Caritas), as well as the network of 23 women and men religious congregations engaged in social works in Thailand.

The Episcopal Commission for Social Ministries (Caritas Thailand) has a policy on studying the social teachings of the Church and putting them to practice with the planning at the national level to the diocesan level, including the religious congregations that have pastoral plan on social ministry. The said commission builds network of collaboration between the Church at national and local churches, public and private organizations and NGOs/CSOs. It also supports concrete social activities at the parish level. **Social work is carried out in various dimensions**, namely: **1) providing humanitarian assistance**, such as response to natural disasters by helping the victims, assisting refugees, migrants and migrant workers who are in difficult situations, and so on; **2) social pastoral care**, such as organizing the mobile medical clinic, pastoral care for detainees, assistance to persons living with HIV/AIDS, assistance to victims of human trafficking with referral and legal aid; and **3) Development work and raising social awareness**, such as protection and raising awareness on the issue of human rights, promotion and training of volunteers, capacity building for children, women, the elderly, and small scale farmers through networks of Caritas Thailand at national and diocesan levels, as well as religious congregations engaged in social works, such as assistance to orphans, healthcare, assistance on education for poor children and migrant children.

## **Response of the Catholic Church in Thailand toward the Situation of Covid-19**

Thailand is the first country outside China with a report on Covid-19 infected person found in January 2020. From thereon, we found the pandemic continued until May 2022 with a record of 4.4 million persons infected with Covid-19 confirmed with PCR, and death told of 30,546.

The government, through the Ministry of Public Health, has declared a state of health emergency, and used 2 mechanisms to control the pandemic. The first mechanism is a declaration of the law on emergency giving power to the Cabinet to take all necessary measures to control the pandemic, and the second mechanism is enforcement of the Act on Communicable Diseases B.E. 2558 (2015). The interventions of the government enabled the people infected with Covid-19 to get free diagnosis and treatment. However, when the number of infected people soared up, the government run out of facilities and resources. Migrants and ethnic peoples could not have access to medical care provided by the government.

The Catholic Church in Thailand through Caritas Thailand and diocesan Caritas, with religious congregations and lay people, joined efforts in providing assistance to victims of Covid-19 such as food, the place for quarantine and isolation, visiting and helping victims of Covid and detainees, working with migrants and indigenous peoples, helping unintended pregnant women and victims of human trafficking.

### ***3.2.4. Interreligious and Ecumenical Dialogue***

Christians represent only 1% of the Thai population. Thus, the Catholic Church in Thailand, through the Catholic Commission for Interreligious and Ecumenical Dialogue, aware of the necessity to foster Catholics to live and carry out the mission amidst the diversity in society in terms of religions, traditions and cultures in Thai society<sup>xiv</sup>. The Catholic Church in Thailand does not only transmit the truth and values but must also prepare to receive good elements from people of other faiths, beliefs and cultures without overlooking the good values and way of practices of various religions, traditions and cultures in Thai society, so as to bring the divine blessings of justice and peace to Thai society.<sup>xv</sup>

The local Church and parish community give importance to building relationship with our brothers and sisters of different Christian denominations, people of other faiths and beliefs by taking part in social and community activities so as to build mutual relationships. For example,

we can take part in food offerings to Buddhist monks in schools, take part in important Buddhist events and various local traditional celebrations. We also join hands with them in addressing and responding to social problems, such as care for the environment, and assistance to the poor in the community.

### ***3.2.5. Social Communications***

The advance in communication technologies at present, results in the changing in the way of communication among the people in society. The world has changed from the past, as it reduces the role of traditional media, which was the apparatus of one-way communication, and gives rise to widespread new media (Brunett, R. and Marshal D. p., 2003: 40-41). This is indicated by the total number of Internet users in the world in 2016 at 3.42 billion, or 46.0 %, of the world population, Thailand itself is ranked 20<sup>th</sup> of the world with the highest number of Internet users (We Are Social, 2016). A survey conducted by Electronic Transactions Development Agency finds that Thai people uses Internet at the average of 45 hours per week or about 6.4 hours per day. In particular, children and youth are the groups with maximum usage<sup>xvi</sup>.

The Catholic Church in Thailand is aware that technology and communication is the gift of God, the means for evangelization. Therefore, every sector of the Church should have an interest and understanding of how to use them wisely, especially new media, for pastoral ministry and evangelization<sup>xvii</sup>. In the Decree of the Plenary Council of the Catholic Church in Thailand A.D. 2015 no. 39, it stresses that the Catholic Church in Thailand uses technology and communication for pastoral care and evangelization. It serves as the voice of the Church and her response to the social situation by publicizing messages of the Pope on various occasions as direction in coherent activities implemented to respond to current social situations. It will also be integrated with its activities to reach people through all channels corresponding to the progress of media in the current digital age, so to communicate and disseminate updated news and information of the Church. However, Thai society is highly sensitive to delicate social issues, such as LGBTQ+, different political opinions, which give more challenges to the Catholic Church in Thailand.

Catholic Communication Department creates networks and link with all other diocesan Catholic media, including networks with mainstream mass media and other alternative media, such as various Catholic webpages. This collaboration and networking aim at fostering

common direction in communicating and proclaiming the Good News of the Church effectively. This is done through sharing of resources, operational technics, and information, which foster linkage and networking and mutual support.

The Catholic Communication Department also disseminates teachings of the Church through the publication of Udomsarn Weekly Newspaper and Monthly Udomsarn Journal, as well as through other channels such as YouTube, Facebook, podcast, especially campaign and affirmation of the teachings of the Church on various issues in society. This is done as it is always aware that Catholic Communication is an important apparatus in communicating living witness of the Church accompanying the poor by communicating life story of pastors and Catholics who dedicate themselves to the poor.

#### **4. CHALLENGES - keeping in mind the situation and the church's response**

##### **4.1 CHALLENGES OF THE CHURCH**

Thai society is influenced by mainstream development towards modernization with globalization as the mechanism spreading the capitalist system coming with consumerism, materialism and secularism. This system pushes both urban and rural people, including Christians, to work harder in the current recessive economic situation and Covid-19 pandemic. There is an increase in competition, individualism, exploitation, and destruction of resources and the environment that leaves serious pollution. It also leads to more conflicts, widening the gap between the rich and the poor, while good values and relationships among one another deteriorate.

It is true that globalization enables people to communicate more. However, people in rural areas are also affected by development towards modernization, but can still maintain their community and relationship with one another. They can maintain their values of sharing and mutual aid to a large extent. We also found that when many people were affected by Covid-19 pandemic, other people were still generous that many of them mobilized resources and physical energy to support those in greater hardship. Catholics also live in communities like this.

##### ***a. In the midst of these challenges what are your immediate concerns?***

The Catholic Church in Thailand is facing more challenges in society with structural problems brought by rapid change. It is a society of aging



people with fewer younger generations. At the same time, new media has impacted the way of life more, especially among young people. As a result, the Church is called to restructure herself for effective work on the mission of evangelization with more concrete results. She focuses on teamwork and network building with more systematic management, resource sharing and integration of her operation for maximum benefit in the evangelization. There is an adjustment of methodology to respond to Thai society by using modern technology for better pastoral work. She also aims at the systematic development of lay people to empower them more for the mission.<sup>TM</sup>

Besides, the Church is called to respond to more social problems, such as human trafficking, violence against women and children, migrant, destruction of the environment, food security, etc. She will be conscience of society more with the awareness that the Church is the instrument to build the Kingdom of God in this world based on building justice and peace in the community and society as a whole. To do this, she will focus on her prophetic role with the firm stand that disagrees with various injustices occurring in society.

Hence, the Catholic Church in Thailand is challenged to set up clear and concrete goals for evangelization. She must have short and long-term planning with regular evaluation of her performance.

## **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?**

Amidst the challenges of today's society, the Catholic Church in Thailand, through the Decree of the Plenary Council A.D. 2015, is aware and admits that the "parish community" or "Basic Ecclesial Communities-BEC" is the main way of life aiming at forming "community" or "group" to be the Church in the context of Asia and Thailand following the pattern of the first Christian community of the early Church which lived a life in unity with Christ as the center, followed the words of God with the spirit of love, sharing life and faith experience, and helping one another. (cf. Act 2: 47; 3: 33; 5: 13).<sup>xix</sup>

The direction of the Decree of the Plenary Council A.D. 2015 is, therefore, considered to be in line with the 3 main themes of the Synod on "Synodality: For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission". These three themes are linked to the same cycle and important aspects of the Synodal Church in the Basic Ecclesial Communities.

## **1) COMMUNION**

BEC is the main approach in building communion through encounter, gathering for prayer, reading the Bible, reflecting the Word, sharing faith and life experiences. All these methods support the parish community to be more united. At the same time, it is witness to the life in communion amidst materialism and consumerism mainstream.

## **2) PARTICIPATION**

Jesus promised that “Where there are two or more people gathering together under my name, I will be among them” (Mt. 15: 20). He also let the apostles share in the proclamation of the Kingdom of God by sending them out to find the lost sheep” (Mt.10:6)

BEC is considered to be a sacred space, a space for every Christian in every social and economic situation without discrimination. They can equally take part in community prayer, reflection, opinion sharing, building relationships, care for one another, sharing and mutual aid as well as helping the poor.

It is important that BEC through living in accordance with the Word of God will support all Catholics in the parish community to take part in the common work of the parish council, charismatic groups of lay people, the elderly group, youth group, family group, neighborhood group, professional group, etc., in order to make the parish community a sacred space that people of all ages and sexes could concretely take part in the life of the local Church.

## **3) MISSION OF THE EVANGELISATION**

BEC promotes the mission of evangelization by helping build the culture of love, respect the value and dignity of a human person without discrimination, as the image of God and as brothers and sisters. It promotes, supports and develops the quality of life and rights of our fellow human beings, and takes care of the environment which is God’s creation. The approach of dialogue in every group, by every faith and belief to build good relationships with one another and share life, faith and hope experience will employ the process of scrutiny of the signs of the times, reflection on the Bible to discern the will of God, and planning response to change the world. This is the process employed by the Second Vatican Council.

Besides, the mission of evangelization also includes the prophetic role of all Christians, i.e. denunciation and protest against what is not right,

injustice and conflicts that do not conform to Jesus' great commandments which is: Love God and your neighbours (cf. Mk. 12: 30-31).

<sup>i</sup> 'Household debts: the problem that everyone has to help resolve', Rachot Tangnararachakit and Piraya Ronnaparb, Bank of Thailand, quoted on May 16, 2022

<sup>ii</sup> 'Economic gap and social vulnerability', <https://www.pier.or.th/abridged/2021/16/>

<sup>iii</sup> See 'Scars left in Thailand by Covid-19 crisis', <https://www.pier.or.th/abridged/2021/16/>

<sup>iv</sup> 'Agricultural reform in Thailand'. Dr. Taweesak Thanadechopon, Dr. Viplob Teamsuwan and Mr. Uthaiwut Chamnarnkaew, p. 1

<sup>v</sup> 'Globalisation, Localism and Nostalgia', Rungnapha Yanyongkasemsuk, *Journal on Economics: Eastern Politics*, Vol. 2, Iss. 2, p. 11

<sup>vi</sup> 'Situation of debate on multiculturalism', *Journal on Language and Culture*, Vol. 32, Iss. 1/2556, p. 18.

<sup>vii</sup> 'Conflict and Conflict Management Concepts: Contexts in Thai Society', Punnapong Wongnasri, *Journal of Library Office, Thaksin University*, p. 78-81

<sup>viii</sup> 'Decree of Plenary Council of Catholic Church in Thailand A.D. 2015, Catholic Bishops' Conference of Thailand, p. 10-11

<sup>ix</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 12

<sup>x</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 9

<sup>xi</sup> *op. cit.*, no. 25, p. 30

<sup>xii</sup> *Statistics on students and teachers in Catholic Educational Institutions, 2020*

<sup>xiii</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 26-28, p. 31-33

<sup>xiv</sup> *Op. cit.*, no. 3, p. 11

<sup>xv</sup> *Op. cit.*, no. 29-31, p. 33-34

<sup>xvi</sup> 'Influence of contents in new media on world view of children and youth', Kritsarin Raksakaew and Nuntiya Dounghummes, *Veridian E-Journal, Silpakorn University ISSN 1906 - 3431*, p.154-155

<sup>xvii</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 32-29, p. 35-39 <sup>xviii</sup>*Op. cit.*, No. 39, p. 39

<sup>xix</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 23,

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### III. CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE OF VIETNAM (CBCV)

The 50th anniversary of the establishment of FABC (1970-2020) takes place amidst global struggle against CoVid-19 pandemic.

It is within this abnormal situation that the members of the whole world, from international organizations, political governments, religions to families and individuals, all reveal both strong and weak elements of their

reactions in front of the disaster, and at the same time, are forced to re-examine all factors of human life.

The Catholic Church in Vietnam has quickly detected ‘damaging psychological as well as physical effects and negative consequences on faith life.’ (CBCV’s Letter to the people of God 2021: ‘Live Our Faith In the Time Of Pandemic’). At the same time the Church in Vietnam is conscious of the obligation to adhere and remain united with her sister Churches in Asia throughout all events, particularly on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of FABC, in order to be always convinced and faithful toward the mission of being salt and light to the world. (cf. Mt 5:13-16), no matter ‘whether it is favorable or unfavorable’ (2Tim 4:2)

While studying the Guide Document with its 15 sections, we have developed its contents according to the strong points suggested by His Eminence Cardinal President of FABC into 5 categories: Situation, Analysis, Church Response, Challenges và New Paths.

To keep the report coherent and logical with its related questions, we report it under the following diagram:

**PART I:** Situation, Analysis, Church Response to the prominent problems that require attention

**PART II:** Challenges

**PART III:** New Paths

## **PART I: SITUATION, ANALYSIS, CHURCH RESPONSE TO THE PROMINENT PROBLEMS THAT REQUIRE ATTENTION**

### **1. GLOBAL PANDEMIC**

#### **SITUATION:**

The pandemic spread from late 2019, but only until late April of 2021 with the invasion of Delta variant did it break out. As of late November, 2021, Vietnam has had 1, 340,000 cases of infection and 26,700 cases of death.

The pandemic causes physical and psychological effects on each individual, on the entire society in all its aspects: political, economic, cultural and educational and faith wise. Its most severe and evident victims are farmers and poor workers, especially migrants.

## **ANALYSIS:**

“Since the first case was reported on November 17, 2019 in Hubei province, China until now, there are countless questions about Sars-CoV-2 ... An accident from a lab in Wuhan, a wicked conspiracy ...? While its cause is still under scrutiny, reality shows disastrous consequences, bereavements all over the world. In Vietnam, on March 31, 2021, the government issued Decree 16: national and local transportations blocked ... companies, private businesses, even administrative offices closed to the public ... Quarantining in “so-called” makeshift hospitals those affected by the Virus and classified as F0, isolating in concentration camps the F1 individuals who have had close contact with them...

## **CHURCH RESPONSE:**

Sensitive to sufferings of each individual and families, the Catholic Church in Vietnam has swiftly found out ways of relief. The Catholic Bishops Conference of Vietnam has issued numerous pastoral letters instructing the faithful how to live their own faith during this pandemic time and also organized relief programs such as “lá lành đùm lá rách” (good leaves covering damaged ones), “gánh nhau trong đời” (carrying one another in life) ... Diocesan Bishops, closely watching local situations along with the length of spreading of the pandemic, had all resources available in parishes to provide food to people regardless of religion, assist workers or migrants on their respective territory. Especially some dioceses have formed Volunteer Groups from all paths of life: priests, men and women in the consecrated life, catechists, youth, all came to the front line in the hospitals and isolation centers ...

Countless testimonies came from non-Catholic people who were moved by the zealous hearts of the followers of “the Lord’s religion”: careful food preparation, medical care, diligent assistance in the searching of lost relatives ... warm comfort in their misery... There were also stories of volunteers who had been affected with Covid-19 but always showed their joy in the middle of sufferings in the name of the Lord (cf. Acts 5:41).

## **2. MODERN SOCIETY**

### **SITUATION:**

In 1858 of mid-19th century, French groups landed in Đà Nẵng, starting a “one-century presence in Vietnam”. French colonialists had torn off the “embargo shield” of the Nguyễn dynasty. Along with exploitation of natural resources, they also imported their own culture and arts and

launched the European model urbanization. Groups of cities were created around the proximity of major rivers, which were already big agglomerations of inhabitants. Satellite cities of “Hanoi” on both sides of Red River, Saigon by Dong Nai River, Can Tho by Mekong River.

As of July 4, 2021, population of Vietnam has reached 98,176,244 inhabitants. This is the most updated data from UNO, putting it at 1.25% of the world population, ranking number 15th in the list of countries and territories.

In Vietnam, percentage of urban population has been recently growing: Only 8.7% in 1955, 20.6% in 1975 but up to 34.43% in 2019 (33.122.548 persons). It means that despite being an agricultural country, rural population reduced to only 65,57% (63.086.436 persons)

People in modern time start the globalization process. With its traditional concept as ‘an independent territory’, each country is self-sufficient. Nevertheless, nowadays small village inhabitants find it difficult to survive if lacking communication with outsiders.

Means used as “launching platform” of the dazzling lightning speed leaping process of globalization are scientific - technological inventions and creativeness beyond imagining. Presently quite a few scientists and political already mentioned the 5.0 industry era, 5.0 society, which is a super-intelligent society, with its global governing system, supported by digital techniques such as big data analysis, artificial intelligence (AI), robotization, cybernetics and Internet of Things (IoT).

As a matter of fact, modern societal changes cause migration phenomenon to developing areas, especially among youth. World Bank classifies Vietnam as the speediest urbanization country of ASEAN with very high migration percentage. There are two forms of migration: emigration to overseas and migration to megacities for further studies, work assignment and life improvement.

According to Vietnam General Statistics Office Vietnam (GSO), there are 13.6% of migrants in 2015. Age 15 to 39 is 17.3%. Main purpose of migration is for further studies and labor, therefore, the above age range occupies 84%. Also, feminization is growing to 52.4% of the total of migrants.

## ANALYSIS:

Urbanization is not only superficial: house constructions, daily life accessories, advanced communication interactions, merchandises of all kinds ... are overflowing but also, deep under the surface, are internal changes in human heart: conscientiousness about one's personality, liberty lifestyle, distancing from noble traditional values.

Globalization brings to the developing countries opportunities to learn from achievements of developed nations, more jobs, services ... However negative consequences of globalization are evident: gap between rich and poor, different living standards and ways of thinking between urbans and country people, careless absorption of foreign elements somehow shaking authentic national culture, especially in the area of mutual family sentiments and noble basic ethics ... Moreover globalization presents a risk of rigging the management and protection of natural riches, ecosystem and grey matter reserves.

Beneath advances of digital technics aiming at 5.0 era are hidden two aspects. This progress brings incomparable conveniences to media: publishing and collecting knowledge, sharing life with all its aspects, confiding and treasuring intimate feelings. Yet this kind of progress poses huge challenges to parents, educators or shepherds. Digital technics and virtual world are a complex mix, difficult to distinguish real from fake, good from bad, true from false ... Digital technics and virtual world also create big gap between old - young generations. Those who are in charge, namely parents, teachers, shepherds seem to face a locked door of the world with innumerable potentials, useful as well as damaging, of web pages, facebook, tweeter and other media means that children, students, and young faithful tirelessly waste their time and energy to it.

A characteristic of migrant life consists on financial fluctuation and dwelling instability, not knowing the future and final destination. Collateral effects are challenges in conjugal fidelity, solidity of traditional family and the task of bringing up the children in the spirit of Christian faith. Many children do not have a chance to schooling, thus lacking necessary environments for development suitably to their own age. The recent pandemic presented to us miserable conditions of migrants, specially company and factory workers.

## **CHURCH RESPONSE:**

The Gospel enlightens the Church to make our efforts in “filtering clear from cloudy”, not allowing “urbanization process” to erode our Việt spirit. Maintaining traditional rural lifestyle which is close to the Gospel: Treasuring family relationships, neighborhood mutual affection, peacefulness as top priority, ‘loving others as oneself’.

Facing phenomenon such as urbanization, globalization and developments of digital techs ... the Church ought to be vigilant in unmasking the growing strength of secular inclinations. Human nature is too much complacent with a lifestyle that only enjoys, indifferent with God’s presence and actions in life. Everywhere can be found the youngsters without directions and goals of life, poisoned by unhealthy media.

Many dioceses in Vietnam have already set up practical youth programs: Eucharistic celebrations, conferences, marriage preparation, formation for mature usage of modern media means, ecclesiastical province and diocesan level conventions. Many religious communities live their spirituality aiming at educating youth by committing themselves to accompanying students in university campuses. CBCV, Dioceses, Religious Communities ... all focus on taking advantage of media to spreading Catholic doctrine amidst aggressive waves of secular propaganda.

There are still numerous people of noble spirit and high aiming that people could witness during this prolonged pandemic. In a particular way, teachings from Holy Father Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation ‘*Evangelii Gaudium*’ about an ‘outgoing’ Church, ‘be shepherds with the smell of the sheep’ have become a spiritual guideline to all members of the Church.

### **3. HUMAN DIGNITY, FAMILY AND CULTURE**

#### **SITUATION:**

In Vietnam, awareness of human dignity, sacredness of life, family is still inadequate and superficial. One can see lots of negative acts: Abortion, disrespect of the children, neglect of the elderly, contempt of poor people, women used as means to satisfy sexual urges. A good number of individuals, defying reason, abuse their positions to corrupt for their own benefits, public system ‘nontransparent’, unpredictable ... Truth is not yet to be respected, chained freedom of speech and even temperate critics, a regime based on ‘political background’ that limits Catholic people from participating to social activities.



2019 statistics from the Government Committee for Religion Affairs issued data of mainstream religions as follows: Buddhists 14.91%; Catholics 7.35%, Protestants 1.09%, Hòa Hảo Buddhists Bu 1.47% and Caodaists 1.16% ... Popular belief people and no religion adherents 74.60% ...

There are still cases of thought dictatorship, pressing all citizens into one single lifestyle with the ambition of replacing the perennial and sacred culture by a 'so-called culture' of a minority. Reality has proved that 'this kind of culture' is destructing values which are the foundation of a Vietnamese person and the Vietnamese soul. Its cause was born from a conspiracy of group benefits that eventually fades away real patriotism. That also leads to creating policies with unpredictable damaging consequences: Poor people losing their land, devastating floods, unfinished major projects ...

#### **ANALYSIS:**

Human dignity, family and culture mainly depend on education. Education in Vietnam is forever a painful problem. After 1975, for a long time, everything that belonged to the 'former regime' was rejected. Radically brainwashing the old thing, even musical works ... simply to import into South 'what' had been applied in the North. At this point, one aspect should be emphasized: Education. As of now, 2021, the tumult of a school book level I is still echoing: The entire society zealously raises concerns about its contents that go against childhood and psychology ... There have been lots of changes in the teaching programs of levels 2 and 3 ... numerous new exam rules ... to the point that people have the impression that generations of students are used as 'guinea pigs' ... Pedagogic and exam methods are not logical, blindly learning like parrots and you are safe if expressing your thinking according to the authority standard ... There are also lots of abuses in school between teachers and students, making a popular non-stop refrain the motto 'Venerate Teachers and Respecting Moral Values' amidst anxiety and worries of the parents and genuine instructors about transmitting human personality to students.

According to the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA), almost ¼ of population are young people, age 16-30: 23.8%. What do they expect, who will lead them and where to go ... It seems that many youngsters feel lonely at the crossroads of their life ... How are they prepared to face important decisions concerning family life. How do they think of premarital relationships, conjugal fidelity and cohabitation, bringing up the children ... ?

Families in Vietnam are burdened with challenges. Divorces are easily permitted by law. The 2019 general census informs that married couples are 69.2%, divorced or separated 2.1%. Age of divorce under 30 has high percentage which increases every year ...

Under the influence of Confucianism homosexual people are still reserved toward various reactions from family and society. Nevertheless, societal attitudes have recently changed. Decree 82/2021 from the government rules that homosexual people can marry, organize wedding receptions and cohabit as spouses ... An omen that predicts a somber future ...

In general, the Vietnamese society used to highly value men and consider women as secondary. Nowadays relationships between sexes tend to be more and more balanced. Daily work assignment is more appropriate. Yet, in some locations, women are still underprivileged.

#### **CHURCH RESPONSE:**

The Church in Vietnam is characterized by active parishes. Dioceses urge faith formation for all different groups: children, youth, family leaders, mothers, elderly ... parallelly with activities of associations/organizations. Parishioners are faithful to Mass attendance, frequenting the sacrament of Reconciliation.

A noteworthy effort consists of the concern to educating Children. The CBCV has approved the 'Regulations of the Eucharistic Children Movement', applied to the whole country. Many Dioceses set up catechesis programs to prepare them for sacraments. Focusing on teaching them to encounter God, each lesson shapes form of a single personal meeting with Jesus. Besides, the program organizes teamwork groups that would help them concretely experience what they learned in the class, exercise living skills, spirit of synodality, awareness of one's responsibility, practice to organizing personal and collective activities, live the mystery of the Church amongst their peers, participate to learning activities outdoors, camping, Eucharistic in the desert. These activities are fruitful to them as well as the Church.

Education of the children depends on the formation of Leaders - Catechists and is closely connected with the education of youth. There are dioceses which are capable to gather thousands of young people who volunteer to useful actions. Spiritual training courses, knowledge of ministerial activities, peer groups such as university student associations,

inter-diocesan conventions and diocesan and provincial meetings are strongly vitalizing the Church in Vietnam.

Family's father group and mother group have their own activities in liturgy and charity works. Catholic movements such as Legio Mariae, Dominican, Franciscan, Blessed Sacrament Fraternities, Whole Family Following God, Khôi Bình (Kolping) Movement, Marriage Improvement, Divine Mercy Association ... contribute to abundantly offering spiritual ways of living the Good News.

The Church in Vietnam is indeed expressing her identity, life and mission in the middle of the society, contributing to consolidating human dignity and the culture of life through caring and supporting families. Despite the society exhorting trends of thoughts and lifestyles that badly influence family life, the Church makes every possible effort to maintain and promote real family values, namely love and conjugal fidelity, filial piety, brotherhood, mutual tolerance, neighborhood friendship and mutual support in times of need ... The Church is conscious that the family beauty does not only stop at emotional expressions but also is a favorable place to transmit human values and Faith to future generations.

Many Dioceses, aware of the importance of literature, brought back to life the treasure of Catholic literature by awards such as 'Viết Văn Đường Trường' (Long Way of Writing), 'Đất Mới' (New Land) in order to strengthen and penetrate yeast of the Good News into all life dimensions of a society full of constant changes.

## **PART II: CHALLENGES**

Based on the actual situation of Asia and Vietnam as presented in Part I, we observe challenges of 4 following relations:

### **1. THE CHURCH AND AUTHORITIES:**

In Asia, there are some countries that conduct regime of dictatorship, atheism, group benefits. Our Church in Asia need to be impregnated with the spirit of the Lord, live and proclaim the Good News of love to all people. Instead of supporting forms of rejecting people with opposite stances or violence, the Church should present herself as an instrument of peace to everybody.

In the globalization process which has become an unavoidable trend today, authorities, facing pressures from all sides, internal and

external issues, are trying to draw multilateral supports, including religions.

The Church's position must be collaborative and neutral. Collaborating with love and independence for the sake of the poor, based on the conviction of values of the Good News and listening to the multilateral voices of real life and scientific findings, for instance, the problem of "climatic changes" which are now controlled and decided by underground powers in the world with direct effects on all humankind.

## **2. THE CHURCH AND OTHER RELIGIONS:**

The Church always honors all kinds of thirst for truth and salvific ways in the religions with firm conviction that only Jesus Christ is the ultimate Savior. Therefore, the Church faithfully pursues the dialogue path... In the middle of conflicts, the Church has experienced positive results in the model of 'Blessed Martyrs' manner. The most effective heart-winning way is to live in human harmony, neighborhood solidarity, sharing joys and sorrows, especially at mourning moments ... Human bonds lead to divine bonds.

## **3. THE CHURCH AND THE POOR**

The Church is constantly aware of her vocation of being poor and reaching out to the social poverty: Poor people, lack of hope, lack of truth, penury of compassion, exclusionism. Within the Church, some brothers and sisters are facing 'difficult' or 'irregular' situation ... in need of being treated on the basis of mercy as taught by Holy Father Pope Francis:

'We need to tirelessly contemplate the mystery of mercy. This is the source of joy, tranquility and peace. That's the condition to receive salvation. Mercy is the spoken revelation of the Most Holy Trinity. Mercy is the final and ultimate act by which God is coming to us. Mercy is the fundamental rule placed in the heart of those who look at the brother encountered on life journey with sincere eyes. Mercy is the road linking God to men, directing us toward the hope of being loved without end, despite our sinfulness.' (Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus* s. 1.2)

Moreover, the Church must be a prophet, proclaiming and preventing dangers of impoverishing human life and its force:

'The poor, you always have with you ...' (Jn 12:8). There are 'poor people whom we can see, they are a minority', and there are 'other poor people whom we don't see. We do not see the poor due to our indifference

or because we are accustomed to look at them as decorative objects' (Pope Francis, homily on April 6, 2020 at Santa Marta chapel)

#### **4. A CHURCH IMBUED WITH THE GOOD NEWS:**

Imminent priority, our Church in Asia shares same concerns with the Universal Church: Forming 'shepherds according to the Lord's own heart' (Jr 3:15), maturely facing modern cultural challenges; dignifying celibacy and chastity, indifferent to material wealth and obedient submission to unity.

Nourishing the concern of encouraging consecrated life, we strongly believe that this encouragement process must be done by our effort in the education system since childhood. The Church in Vietnam is profoundly aware of the responsibility to educate children from the very time they are in the mother's womb, 'haptonomy' with our ancestors' experience of 'start educating children during childhood and wife at the first days of her entry into new family' (Folklore) ... First years of an individual are very important, somehow like a 'Achilles heel' for the whole life span. A very convincing cause of the shortage of vocations to consecrated life, youth decadence and broken families is from the sad fact that children do not have a chance to go to the church early in their age, to be taught to pray even while in Mother's loving arms, to inherit an early experience of 'the Church' and rarely to be directed properly in psychology and spirituality.

Unity is the sign of God's love present and active in the Church (cf. John 17:21). Unity, first and foremost, is unity with 'Peter':

'The order of bishops is the successor to the college of the Apostles in teaching and pastoral direction. or rather, in the Episcopal order, the Apostolic body continues without a break. Together with its head, the Roman Pontiff, and never without this head it exists ...'(Vatican II, *Christus Dominus*,# 4)

The unity becomes more imperative 'in front of challenges from relativism and secularism, reinforcing unity among different members of God's people through the worship of God, ... mutual love,... togetherness in bearing witness to the Gospel.' (Cf. Message of the Congress of God's People in Vietnam, 2010 s. 8). Promoting the spirit of 'synodality' with the newness of the ongoing Synod XVI (2021-2023).

During Covid-19 pandemic, the Church profoundly perceived the bond in relationship with God and with the brethren. God dwells amongst His people. God uplifts, consoles and strengthens His people. God invites them to living the mystery of suffering and death with Him.

### **PART III: NEW PATHS**

We understand the term 'new' in the 'New Paths' according to the spirit of St. John Paul II in his teaching about evangelization:

Addressing the convention of American Caribbean Bishops at Port-au-Prince on March 9, 1983, Pope John Paul II clearly affirmed the notion 'New Evangelization' (Neo-evangelicalism): 'The commemoration of 500 years of Evangelization (in Latin America) will be meaningful if accompanied by your personal commitment, you along with clergy and lay people; commitment, not for re-evangelization (re-evangelización) but for new evangelization (nueva evangelización). New in enthusiasm, methodology, ways of expression'.

The new path is the awareness of being settled on the foundation of the Church, loyal to Traditions and Adapted to develop, 'Constant in Context' (Stephan B. Bevans và Roger P. Schroeder).

#### **1. The Church in Vietnam is moving, growing and developing.**

The Good News of Jesus Christ reached Vietnam in 1533. During nearly five centuries, the Church in Vietnam sustained with 259 years of persecution, from 1625 with the religious prohibition act of King Nguyễn Phúc Nguyên, to 1884 with the Giáp Thân Treaty (Treaty of Patnos) between Nguyễn Dynasty and France.

Besides, Vietnamese faithful along with their compatriots, have lived through many wars, particularly two wars in 1945-1975 and the aftermaths with painful consequences, misunderstanding, hostility between 'winners and losers'.

That tragic history was marked by the faithfulness of 117 Holy Martyrs, 1 Blessed Martyr (Catechist Andrew of Phú Yên), 1 Servant of God (Cardinal Francis Xavier Nguyễn Văn Thuận), three are documented for sainthood (Bishop Lambert de la Motte, Bishop François Pallu and Father Francis Xavier Trương Bửu Diệp).

In 1960, the Holy See formally established the Vietnamese hierarchy with 17 dioceses, approximately 1,500,000 Catholic followers (4.5% of population). This event marked the maturity of the Church. Presently, after

50 years of the establishment (1960-2021), despite living through changeable, difficult and challenging periods, the number of faithful continues to grow from 4.5% (1,500,000) to 7.21% (7,294,713) with 3,400 parishes, 4,948 diocesan priests, 1,817 religious priests and 26.057 religious men and women. The Church also is gifted with 11 Major Seminaries, one Catholic Institute and several Inter-Congregations Institutes.

From the very birthday of the Church in Vietnam, during bloody persecutions, the Holy Martyrs, Ancestors of Vietnamese faithful, had set up for their descendants the directions for living the Good News, which were explained by St. Pope John Paul II in his homily on the occasion of the canonization of the Holy Martyrs in Vietnam on June 19, 1988:

‘They have launched a profound dialogue that was liberating with the people and their culture, first by proclaiming truth and the universality of the belief in God, also by suggesting an order of values and duties that truly conformed to the religious culture of the whole Oriental world’.

## **2. Path of the Church in living the Good News: Incarnation into cultural tradition of Vietnam**

Being sent out to proclaim the Good News in an environment ‘favorable’ as well as ‘unfavorable’, the Church in Vietnam invites God’s people to continue the journey of living the Good News chosen and directed by our Holy Martyrs. This path was described by St. Pope John Paul II in his homily on the occasion of the canonization of the Holy Martyrs in Vietnam on June 19, 1988:

‘They gave witness to the fact that one ought to worship only God, who is the sole Creator of heaven and earth. Facing oppressive attitudes of the authorities concerning their faith, they affirmed the singular freedom of faith, (at the same time) by humble courage, they defended their own position that Christianity was the unique righteous cause they could not abandon, because it was impossible not to obey God the Supreme Being. Besides, they strongly expressed their willingness of respecting civil authorities, not behaving against just and honest values; they also taught the duty of respecting and honoring Ancestors, according to regional customs, under the light of the mystery of the Resurrection. Together with their Martyrs and through their own testimony, the Church in Vietnam is now able to proclaim their commitment and willingness that they do not deny their traditional culture and legitimate institutions in the country; on the contrary, the Church has already declared and proved that the Church

is willing to be incarnate into this tradition, faithfully contributing to the true development of the country’.

To apply this path into the life of the faithful, especially young people, our CBCV has issued a three-year plan: Living the mystery of the Church (2012-2014), Evangelization (2014-2016), Accompany the families (2016-2018), Youth Ministry (2018-2021).

By this path, the CBCV invites the faithful ‘to dialogue and collaborate’ with one another and other citizens:

‘In the spirit of dialogue and collaboration in mutual respect, the Church is able to contribute her own part to the life of the country, aiming at serving all people’ (Message of the Congress of God’s People in Vietnam, 2010 # 4).

On Asian soil appeared many virtuous and wise personalities. Major religions of the world such as Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism were born from this vast continent. Being descendants of unshakable faith people, the biggest desire of all Vietnamese Catholics is to introduce to their brethren the Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

### **3. Post-Covid-19 pastoral ministry**

#### ***a. The ‘Fratelli Tutti’ conviction***

His Holiness Pope Francis is a ‘Prophet’. His teachings foretold and could fit into what had happened in the world history, ‘nourishing’ humanity in facing with current situations ...

Facing consequences from Covid-19 pandemic that followed the Postmodernism which favors listening solely to emotions and radical individualism, ‘breaking apart’ healthy community harmony, the Church realizes an urgent call for the way of life for the whole humankind, that is ‘Fratelli Tutti’.

Covid-19 pandemic that appeared in late 2019 caused unprecedented enormous challenges to the human family. In the middle of the pandemic, the Church was both a victim and a caring mother. As a victim: losing shepherds, liturgical and pastoral activities cancelled, sick people not being able to receive sacraments and ‘Viaticum’ ... As a caring mother: Concern towards everyone, Catholic or other religions, distribution and networking in providing necessities, medical advisories, burial of



deceased victims, reinforcing faith with all possible means, invoking God's boundless mercy ...

The Church has never been an outsider of human history, but always felt the same beat with history and shared all that happened in it. These are the meaningful words from His Holiness Pope Francis in a rainy afternoon at a complete vacant square on March 27, 2020: 'We are in this together'. Australian Aborigines convinced: 'I am because we are'.

The 'we' reaches out to 'all creatures' (Mk 16:15). We are living in the same garden, 'a common household'. St. Francis conversed with flowers and invited us to 'praise God' (cf. *Laudato Si'* # 1 & 11). According to Pope Francis, creatures also can 'speak': 'Laments and cries of Mother Earth ... echo up to God'; 'Between us and all other creatures there must not be master and slave 'relationship' (*Laudato Si'* # 2), but that of 'shepherd and sheep' of the same flock (Ps 22).

### ***b. Discerning in the Spirit***

Among main characteristics in the teachings of Pope Francis is discernment, discernment of the Holy Spirit. '*Evangelii Gaudium*' Apostolic Exhortation defines 'Spirit-filled evangelizers are fearlessly open to the working of the Holy Spirit' (# 259). '*Gaudete et Exsultate*' Apostolic Exhortation discusses the call to holiness in this modern world, focusing on discernment: This act not only requires a capacity of good reason and a righteous conscience, but also is a gift that we ought to ask for. If we pray with confidence, then the Holy Spirit will grant what we ask for ... Nowadays discernment is more necessary ... All of us, especially young people, are influenced by a culture driven by hustle ... Without wise discernment, we easily become puppets at the mercy of ephemeral movements ... 'Prove all things, hold fast that which is good (1 Thess 5, 21)' (cf # 166-171). Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation '*Christus Vivit*' dedicates the entire chapter 9 to confide to each and every young people about discernment: 'Discernment becomes a genuine means of spiritual combat, helping us to follow the Lord more faithfully (n. 295) 'May the Holy Spirit urge you on as you run this race ... The Church needs your momentum' (299).

Most recently, in the homily inaugurating the Episcopal Synod XVI, when he mentioned 'three verbs' that the Synod needs to pause for meditation, the Holy Father also emphasized on the discernment in the Holy Spirit. With the verb 'Encounter': The Good News was beautified by

encounters with Christ, the encounters that changed life and healed' ... We should reserve our time to meet God and open our hearts to one another ... Spending time to pray, attend Eucharistic Adorations, for what the Holy Spirit wants to speak to the Church ...'. With the verb 'Listen': 'Listening with our hearts ... That is also a discovery filled with wonder at the wind blowing of the Holy Spirit in His forever new manners of leading to new paths and languages ...' With the verb 'Discern': 'In dialogues, the Lord Jesus helps you discern ... helps you sell out whatever occupies your heart to make room for God to enter ... The Word of the Lord helps us open ourselves to discernments and enlighten them. The Word of the Lord guides the Synod for this is not a Catholic 'conference', a scientific discussion or a political association ... but an event of grace, a healing process directed by the Holy Spirit ...'

### *c. Anchoring life to 'Christus Vivit'*

'A child was born to us' (Is 9:5). The Child Jesus has begotten for us. Jesus is Verbum. 'In the beginning was the Word ... the Word was God' (John 1:1). The Word became flesh ... We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.' (John 1:14).

Humankind surrounds Verb. 'What words these are! With authority and power' (Lk 4:36). The eyes of everyone were fastened on him' (Lk 4:20) ...' 'Amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing (Mt 15:31).' 'Gracious Words came from his lips' (Lk 4:22) ...' 'Your sins are forgiven ... Your faith has saved you; go in peace' (Lk 7:48) ... That woman, 'a sinner in the city ... she profusely wept, wetting His feet with her tears ... wiping them with her hair' (Lk 7:37.38) ... While she was wiping the feet of the Lord, the Lord in turn "had already wiped off her tears' (Is 25:8). There was a radical act: "breaking', she broke the alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard' (Mk 14:3) ... Breaking to leave behind an ephemeral past ... Expensive jar, precious oil but meaningless to Jesus ... Perhaps still echoing in her heart as in that of the adulteress are gentle advises from Jesus: 'From now on do not sin anymore' (John 8:11).

How many times did the Lord open his heart: 'I have compassion for these people, they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat! I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way' (Mt 15:32). Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world

unto the Father, having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end' (John 13:1): Loving unto the end, revealing the Father. Loving unto the end, sacrificing His own life to be crucified, open to the resurrection. Loving unto the end, giving the breath of the Holy Spirit. Loving unto the end, 'This is My Body - This is the chalice of My Blood' ... in order to remain with you until the end of the world ...

## **CONCLUSION:**

The Church in Vietnam is heading together with Mother Church toward New Heaven and New Earth ... 'prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her Spouse...' (Revelation 21:1.2). In unison with the Universal Church, the Church in Vietnam is on her way to bring her children to be united with the Resurrected Lord.

On the journey in the midst of humankind, facing concerns about life, ups and downs of the society, and multiple challenges in the task of evangelization ... the Church constantly pleads for and places hope in the love and action from the Holy Spirit, as invoked in the Eucharistic Prayer II: 'Haec ergo dona, quaesumus, Spiritus tui rore sanctifica...' (Make holy, therefore, these gifts, we pray, by sending down your spirit upon them like the dewfall)

The Spirit of God abundantly showers the grace of sanctification like the dewfall absorbs... The entire world and particularly this Asia land is absorbed with the gifts of the Spirit of Love and Life.

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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

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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
171. Country Reports: FABC 50 General Conference, submitted by the Vicariate Apostolic of Nepal, Pakistan Catholic Bishops' Conference (PCBC), Catholic Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka (CBCSL), compiled by the FABC Central Secretariat, September 2022
172. Country Reports: FABC 50 General Conference, submitted by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Indonesia (KWI), Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei (CBCMSB). a. Malaysia, b. Archdiocese of Singapore, c. Apostolic Vicariate of Brunei, Catholic Bishops' Conference of Myanmar (CBCM), Catholic Bishops' Conference of Philippines (CBCP), compiled by the FABC Central Secretariat, September 2022

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