

**COUNTRY REPORTS**

**FABC 50 GENERAL CONFERENCE**

Compiled by the FABC Central Secretariat

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## I. DIOCESE OF HONG KONG

### 1. CURRENT SITUATION

Since its reunion with China in 1997, Hong Kong has been adopting the governance model of "One Country, Two Systems". The general sentiment in the first ten years was that the city was enjoying stability. However, the scenario underwent a significant change in the next 10 years, with the city coming close to the climax of instability on account of the social unrest in 2019 ('2019 social unrest') and the subsequent Coronavirus pandemic lasting for more than 2 years.

Even now the scars of the political polarization and the broken interpersonal relationships as a result of the 2019 social unrest are still plainly visible. The political polarization persists, probably because the general public lack the time to reflect on the recent past, since they are too occupied with the pandemic; or probably it is because they do not know where to look for remedies. At present a wide-spread outlook of disappointment and helplessness looms large among the general public, mingled with negative emotions. From July 2020 to early December 2021, around 192,000 (2.5% of the total population) local citizens had emigrated like refugees to other countries. Among the young people, there is a sense of hopelessness, with many of them opting for a passive and idle way of life like down-and-outs.

In terms of livelihood, Hong Kong has a relatively high cost of living. The pandemic has aggravated the existing extreme disparity between the rich and the poor. Economically, the city pursues a policy of high land prices, with finance and the property market as key supports of the city. Those at the grassroots are struggling to survive, but for them to climb up the social ladder, the obstacles are almost insurmountable. The housing policy of the Government has not made it possible for ordinary grassroots citizens to achieve home ownership. In fact, the housing problem, i.e., the dire shortage of affordable housing, has long been the most crucial livelihood issue that remains unresolved for the people of Hong Kong.

Nominally, Hong Kong at present still retains the "one country, two systems" model as the basic political framework, as pledged by China. In reality, however, the unprecedented chaos of the 2019 social unrest have made the Central Government determined to ensure that in the future "one country" will take precedence over "two systems". The political structure

of Hong Kong has therefore given way to a model in which administrative power is obviously dominating and can even override legislative and judicial powers. Bearing in mind the recent change in the socio-political scenario in Hong Kong, it is understandable that the Hong Kong Government is making every effort to promote National Education. Since the Catholic Church runs around 250 schools (kindergarten, primary, secondary and tertiary, with approximately 142,000 students), it is necessary for her to watch out for the new educational policy. So far there have not been appreciable changes in religious freedoms.

As for our ecological environment, the Hong Kong Government has decided to carry out a plan for increasing land supply through a large-scale reclamation and a further development of rural areas. Such a plan, however, would definitely be very detrimental to what remains of the green zones and the fragile coastal ecology.

## **2. ANALYSIS**

Since the resumption of Chinese sovereignty over Hong Kong in 1997, more and more differences and even conflicts between Hong Kong and the Mainland have surfaced, in such areas as political system, culture and competitive economic priorities, to mention just a few. There is no question that the integration of the two parties will be a long and gradual process that requires mutual trust, patience, and respect between them. Without those prerequisites the fine-tuning and the integration process would be difficult, if not impossible, and would be painful for either party along the way.

## **3. CHURCH RESPONSE**

During the most turbulent times of the city in 2019, a large number of those who took to the streets, in particular youths and students, had decried the heavy-handed manner and the excessive force adopted by the police in suppressing the protests and demonstrations, and so instinctively they reacted with violence. The Church had repeatedly urged both the police and the protesters to exercise restraint, calling for constructive dialogue to find a way out of the social turmoil. To our “torn apart” society, the Church had consistently emphasized the need for non-violence, dialogue, fact-finding and reconciliation.

The social tensions had hardly relaxed, when Hong Kong found itself facing a new challenge, the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic which later deteriorated into a pandemic. The Church promptly responded by

providing charitable services for those in urgent need. Many members of the faithful and their pastors have been organizing visits to different locations, distributing the most needed anti-infection supplies and accompanying the poor and the socially marginalized.

#### **4. CHALLENGES AHEAD**

##### **INTERNAL CHALLENGES:**

Conflicts arising from the 2019 social unrest: Though our faithful are all citizens of the global family, they do have different views and different experiences in regard to the social unrest, and in their personal life and Church life, there have been conflicts, confrontations and divisions among them. By now divisions have been temporarily put aside, but in the long run the wounds will have to be healed. It seems that no one has the courage or knows the ways to address the consequences of the social unrest, so as to help the concerned parties to reach mutual forgiveness and reconciliation.

A new wave of emigration: There is an outflow of emigrants from Hong Kong to overseas countries. Most of the emigrants are from the relatively well-off social strata. They are typically young people, middle-aged couples or families with children. A substantial portion of them are also active members of the Church. Their departure has seriously weakened parish life. There seems to be an emigration tendency among the younger generation, many of whom have left Hong Kong, or are planning to do so, with their further studies or future prospects in mind. Such a wave of emigration cannot but have negative impacts on the future development of the local Church.

The diminished presence of young people limited physical participation of the faithful in Church activities under the pandemic and the aging of the diocesan clergy are our major concerns ahead.

##### **EXTERNAL CHALLENGES:**

The process of integration between the Mainland and Hong Kong has already begun, but it takes time to build up. In such a process, the Church, as a stakeholder, can and should play a role through discernment, exploration and, if necessary, commitment.

After the 2019 social unrest, the Central Government has imposed a policy of "patriots ruling Hong Kong". It goes without saying that such a new policy will have implications for us both politically and socially. Nevertheless, the precise influence of such a policy on local religious affairs

has yet to be seen. We cannot foresee whether, and if so to what extent, Hong Kong's religious freedoms will be affected by the recent "Sinicization" of religious policies implemented by the Central Government, but some of our faithful and pastors have already voiced their worries and concerns.

Confronted by the social conflicts and political polarization brought about by the 2019 social unrest, our local Church has been advocating reconciliation between the conflicting parties, but the Church has to further discern its proper role and choose the right course of action, so as to set a role model for society.

## 5. NEW PATHS

The Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong is aiming to be:

- A Synodal Church: That the pastors and the faithful will be able to journey hand in hand, with the courage to face the consequences of the 2019 social unrest; listening to and understanding one another; accommodating themselves to plurality in resolving conflicts; gathering strength with the local people and look for ways to heal our wounded society.
- A Church that focuses on young people: In setting our long-term pastoral priorities, we will give special consideration to the pastoral care of young people, cherishing their contributions, listening to their aspirations, empowering them for Church services, and journeying with them to create a hope-filled future for the Church.
- A Church which is solidly grounded on faith, hope and charity: Recognizing changes as opportunities that can deepen our faith, stir up our hope and enkindle our charity; being true disciples of the Lord and witnesses to the Gospel in daily circumstances.

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## **II. DIOCESE OF MACAU**

### **1. SITUATION**

#### ***GENERAL STATISTICS***

The Diocese of Macau is going to celebrate the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its founding in the year 2026. At present, the Diocese is under the leadership of Bishop Stephen Lee Bun-Sang who took office in 2016. Ours is a small diocese which comprises 9 parishes, a dozen secular clergy, around 40 religious priests, a little less than 100 religious sisters, 3 seminarians, 32 schools, 1 seminary, 1 university, 1 music academy, several nurseries, and a host of elderly and youth social services. The number of faithful amounts to about 30,000 on average, while the total city population is 680,000.

#### ***SIGNS OF THE TIMES***

Macau, though being a special administration region with its own judiciary and legal structures, has a very porous border policy with mainland China. Large numbers of citizens and labour force commute across the border into the Canton province hinterland every day. The recent opening of another major border gate testifies to the increased population mobility on this front. This affects the demographics, cultural values, social expectations, and it also influences religious practices of the people.

#### ***ECONOMIC SITUATION***

The economic impact of Covid-19 means Macau has lost a significant amount of tourists that used to prop up the gaming/ casino/ hotel /tourism/ conference industry and related commercial activities. Reduced gaming revenues and new government policies also bring about stricter spending budget and that means reduced subsidies to many sections of society, including church related agencies, especially schools, cultural institutions, and social services.

#### ***POLITICAL SITUATION***

The political situation in Macau is not volatile. It is generally perceived that Macau maintains peaceable ties with mainland authorities. Laws and measures to protect national security and civil stability are in place and pronounced resentment against the local and Chinese government is extremely rare. During the most recent legislative assembly election, however, several candidates have been disqualified under governmental scrutiny.

## ***RELIGIOUS SITUATION***

Religious pluralism is well respected in Macau, and the government has always been keen to maintain a harmonious relationship with the local religious communities, especially when it comes to promoting the city's image through the preservation of religious cultural heritage, such as maintenance of churches and temples, exhibition of artefacts, processions, and other artforms such as music.

## ***CULTURAL CHALLENGE***

One of the chief cultural challenges to the local society is the growth of secularism, and one of the worst hit areas in the sphere of human relationship is the institution of marriage. Increased divorce rate among Catholics too is worrying.

Another strong cultural or ideological problem that poses challenge to evangelisation is the social configuration of cross-border families, where members of the same family sometimes do not share similar social or cultural values due to the differences in style of living or axiological expectations between Macau and mainland China. The proliferation of casinos and associate vices, such as gambling debts, threats from loan sharks, prostitution, drugs abuse, smuggling, etc, remain something which the society at large has to tackle in order to enhance the general "health" of the city.

## ***ECOLOGICAL CHALLENGE***

The territorial configuration of Macau precludes the establishment of major heavy industry, which is a blessing, and fortunately it retains some healthy mangroves and green environment. But the lack of farmland also means it relies almost totally on the mainland for livestock and produce. Decreased water quality due to industrial development around the Pearl River Delta has always been a matter of concern. Some negative opinions have been raised too over the proximity of garbage incineration sites to the urban area. Land reclamation for new urban development is surely a welcoming move to provide more housing, but such plans may draw people's attention to the question as to how ecological balance could be better preserved. Flooding in low lying areas of the city has been a permanent nuisance to the citizens, and the risk of threats to the livelihood and safety of citizens in times of major tropical typhoons is still alarming.

## **2. ANALYSIS**

The manifold causes for the situations outlined above could be summed up in this way.

In the first place, the greater osmosis between Macau and mainland China is the strongest catalyst for change in both demographics and social-economic issues. This is proven by the fact that, despite the Covid-19 pandemic, Macau remains very much reliant on the free commute with mainland China. Positive state and local policies are all very much in favour of strengthening the already stable ties between the city and the country.

Secondly, the large number of students who graduate or are trained in mainland tertiary educational institutions provide a fertile ground for bridging the gap between Macau and the mainland. These make up a good percentage of the professional work force, including people in the civil service, medical service, and commercial sector. Yet this also means that contact with religious sponsored or specifically Christian bodies for these university students could be amply reduced during their time of young adulthood while studying in China, despite some of them having attended Catholic schools before leaving Macau. What impact would such experience have on their formative years in social, personal, and moral values is a topic that remains to be studied.

Thirdly, the lack of shared value system (religious affiliation) among family members, beyond simple problems due to generational gap, is becoming a growing cause for the breakdown of families resulting in separation, divorce, single parenthood, second marriages, etc.

Fourthly, being a small and tight-knit society, activism in many spheres of life in Macau tend not to be strong as there is a general tendency to wish to have matters settled in a non-confrontational manner. The presence of many conglomerates and clan-based associations, often with strong political and commercial ties, is a phenomenon which fosters the culture of negotiation and mutual respect of each other's spheres of influence.

## **3. CHURCH RESPONSE TO CHALLENGES AND NEW PATHS**

The Catholic Church has long been an indispensable fabric of Macau society, not only because institutionally it once forged a close link with the Portuguese era civic authorities on account of it having a significant community of Portuguese and Macanese faithful, but also

because the Church has been the vanguard in education and in charitable services to the poor, the migrants, the abandoned, and the socially marginalised. It is in the latter arena that the Church continues its mission in society. Recent ecclesial development took the form of the establishment of various diocesan commissions responsible for actively promoting participation in various aspects and interfaces, such as liturgy, catechetical formation, education, life and family, social communications, cultural patrimony, etc.

The *Centro Católico* in downtown Macau is undergoing reconstruction and will be turned into a multi-purpose multi-storey building equipped with functional facilities for exhibitions, accommodation, and pilgrimage, all at the service of the faithful and society.

Caritas Macau, and other social enterprises organised by religious communities will continue to cater to the elderly, youth, and sick locally and with some extension service projects assisting neighbouring regions.

It is hoped that the facility of transport between Macau and mainland China will translate into a more direct form of communication and cooperation between the local church and the church in China, despite the nuanced differences in ecclesiastical and political structures between the two places. A good example would be the recent permission for the Saint Joseph University of Macau to recruit students from mainland China to study at a number of our graduate programmes. This is an encouraging sign that the local Church's contribution to the service of the country is being acknowledged.

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### **III. CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF JAPAN (CBCJ)**

**1. SITUATION** – *What are the realities you face? What are the signs of the times? What is the social, economic, political, religious situation? Are there any particular cultural or ecological challenges?*

#### **0.1. GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE**

Japan is a thin bow-shaped archipelago consisting of four main islands and almost 6,850 small ones. It stretches about 2,800 km from Okinawa in the south with a subtropical marine climate north to Hokkaido with a subarctic climate and has a total area of about 378,000 km<sup>2</sup>.

The country is surrounded by the sea, and mountains account for more than 60% of its surface area. It is blessed with natural beauty and has four distinct seasons. There are many volcanos, and natural disasters such as earthquakes, typhoons, and tsunamis occur frequently.

#### **0.2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Confucianism and Buddhism were introduced from China via Korea in the 5th and 6th centuries AD, and have had a major impact on Japanese religion, culture, and life. Christianity was introduced in the 16th century, and trade with Portugal, Spain, China, and other countries developed. However, the Edo shogunate (1614–1873) banned Christianity and in order to thoroughly eliminate it made the port of Nagasaki the only window for foreign trade. A unique culture flourished in Japan.

After the establishment of the Meiji government in 1868, Japan fought wars with China and Russia and participated in World War I. The Allies defeated Japan in the Pacific War after air raids across the country and two atomic bombs. On the other hand, Japan inflicted great suffering on the peoples of Asia and the South Pacific. We must not forget our apologies to them and our responsibility to build peace.

Article 9 of the post-war Constitution of Japan renounces war as a means of resolving international disputes and therefore the country does not have an army, though there is a Self-Defense Force. Fortunately, a majority of Japanese have shown strong resistance to any moves to change Article 9. Japan has a special responsibility to promote the abolition of nuclear weapons because it has experienced nuclear warfare.

### **0.3. CURRENT SITUATION**

Japan's population as of July 2021 is 126,109,556. In 2011, the birth rate started to decline for the first time after the war, a trend that has continued to the point that in 2020 the number of births per women was only 1.34. The average life expectancy (males: 81 years, females: 87 years) is the highest in the world. According to statistics from September 2020, people over the age of 65 -- 36,170,000 -- make up 28.7% of the population.

When 14% of a society's population is over age 65, it is called an "aging society." A society with 14 to 21% over age 65 is an "aged society," and when the percentage exceeds 21% it is called a "super-aged society." Japan is now a super-aged society.

The declining birth rate and the super-aged society are leading to a decline in the working-age population, challenges in geriatric medical care, and fewer opportunities for younger generations to play an active role in various public institutions.

#### **1.1. SIGNS OF THE TIMES**

##### ***1.1.1. A Multinational Society***

As the work force, especially unskilled labor, became insufficient due to population decline, the government looked to foreign countries for workers.

In 1989, there were 980,000 foreign residents in Japan. In the 1990s the country began accepting South Americans of Japanese ancestry and technical intern trainees, and by 2019 there were 2.93 million foreigners resident in Japan, of whom 1.65 million were workers. Almost half are Chinese and Vietnamese. Other large groups are Filipinos, Brazilians, Nepalese, Koreans and Indonesians.

As a result, the Church in Japan has also become multicultural and multinational. We are exploring the development of a rich Church community while facing challenges such as a sluggish economy, problems in daily life, international marriage, support for children born and growing up in Japan, and complications arising from relations between Japanese and foreign Catholics.

Japanese society has developed by choosing, becoming expert in and using foreign ideas, knowledge and technologies. Now it is time to accept and integrate people from other countries and cultures who contribute to our economy.

### **1.1.2. Pope Francis' Visit to Japan**

The pope's visit to Japan in November 2019 is a sign of the times. The pope's appearance, actions and message had an impact on many Japanese. From now on, the challenge is to find ways to realize the theme of the visit, "Protect All Life."

### **1.1.3. The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic**

Though Japan is a developed country, social disparities and the gap between rich and poor are widening during the corona disaster. The number of people facing financial crisis is increasing with many only a step away from extreme poverty. More and more young women and single mothers are facing poverty. As non-regular employment increases and the economy is restricted due to pandemic measures, many young people and foreign workers are losing their jobs and face difficulties. Low-paid technical intern trainees are also being driven to the social margins.

In the Church, there is a need for ingenuity to revitalize the faith life of believers while public Masses and other activities are cancelled.

## **1.2. THE SOCIAL SITUATION**

### **1.2.1. Social Inequality and Poverty**

According to a 2019 survey by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, the poverty rate (income below 50% of the median annual income) among residents is 15.4% (1 in 6 to 7), and the relative poverty rate of children is 13.5% (1 in 7 to 8). The child poverty rate for single-parent families is as high as 50.8%.

The majority of people are in search of peace of mind and stability, but increasingly ignore the situation of others. Politically, the system is becoming increasingly protectionist and nationalistic.

### **1.2.2. The Family**

Divorces have declined every year since peaking at about 290,000 in 2002, but in 2020 there were more than 190,000, and the divorce rate (the number of divorces per 1,000 people) was 1.57. Divorce, of course, has a negative impact on children.

In the last decade, domestic violence (DV) caused by domestic problems and mental illness has increased, reaching more than 130,000 cases in 2020.

There is a growing consciousness of the dignity and human rights of each person.

### **1.2.3. Women's Rights**

Japan ranks 104 out of 142 countries and regions in the Gender Equality Ranking (2014). The gender gap is very large and women's social status is remarkably low. In 2020, the percentage of women in parliament was 9.9%, compared to a global average of 25%. That is the lowest percentage among developed countries such as the G7, ranking 165 out of 191 countries worldwide. It demonstrates the low awareness of women's rights. The situation is the same in the Church.

There are laws prohibiting gender discrimination in employment and laws aimed at gender equality in social activities, but the prioritizing of men is deep-rooted. This is said to be because mothers' rights have been valued over women's rights. However, influenced by the global #MeToo movement, public awareness is gradually improving.

### **1.2.4. The Increase in Foreign Workers and Related Problems**

Foreign workers look for respect for their rights, justice in terms of labor contracts and a decent living.

The goal of the first foreign nationals who came to Japan was to work, earn money and have a decent life. They lacked the opportunity and information to provide for the education of their children. It was difficult for them to fully adapt to Japanese life. Now as they are aging, they face other problems. Many do not have pensions, nor can they return to their home countries.

Even when their children marry a Japanese, the difficulty and complexity of Japanese language, customs, social rules and family relationships are a burden. The movement to integrate foreign residents into Japan's general social community is very sluggish, and there are even voices that oppose it.

Many young people of foreign nationality have suffered from social prejudice, lack of Japanese language training, poverty and discrimination. However, young people who study hard and adapt to society are setting a good example for the children who follow them.

### ***1.2.5. Suicide***

From a high of more than 30,000 in 2011, the number of suicides has declined to about 20,000 in 2020. Problems with family, school, work, finances, relations between men and women, and health have become serious, and lead in many cases to depression and suicide. The number of suicides among teens and those in their 20s is increasing slightly due to an inability to find meaning in life. Males account for more than twice as many suicides as females.

### ***1.2.6. Bullying, the Death Penalty and the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons***

Discrimination and bullying take place in schools and society. Especially among the younger generation cases of bullying due to nationality, skin color and physical characteristics are increasing. Some victims are driven to take their own lives. It is necessary to conduct a thorough analysis of the messages that the younger generation gets from media and their awareness of the dignity and rights of each person.

Only nine percent of people want the death penalty abolished and 80.8 percent, especially males, think it is unavoidable.

Based on Japan's experience of war, the world's only wartime atomic bombings and the explosion of a nuclear power plant, the country has a mission to appeal for the abolition of nuclear weapons, war, nuclear power plants, etc.

### ***1.2.7. Adverse Effects of the Development of Information Technology***

The spread of IT has brought about various adverse effects such as hate speech that exploits Social Networking Services (SNS), addiction to information devices, and the dilution of human relationships. Anonymous information dissemination over the Internet has become commonplace, encouraging aggression against those who are different. Disregarding truth or falsity, attacks against the weak increase, and even among young victims, many commit suicide because of psychological pressures.

## **1.3. THE POLITICAL SITUATION**

### ***1.3.1. The Japanese Political System***

Japan is a constitutional parliamentary democracy with a cabinet system in which the Diet (parliament) is the highest body. There is also an emperor who is "the symbol of the State and of the unity of the People"

(Constitution of Japan, Article 1). There are 47 regional governments.

Japan renounces war in Article 9 of its Constitution, but since the end of World War II has remained at peace under its alliance with the United States and the protection of the U.S. nuclear umbrella.

### **1.3.2. People's Interest in Politics**

Nearly 70% of Japanese think that national policies fail to reflect the views and opinions of the people. Many people are uninterested in voting. Many important issues in national politics are often simply decided by the ruling party. The importance of contributing to society as citizens has not been inculcated in people. Those who make political statements are also slandered or otherwise attacked. However, young people who have realized that the coronavirus disaster has a close relationship with policy are beginning to take an interest in politics.

There is strong rejection within the Church of the Church's social teachings tied to politics. For this reason, some bishops find it difficult to communicate to the Church the contents of papal encyclicals related to justice and peace.

### **1.3.3. Refugee Policy**

The Japanese government's immigration policies and relevant laws are far from human rights demands and international standards on this issue. In particular, they are very strict regarding refugees, with only 0.5% of asylum applicants being recognized as refugees. Others are forced into immigration detention centers with no sense of their future. The unparalleled strictness of Japan's refugee recognition policies needs to be changed.

## **1.4. THE ECONOMIC SITUATION**

### **1.4.1. The Labor Force**

In fiscal 2020, the average number of regular employees was 35.49 million, an increase of 330,000 from the previous year. The number of non-regular (part-time, etc.) employees was 20.66 million, a decrease of 970,000. According to the December 2020 labor statistics, the total cash income decreased for the first time in eight years. The unemployment rate averaged 2.8% in 2020, or 2.09 million.

The number of foreign workers reached a record high of 1,724,328 in October 2020.

In April 2019, the government established a special status of residence for foreigners with specific skills in 14 fields (Specific Skills No. 1 and 2) and accept up to 345,000 foreign workers by 2024. Foreign workers are expected to increase in the future.

The homeless population was 4,555 in 2019. Many of these people are in large cities, but the number is declining due to government policies.

## 1.5. THE RELIGIOUS SITUATION

### 1.5.1. *Christianity*

From 1549 the Jesuits and from the 1580s Franciscans, Dominicans, and Augustinians joined to establish churches, religious houses, schools and hospitals. The Church developed thanks to their dedicated evangelization. By 1614, there were 105 priests serving about 500,000 believers. However, in that same year, Christianity was banned across the country, and according to incomplete historical materials in the following decades there were 5,000 martyrs. Among them were not only priests and religious, but also a large number of male and female laity, including children. In the Nagasaki region, believers kept their faith in hiding without a single priest for at least 220 years. In March 1865, Father Bernard Petitjean of the Paris Foreign Missions encountered the hidden Christians in Nagasaki. In 1873, when the prohibition against Christianity was lifted, the Paris Foreign Missions carried out mission work, establishing churches in various places, and inviting religious orders to start schools, hospitals, and other activities. Some of those churches are now World Heritage Sites. After the Pacific War, the Church developed further.

The history of Protestantism in Japan began in 1859 when missionaries from the U.S. Episcopal Church and the Reformed Church arrived in Nagasaki.

There were 1,909,757 Christians in Japan in 2019, 1.5% of the total population. However, the role of Christianity in Japanese culture and society is significant. The Catholic Church has three archdioceses and 14 dioceses. The Catholic population in 2020 was 435,083, 0.34% of the total population. In recent decades, the number has fluctuated, decreasing and increasing slightly. The number of foreign-national Catholics is not counted.

As a result of the declining and aging population, changes in the family environment, a weakening of the sense of faith and young peoples' leaving the Church, vocations to the priesthood and religious life are

decreasing. For this reason, we invite seminary students and priests from abroad.

### **1.5.2. Japanese Religions**

The ancient Japanese religion is polytheistic and animistic Shinto. Confucianism and Buddhism were introduced from China through Korea in the 5th and 6th centuries. Confucianism influenced Japanese Shintoism, Buddhism, politics, and ways of thinking. In the Edo period (1603 – 1867), Confucianism and Buddhism were separated, and teachings of the neo-Confucian Cheng-Zhu and Yangming schools were adopted into politics.

Until 1868, when the Meiji government made national Shinto a spiritual pillar of the nation, it was a time of undifferentiated Shinto-Buddhist practice in which the Buddha and the gods were inseparable. Since the war, national Shinto is gone, but Shinto *per se* carries on. According to 2019 statistics, Shinto had 88,959,345 adherents and Buddhism had 84,835,110. The sum total is more than the entire population of the country. This is evidence that the Japanese devote themselves to the two religions.

People who do not believe in a particular religion or who call themselves atheists have a deep religious sense in their lives and participate in religious practices and events. Shinto values harmony is relational and is symmetrical to Western philosophy and monotheism (Judaism, Christianity, Islam). There are no religious confrontations or conflicts. Catholicism plays an integral role in inter-religious dialogue.

## **1.6. CULTURAL CHALLENGES**

### **1.6.1. Historical Background**

The introduction of religions and cultures from China and Korea, encounters with Christian missionaries from the 16th century onwards and interactions with other countries formed the values that have made today's Japanese culture and social and economic development possible.

### **1.6.2. A Community Culture**

A Japanese does not live so much as an individual but as a member of a community. The unique sense of community of the Japanese people seems to be due to living in an island country with a uniform environment and sensibilities, and very little contact with other countries. In such a community culture, common sensibilities, customs, and lifestyles are valued as "harmony," the maintaining of accord and peace. Mutual communication is carried out tacitly and without confrontation.

### **1.6.3. Youth Culture**

Until the early 1980s, young people whose behavior differed from the existing culture were called "tribals" and were likened to an alien ethnic group. Since then, youth culture has taken hold with the development of telecommunication and transportation networks. From the late 1990s, anime, manga, computer games and the Internet have spread beyond those generations. On the other hand, many Japanese cultural traditions are not being passed down to the younger generations.

## **1.7. ECOLOGICAL CHALLENGES**

Immediately after the disaster at a nuclear power plant in Fukushima following the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, there seemed to be a growing interest in environmental issues and rapidly shifting to sustainable energy. However, since then, decommissioning work on nuclear power plants has not proceeded, and the logic of the economy has taken over.

Many people have given in to the current situation, and a backlash against environmental issues is spreading. This backlash is seen especially in insulting or ridiculing language and derision on the Internet.

The vast majority are reluctant to lower their current standard of living, and only a minority are active in environmental initiatives. Efforts directed to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are diffuse, so there is a risk that they will merely be for show. In Japan and within the Church, thoroughgoing efforts to address environmental issues are yet to come.

## **2. ANALYSIS -- Are there causes that you can identify for the above?**

### **2.1 THE SOCIAL SITUATION**

Since the end of World War II, Japanese society has made economic affluence its priority. It joined the ranks of developed countries and at one point became the world's second largest economy after the United States. Meanwhile, people became accustomed to the idea that economic development was society's priority and began to pay less attention to psychological and spiritual fulfillment. Without psychological and spiritual values, Japan has become a shrinking and super-aging society where it is difficult to obtain a sense of financial fulfillment. People wander in the dark because the foundational values of the social community are not the values they need to rely on.

The high relative poverty is largely due to two factors: (1) parents have no work, and salaries are low due to non-regular employment such as part-time jobs; (2) the increase in unmarried and single parents due to divorce. The many causes of the low birth rate include: an increase in those who do not marry or marry late; the lack of stability in employment leading to no prospects for the future; the high cost of raising children; and shortages of obstetricians, gynecologists and pediatricians. The government has not provided sufficiently for Japanese language education for foreign workers, for children's education and for welfare.

## **2.2. THE POLITICAL SITUATION**

The Liberal Democratic Party, formed in 1955, was in power for 38 years before turning over governance to the opposition for about four years, but has since regained and kept power. With the economy sluggish, the government's attitude of tossing policies directly related to protecting human life to the private sector is remarkable. However, "mutual aid" has collapsed and "self-help" is difficult in the sluggish economy because the local communities on which mutual aid is based are not functioning, especially in cities with large populations.

## **2.3. THE RELIGIOUS SITUATION**

In Japan, "family religion" where the whole family followed the same religion for generations was common. Now more and more people do not even know what their family religion is, or do not care about a particular religion. Even so, those who have a religious bent are increasing. Many people are interested in religion, but in a sort of folk religion, and still tend to avoid organized religions. However, many people are drawn to spiritualism, for example, and visit churches as "power spots." They basically are looking for self-satisfaction, and few come to baptism.

Due to the aging of priests and believers and the departure from the Church of young people, the Catholic Church is at a standstill in its evangelization and pastoral activities for lack of personnel and financial resources. Even when there is a desire to be involved in social issues such as the environment, systematic involvement is becoming impossible.

Faith formation not only for children but also for adults is insufficient. In particular, young men are not taught enough about marriage and family life.

The proportion of foreign believers is relatively large, but participation in liturgy is not easy when using different languages along with Japanese. Children who do not have their own language to do so do not develop the ability to think deeply about things.

New religious movements that originated in Latin America are becoming popular among foreigners who were not interested in them when in their home country. But faced with the challenges of unfamiliar Japanese life, many have found such groups helpful and caring. Receiving support (translation, assistance in obtaining visas, etc.) from such groups, they leave the Catholic Church and thus promote the groups' expansion.

**3. CHURCH RESPONSE** – *What has been the Church's response to these realities? How has the Church contributed for the development of society in general?*

### **3.1. THE CHURCH'S CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY**

It is worth noting that the minority Catholic Church has played an outsized role in the development of Japanese society. The Church made no small contribution to Japanese society in the fields of social welfare and education during the Christian period, the Meiji era and the postwar reconstruction. There are many people who have a Christian spirit engraved in their hearts through such education and social welfare activities. Catholic educational institutions generally have good reputations and their influence is not small. Catholic support for victims of natural disasters and peace activities are also highly valued.

However, as the development of society has reached a certain level, more organizations offer similar services and more legal regulations must be followed, it has become more difficult to make such contributions. An added difficulty for Catholic schools is that as priests and religious have decreased there are schools that are Catholic in name only because there are no Catholics involved in their operation.

Drawing close to and accompanying people in society was and still is one of the characteristics of the Christian community. One example is devotion to accompanying foreign residents. It can be an opportunity to win trust for the work of the Church. The Catholic Commission of Japan for Migrants, Refugees and People on the Move organizes seminars for the training of religious and laity to confront the unjust situation of refugees, migrants and foreign workers, to protect their human rights and justice, and to demand that the Japanese government enact better laws for them.

It is becoming difficult in small parishes of the elderly to play the social role of the Church. On the diocesan level, committees and social outreach remain active through the efforts of the committees and individuals, despite small numbers of people. Some dioceses have established "Open Houses" where South Americans and Filipinos trained as leaders can provide mutual support. Their activities include supporting refugees and migrants in immigration detention centers and bear much fruit. In addition, this process of accepting newcomers has been initiated in all parishes.

The Church continues to work in solidarity with other organizations, religious groups and civic groups on matters that are difficult to respond to on Catholicism's own. However, the consciousness of average Catholics is low.

### **3.2. FORMATION OF CHURCH COMMUNITIES**

The cancellation of public Masses due to the pandemic has made it clear that the parish plays a role as a place to disseminate information on people's health and economic conditions. Thanks to the work of parishes, pastors and teams of parishioners, online access to Mass, catechesis, the rosary, etc. has spread. So that they might participate in online prayer, many elderly people are learning to use smartphones and computers.

Marriage courses are important in a situation where more and more young people do not believe marriage is permanent.

In providing pastoral care for foreign believers, it is time to move ahead as communities, focusing on use of the Japanese language even while using multiple other languages. Special celebrations, the Sacrament of Penance, funerals, etc. still should be carried out in the native language of foreign believers to the extent possible.

### **3.3. THE EVANGELIZATION OF JAPANESE SOCIETY**

Since the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011, the Church has engaged in locally rooted volunteer activities through Caritas. This grassroots service testifies to evangelical values for many who had no contact with Christianity. This is the way forward in planting a Christian spirit.

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

#### **4.1. THE CURRENT SITUATION**

To mitigate the decline in births and address the problems of a super-aged society with few children, it is important to understand the fundamental attitude toward marriage of young people, providing pastoral guidance to help them understand that marriage is joining with another to journey together through life.

#### **4.2. SOCIETY**

Initiatives to respect human rights, and promote peace and the abolition of nuclear weapons are two important issues that the Japanese Church has been involved in. In response to Pope John Paul II's visit to Japan in 1981, the following year the Japanese Church prayed for peace, reflected on peace and acted for peace from August 6 (anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima) to the 15th (the end of the war). This "Ten Days of Prayer for Peace" is an annual event of the Catholic Church in Japan. The Church also invites the general public to join the prayers for peace and other activities such as promoting ratification of the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

In response to Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan is creating a basic policy to promote environmental issues. This not only responds to the pressing problems facing humanity but will also help raise awareness of the need to create "a Church that goes out," conscious of the need to understand and live faith in everyday life.

#### **4.3. CHALLENGES WITHIN THE CHURCH**

Traditional Christian families are no longer able to communicate their faith to their children.

Frequently in Japan not everyone in a family is Christian, and so inter-religious dialogue often takes place in the home. For this reason, more personalized pastoral care is needed to support each believer's path of faith. Therefore, community is important, especially when considering lone Christians in Japanese society where Christianity is considered a peripheral entity. Strengthening the sense of community is a challenge, especially in parishes.

Within the Church, there is a strong desire to continue the traditional ways of doing things, and there is little enthusiasm to try anything new. While it is important to realize "a Church that goes out" as

an attitude that embodies the "open church" that the Second Vatican Council aimed for, unfortunately, young people who yearn for the traditions (Latin liturgy, etc.) that predate the Council, and a generation who like a passive Church which focuses on deepening individual faith are increasing. It is essential to look back at the history of the Church that led to the Second Vatican Council and learn the modern meaning from it.

Approaching young people is also an important issue. We must create a space for the Church to draw near to those who suffer in their social lives, a place to learn how to listen to them, a space where they can share their dreams and concerns and meet Jesus and the gospel. This is an essential mission for the Church.

In parishes, the declining birthrate, aging congregations, the resulting deterioration of church finances and the shortage of priests are major concerns.

The presence of women, including religious, is a great force in the mission of the Church. Today with the number of religious declining, diocesan and national organizations are very important. Members of international orders and congregations able to speak the languages of people from various countries (e.g., English, Vietnamese, Spanish, Portuguese) can deal directly with immigrants. However, in their first few years in Japan, they must take time to study the Japanese language and gain a footing in Japanese culture and customs.

#### **4.4. EVANGELIZATION**

The Catholic Church in Japan held a National Incentive Convention for Evangelization (NICE I & II) in 1987 and 1993 but has yet to successfully convey the gospel of Christ to society or even the Church. The proclamation of the gospel by all believers is the challenge for the future, but the first step is to evangelize the believers themselves by creating strong bonds that bring the Word of God to life. In order to do so, it is necessary that Catholics be trained to take on the new challenges that reality presents.

Outside the Church, distrust of religious groups is strong, and it is often questioned whether service is actually motivated by an intention to proselytize. Secularization permeates Japanese culture, but some people come to the Church in search of new answers to religious or spiritual matters. Therefore, it seems necessary to deepen religious "experience," that is, a faith experience that goes beyond mere catechism. There is no doubt that there are many people in the consumer society who want to connect

with the spiritual dimension of their lives. The challenge is to create a path that responds to this quest.

The younger generation needs experience beyond merely filling roles in their parishes; they need to experience the joy of freely serving the poor, the outcast and the elderly.

#### **4.5. INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE**

Inter-religious dialogue must be promoted in Japan. First, we must not be ignorant of the great religious traditions that continue to convey religious experiences and create values that form the foundations of our lives as human beings. They should be evaluated and respected. In addition to sharing with representatives or experts of various religious traditions, there is collaboration among various churches and religious groups coexisting in a particular area. Collaboration aims to promote joy-filled and active coexistence among people and organizations in the region. Finally, inter-religious dialogue takes place in families where all the members do not belong to the same religion. Knowing how to respect and accept each other and trying to support the religious journey of other members of the family who do not belong to the same tradition is fundamental to maintaining harmony in the family.

#### **4.6. ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES**

Ecological education takes place in educational institutions such as child-care facilities, kindergartens, and schools as well as in nursing homes, etc. This includes practical activities such as collecting and cleaning up trash, recycling paper and cardboard, and interacting with nature. Parishes should become centers for fostering this sort of ecological awareness. There are also specific ecological initiatives based on a faith perspective found in the word of God and the teaching of the Church. These can lead to prayer (including prayer with other religions), training camps, and cleanup action in the sea and mountains that are all practical parts of an ecological conversion. Projects organized by local governments to protect nature provide an opportunity to create good relations with local people and improve the human environment.

#### **4.7. OTHER MATTERS**

Pope Francis' visit certainly provided Japan with a better look not only at the Catholic Church, but at Christianity in general. It resonated with the whole of Japan. After the visit, social media reaction was very positive,

and the pope's messages reached many people beyond the Church. There was a great positive response to the pope's call to create a culture of dialogue and his clear position on nuclear weapons. He made it clear that not only the use of nuclear weapons, but even their possession, is immoral. In addition, he repeatedly referred to the situation of immigrants and touched on other issues that have had a negative impact on Japanese society such as the search for meaning in life, loneliness (especially among the elderly living alone) and the importance of the family. For Christians, it was a powerful experience of fellowship with the Universal Church and a powerful invitation to witness to the joy of the gospel.

The Japanese Church faces a shortage of priestly and religious vocations. One of the causes is the decrease in the number of young people, but this points out the urgent need of a pastoral response to young people. The Japanese Church appreciates the dispatch of missionaries from other Asian countries and their generous contributions. People-to-people exchanges among Churches in Asia strengthen the sense of the universality of the Church. In fact, the number of priests is more than sufficient for the number of Catholics in Japan. Therefore, the "missionary dimension" of priests' work must be strengthened. To that end, we need to invite them to look beyond the community of Christians for a way to reach the hearts of those waiting for the gospel. It means transforming the model from "administrator" to "pastor" and from "pastor" to "missionary."

## **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?***

### **5.1. A MULTINATIONAL CHURCH**

Foreign laity play no role in the Church. We must instill the awareness that the Church in Japan is not a Japanese Church, but a multinational one. The strength of the Church in Japan is the presence and hidden potential of believers from abroad. When foreign believers play an active role, the Church will be revitalized and international awareness will increase. By actively interacting with them, we may be able to better see international issues, especially, new ways of interacting with Asia.

### **5.2. BEING CHURCH WITH THE YOUNGER GENERATIONS**

We need to be more interested in what the younger generations think, discern together with them through dialogue and find the ways in which we must move forward. If we fail to meet challenges together with the younger generations, the Church will die. This does not mean dumping

everything on the younger generation; it means promoting intergenerational dialogue and continuing to walk together while entrusting leadership to the younger generations.

### **5.3. REORGANIZING EDUCATION**

There is almost no cooperation in Japan between Catholic schools and dioceses and parishes. Since Catholic schools have few Christians among their faculty and students, it is a challenge to maintain their identity. Therefore, we want to explore new possibilities for schools, parishes and church activities to work together. For example, *Laudato Si'* presents a number of environmental issues that can become opportunities for cooperation.

Educational facilities should be reorganized so that schools can interact with poor children. Religious congregations should cooperate to set up centers based on Christian values and standards to train non-Christian teachers who work in Catholic schools.

The same is true in other fields such as nursing homes, clinics and hospitals.

As the number of religious decreases and ages and management is increasingly turned over to trained laypeople, and since the aim is to convey the Christian spirit, it is necessary to continually provide lifelong formation for new workers.

### **5.4. A CHURCH OPEN TO SOCIETY**

The Church does not exist solely for Catholics or those who want to become Christians, and thus it cannot simply maintain the current pastoral system. We must seek new ways to evangelize.

We seek to be a Church that:

- is open to the reality of the local region and community;
- meets the concrete needs of people;
- accepts people, including the needy, the disabled and sexual minorities, as they are;
- provides support to foreign residents and other people who are at the bottom of society;
- welcomes multinational believers, and those who are suffering;
- responds to the spiritual needs of seafarers in port;

- protects all life through activities for peace and environmental conservation.

In all this, we do not use abstract criteria to look at people but look at the stage they are at in their process of maturation. Each person's level of maturity must be respected and accompanied.

To be a Church that is open to society in this way, it is necessary to encourage the formation of believers to be small, outer-directed communities.

## **5.5. PARTICIPATION IN INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE**

More people must become involved in responding to the crises of the world through ecumenical involvement with other Churches and cooperation with other religions. More than discussions at the doctrinal level, this should involve uniting in acts of love and mercy.

## **5.6. ASIA-WIDE COLLABORATION**

For the Catholic Church, the challenge is to work together in Asia as a whole, being a Church that walks with the peoples of Asia. As FABC documents repeatedly remind us, the Church in Asia is sent by the Lord to walk with the peoples of Asia.

Therefore, there are four important aspects of Church life in the Asian context.

- 1) Learning – Believing that God has always accompanied the journeys of the peoples of Asia, we will learn with gratitude. This is especially important against the backdrop of religious traditions that exist in many Asian countries and regions.
- 2) Sharing – Giving each other what we have received will contribute to the spiritual and human growth of the entire Church in Asia, and each will be able to grow in their own divine experience. To that end, for example, we will use online systems to strengthen dialogue in various fields at the Asian level. We can make opportunities to pray together in the context of the current situation in Asia that includes such challenges as human trafficking, environmental issues, refugees, migrant labor, etc.
- 3) Confronting – Standing as disciples of Jesus with the poor and those driven to the periphery and trusting in the Lord and his love, we will confront the powerful.

- 4) Building an inclusive society – We will respond to God's dreams for God's children by serving the people of Asia alongside people of good will. Where there are ideological differences, unstable relations between countries, economic disparities, and religious differences the Church will work as closely as possible with others to influence political and economic areas in Asia. Even in education and Catholics' evangelization work, we must have the consciousness that the whole of Asia is one area.

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## **IV. CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF KOREA (CBCK)**

**1. SITUATION:** *What are the realities you face, what are the signs of the times, what is the social, economic, political, religious situation? Any particular cultural or ecological challenges?*

### **(1) THE SIGNS OF TIMES: COVID-19 SITUATION**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the problems of a competitive society that has blind faith in technological development and prioritizes money, and the fact that these problems have been linked globally across borders became evident.

The polarization of wealth is becoming more serious as the lives of people are transformed into a non-contact society due to the pandemic. This will continue to be a direct and huge obstacle to the ideal development of Korean society. It is worrisome that the gap between the rich and the poor is widening not only in the residential environment but also in the educational environment. From the Church's point of view, the Contactless environment makes life of faith difficult, particularly increases young people's indifference in religion, and breakaway from the church.

In addition to the climate crisis, which is causing more serious damage to poor areas and poor people, Korea is experiencing aging and low birth rate. As the influence of social media and digital virtual space rather than social relationships grows, disregard of human life, hatred, and violence are seriously emerging. Despite of the high unemployment rate, migrant workers replaced the lack of labor in the agriculture and fishery in rural areas and fishing villages. At the time when the influx of immigrants and migrant workers is increasing, the need for a change in perception of living together is raised.

Meanwhile, it reminds us for international solidarity since the need of the unjustifiable oppression of human rights in certain countries, such as suppression of democracy in Hong Kong and military coup in Myanmar, is not only a matter for each country, but also a link to the interests between neighboring countries.

### **(2) THE REALITIES WE FACE**

**Conflict and Hatred:** In the 21st Century, the social polarization is intensifying due to the loss of authority on existing values, the polarization

of the gap between the rich and poor, and the rapid spread of social media. Conflicts between generations, which started from a political standpoint, are increasing along with the changed attitudes towards the zeitgeist, lack of dialogue between generations, and anger resulted from the economic alienation of young people. As a result, not only the polarization of opinions between the rich and the poor, but also the generational conflict intensified. Gender conflict, another social issue in Korean society, has also been triggered from a social unrest and an employment instability, and shared among the young people. The issues of conflict and hatred appear sharper in migrants and refugees, who are the traditionally existing marginalized people.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has paralyzed social, economic and religious activities, causing difficulties in life, anxiety about the future, and distrust among members of society. This is because social activities, including face-to-face encounters with others, which are basic human behavior, have been limited. Also, volunteer work for the poor has shrunk, making the pain of the socially weak more severe.

Material affluence and spiritual poverty: Korea has achieved high economic growth through the successful establishment of a capitalist economic system, overcoming political and economic difficulties. Behind the rapid quantitative growth, however, the dark side exists. The spiritual poverty, which comes with material affluence, reveals negatives in many situations. The traditional community culture of Korean society collapsed, and the culture of care and coexistence gives way to individualism. At a time when youth unemployment due to COVID-19 is a problem, the number of young people living on their parents without economic activities has increased. With this situation, the population decline is serious as young people postpone marriage and childbirth. This leads to a shortage of labor and an influx of immigrants, and social problems of failure to adapt to the culture of migrant workers into our society.

**Polarization:** Since the capitalism based on neo-liberalism puts economic benefit above everything else, the wealth is focused on the privileged. As a result, serious problems of polarization are emerging. A few who own most of the capital accumulates wealth, but the economic condition of most people who earn a living through labor is difficult even to maintain. For example, the closure of small business owners and consumption of luxury brand products are increasing at the same time. This is because wages, the price of labor, are rising slowly, while capital income

is rising steeply. The speculation of real estate, the representative asset, hinders youth from having a family. As a result, polarization is also accelerating low birthrates and aging society.

***Religious Situation:*** Although the Catholic Church in Korea is generally favorable to non-Catholic in Korea, but the actual percentage of faithful is still low, so efforts to evangelize are needed. It is not frustratingly low, compared to other Asian countries, but it is the time for a new momentum for greater growth.

Secularism, young people's indifference to religion, and the upswing in the economic activity in middle-aged people led to a decrease in the number of catechumen and increased lukewarm Christians. The aging of faithful and the decreasing number of volunteers in Church have made it difficult to manage the parish community.

Moreover, COVID-19 has suspended and limited group activities in the church and ritual mass over the past two years. This caused religious laziness among faithful, made religious education for children and youth difficult, and also severely damaged the economic operation of the parishes and the dioceses. In addition, existing volunteering and missionary work has been restricted, requiring a new vision of the identity of the Church.

More people are trying to find the meaning of life through psychological counseling or activities in nature rather than church.

With being a multicultural society by the increase in migrant workers, the number and influence of Muslim are rising naturally. Although proper understanding of Islam and interreligious dialogue are now required, COVID-19 also prevented church unity movements and interreligious dialogue. In the future, research and dialogue on multiculturalism, especially Islamic culture, will be needed.

***Lack of Policies for Ecological Transformation:*** Calls for ecological transformation are rising due to climate change and pandemics. Environmental destruction and waste accompanied by industrialization and consumerism cause serious environmental problems. In particular, damage such as global warming and air pollution is getting worse day by

day due to increased carbon dioxide emissions. Individuals' eco-activities are promoted and encouraged, but there are various noises in the establishment of policies such as nuclear power phase-out and coal phase-out, which are fundamental environmental transitions. Recognizing the consequences of nature destruction and the sacrifice of the poor behind

the pursuit of convenience and comfort, government policies implemented under the name of Green Growth and Green New Deal should also be tried to consider the poor and the environment.

Furthermore, neighboring country's decision to release radioactive waste into the ocean causes a serious ecological crisis of global ocean pollution beyond East Asia.

**Cultural Challenges:** At the core of cultural challenges, the overload of online information and the rapid spread of social media exist. Not only does unverified excessive information lead to false preconceptions, but also causes socio-cultural division. Moreover, the spread of social media concentrated on the anonymity rather than direct encounter and friendship, obscures the boundaries between truth and falsehood. For example, the popularization of YouTube leads to the spread of biased and malicious fake news, beyond providing information. Meanwhile, the human rights of sexual minorities, their marriage and adoption are social issues and new cultural challenges that the church facing.

## **2. ANALYSIS: ARE THERE CAUSES THAT YOU CAN IDENTIFY FOR THE ABOVE?**

The immediate causes of these problem are rapid industrialization, digital development, population concentration in large cities, the gap between rich and poor, increase of unemployment, reckless use of social media, lack of face-to-face dialogue due to non-contact culture, spiritual and religious indifference and the influx of migrant workers. At the time when COVID-19 is a serious destabilizing factor in our society, the church's failure to respond quickly and appropriately for those in psychological and spiritual need to provide spiritual education, experience of God, and comfort might be an indirect cause.

**Confirmation Bias in the Digital Age:** As Pope Francis pointed out in "Fratelli Tutti" about digital culture that is now commercialized not only for young people, but for almost every generation, "there are harmful interiors operating in the digital world (45)". This is because more and more people are affected by this insidious economic logic. Furthermore, Pope Francis is urging the convenience-seeking generation to establish the cause in a clear tone: "The way many platforms work often ends up favoring encounter between persons who think alike, shielding them from debate. These closed circuits facilitate the spread of fake news and false information, fomenting prejudice and hate (47)".

**Economic Inequality:** The cause of many problems is economic inequality. In a society which achieved economic quantitative growth, it has become richer than in the past, but the distribution of fruit has not been made justly. Globalization, in which investments are made across borders to profitable places under a capitalism structure that prioritizes financial interests, causes international environmental destruction and income polarization. It moves factories from countries with strict legal regulations on the environment and human rights, to countries with low regulations and cheap labor, carrying out processes that pollute the environment in poor countries, destroying rainforest and building nuclear power plants. As a result, the poor countries have to endure the damage of various pollution. There is no system that reflects the voices of the poor, or it only works perfunctorily, so it may be done without sufficient information or discussion on issues closely connected to the lives of people and communities.

The national community system which has to remain fair, and the media which should keep the authority in check with the right information have often fallen into the hands of capital at critical moments. Those who cannot see the exact cause of the difficult problem are expressing anger at others. In conjunction with this, conflicts and discrimination against irregular workers, genders and immigrants are intensifying.

**The weakening of Humanism-Based Human Rights:** The political and social environment of Korean society had grown out of basic demands for human rights. After the IMF crisis in 1997, however, economic value became a top priority in people's lives, weakening the value of human rights based on humanism. As the nation reorganized its social safety net, much of social welfare was transferred to the public. It is positive in that the government performs its role actively, but there is a negative aspect that the value of taking care of neighbor and understanding other people disappears. Although voices for human rights are growing, sound common sense in society is not in place due to prejudice and hatred toward people who are considered different from us. The weakening of understanding and caring for neighbors and others is ultimately revealed as a weakening of the sense of community. As the wisdom of living together fades, the individualism grows higher.

Due to the collective selfishness of each country and group, practical discussions for solving the problem has stopped developing, and only antipathy toward each other is growing and sometime the social

community is divided by the logic of power. Construction projects such as dams, airports, nuclear power plants, which destroy the environment and local communities, clearly show this.

In addition, competitive arms expansion also contributed to the conflict in Asia. Weapons produced due to the arms race are sold to various powers in each country. It fuels regional conflicts in Asia and conflicts between the U.S. and China can lead to bloodshed, such as the situation in Myanmar. The problems of suppressing democracy, afflicting people and damaging the environment and peace, are also linked to the pursuit of economic benefits through arms expansion by the great powers.

**3. CHURCH RESPONSE:** *What has been the Church's response to these realities? How has the Church contributed for the development of society in general?*

***Church Response to the COVID-19:*** In order to seek alternatives for Post-Pandemic, we are focusing on finding ways to come up with alternatives such as symposium and forum in each parish and research institute within the church. In the pandemic crisis continued since 2020, Parishes have been in solidarity by sending donations to other Parishes in a difficult situation. Also, there were voluntary activities within the church that empathize with the suffering situations, such as a donation program to help small business owners and support the purchase of vaccines for poor countries. As a result, the chaotic situation at the beginning of the pandemic is quite being stabilized. However, we must continue to cooperate in the common good and fraternity in the realities outside the church as well as in the church.

***The Church's contribution to social development:*** The Church has played a major role in realizing democracy in the nation under the long dictatorship. The church has become the voice of the oppressed who have no voice. In a grim situation where, human rights violations were tolerated under the pretext of economic growth, the Church was willing to defend human rights values and take the lead in promoting human rights according to social doctrine. In addition, responding to the human rights requests of the new generation, we were able to exist as a dynamic Church that makes a virtuous cycle that promotes the growth of society along with the growth of the Church.

In the early days of Korean society, the Church played a practical role in the poor social welfare field, working with the poor. In an environment of the insufficient social safety net, the Church has

demonstrated her values through caring for the economically and socially disadvantaged. While working with the marginalized who are exposed to the circumstances of the times in various ways, we took care of various social issues that have not yet matured in social discussion. The Church has made an efforts to help migrants and refugees, and to abolish the death penalty in the name of universal human rights. Even though the abolition of the death penalty has not yet come to fruition, it has resulted in the fact that Korea is in the process to abolish the death penalty. In order to overcome the thought of disregard for human life, the Church is providing education of pro-life activity and raising our voice in society.

For the future Church, we have supported the religious life of youth through Sunday school, youth religious education, and Catholic Bible Life Movement. We also provided pastoral care for the poor and multicultural families, as well as medical support for migrant workers who do not have access to healthcare. Although the Church could not actively engage in outside activities in the context of COVID-19, it has set to be an exemplary religion in the difficult situation of the pandemic.

*Activities of the Committee for Promoting Christian Unity & Interreligious Dialogue:* Preparing for the advent of the new era, the Catholic Church has been trying to find a new direction through various studies and seminars on its own new identity and pastoral ministry. In order to democratize society, realize justice, and solve environment problems, we have gathered strength together through ecumenical movements with Protestant Church and through dialogues with other religions. In particular, the Church will work together with them to deal with environmental destruction, global warming, garbage problem, and air pollution.

These activities are being carried out in cooperation with the Korean Council of Religious Leaders (KCRL), which consists of the heads of major religious organizations in Korea, and the National Council of Churches in Korea (KNCC), a consultative body of Protestant churches. Meanwhile, for dialogue with the Protestant church and the other religions, the guide for the ecumenical movement and the guide for meeting with neighboring religions were published as pamphlets to educate lay people, while also providing education in the seminary training course.

*Activities of the Committee for Ecology & Environment:* Through educations of social and ecological environment doctrine, a small active community of laity is being formed, and more and more lay people are

acting in various fields. In accordance with the spirit of the ecological rule of Pope's [Laudato Si'], various groups of clergy, religious, and laity responding to the climate crisis were formed "Catholic Climate Action Korea" to visit each region with ecological and environmental problems along with education and prayer campaigns. In addition, as a form of traditional apostolic activity of the Church, the Parish level Ecological Environment Apostolate "Friends of Heaven, Earth, and Water (FHEW)" was formed at the parish level, starting with the Archdiocese of Seoul. And it is expanding to all parishes across the country.

In "*Laudato Si' Week*" and "*Laudato Si' Special Anniversary Year*", commemorating the 5th anniversary of "*Laudato Si'*", the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea (CBCK) announced a joint statement of bishops on the climate crisis and guidance for each diocese, and bishop from dioceses were asked to make plans for the 7-year journey of *Laudato Si'*, which started with Mass. On May 24, 2021, *Laudato Si'* was dedicated to the opening Mass of the 7 years journey and began to be implemented in each diocese.

Since climate issues and ecological, environmental issues are common issues across national borders, after the Fukushima accident, joint pilgrimages and conferences about nuclear power generation, local residents' suffering by the accident and Fukushima contaminated water, were held every year with the Church in Japan. It is also in close solidarity on various issues, peace and historical issues in Northeast Asia.

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

Challenges the church faces internally include secularization, indifference to the religious life, declining numbers of faithful, aging, and difficulties in Youth activities. Underlying these challenges is the need of activate the inculturation of the gospel. Despite the high affinity for the Catholic Church in Korean society, the low percentage of faithful shows this.

**Individualism:** As individualism prevails, the community spirit of the church is threatened, and faith tends to be individualized. Personalization of faith can reject the absolute value of faith and relativize it by taking it according to individual needs and preferences. This is because by replacing the response to God's call with personal choice, becoming a consumer of religion rather than a faithful. The personalization of faith has also pushed

back interest of caring for the marginalized and the poor. Therefore, in order to prevent the spread of excessive individualism, realistic and relational efforts are needed to find and restore mutual agreement.

**Aging:** At the point where the growth of church is declining, one thing to consider is the aging of the church community in Korea. The problem of aging is, in other words, the disappearance of young people in the church. This means that the dynamic challenge and vitality, which the church in Korea had shown, disappears. A church community, which has lost its vitality is creating a vicious cycle that makes it difficult for new generations to have faith, and accelerates aging.

In addition, young people are not coming to the Church due to excessive competition and low birth rates. This is because of the lack of awareness of the clergy and the lack of a place for young people to work in the Church. In addition to liturgical and devotional activities, there is a lack of space or activity areas for young people to gather around the Church. In the realm of society and ecology, we are faced with the challenge of connecting the Church and young people so that they can find place for activities based on their faith.

**Challenges outside the Church:** The challenges facing outside the Church include an atmosphere of disregard for life and social indifference to religious values. To overcome these challenges, the Church is conducting the pro-life activity and environmental campaign.

The Church has faced with the task of delivering the teaching of ecological and social issues to more faithful and sharing it through experience. While the participation of lay experts is necessary, it is also needed to provide opportunities for the training and participation of lay group leaders who organize and lead small groups in the Church. The concrete practice of the Church's teachings must be manifested in the world. We need to move from a personal faith for spiritual comfort and salvation, to a social faith that cares for our neighbors. To this end, the Church must apply and educate social teaching and actively present new environmental issues. The primary concern of the Church is to expand the Kingdom of God concretely on the earth through respect for life, human dignity, and solidarity.

As for the challenges outside the Church, both social issues and climate crisis are important tasks presented by the Holy See. Along with social activities, it is a priority to make various efforts so that faithfuls can

move with one spirit in the community of faith above all else. In addition, appropriate regulations and management are required to minimize the spread of air pollution such as fine dust, and if possible, international cooperation should be sought. The Church will also have to accompany the government in a way that helps to prepare countermeasures for reducing carbon emissions.

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

***Realization of fraternal friendship:*** In Asia, where each region has its own

culture and traditions as well as diverse social, economic and political values, the way to go together to the Church that profess one faith is to confess that we are all brothers and sisters. We must become the Church that sees diversity as a rich culture, not as a ‘different’, and look at our neighbors with a fraternal heart.

As suggested in Pope Francis's Encyclical "Fratelli Tutti", "Every human being has the right to live with dignity and to develop integrally (107)."

Therefore, the Church must choose a new path that is not only for some faithful, but for all, with "social friendship and universal fraternity (106)."

We should also shift our consciousness to recognize that we are brothers and sisters to all creatures in the Earth. To this end, it is necessary to make an effort to share, experience, and solidify the situation in each region of Asia.

***Continuous Commitment for Promoting Integral Human Development:***

For better Asia, the Church must strive for the Integral human development. In particular, efforts must be made to address the problems of immigration, the needy, the sick, the displaced, the socially discriminated, the victims of armed conflict and natural disasters, slavery and torture. Especially in the current difficult situation due to the epidemic, practical cooperation and support are needed historically. Therefore, the Church should send a direct help to the neighbors in terms of social welfare. In this regard, the Church in Korea has installed and operated Local Soup Kitchens in each parish.

***Implementation of Solidarity in Various Ways:*** In a rapidly changing society, the Catholic Church need to prepare to become a haven for society, facing mental and spiritual problems, with adapting to the changes. To do this, we should prepare a teaching that not only within the Church, but also to social impact. In addition, through the practical life of Synodality in the local Church, the members of the Church community should engage in evangelical activities together. Thus, rather than exist as one of many social groups, the Church must live an evangelical life with the marginalized, proclaiming God's justice and peace beyond the parish. In order to collect, analyze, and act on opinions according to Synodality, it is necessary for the laity active participant of laity, efforts to educate and solidarity to activities of small communities. Sometimes it is needed to deliver a message to the nation to demand and practice of peace and coexistence, sharing and solidarity, and respect for all life. The Church must resolutely and clearly speak out to the brothers and sisters in neighboring countries who are suffering from the state violence that oppresses its own people with disturbing intention. Through this, we will be able to look at and improve the problems of the whole of Asia together and move forward together without being bound by each country's interests. Being Church is revealed in the path of empathy and solidarity.

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## **V. CHINESE REGIONAL BISHOPS' CONFERENCE (CRBC - TAIWAN)**

### **1. GENDER EQUALITY: STATUS OF WOMEN IN TAIWAN SOCIETY**

#### **SITUATION:**

Women's status in Taiwan Society in the 21st century has already improved. Taiwan has developed from a traditional patriarchal society to a modified patriarchal society due to the fast political, economic and social change, over the past twenty years or so. Women are given equal representation and active participation in the political, social and economic spheres of social life. Taiwan Constitution protects women's rights. Marriage regulations are based on gender equality. Both husband and wife have the right to the decision-making in terms of domicile have equal rights towards their children's custody and their property. There are no restrictions on the employment of women (Taiwan Act of Gender Equality in Employment).

However, women's role in the home is still influenced to a certain extent by the modified patriarchal view within Taiwanese society that placed women in a subordinate position to men in the home. Part of the remaining influence of Taiwan's modified patriarchal society is that women have to do all the household chores but at the same time have to work full-time just like their husbands. Gendered division of labor still exists in the homes, which gives more pressure to women, especially to working mothers and at the same time "homemakers".

The women's flourishing economic power and changing views on marriage based on gender equality gradually changed the dynamics in the home. Women are looking forward to a more equal partnership in the home, not just equal opportunities at work.

Modified patriarchal views can be considered a cause of the gendered division of labor between husbands and wives in the homes, and women are inclined to choose to remain single, get married later in life, or leave unhappy marriages.

#### **CHALLENGE:**

The Church is challenged to provide pastoral care for the home especially with working mothers carrying the burden and pressure of their work and taking care of the home and children.

## **RESPONSE:**

Strengthening of Christian Family Formation through Home visitation via family life apostolate: bringing the Family Life Apostolate (FLA) programs toward the homes of the faithful instead of the faithful going to the church asking for formation.

Strengthening Christian Family Formation through Compassionate sitting (home prayer, faith sharing and meditation, counseling, education and fellowship) for the neighborhood of the BEC Program.

Pastoral Accompaniment (outreach program and home visitation, guidance and counseling) or Care for the young Families DURING (short terms services such as: providing relief goods, guidance and counseling, immersion and prayer,) and AFTER breakdown or divorce, (long term services and assistance which may include guidance and counseling and legal and para-legal assistance, financial assistance)

Family Guidance and Counseling (different families in crisis or trauma may vary in terms of needs; some may need counseling help, others may need professional counseling psychology assistance because of trauma/stigma brought about by covid-19, the guidance and counseling services are now professionally separated. For extreme crisis and trauma/stigma due to the aftereffects of pandemic others may require long-term professional psychiatric aid.

Taking care of elderly with increase respect and through dialogue (the care for the elderly maybe household bound care or nursing home facility intervention which may be determined by professionals and apostolate should adhere and abide to protocols on how to provide elderly care in a rather compassionate, happy and dignified death), increase respect (for the dignity of human life, according to the Roman Catholic Church's solicitude for the care and preservation of the dignity of human life) and (enriched/up-to-date response, involving all interested stakeholders through networking collaboration or cooperation, all forms and elements of cooperation and collaboration should be sensitive and inclusive) dialogue... for an enriched dialogue in each family, no member should be left behind in the dialogue process, consultation, representation, deliberation and decision making for the alleviation and the betterment of the total welfare of the said family. May it be elderly, child or any member in need of care and respect to be sure that ministry is exhausted and implemented by the Catholic Church for the promotion of the family welfare and preservation

of its dignity as the basic unit of our society and the Church. Note: this is how crucial is, the role of the Roman Catholic Church in the promotion and preservation of the total human development through its stream and sphere of mandated organizations within the Catholic Church in the planning implementation and evaluation of the efficacy of its ministries.

## **2. LEGALIZED ABORTION**

### **SITUATION:**

Abortion is legal in Taiwan since 1985. Abortion is legal under the following circumstances:

Medical reasons (pregnancy/defect issue harming either mother or child), mental health issues, psychological impact, rape, incest or seduction, abortions may only be permitted in the first 24 weeks of pregnancy except to save a woman's life or preserve her physical health.

According to the Enforcement Rules of Genetic Health Act, it is legal in Taiwan to receive artificial abortion within the first 24 weeks of pregnancy; but some abortions are carried out beyond this period of time based on the judgments of medical professionals.

Taiwan law considers the right to life and the protection of life, but life only starts after the 24th week of pregnancy. Before 24th week of pregnancy life is not recognized as such.

Aside from having high abortion rate, there is also high unwanted pregnancy rate. While the birth rate is decreasing, the abortion rate is not.

Aside from the legal abortion, the women's growing awareness on feminism also reinforce women's inclination to have abortion as there are women who fight to have absolute right to their body and some women see abortion as a "Healthcare" issue claiming, "My Body, My Choice".

The issue on abortion can be attributed to Ignorance on the inviolable dignity of human life and too much appeal for freedom.

### **CHALLENGE:**

The Church need commit itself to the advocacy of social justice on the protection and the preservation of the dignity of human life at all cause, forms and elements. (This commitment can only be made possible with the help of committed and well-trained resource personnel).

## **RESPONSE:**

In spite of the high unwanted pregnancy and abortion rate in Taiwan, the Church remains consistent in her teachings on the inviolable character of every human life (from its conception to its natural end), as human being. The Church is trying to promote the advocacy of the protection on human life (through its instituted and accredited Church based NGO Units and through the merit of its teaching, preaching and pastoral ministries.

### **3. TAIWAN'S "AGED" SOCIETY AND THE ON THE PROCESS LEGALIZATION OF MERCY KILLING**

#### **SITUATION:**

One of the current situations that concerns the society of Taiwan and the Church is the on the process legalization of Mercy Killing in the "aged" society of Taiwan.

Taiwan is an aging society with low birthrate. Fourteen-point zero five percent (14.05%) of the population is above 65 years old. Out of seven (7) people, one is a senior citizen. The number of elderly people is increasing and as a consequence, many of our sick people are elderly with an advanced illness, and the worst situation is, in some cases, the one taking care of a severely sick elderly patient happened to be their own spouses who are also advanced in age. So that, with all the emotional exhaustion they experienced, mercy killing becomes an option or solution for the patient or for their family members who wanted to end the suffering due to old age sickness, and even for those who are not elderly, but who suffer from a critical and terminal sickness. Many advocates of mercy killing thought of it as "good quality death" for the terminally ill patients. It is inevitable that Taiwanese families are now confronted with the reality of making awful decision of whether to put an end or not to the life of an aged, sick and suffering loved one.

As part of responding to this concern of caring for the people in the society, the first draft of the Patient Right to Autonomy Act was passed to the Legislative Yuan in 2019. However, record says that, the Peaceful Palliative Care regulations and the Patient Autonomy Legislation system have not been effective in practice, thus demonstrating that the current legal framework only allows voluntary passive euthanasia that appeared failure to meet the needs of the nation. Therefore, physician-assisted suicide and voluntary active euthanasia should be legalized.

## **CHALLENGE:**

Taiwan society and the Church are challenged how to build a “Compassionate City” in an “Aged Society” and to counteract mercy killing with holistic care for the elderly, sick and suffering members of the society. Death and dying should involve a certain process. Once shortened...it is half hazard and therefore less likely meaningful and purposeful...certainly not joyful and happy death and dying. Against the will of the suffering member and the relatives are unwilling to suffer with the one suffering. They are left alone...and being alone could so lonely.

## **RESPONSE:**

Given this present reality of being of an “aged society”, we hope to have a more holistic and realistic response to the crisis due to an “aged” society. That is, we hope to build a caring and friendly environment for the elderly people and their family, offering care and support those who are living with advanced age or illnesses and at the latest stages of life.

With this, we propose to establish a “Compassionate City”. A community that its members assume the responsibility to care for one another and work together to build a well-trained society to care for the elderly who are sick, abandoned, depressed, alone and lonely, etc., and to become a ready and competent society to face unavoidable part of life’s cycle such as sickness, death and bereavement.

We intend to have it establish first in the parishes. The BEC communities in the parishes can be the first “Compassionate Cities” to offer care and support to the elderly within the parish community, then to the surrounding communities and then moving further to the larger communities until the whole society will become one family where everyone is concerned and committed to care for one’s neighbor like the Good Samaritan, the best icon of compassion for the sick and dying.

As a Church, we need to suffer with the suffering member of our family and society through: prayer, patience and presence in and through our pastoral care for a happy and meaningful death ministry.

We also need personnel or additional separate commission with group of qualified and accredited CPE...Clinical and Pastoral Education chaplains. Clinical Pastoral Education and Chaplaincy Unit both in the Hospital and the Nursing Care facilities of the Diocese.

This proposed building of a “compassionate city” is a long-term response to the crisis of Taiwan’s “aged” society.

#### **4. COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

##### **SITUATION:**

The average of new confirmed domestic transmission cases and the number of deaths is either very low or zero. There is a possibility in March that the length of quarantine period for passengers arriving in Taiwan will be shortened from 14 days to 10 days depending on the nationwide COVID-19 pandemic situation and the booster shot vaccination rate.

The People’s way of life has almost back to normal. Religious venues such as Churches, Temples, and Mosques are open for religious worships and gatherings. Religious gathering is allowed without checkerboard seating arrangements, but proper COVID-19 protocols such as periodic sanitation and wearing of mask is obligatory. Restaurants and Bars are open with restrictions. Restaurants are allowed to offer dine-in services.

The Church continues to celebrate Sunday/daily public masses with the congregation gathered inside the Church. Online Masses are celebrated for the Faithful who are confined in their homes because of sickness and old age. The Church continues her pastoral ministry.

The government has decided to allow the selective entry of foreign migrant workers starting November 11, 2021, to help address industry and care needs while it ensures that anti-pandemic measures are implemented.

##### ***On Vaccines:***

Taiwan is making good progress on vaccinations. Up to the present, 82.02 percent of Taiwan's population of 23.35 million has received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, 75.19 percent have gotten at least two doses, and 25.89 have received a booster shot.

##### ***Taiwan Carefree Covid-19 Vaccination Program***

Carefree Covid-19 Vaccination Program for Foreign nationals: Overstayers or Undocumented Migrant Workers, Detainees, Detainees who are on a temporary release.

The program allow foreign nationals in the country such as: overstaying foreigners (including unreported overstayers or undocumented migrant workers, detainees, detainees who are on a

temporary release,) to receive vaccination at sites designated by the Disease Control Agency (Clinics, Hospitals, Churches, Temples or other NGO sites) starting December 3, 2021 to January 31, 2022. Overstaying foreign nationals including undocumented migrant workers, overstaying residents or visitors, are encouraged to sign up for vaccination at NGOs such as the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Taipei, Chinese Muslim Association, R.O.C. Community Sustainable Development Association. They will not be seized on the vaccination area. No report will be given to law enforcement agencies. Free vaccination and the vaccination name list will not be a legal ground for investigation.

### *Vaccine Certificate*

Taiwan issues digital COVID-19 vaccine certificates under same conditions as holders of EU Digital COVID Certificate.

For safe travel, holder of Taiwan COVID-19 vaccine certificates will have the same conditions as the EU Digital COVID Certificate. Taiwan digital COVID-19 vaccine certificate is hoped to be available end of December 2021.

### *Economic*

Even amidst pandemic, Taiwan has made an outstanding economic performance in terms of its exports of semiconductor chips, metals, plastics, chemicals and textiles. Taiwan's manufacturing activities were largely unaffected by COVID-19. Even with the travel restrictions around the world caused by the pandemic, the demand for Taiwan's global exports for information and communications technology products have increased. The semiconductor industry is the most essential contributor to domestic capital formation.

### **CHALLENGES:**

On the other hand, the COVID-19 implemented movement restrictions seriously impacted the local accommodation and restaurants and even with the partial easing of restrictions, local accommodation and food businesses have not fully recovered.

There are still limitations to Church's gatherings and the implementation of some pastoral works due to the unpredictable situation of COVID-19.

## *Impact of COVID-19 on the Migrants in Taiwan.*

Covid-19 aggravated the situation of foreign migrant workers in Taiwan the last 2 years (2020 to 2021) by the following situation:

1. Shortages of workers (employees). The no entry policy in the last two years means more work for the migrants as new replacement or new hires cannot enter Taiwan. The big shortages put heavy burden to the work load of many factory workers.

2. In May 2021 COVID-19 outbreak in Taiwan, migrants were blamed by some local citizens of the spread of the virus (Zhunan, Miaoli). Discrimination, fear, racism and double standard were experienced in the workplace, dormitories and the community. The overcrowded poorly ventilated and maintained dormitories once again were highlighted.

3. No entry for returning and new foreign workers cut the financial support to their family.

In general, COVID-19 can be attributed to too much exercise of freedom and irresponsible use of freewill and knowledge over and above natural causes.

### **REPONSES:**

The Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, the Pastoral Team in the different Migrant Centers and Dioceses' Migrant Chaplains, have joined efforts in responding to the social and pastoral needs of the migrant workers quarantined and hospitalized due to COVID-19 pandemic.

### *Actions have been done in terms of:*

- Provision of additional or lacking relief goods to those in the quarantine areas.
- Moral and spiritual support through online Counseling and spiritual guidance.
- Constant communication and follow-up of the condition and other needs of the migrant workers in the different hospitals and quarantine areas.
- Coordination with the officials from the local government and Economic Cultural Offices officials to facilitate proper and safe

distribution of relief goods and to ensure the safety and welfare of the migrants and volunteers.

- The Church used technologies and social media (Online masses, counseling, spiritual direction, etc.) for a sustained pastoral ministry, to continue reach to out to her faithful thereby sustaining her relationship and making her presence not only seen but felt.

- The faithful were encouraged to continue to pray, offer sacrifices and do spiritual and corporal acts of mercy and offer prayer intentions to end the pandemic.

## **5. INFLUX OF MIGRANTS AND IMMIGRANTS IN A GLOBALIZED TAIWAN**

### **SITUATION:**

Taiwan Human Mobility...migration is no longer an option but rather a necessity to survive because of lack of opportunity back home. Globalization in Taiwan, no doubt has brought economic success and prosperity to the country, with minimal adverse social disruption, because of the relatively equitable distribution of its wealth-creating productive capacity. Taiwan's success during the transition from a traditional to becoming a first world industrialized nation is measured by the standards and ideology of globalization. This success has its dark side for ordinary workers, particularly among foreign workers like the unfair and unjust contractual labor mechanism, broker/systematic brokerage mechanism, contractual migration, foreign workers cheaper labor force, maltreatment cases of fishermen, seafarers, caregivers, construction workers, factory workers, foreign housewives. There are more than seven hundred thousand (700,000) migrant workers in Taiwan. Majority of the migrant workers in Taiwan are coming from Southeast Asia like Vietnam, Indonesia and Philippines.

### **CHALLENGE:**

The local Church has to provide pastoral Care for the migrants as response to the mandate to her by Christ. Every stranger who knocks at our door is an opportunity for an encounter with Jesus Christ, who identifies with the welcomed and rejected strangers of every age (Matthew 25:35-43). The local Church of Taiwan is called "to respond to the many challenges of contemporary migration with generosity, promptness, wisdom and foresight according to her abilities" by welcoming the migrants to have more encounter, by protecting their rights, by promoting their welfare and

by integrating them into the local Church. No one should be excluded or no one should be left behind in the pursuit of the realization of the Church's solicitude for total human Development.

Pluralism is a source of richness and strength that enables different communities to live and work together beyond mere toleration. With the influx of migration, Catholic migrants from the Philippines, Vietnam, and Indonesia flocked in the church during Sunday Mass celebrations. Thus, in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, there is a need of total integration and inclusion where faithful of diverse cultures, of different mode of faith expressions, varied languages and nationalities are present.

The migrants both in the social sphere and local Church arena are tolerated but not totally integrated or incorporated into the local Church. Lacking in participation and reciprocity in the local Church.

#### ***Demands:***

- Abolish Broker System – source of incidents of abuse, deceit, excessive and exorbitant collection of fees...or misrepresentation. Government to government hiring system. Employers will have to be accountable to embassies and no longer resort to the aid intermediaries.
- Extension of Limits of Contract...to include migrants in the retirement plan, programs and benefits... contractual labor migration is disadvantageous ... commoditization of cheap human labor.
- Day off should not be limited to only few sectors in migration...but should include those isolated in the household sector of care-giving.
- No more segregation, isolation due to dormitory system and possibly avoid marital infidelity and casual, transitional homosexual coupling and cohabitation.
- Allow creation of migrant's labor union for the sake of total human development.

#### **RESPONSE:**

The church, through the various migrants' centers and shelters has reached out and provided social, services to migrants, seafarers, and the victims of human trafficking in Taiwan, regardless of religion, race and ethnic background so that their material and spiritual welfare were addressed and their social welfare promoted and labor rights protected. The Church upheld the tradition of opposing the logic of discrimination and

the rejection of one's neighbor. Hence, the Church provides an inclusive and equal services given to the migrants, seafarers, and the victims of human trafficking as follows:

- 1.) Provide temporary shelter, personal/pluri-cultural counseling, legal and paralegal assistance to migrants, seafarers, and the victims of human trafficking in distress or experiencing difficulties either on a family or working level;
- 2.) Verify the living condition of migrant workers through regular visit to factories, dormitories, etc.;
- 3.) Regular visit to hospitals and detention centers/prison to provide comfort, moral support and advises;
- 4.) Cooperate and establish networking with other NGO's and government offices
- 5.) Bridging between the country of origin, society and the government in Taiwan to remind them of their responsibilities and obligations towards the migrants through negation, lobbying and advocacy works.

The Church need to invest more on human and other resources to educate and prepare priests, lay leaders, Church NGO workers and religious men and women to work and respond to the above needs with compassion and professional standards.

The Church of Taiwan is starting to go beyond tolerance into Acceptance, Inclusion and harmonious Co-existence in an environment of pluralism and diversity due to the influx of migration. The Church is exerting efforts towards integrated celebration of the Holy Eucharist, using different languages and mode of expressions of both the local faithful and that of the migrants from the Philippines, Vietnam and Indonesia.

With the growing number of foreign migrant workers, foreign students, new immigrants and their family, the Church is trying to strengthen her outreach programs for the migrants and immigrants. Regular masses in English, Vietnamese and Indonesian languages are made available in several local churches and dormitories. Catholic centers and shelters for migrant workers are available in the different dioceses.

The Church is trying to have a sustained collaboration, networking and lobbying together with other NGOs and government agencies to

amend or improve Taiwan laws and policies to be more beneficial to the foreign workers.

## **6. CLIMATE EMERGENCY/ EXISTING AND EMERGING CRISIS...**

### **SITUATION:**

#### **The Threat of Rising Sea Level**

The increasing frequency of extreme weather events and rising sea levels caused by global warming endanger Taiwan's environment and survival. Taiwan's average temperature in the past two years has been the highest in 100 years. A typical heat wave has been causing water shortages, damaging the economy, threatening the people's welfare, and restricting the generation of hydroelectric power.

The number of the displaced people in Taiwan is expected to increase in the future as the effect of climate crisis is worsening. Floods, typhoons, landslides and particularly the rising sea level are predicted to cause many people to be displaced in the future. Taiwan is facing "Potential sea level rise and storm surge threat." 1,400 km<sup>2</sup> of Taiwan will be underwater by 2050 if it will not reduce its greenhouse emissions and nearly 3 million residents will be victims of rising sea levels and storm surges (the capital city lies in a basin).

This phenomenon can be attributed to irresponsible use of the natural resources and greed of the select few.

### **CHALLENGE:**

#### **Reduction of Greenhouse gas emission**

### **RESPONSE:**

As we foresee this great threat ahead of us, the Church of Taiwan anticipates the need to employ a preventive measure approach in our ministry of care towards the environment to help prevent the rapid and worsening effects of climate crisis.

#### ***Education and Awareness Drive:***

- The Church to proactively engage in preparing people for the impending disaster.... prevention through education and awareness drive; Information dissemination campaign and sensitization of our Catholic Faithful about the basic and fundamental information pertaining to the causes and effects of climate crisis.

- To engage in an enriched cooperation with government to do the mapping of the hazard zones, survey of possible crisis affected residents who are members of our Church or those who are well within the jurisdiction of our local Parishes.

- To facilitate group discussion of the preventive mechanisms to address possible crisis within our church facilities and elicit opinions and evoke philanthropic sentiments to possible donors for possible crisis intervention through on-going fundraising initiatives and other drives to note even where to go and get assistance before the crisis will arise.

- Continue collaborating with the government entities, Church NGO Units and civil society groups to plant trees, sea shore mangrove planting drive and we support zero carbon transportation mechanism through a (gas reduced carbon emission) use of transportation and other measures supportive of the renewable energy use like solar panels and LED lights in our churches and schools.

## **7. TRANSFORMATION OF CULTURES/INCULTURATION**

### **SITUATION:**

Interpersonal and cultural exchange of the people on the move...education and social media, artifacts and other historic evidences....

In the context of Taiwan, the inter marriages among different nationalities has truly enriched to a certain extent the cultural landscape of Taiwan. There are a growing number of children of mix marriages. The children of the immigrants can become the hope of the Church in Taiwan (considering the decreasing number of local Catholics and dearth of vocation) because they have been brought up by their parents in the Church and they may also provide vocation for the Church in the future.

### **CHALLENGE:**

How will foreign migrants contribute to the enrichment of the local culture and the local faithful also transform the arriving culture...it must be a two-way process of exchange through facilitating or participating. Religious and cultural practices and food fare or exhibits, dances and other forms or elements of arts.

It is also a challenge how to continue to nurture and sustain the faith and vocation of the children of Catholic Immigrants, provide education to teach their mother tongue and cultural regeneration or introduction to their mother culture and faith traditions.

**RESPONSE:**

Organized church-based group for the Families of Catholic Immigrants, as a means to accompany, sustain and nurture the faith of families of Catholic Immigrants through education, children catechism and other varied Church's gatherings and activities that provides integration of the children of the immigrants and local people.

To organize Religious and cultural integration activities, such as: food fare or exhibits, cultural dance presentations and other forms or elements of arts.

**8. ECUMENISM/INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE****SITUATION:**

The context of pluralism of culture and religion – is not a threat to dialogue, respect and communion. Taiwan is respectful and open for dialogue and expression of other religious belief and conviction. Catholic religion enjoys relative freedom of faith expression and association. Taiwan has a very open and relevant political relation with recognition from the Vatican.

**CHALLENGE:**

How to strengthen Church's mechanism for ecumenism that is geared toward a collaborative effort to advocate world peace and synergized acts of charity.

**RESPONSE:**

The Church of Taiwan adheres to possible means of cooperation, dialogue and networking for the advancement of ecumenical relations and shared advocacy, ex. care for the disadvantage Buddhist, Islamic and Catholic migrants and fishermen.

The Church, through her faithful will remain in fidelity to her thrust and solicitude towards humanity. We cannot just grow in our faith (preaching, evangelization) and be grateful for our blessings; we definitely have to do something for what we believe in a collaborative and sustained compassion and synergized acts of charity.

**9. CHURCH GOVERNANCE: SYNODALITY****SITUATION:**

Inclusivity of all sectors for the sake of total human development.

The Church of Taiwan recognizes and welcomes the enormous richness of the diverse charisms of all the members of hers both lay and religious. As a Church, we recognized the need for all the baptized to have participation and active involvement in Church's mission to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. We hope that all the faithful regardless of their level of instruction in the faith will have participation through representations in the different levels of church administration such as: Parochial, Deanery and Diocesan levels.

#### **CHALLENGE:**

On the Diocesan level: to have each diocesan council well represented with bishop/s, priests, lay faithful and religious to discuss and reflect on Church concerns. On the Deanery level: how to form and create a small group or representative group represented not only by the priests but also of the lay faithful and from this group we can have lay representative/s to the Diocesan level. On the Parochial Level: it is already well represented with Lay Faithful.

In this way, the Church from the parochial level to the diocesan level will be well represented by her members commensurate to the total number of each group.

On the level of the Episcopal Conference, the CRBC serves as a platform where we help each other for whatever needs a particular diocese may have.

#### **RESPONSE:**

To build a synodal Church through Listening, Dialogue, Discernment, Contemplation with Bishops, priests, religious and lay leaders walking hand in hand. To have a Synodal approach in responding to the needs of the Times: See-Judge-Act = Ensure-Secure-Assure

SEE = Ensure (Listening and Dialogue - Parochial level with the majority number of the Faithful/grassroots, Religious and parish priest) that the most vulnerable, the majority of the lay faithful/grassroots are listened to and are given the venue, the time, and the platform to share their opinion, time, talent, expertise, and spiritual life experiences.

Ensure ... Solidarity and the virtue of faith... Love and sense of the common good will be promoted...

JUDGE = Secure (Dialogue and Discernment - Deanery level with Priests/ Religious and Lay Faithful) that all processes of Discernment are

adhered or exhausted - with Humility (as an Institution) to seek help and exhaust all possibilities of dialogue to fully understand the signs of the times from the perspective of the "ordinary people" and the lay faithful who has the authority and credibility to speak about their experiences and what appropriate responses can we do together in solidarity and synergy.

Secure ... Solidarity and the virtue of faith....will be of prime consideration...

ACT = Assure (Decision and Implementation) Diocesan Level with Bishops, Priest, Religious and Lay Faithful

That the responsible group for the decision making and implementation of the responses to the needs of the times have gone through series of thorough dialogue.

Assure... The preferential option for the poor and the virtue of charity is delivered... Christ through the Church teaches believers the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity.

Inclusivity in the Catholic Church for the planning, representation, decision making and implementation of the pastoral ministry. Inclusivity in the pursuit of the mandate of the thrust and charism of the Roman Catholic Church.

## **10. FAMILY**

### **SITUATION:**

Propagation and preservation of the dignity of human life.

In the Taiwanese society, the social and religious institution of marriage is suffering a crisis due to the high rate of divorce cases. Many young people prefer cohabitation instead of receiving the sacrament of marriage. In effect, it creates psychological wounds among the members of the family and irregularities on family life. The broader effects will most likely be having an unstable society, continues decrease of birth rate and becoming a more aged society. This reality is also true among the faithful. They recourse into divorce and cohabitation and finally turn away from the Church.

### **CHALLENGE:**

The Church needs to take special attention and care of the family especially through sound marriage preparation, accompaniment of the

young families, attention and care to those who are going through family crisis and pastoral care and accompaniment for the divorcee.

**RESPONSE:**

Strengthened Christian Family Formation, intensify programs on Marriage Preparation and mixed marriages, Pastoral Care and Accompaniment of Families during and after breakdown and divorce.

**11. YOUTH**

**SITUATION:**

The hope of the basic unit of our human society is also the hope of the Church...therefore the response to uphold and promote their welfare and future concerns all sector and level of possible networking.

The faithful of Taiwan who are actively present in the Church are mostly elderly people. The youth are not so visible in the Church. Their Catholic parents do not bring them regularly to the Church. They grow up as baptized Catholic but without much involvement in the Church. School requirements and other education concern is their top most priority as well as the allurement of the modern world. There are some who used to go to the Church during childhood not until they reached High School. Young people, attract fellow young people. Peer factor is very important for the young ones.

**CHALLENGE:**

The Church needs to intensify her local pastoral ministry for the Youth.

**RESPONSE:**

Individual Parish and inter Parish Youth Group to offer spaces and opportunities, trainings, formation and other activities for the youth. Employ professional youth Animators and leaders.

Improve on the animation and recreation of the life and ministry for the YOUTH by providing and creating venues for the youth to experience dialogue of life, culture and religion at the very early stage through youth encounter or youth camps, cultural exhibits and other avenues of cultural exchange and dialogue.

To create avenues for the youth to facilitate or participate in the cultural and religious exchange and dialogue. Youth Dating Site for the preservation of religious affiliation and tradition but still remain open for mix marriage.

Doing ministry as a response from the Catholic Church, the above social concerns and issues is aimed to be responsive to the urgency, relevancy, and exemplarity of the different concerns of the Church. As a Church, we hope to remain sensitive, responsive significant agents in responding to the needs of the times.

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