

**SYNTHESIS REPORTS**

**SYNOD OF BISHOPS 2021–2023**



- I. Catholic Bishops' Conference of Bangladesh (CBCB)**
- II. Catholic Bishops' Conference of Central Asia (CECAC)**
- III. Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI)**
- IV. Syro-Malabar Church**
- V. Syro-Malankara Catholic Major Archiepiscopal Church**

**Catholic Bishops' Conference of Bangladesh**  
**For a Synodal Church:**  
**Communion, Participation and Mission**  
**Synthesis Report on the Synodal Journey**

*Indicate the milestones, turning points, and especially the spiritual dimension of the journey (difficulties, surprises, etc.).*

The Catholic Church in Bangladesh has wholeheartedly welcomed the call of the Holy Father for a synodal Church and immediately started taking all the necessary steps in actualizing the process of the diocesan phase following the instructions provided in the *Vademecum*. All the dioceses made a formal opening of the synodal process with a solemn Mass with the participation of the significant number of the faithful and representatives of the different walks of life. Each diocese has selected a contact person and a diocesan core team had been made. The *Vademecum* has been translated in Bengali for the accessibility of all the people. Orientation program was arranged at different stages for a clear understanding of the synod and its spirit. Each diocese had prepared a roadmap for the process of listening and a guideline was provided.

The categories of the people were included baptized Christians including man-women, handicapped, internally migrants, elderly, people who live in poverty and in peripheries, Catholics who rarely or never practice their faith, etc. Moreover, representatives of all age groups of people such as children, adolescents and youth also took part in this journey. Besides, non-Christians and people from other Churches were also invited to participate in this journey.

This journey included various phases. There were: village or block levels, different age and gender group levels, lay movement levels, congregation levels, institution levels, parish levels, vicarial levels, diocese level.

The process of discussion, dialogue, prayers and reflections were ice-breaking; it had reciting prayer for the Synod (mentioned in the *Vademecum* for the Synod on Synodality and hymn to the Holy Spirit, sharing objectives of the reflection sessions, reading from the holy Bible and reflections. There were sharing main questions and

collection of reflections of the participants, sharing issue-based questionnaires and collection of reflection and experiences of the participants, recording all the reflections of the participants, display and validations, conclusion of the session with prayers, hymn and thanksgiving.

The diocesan synthesis reports were prepared at each levels and then additions, deletions and validations were made before forwarding them to the next levels (from village/block levels to diocesan level) with monitoring and guiding by the synodal team, etc.

The participation of all types (regardless of location, language, education, socio-economic status, ability/disability, and material resources) and age group people were ensured. The teams were mindful of the Cultural awareness of different ethnic group people and they were inclusive and integrated. The equal respect on participation and opinion were maintained. the matter of transparency, fairness in preparing the accurate synthesis through validation and participation were of immense importance.

The methodologies for discussion, dialogue and reflections sessions were included but not limited to; plenary discussion; discussion in small groups; focus group discussion (FGD); In depth interview (IDI); prayers and meditation; etc.

While sharing the fundamental question: *How is this journeying together happening today in your particular Church?* it was noted that people could realize the true nature of the Church and in that light, they were able to see the situation of their Particular Church. Its historical context is marked by social and political discrimination, hierarchical structure, male-dominated society, clericalism, autocratic tendency, rich-poor division, the abuse of power and the abuse of conscience, lack of faith and corruption within herself, selfishness and self-interest, partiality, lack of recognition and due respect to the gifts of the Holy Spirit etc., still, they could perceive that their Particular Church is slowly moving ahead in journeying together in the midst of various challenges and shortcomings. At the same time, participants could see the need for ecclesial conversion in order to regain the synodality of the Church.

## **The Main Question**

### **A.1 How is this journeying together” happening today in your local Church?**

- Participation together in the Holy Eucharistic and Sacramental Program and in different social, cultural and religious events;
- Living together as family members and taking care of each other;
- Solving different social problems with mutual understanding together;
- Participating together as pastoral team for leading activities of the local Churches;
- Organizing and participating joint prayer programs and family blessing programs;
- The active presence of different institutions, organizations and movements.
- Participation in maintenance of the Church and sharing responsibilities
- Pastoral care of the poor and needy, elderly, sick people and people with disabilities, drug addicts, transgendered, prisoners, gipsy, homeless and migrants, refugees, street children, orphans, sex workers and their children, vulnerable people due to climate change, garments workers, people with undignified jobs, slum dwellers etc.
- Sharing resources with the people who are in need;

### **A.2 What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our “journeying together”?**

#### **The Spirit invites us to take the following steps to:**

- Demonstrate God’s love in action to the human beings, nature and creation
- Active and regular participation together to the Holy Mass, worship and prayer program and maintain sacramental lives;
- Organize and attend the regular family prayer and extend support to others;
- Protect, preserve and practise own culture, language and customs;

- Avoid selfishness and grouping and live together with mutual love and respect;
- Active participation to the activities of the Parish and social welfare;
- Ensure dignity, protection, care and respect of women and children at family and society;
- Care and wellbeing of the sick, disable, poor, deprived, elderly, orphan, those who live in peripheries and neglected people;
- Take appropriate and sympathetic steps to bring the people to the church who are excluded, who have left the practice of the faith, people of other faith traditions, people of non-religious belief, people involved with illegal marriage, etc.;
- Create space and scope to listen to Children, youth and women especially those who do not have a voice, and take care of them;
- Taking steps for resolution of conflict among and between individuals, families and societies through discussions and arbitration;
- Take steps to raise awareness to all to be responsive and accountable;
- Creating scope for new and young leaders in the society who bear the values of Christian and servant leaders;
- Share love, faith and hope together in a communion of communities;
- Increase family visits by the Priests, Nuns and Brothers;
- Organize and participate in different capacity building events and events on church teaching; etc.
- Encouraging and promoting priestly and religious vocations;
- Participatory decision making in the Church;
- Witnessing the gospel values in daily life;

## 1. COMPANIONS ON THE JOURNEY

**Question: In our local Church, who are those who “walk together”?**

The religious authority, the local ordinary, the presbyterium and the religious communities; Different Ecclesiastical and social movements, organizations, institutions, Diocesan Commissions;

Pastoral and administrative bodies at different levels; Remarkable numbers of Christian Families who cooperate and contribute in the Church; etc.

**Question: Who are those who seem further apart?**

- People who have left the practice of the faith and weak in faith;
- People who are involved with illegal and immoral activities;
- People of other faith traditions and other denominations of the Church;
- Some people with special needs, poor and abandoned people;
- Some of the very rich;
- People living in remote, distant and inaccessible areas,
- People who stay away because of the conflicts of interests and rivalry.
- People who are involved with drugs (addiction, selling); etc.
- People with illegal and mixed marriage,

**Question: How are we called to grow as companions?**

- Active participation in the liturgical and sacramental life
- Growing-up together with mutual benefit and cooperation through individual initiatives and different organizations, institutes and movement;
- Active participation to the different programs and traditional and customary events at family, social and Church levels;
- Respecting all the people irrespective of caste, cult and practices.

**Question: What groups or individuals are left on the margins?**

- Non-Christians/ who are not yet baptised;
- People who are antisocial and involved with immoral activities;
- People with illegal marriage;
- The drug addicts and who sell drugs illegally;
- Those against society and Church;
- Ultra-poor families;
- People suffering chronic diseases, elderly and children; etc.
- People living hardest to reach areas.

## **2. LISTENING**

**Question: How is God speaking to us through voices we sometimes ignore?**

- Through the nature and creation;
- The goodness and beauty that is present in them as God is the source of all goodness.
- Through the children who have the purity of heart;
- The elderly and the sick who have the wisdom;
- The poor and the needy and the suffering who speak for justice and mercy;
- through the initiatives of unity, cooperation and activities for the youth who have the intention to do good things for the world;
- The “other people” who take initiatives of negotiating reconciliation, offering forgiveness, charity, dignity and love at family and society

**Question: How is the laity listened to, especially women and young people?**

The priests visit the families, especially those who have troubles and conflicts, those who need consolation, advice and counselling. Programs are arranged for the laity and the youth where there are scopes to participate and speak about themselves. Whenever the people, especially the women, children and vulnerable come to the priests for whatever needs, they listen to them with compassion and mercy. However, many remain left away and are not listened to properly.

**Question: What facilitates our listening?**

Discussion at family level, family prayer and cordial environment at family level, taking meals together, visiting/outing together, participation at the social and planning meetings at village level; paying importance, attention and scope; showing affection and love, being open minded, patient, making initiative and personal communication, through forgiveness and willingness, etc.

**Question: What inhibits our listening?**

Paying more importance on own thoughts; more speaking than listening; protesting; while speaking unfavourable issues; keeping

busy with mobile phone; not listening attentively; side talk; lingual barrier; paying less time and absence of conducive environment, negligence, mentality of not accepting, etc.

**Question: How well do we listen to those on the peripheries?**

Those who live in the peripheries, are also listened to with same compassionate heart with regard to basic material needs in times of need. However, due to practical difficulties we pay comparatively less attention, less time, and avoiding tendency while listening to those on the peripheries.

**Question: How is the contribution of consecrated men and women integrated?**

The consecrated men and women have a significant role in the Church in Bangladesh. They actively take part in the parish and church activities as per the charism of their society. Their contribution in the Church activities is very essential and helpful. However, in some cases they are not given proper scope for work and true recognition of their activities. In many cases, they are so much engaged in the institutional activities that they do not find time, interest in sharing the pastoral and spiritual care of the faithful.

**Question: What are some limitations in our ability to listen, especially to those who have different views than our own?**

Sometimes there is a tendency to ignore and avoid them and sometimes they are silenced. Sometimes they are not invited and not be present in the meeting even when invited.

**Question: What space is there for the voice of minorities, especially people who experience poverty, marginalization, or social exclusion?**

They have space of organizing meetings, seminars and workshops. They can also meet with Priests at their Parishes. There are also organizations such as Caritas; St. Vincent D' Paul Societies; dispensaries, Credit Unions, Traditional social organizations, village leaders.

### **3. SPEAKING OUT**

**Question: What enables speaking up courageously, candidly, and responsibly in our local Church and in society?**

**Enables:** The church treats all with love and respect and creates conducive environment; cordial behaviour;

**Question: What hinders speaking up courageously, candidly, and responsibly in our local Church and in society?**

**Hindrance:** At times, due to the personality and behavioural problems of the some of the church authorities hinder the people to speak out. Sometimes the guilty feeling, shyness, fear etc. hinder speaking out.

**Question: When and how do we manage to say what is important to us?**

To the Parish Committee/Parish Pastoral Council members and village leaders during formal or informal meetings and visiting families; During Parish Committee / Parish Pastoral Council meetings; In the village or community meetings; During seminars, workshops; In the meetings of different institutions and movements; While meeting with Priests; in the Pastoral Assemblies of the diocese; Announcements in the church regarding important issues.; Through publications and social media.

**Question: How does the relationship with the local media work (not only Catholic media)?**

The good relationship with the local media works well in our favour. This relationship helps us to address the issues of justice to establish peace. Usually, the local media people are invited during Christmas, Easter and during the observance of other events. Local media people visit Churches during Christmas and Easter, take photographs and interview of the believers. They publish and telecast in the local media but pay less attention. In addition, the Local Church takes initiatives to publish news and article to the local media. However, the social issues pay less attention to the Church media.

Who speaks on behalf of the Christian community, and how are they chosen?

In the dioceses there are Spokesmen on behalf of the Christian community who are chosen by the respective diocese. In the parish level, usually the parish priest or in his absence the Vice Chairman and Secretary of the Parish Committee/ Parish Pastoral Council play

the role of spokesmen. The vice chairman and the secretary are elected democratically through vote. In the diocesan level, when necessary, it is the bishop who speaks.

#### **4. CELEBRATION**

**Question: How do prayer and liturgical celebrations actually inspire and guide our common life and mission in our community?**

- Through the meaningful and lively celebration of the liturgy and through well prepared and inspiring homily
- Through prayers and participation in the Eucharist we become one in spirit.
- Participate in the charity and service work;
- Formation of families as per Christian Values;
- We are inspired to be good neighbours to others;
- We are able to love and forgive each other especially through the sacrament of reconciliation;
- We maintain peace and harmony; etc.

**Question: How do they inspire the most important decisions?**

The most important decisions are taken with prayer and surrendering to the Holy Spirit. Thus, it helps all be open minded to the will of God and not in personal or and particular communal interest. The issues are discussed in various levels of the Church and society before finalizing by the authority of the Church.

**Question: How do we promote the active participation of all the faithful in the liturgy?**

The faithful are inspired to invite the neighbours to join liturgical Services regularly. The responsibilities of the different parts of the liturgy are distributed among the faithful. Different villages or blocks take the responsibilities for the preparation of the Sunday liturgies. The faithful - elderly, married couples, young and the children - take part in the prayers, hymn, reading Bible, etc. The use of the vernaculars helps the faithful in the tribal areas to actively participate in the liturgy.

**Question: What space is given to participating in the ministries of lector and acolyte?**

In the Church of Bangladesh there is no tradition of the official practice of the ministry of lectorship and acolyteship for the laity. However, the laity takes part in such ministries spontaneously. They read the readings and, in some places, assist the priests in distribution the Holy Communion. Sometimes catechists and prayer-leaders are assigned to lead the Liturgy of Sunday in the absence of priests.

## **5. SHARING RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR COMMON MISSION**

**Question: How is every baptised person called to participate in the mission of the Church?**

- Facilitating in the liturgical and religious activities of the Church.
- Participating in the parish activities;
- Ensuring participation in different sub-committees and movements;
- Participation in the mission work to different committees on different issues at different areas (village);
- Contributing to the Church from personal times, talents and treasures;
- Participation to the Charity works;
- Participation to the evangelisation works;
- Providing religious and social teaching;
- Activities of the Catechists, religious teachers, animators, community leaders,

**Question: What hinders the baptised from being active in mission?**

- Lack of adequate formation in evangelical values;
- Social and Family level conflicts;
- Drug addiction and irresponsible life styles;
- Living immoral lives;
- Mentality of negligence to be responsible;
- Lack of the awareness of being a Christian.
- Lack of knowledge and awareness on liturgy and mission works;
- Negligence to participate in the prayers and Holy Mass;
- Poverty;
- Self-centeredness;

- Destructive criticism;
- Lack of faith and trust on God, etc.

**Question: What areas of mission are we neglecting?**

- Social and religious teaching of the Church;
- Good Customs and Traditional Feast of Indigenous peoples, etc.
- Importance of the Bible as the living word of God.
- fear of witnessing the faith
- Lack of interest in our faith

**Question: How does the community support its members who serve society in various ways (social and political involvement, scientific research, education, promoting social justice, protecting human rights, caring for the environment, etc.?)**

In general, the community accept them positively and the Church and the community appreciate and encourage them as well as are grateful to them for their noble works. In addition, the Church associates with them in terms of serving the society.

**Question: How does the Church help these members to live out their service to society in a missionary way?**

The Church encourages them to continue their services in a missionary spirit and with the attitude of Christ-like service. The Church encourages the youngsters to embrace the noble services like, nurses, doctors, social services, and social business and maintain Christian identity.

**Question: How is discernment about missionary choices made and by whom?**

The process of discernment about missionary choices is made through the encouragement of the religious personnel, the parents and the elders as well as the exemplary lives of others. The examples of the pious foreign missionaries also encourage and instigate many missionary vocations.

## **6. DIALOGUE IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY**

**Question: To what extent do diverse peoples in our community come together for dialogue?**

While organize meetings, workshops, assembly, during conflict resolutions, on special occasions like feast days, during irregular meetings, during social welfare activities, dialogue meetings, while facing common problems, etc.

**Question: What are the places and modes of dialogue within our local Church?**

At village level when people organize social and religious meetings; in the meetings of social organizations; on the cultural festivities and social and religious programs; on observing National and International days; in marriage ceremonies, ordinations, religious professions, jubilee celebrations etc.; in family gatherings and anniversaries where neighbours and relatives are invited; on interreligious dialogue sessions and seminars; on family conflicts and marriage problem, etc.

**Question: How do we promote collaboration with neighbouring dioceses, religious communities in the area, lay associations and movements, etc.?**

- Through organizing programs together of different commissions;
- Through making learning and exchange visits;
- Through organizing joint capacity building and dialogue programs;
- During organization of pilgrims' programs, etc.
- Inter-diocese tribunal

**Question: How are divergences of vision, or conflicts and difficulties addressed?**

- Through personal initiatives and interactions;
- Organizing discussion sessions at different levels;
- Through mediation, arbitration, etc.

**Question: What particular issues in the Church and society do we need to pay more attention to?**

- Moral lives of Christians;
- Ensuring participation to the Holy mass and liturgical programs;
- Marriage and conjugal lives especially mixed marriages;

- Donation to the mission works and participation in the charitable activities
- Leadership conflicts,
- Religious lives, the Bible sharing and evangelisation, catechism,
- Coordination and inclusion of social and religious teaching as well as strengthening and extension of social and religious teaching;
- Child education and formation;
- Practise and Protection of own culture;
- Protection of Children and vulnerable adults and safeguarding;
- Care and Protection of the earth, our common home;
- Fraternity, friendship and communion in the society etc.

**Question: What experiences of dialogue and collaboration do we have with believers of other religions and with those who have no religious affiliation?**

Bangladesh has religious harmony and peaceful coexistence. Each religious group can freely participate in their own religious festivals and practices. People of other religions are also invited and join those festivities of the Christian communities. On certain occasions the people of all faith come together for social activities. Christian education and health care services are open for the people of all faiths.

However, in recent years, the fundamentalism is on the rise, and Bangladesh, being a devoted Muslim majority country, the atheists are always targeted and even sometimes killed. The atheists do not dare to openly express their position and opinions.

**Question: How does the Church dialogue with and learn from other sectors of society: the spheres of politics, economics, culture, civil society, and people who live in poverty?**

- Through bearing constructive attitude;
- The Church collaborates and stands beside the country in various crisis moments of and in various problems in the wider society.
- Showing love for the poor and underprivileged and providing for their needs;

- Through special attention to the people in need and being open minded;
- Through inviting and ensuring engagement in different events together with the people of other faiths, etc.

## 7. ECUMENISM

**Question: What relationships does our Church community have with members of other Christian traditions and denominations?**

Organizing dialogue, joint prayer services, sharing of faiths to each other, sharing works of charity; organizing awareness and capacity building events, participation and sharing greetings in different religious festival and national and international days observance.

**Question: What do we share and how do we journey together?**

The Church shows respect to other Churches and their faith and practices. The Church journeys together through organizing different events together and grows together living side by side, etc.

**Question: What fruits have we drawn from walking together?**

It created mutual trust, respect and dependence and generosity to walk and work together. It increased good relationship with each other. The misunderstanding, fear and prejudice have decreased and increased communal harmony and living peacefully together; in a few cases the non-Catholics are inspired to embrace the Catholic Faith, etc.

**Question: What are the difficulties of walking together with members of other Christian traditions and denominations?**

Sometimes there is a tendency of showing greatness of own beliefs and sacraments among the members of the other churches; Destructive Criticism; sometimes there is rivalry and even the stealing of sheep by deception and providing material benefits.

**Question: How can we take the next step in walking forward with each other?**

By organizing more dialogue sessions and prayer services; increasing participation in different events together; increasing respect for others' beliefs and faith practices; arranging

accommodation of students from different Christian traditions and denominations in the catholic academic and vocational institutions.

## **8. AUTHORITY AND PARTICIPATION**

**Question: How does our Church community identify the goals to be pursued?**

These are pursued through participatory discussion during Parish Committee meetings, regional meetings and during annual pastoral assemblies.

**Question: How does our Church community reach to the goals?**

Through increasing of participation of the faithful at higher level discussion and decision-making process; through increasing participation of different stakeholders and through participation of different age groups and occupational groups; through preparing participatory planning and making consensus; through ensuring unity, by ensuring the greater participation of women, etc.

**Question: What steps to be taken to reach the Goals?**

- To be more open-minded and generous to one another.
- Communicating the goal at different levels.
- Steward leadership.
- Access in decision making process of more faithful, men and women, to be increased;

**Question: How is authority or governance exercised within our local Church?**

It is exercised as per rules and regulations of the Church and of the respective institutes, organizations and movements. Parish Pastoral Councils play a vital role in the exercise of the pastoral authority. Moreover, need based different committees and subcommittees are formed and exercise of authority and governance follow a participatory process.

**Question: How are team work and co-responsibility put into practice?**

Through sharing responsibilities, authorities and accountabilities among Bishop, Priests, nuns, brothers and the faithful and through developing and implementation of plan and

modifications of rules and regulations considering needs, demands and expectations of the faithful.

**Question: How are evaluations conducted and by whom?**

The different sub-committee members Parish Pastoral Council members, Nuns, Brothers and Priests conduct evaluation after each of the events. Usually, a participatory process is followed for evaluation. The Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, Threats are analysed during evaluation and action plans are prepared for next course of actions. Besides, annual activities and budget plans are prepared together and joint evaluations conducted. However, the proper and formal evaluations are needed to be done in different spheres.

**Question: How are lay ministries and the responsibility of lay people promoted?**

The church in Bangladesh does not have a formal lay ministry in the church, except for catechists. However, the church activities are undertaken through various means such as:

- Formation of different sub-committees according to participatory method;
- Formation of Parish Pastoral Councils through votes;
- Defining roles and responsibilities of different committees and different positions;
- Arranging orientation program for the people involved with lay ministries;
- Assigning roles and responsibilities;
- Doing monitoring and providing feedback;
- Arranging capacity building trainings and meetings, etc.
- Informal way choosing people for readers, distributors of Holy Communion, etc.

**Question: Have we had fruitful experiences of synodality on a local level?**

We have experienced the capacity in diverse skills of the lay people such as conducting meetings, facilitation training and workshops, mediation of conflicts resolutions, solving local level problems, resource mobilization, donation collection, etc. The fruitful experiences are increasing. The sense of ownership and active

participation in religious and social activities are increasing among our laity. Lay people are being empowered in decision making and in taking responsibilities as well as their skills are being developed. Still there is enough scope to journey to synodality, etc.

**Question: How do synodal bodies function at the level of the local Church (Pastoral Councils in parishes and dioceses, Presbyteral Council, etc.)?**

- Presbyteral Council and councillors of the Bishop generate ideas and policies;
- The diocesan pastoral team organize pastoral meetings, annual pastoral assembly and prepare yearly plan following participatory process where long term plan of CBCB and diocese are considered;
- The Pastoral councils at Parishes prepare Parish level plans and implementation process focusing on diocesan plan and local context;
- The diocesan pastoral team and Presbyteral Council take initiatives for building capacity of the Pastoral Councils at Parishes;
- The Pastoral Councils at Parishes take initiatives to form different sub-committees and movements;
- The Pastoral Councils at Parishes distribute the responsibilities to different sub-committees, movements and individuals, do monitoring, ensure accountability and evaluation of the progress of the plan, etc.

**Question: How can we foster a more synodal approach in our participation and leadership?**

Through proper distribution of responsibilities at local level of the Church; by increasing participation of more lay people at different synodal bodies; increasing accountabilities at all stages; organizing orientation and capacity building, and other interventions; by utilising resources appropriately; by organizing motivational programs, etc.

## **9. DISCERNING AND DECIDING**

**Question: What methods and processes do we use in decision-making?**

We follow participatory methods in the decision-making process and decisions are taken during meetings, seminars, workshops. In most of the cases participatory and democratic processes are followed without compromising fundamental rules and regulations of the Church. Prayers and reflections are the means of decision-making processes.

**Question: How can they be improved of decision-making methods and processes?**

By ensuring representation of people from all villages and all age groups in different parochial and pastoral bodies; by increasing participation of representatives of multi stakeholders in meetings, seminars and workshops; by incorporating more prayers and reflection programs before taking decisions.

**Question: How do we promote participation in decision-making within hierarchical structures?**

Proper utilization of different pastoral bodies to hear voices of all people; by organizing capacity building on participatory decision-making skills for the people involved with hierarchical structures; by organizing trainings meetings considering the opinion of the local people; by ensuring participations of representatives of the people of different age, gender, cultural and geographical groups; by use of feedback mechanism and addressing feedback.

**Question: Do our decision-making methods help us to listen to the whole People of God?**

Due to the lack of good will and proper understanding our decision-making methods do not help us to listen to the whole People of God appropriately.

**Question: What is the relationship between consultation and decision-making, and how do we put these into practice?**

There is a strong relationship between consultation and decision-making. Consultative decision-making processes always bring the best results. We are practicing both for bringing optimum outcomes and ensuring ownership to the decision-making process.

**Question: What tools and procedures do we use to promote transparency and accountability?**

- Taking decisions in the meeting following participatory process
- Sharing draft decision and taking final decision together
- Disclose budget and plan to the people
- Utilization of signboard where required
- Utilization of feedback box and feedback mechanism where applicable
- Announce the decisions in the Holy Mass as and when required
- Ensuring results based as well as quality-based monitoring
- Regular internal and external audits.

**Question: How can we grow in communal spiritual discernment?**

- Regular and active participation in the family prayers and in the Sunday Mass
- By participating in the social and religious program together
- Extending cooperation to the Church and pastoral activities
- Taking responsibilities and perform duties
- Maintaining real Christian lives
- Living together as a communion of ecclesial communities both in the diocesan and parish levels.
- Functioning of the different institutions, organizations and movements at Parish and diocese levels.

**10. FORMING OURSELVES IN SYNODALITY**

**Question: How does our church community form people to be more capable of “walking together,” listening to one another, participating in mission, and engaging in dialogue?**

- Accepting each other with sympathetic and empathetic mentality
- Extending cooperation to each other
- Increasing family visit by the Priests and Religious
- Organizing and participating joint prayer programs, Bible sharing, etc.
- Participating Holy Mass and other liturgical events together
- Participating and working together in the family, social and religious programs

- Organizing regular social meetings and discuss together
- Constituting, strengthening and activating of the different committees and movements
- Maintaining regular communication and coordination

**Question: What formation is offered to foster discernment and the exercise of authority in a synodal way?**

- Organizing training on Christian Leadership at Parish and Diocesan levels
- Organizing trainings for Children, youth, man, women, couple, disable people on self-reliance
- Importance is given to prayer and sacramental life.
- Continuation of formational interventions for people of different age groups and different categories at parish and diocesan levels
- Increasing participation of different categories of people organized at diocese and parish levels
- Increasing participation at the planning and decision-making process

- **CONCLUSION**

In response to which was recognized as the call (or the calls) of the Holy Spirit, the participants felt the need that the following steps to be taken to grow in the Synodal journey:

- **For Communion**

It is necessary to organize wariness programs in order to make Christ’s faithful understand the importance of participation in liturgical celebrations (of Sundays and Holy days of Obligations); active participation in liturgy will become a visible sign of communion;

Formation in Sacramental life to eradicate barriers of communion;

Educating and encouraging Christ’s faithful to participate in various liturgical celebrations, especially the Sunday Eucharist and holy day of obligation;

Promoting vocations for priestly and religious life as well as increasing the number of lay ministers through “vocation camp”, prayer for vocation, life-witness, etc.

Strengthening Church and Social Organizations to patronize the communion of Communities;

- **For Participation**

Providing adequate religious and moral education so that people may know about their rights and obligations as Christ's faithful; Recognizing the gifts of the Holy Spirit and creating opportunities to participate in building up of the strong local Church; promoting financial contribution by the faithful for carrying on Church's activities; strengthening credit union movement, organizing capacity building program, and creating opportunities for employment for emancipation from economic hardship and poverty; Structural reformation to create opportunities for people to participate in the decision-making process, especially creating more opportunities for women.

- **For Mission**

It is necessary to strengthen the works of evangelization among the tribal and other communities. Formation in the Christian family and community to live a missionary spirit is a felt need. We should promote the new evangelization in the older Christian communities. Formation of missionary society is a need of the time.

Ensuring pastoral care of the persons/families in difficulties to bring hope to the hopeless people; Ecclesial, inter-church and inter-religious dialogue programs for maintaining harmony and peace; Use of social media in preaching the Word of God; Increasing the number of volunteer part-time catechists (prayer leaders).

## **2.4 Appendices**

### **The Catholic Church in Bangladesh**

**General statistics:** Bangladesh earned its independence from Pakistan in 1971. It has a total population of about 162 million. Biggest ethnic group is Bengali with 98% of the population. Christians of Bangladesh are only 0.4%, in the midst of a predominantly Muslim majority (88%), along with Hindus of about 9% and Buddhists about 2%, and others followers of traditional religions (about 0.6%). Among the Christians, Catholics are about 70%, and the other 30% belonging to Protestant churches and other Christian denominations. Among

the total Catholic population, which is about 400,000. Though first evangelization was among the Bengali community, due to the continuous evangelization among the tribal communities today the tribal Catholics outnumbered the Bengali Community. Catholics coming from more than 34 tribal ethnic groups count about 60% of the total Catholic Population in Bangladesh.

**Catholicism in Bangladesh:** The history of the Catholic Church in Bangladesh goes back to 500 years. The year 2018 marks five hundred years of the arrival of the merchants and traders who were Christians coming from Portugal to Diang, Chittagong in 1518. This area of the Church was transferred to that of Cochin Diocese in 1958, the year when first two Jesuit Missionary priests, Fr. Francesco Fernandes and Fr. Domingo D'Souza landed in Diang. In the year 1600 two churches were built, one in Chandecan (Iswaripur, Jessore) and the second in Chittagong at Bandel. Fr. Francesco Fernandes SJ is considered the first martyr in Bengal. After being tortured in a cave, he died on November 14, 1602.

The Church in Bangladesh has been under different Ecclesiastical Jurisdictions starting from the Diocese of Goa from the beginning, Cochin Diocese (1598), Mylapore Diocese (1606), Vicariate apostolic of Bengal under Propagation of the Faith (1834), Vicariate of Eastern Bengal (1845).

At present, the Catholic Church in Bangladesh has eight dioceses. Dhaka Archdiocese was erected in 1886 and later in 1950 was made a metropolitan Archdiocese. The erection of other dioceses followed: Diocese of Chittagong in 1927 which was made a Metropolitan Archdiocese in 2017, Diocese of Dinajpur in 1927, Diocese of Khulan in 1952, Diocese of Mymensingh in 1987, Diocese of Rajshahi in 1990, Diocese of Sylhet in 2011, and Diocese of Barisal in 2016.

**Catholic Bishops' Conference of Bangladesh (CBCB):** The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Bangladesh (CBCB) which came into being in 1971 immediately after the Independence of Bangladesh. The Conference now consists of two archdioceses and six dioceses. Since the Independence, in response to its life and mission, the Catholic Bishops, in collegiality with each other, inspired by the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, committed itself in bringing renewal in the local Church with ongoing reflection and action, developing

organizational and infra-structural services, setting up pastoral priorities, providing pastoral directives for the mission of the Church in Bangladesh. The Conference meets regularly about three to four times a year, on average for 2 days.

At the level of the Conference there are fourteen Episcopal Commissions and Organizations in order to constantly assist the Church at the Diocesan and national reflection, doing action together, providing inspiration and implementing the decisions of the Conference in the fields of: liturgy, Bible and Catechetics, Family Life, Education, Health Care, Justice and Peace, Inter-religious Dialogue and Christian Unity, Social Communications, Youth, Laity, Seminary, Clergy and Religious, Evangelization and Caritas Bangladesh. All eight dioceses have Diocesan Commissions which are concomitant parts of the national commissions.

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**Catholic Bishops' Conference of Central Asia (CECAC)**  
**Synthesis for Synodal Process**  
15 August 2022

**2.1 Introduction: rereading of the synodal experience**

The synodal process was undertaken in different forms within the various ecclesial juridical territories which make up the Conference. Clearly, while attempting to take into account the specific conditions of the local church communities, the spirit of the synodal process was largely maintained. All of these communities that reported on the manner of engaging in the synodal process reflect an attempt to express the essence of conversations and deliberations undertaken at the local level. As could be expected, some local communities engaged the topics presented in the *Vademecum* and Preparatory Document in more detail and all highlighted with particular focus those topics of life and functioning in the Church that were more salient to their own circumstances.

The process in most places began in connection with the synod's opening throughout the world in the fall of 2021, commencing with an inaugural Mass and prayer in mid-October. The local Ordinary then designated the path of conducting this process. Committees or other bodies responsible for the overall process were formed with a variety of configurations, again depending on the local conditions of the communities and at the judgment of the local Ordinary. During this time, the goals as well as the overall schedule and the various relevant steps of undertaking the process were outlined for the priests, religious, and parishioners in most places. In some cases, these Ordinaries had previously conveyed this information to the local clergy as preparation for undertaking the process. Moreover, in some places a more structured committee was established on the diocesan level to oversee the procedure. A representative, chosen from among the clergy or religious, was normally appointed to facilitate this endeavor.

The considerably lengthy material for the synodal process had to be translated into local languages. This undertaking became, in and of itself, an important part of the overall process as not only linguistic

nuances but sensitivity to cultural context regarding both theme and process demanded attentiveness.

In at least two communities, foreign parishioners were included in this process.

In some areas, different groups within the larger community met both with the larger community and separately in order to engage in this process, e.g., youth, adults with special needs, etc.

In one country, this *synodal* process assisted in preparation for celebration of a significant anniversary marking the establishment of church structure.

There was a varying level of effort expended to include as many persons as possible in local Churches in order to “achieve the goal of this synod.”

During the (first ever) session of the episcopal conference, a coordinator was chosen to represent the conference both in the continental conference of bishops as well as before the Holy See. The coordinator was assigned the task of composing this summary report, of submitting it for approval before the other members of the conference, and of forwarding this to the appropriate body.

When the process of discussion was processed in the local Churches, a summary was sent to the coordinator. This report is based on these summaries with correlative comments and observations added by members of the episcopal conference.

Moreover, there is the possibility that the conference of bishops will discuss these findings and other aspects of the synodal process during one of our next gatherings.

Difficulties and Surprises: There was general difficulty in most areas resulting from organizational challenges that are endemic to the profile of the small church communities; from of a general lack of experience for people to engage in such a process; and for practical reasons related to lingering consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The summary from one of the local Churches articulated difficulties in the process of engaging in synodal discourse that could be applicable to many, if not most of our communities. Included in that presentation were the following points: difficulty in adequately

preparing participants for a sufficiently deep level of discernment necessary for conducting quality conversation; fear of being disappointed by the process or being judged; difficulty in finding a time that was convenient for busy parishioners; the absence in some parish communities of experience in discussing serious themes; a difficulty for some members to understand the true meaning and goal of the process.

Naturally, both the content of the conversations as well as the rather profoundly varying level of engagement of local Churches—both at parish and diocesan level—might be described as providing surprise. Many if not most of our Catholics are united in expressing their clear appreciation for the positive role and influence that the Church has in their lives and, indeed in some cases, claim that the Church is the *most positive* influence that they experience. Although this has obviously always been the hope of the local Churches, it is consoling to hear this sentiment confirmed.

One of the local Church communities noted the unfortunate absence of voices of most who had left the church: “We wanted to know from them why they are no more coming to the church.”

Again, it was perhaps surprising for some to witness the mixed reception and varying level of desire to engage in the synodal process on the part of some members of the Church.

## **2.2 Body of the synthesis: discernment of the collected contributions**

In fact, it would be difficult to present without exaggeration any sort of general trend in content expressed by a substantial portion of the communities reporting. Without attempting to compose in this summary an artificial consensus of views, here are highlighted themes that seemed to be of most interest within the dialogue throughout the various diocesan territories:

- A recognition of the need for *greater participation* in the life of the Church among laity was expressed in most places. Not understood as a desire to significantly change or undermine the hierarchical structure of the parish or diocese (i.e., ecclesial

jurisdiction), laity as well as clergy and religious highlighted the need for greater lay participation in parish and other activities of the Church. In most of the summaries submitted, there was a recurring theme of concern regarding what is perceived as a passivity of laity in communal, liturgical, and social areas of the Church. Questions and ideas/suggestions were discussed concerning how to improve this tendency. Some of these suggestions are included in the following points.

- The question as to how to more fully activate the laity was raised in several places, with suggestions offered which included a call to more direct work with families and personal invitations to increased involvement.
- Some communities affirmed the need for more active parish councils and other bodies—organized with varying levels of formality—to assist in animating the lives of the parishes.
- While some summaries highlighted the need for more work with youth, in several places in this territory the communities attested to the active attempts on the part of the local Churches to engage young people.
- Some communities lamented a lack of deeper interaction among parishioners.
- One pointed to the need to shift from an individualistic notion of life in the Church to a more communal understanding: “from an ‘I’ Church to a ‘We’ Church.”
- The importance of witness was underscored: both in individual and community practice, as well as in the need for continuing and strengthening relatively strong witness through assistance to those in need within and outside the local community.
- At the same time, the regrettable observation that the church is perceived in some places as being primarily a sort of “relief organization” was noted. How can we come across as being much more than merely a place to come when material assistance is needed?
- The summaries expressed with some candor problems within the communal life of parishioners. These included the previous

observations concerning a lack of deeper interaction of parishioners outside of Mass, varying experiences of relationships among Catholics, etc.

- In one place, an impression of “tiredness” on the part of church workers was noted. Perhaps this occurs in other areas.
- The perception of a lack of compelling activities offered outside of Mass and catechism in some parishes was mentioned. Do we continually work to assist various groups within the church (i.e., families, the elderly, youth, people with special needs) further develop in their personal and communal faith journey?
- In general, the relationship of the clergy and leadership of the Church to the parishioners is seen as being appropriate. There are surely cases in which parishioners feel that the priest makes all of the decisions for the parish; however, on the whole there was not a complaint of “clericalism”.
- There is a general positive evaluation of the interaction of local Churches to the wider societies.
- The need for quality of liturgical life and its connection to the lives and activities of participants was expressed.
- Questions regarding the meaning and style of *evangelization* were discussed. In a few places, ideas for greater evangelization were proposed (i.e., encouraging laity to share with others in their lives about their faith; witness through humanitarian and other social/cultural endeavors; etc.).
- The reality of living in areas that demand inter-religious and ecumenical interaction is expressed in the reports of more than one of our local Churches. The fact that all of our Catholic communities exist in predominantly Muslim populations (with the exception of Mongolia) and mostly within minority Christian communities in which Russian Orthodoxy is the main Christian denomination impacts the understanding of our parishioners regarding their own identity.
- One summary articulated the unfortunate reality of an often-conflictual relationship with the larger Russian Orthodox community and a need to improve this. This is not the case everywhere, however.

- Participation by local Churches in ecumenical groups and in activities surrounding the week of Christian unity was mentioned.
- The very important role of religious Sisters was highlighted.
- The service of priests in difficult conditions is appreciated.
- The process of synod, although appreciated by most participants, was in some cases approached with a fear of “*protestantization*,” or of danger of diluting Catholic Tradition.
- At the same time, in several places, the process inaugurated by this synodal undertaking have been very welcomed as providing opportunity for meeting and for sharing of both gratitude and concern for our Church.
- Mandatory celibacy of priests was discussed in two of the reports, with the majority affirming the importance of this church discipline. In only one report the observation that married priests could understand better the situation of families was expressed.

### **General Characteristics observed within our communities:**

It seems important to highlight the following observations regarding the understanding of our Catholics regarding the life of the Church, vis-à-vis both the more universal Church and the surrounding societies in which we live:

First, it is again good to emphasize that, in general, our Catholics experience the presence of the Church as one of –if not the most– positive influence in their lives. As was expressed in one of the local communities, “the Church doesn’t need to change but be even more intensely present in our lives!”

Secondly, it is important to remember that all of our communities exist as very small, sometimes even tiny communities within a minority religion (Christianity) amidst a society that opened to freedom of religious practice only three decades ago. This shapes the self-understanding of these communities and, to some extent, distinguishes the dynamics of these communities from local

Churches in other countries which comprise a majority in their societies and/or have enjoyed centuries of uninterrupted freedom.

The recent history of our local Church provides exemplary edification in the powerful commitment and involvement of laity during relentless persecution of religion and a correlative absence of priestly and sacramental presence. There was not an adversary relationship between the laity and their clergy but, conversely, a seemingly authentic engagement by laity in promoting and sustaining Christian life in this area. Priests who were able to periodically serve the communities offered heroic examples of service and of sacrifice for the community.

Subsequent years have seen a marked decrease in the number of Catholics as many people of Catholic heritage have emigrated away from this area. Moreover, the influence of secularism and other influences emerging in most areas of the world have impacted our communities. With the exception of a few places and particularly of one country (where Catholicism is an entirely new community) the number of believers has largely dwindled. Relative to this, one presenter asks: *Why is it that God desired in this land through so much suffering and flowing of blood for His presence to be made manifest in the Catholic Church? .... Is it possible that sixty years of witness during persecution was without reason? What does Jesus ask of us today? To continue to care for the few remaining flock, not to neglect them, witness to all of Jesus and the wonderful life with Him, especially through the path of mercy and beauty?*

Thirdly, the societies in this area tend to be more traditional than many western societies. Some of the issues with which Christians in the west grapple seem to be alien, even repugnant, to many of our people. One of the reports submitted attests to the fear of local Catholics that some forces strongly vocal within parts of the western Church threaten division by adapting views that are not traditionally promoted in Christianity. Others fear the erosion of key elements of doctrine related to family, to proper authority, and to morality in general. It is fair to claim that many people in this part of the world are confused—even potentially scandalized—to hear of movements

within some segments of the Church in the west to undermine the stance of the Church in relation to key moral issues.

Most Catholics in this area tend to value strongly both the hierarchical essence of the Church and values that are consistent with the moral and religious “Tradition” of Catholicism. This Tradition is mostly seen as providing an essentially significant and positive resource to society.

In conclusion, it is important to underscore what can be described as a prevailing *paradox* in this endeavor: On the one hand, our people are not accustomed to engage in any sort of explicit “synodality” or to evaluate in open discussion the workings or intentions of those charged with authority within society, the family, or religion. At the same time, the local Church is comprised of people who are exceptionally confident, comfortable with a style of “ongoing conversation” with their pastors and with each other. There appears to be little hesitancy in expressing their observations and opinions and there appears a remarkable feeling of freedom in articulating their needs as well as their critical observations about issues in the community. They are simultaneously aware of and deeply grateful for the Church’s role in their lives while at the same time not harboring any overly-idealistic impressions about our community. In brief, although not named as such, it could be properly claimed that our Churches live an authentic, “organic” *synodality* in practice, albeit imperfectly, and certainly un-self-consciously.

### **2.3 Conclusions: next step**

The members of the Conference will determine the form and scope of discussing possible conclusion as well as overview of this ongoing process of synodality.

## **APPENDIX: The Catholic Church in Central Asia**

The Catholic Church in Central Asia has a rich and extended history. Although present in most countries in this territory for at least the past 150 years, the number of faithful increased significantly

during the exile of peoples of traditionally Catholic nationalities before and during the Second World War. Most of our Catholics today were born from German, Polish, Russian, and Ukrainian families that were exiled here during the terrible Soviet persecution. The Church is also blessed with a vibrant Eastern Rite community – especially in Kazakhstan.

Central Asia is a remarkable place identified by incredible variety. It is comprised of cultures and peoples from diverse heritages who were frequently united under various political and religious structures over the past two millennium. The Great Silk Route was only one of these unique and tremendously significant seedbeds of collaboration within a part of this vast territory. Great empires emerging from both the East and the West left their mark on this territory.

The unique religious, social, and political environment in the area continues to manifest a wide divergence in approach to the issues affecting humanity in our own era. Often erroneously collapsed into a mere extension of one of the neighboring regions – i.e., the Middle East; the former Soviet Union; the Far East; or the Islamic world – the cultures of Central Asia, themselves widely diverse in scope and character, provide a quite remarkable arena in which ancient as well as contemporary, eastern as well as western, secular as well as religious philosophies are engaged.

The newly created Catholic Bishop Conference of Central Asia (approved by Pope Francis in 2021)<sup>1</sup> serves the needs of the local Churches in the countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. Churches from the countries of Mongolia and Afghanistan have recently begun the process of greater

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<sup>1</sup> §1. Tenuto conto della vastità del territorio condiviso dalle Regioni ecclesiastiche dell'Asia Centrale, e considerate le particolari condizioni di luogo, di situazione sociale e le differenti necessità pastorali di ogni Chiesa particolare ivi sussiste<sup>1</sup>, la Conferenza è distinta in due organismi permanenti a livello territoriale<sup>1</sup>: Gruppo degli Ordinari Cattolici del Kazakhstan; e Gruppo degli Ordinari Cattolici del Kyrgyzstan, del Tadjikistan, del Turkmenistan e dell'Uzbekistan. (Statutes of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of Central Asia).

interaction with this new Conference. In addition, the Bishop-Ordinary of Catholics in Azerbaijan attended our first session, held in late April, with the desire to become more acquainted with our local Church communities and the Conference.

During this first session of CECAC, the topic of the Synod and related processes undertaken in the local Churches was discussed. A coordinator for this topic was chosen to represent the voice of our Churches before the more universal Catholic Church.



**Conference of Catholic Bishops of India - CCBI**  
**Synod for a Synodal Church 2021-2023**  
**National Synthesis of the Synodal Consultation**  
August 11, 2022

**I. Context, Celebration and Consultation**

1. India is a loom holding diverse threads of religions, spiritualities, cultures, traditions, languages and social strata that blend together to form a complex and beautiful tapestry. Alongside a profound spirituality, social and economic disparities deeply fragment the fabric of the nation.

2. The Church in India reflects these diversities and divides. In addition to the Latin Catholic Church, there are two other *sui iuris* Churches - Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara - within the Roman Catholic Church in India, comprising over 20 million faithful. Although this is just 1.9 percent of the country's population, the presence of the Catholic Church is felt in a significant way through the education, health and social ministries. These are now being challenged by the emerging polarization brought about by religious fundamentalism and the central government's new policies. The Christian faithful live as a minority in a multi-religious society. This has its share of influences and challenges as do rural to urban migration and entry of technology and media into the far-flung areas of the country, impacting lifestyle, relationships and faith. Being a Church founded through the zeal of missionaries down the ages, the Church in India not only acknowledges their hard toils, but also imitates them by carrying along the spirit of evangelisation to reach out to many within and outside the country. Although the comfort of being led by clergy/religious is still prevalent, the role of the laity as co-responsible collaborators in the Roman Catholic Church in India has begun, but is yet to take root in many dioceses.

3. The present synthesis depicts the diocesan phase of the Synod on Synodality between October 2021 to June 2022, capturing the essence of what emerged from the extraordinary participation of the People of God in India in this largest global and national exercise. The report, that seeks to apprehend common points of convergence as well as the

minority or marginal voice that is worthy of mention, is wrought from over 1500 pages of reports from the dioceses (129 out of 132) – across rural, urban, and even remote areas, and other commissions, apostolates and movements that were sent to the National Synthesis Team.

4. The inaugural Eucharistic celebrations in the dioceses were held in a solemn and elaborate way, with some dioceses including leaders of other faiths and traditions. Preparation for the consultations included translation of the documents into 49 local languages. The Synod logo and banner were displayed prominently across parishes and institutions and the Synod prayer was recited in families and parishes.

5. The dedication of the organising teams was commendable, some making long journeys into remote villages and working within the time that the people could offer. The efforts by the Synod teams of lay faithful, religious and priests touched the hearts of those they met. The consultations were an eye-opener for many who were not accustomed to being invited to speak out openly and freely – some valued it as a personal invitation from the Holy Father Pope Francis. An awareness of being part of the Universal Church together with the clergy and religious was a first for some of the faithful. Diverse groups were consulted – children, young people, married couples, the poor, migrants, separated faithful, LGBTQIA+ people, prison inmates, the differently abled, etc. People of other churches, ecclesial communities and faiths were included in some consultations and they voiced appreciation of this initiative of the Catholic Church. Special efforts to encourage candid feedback were made in certain cultural contexts like organising women-only consultation groups. The synodal consultation gave many particular churches the impetus to revive their activities which had been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Through the concerns voiced by the diocesan consultations, the Conference of Religious India (CRI) and the different commissions, an awareness of the need to become more synodal was strongly felt.

6. The synodal process has not been without its share of challenges. Initial scepticism and resistance gave the synodal process a slow start

in some dioceses. The paucity of time and the ongoing pandemic situation limited the training of the coordinators and outreach to remote areas. While efforts were directed at the more readily available faithful, many of those distanced from the Church could not be included. Since translations were not possible in all languages, comprehension was reduced. The organisation and facilitation of consultations were led by clergy/religious in many dioceses where lay involvement has not yet come to the fore. 'Consultation' in some parishes was limited to answering questionnaires instead of in-person consultations. Some of the consultations ignored the recommended synodal disposition and turned into forums for criticism.

7. It is in this context of joys, surprises and challenges that the Church in India offers the fruits of the synodal journey. In the synodal processes of 'journeying together', the Church in India sensed the guiding lights of God's Spirit. On the one hand, the experiences of many 'lights' provided consolation and hope to the community. On the other hand, the awareness of the 'challenges' subverts synodality, giving a clarion call to the Church to dispel the dark spots to 'journey ahead' with faith. What follow are the points of convergence of all the consultations, presenting both the lights and the challenges. These express the current status of synodality while also providing roadmaps for journeying ahead guided by God's Spirit. Five broad themes listed below, containing the 10 thematic nuclei of the *Vademecum*, represent the journey travelled.

## **II. Journeying Together: Now and Ahead**

### **i. Communion and Community Building**

8. *Lights*: Enriched by its diversity, there is largely a sense of unity in the Catholic Church. This unity is noticeable in rural and tribal areas where the bonds of fellowship and sharing create natural 'synodal churches' as well as in urban areas comprising people of diverse cultures. The cohesion and spirit of the Catholic community are enhanced by participation in church activities like celebration of sacraments, popular devotions and other communitarian activities, creating a sense of family. In this regard, along with various pious associations, two ecclesial realities require special mention: (a) The

Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) have been found to be the most effective means of building community and improving synodality in the parishes. BECs contribute to community building through fellowship programmes, Bible study, *lectio divina*, prayer services, retreats and assisting those in need in the community; (b) The *Khrista-Bhaktas* (lit. 'Devotees of Christ'), present in a few dioceses, comprising people who love and worship Christ but do not receive baptism due to social and political exigencies. By their deep faith and personal relationship with Christ, they give a powerful witness to many other Christian communities.

9. *Challenges*: In general, while there is unity among Catholics, there is a concern about communion among the dioceses, between dioceses and religious congregations and among the three *sui iuris* Churches. Discrimination based on caste, language, ethnicity, economic, academic and social status divides the community. Families are threatened by alcoholism, drug addiction and broken marriages and they distance themselves from the Church. Inadequate pastoral care to such families and those at the peripheries impinge upon communion and community building.

10. *Journeying Ahead*: "The whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul" (Acts 4: 32) is the ideal for communion and community building. The faithful have expressed a strong desire to belong to the Church and to bear witness to Christ by reaching out to the voiceless, powerless and marginalized. There is a need for greater involvement and collaboration among priests, religious and lay faithful. Pastoral visits to families are essential for building parish communities. The concerns of interfaith marriages and live-in relationships require to be addressed. Support groups need to evolve within parishes/dioceses to assist and pastorally accompany the families struggling with disability care, children with special needs and home-bound elderly. Attending to the material and spiritual needs of different linguistic and migrant groups is necessary. Two broad areas call for renewal: faith formation to be united to Christ, and building a strong, welcoming and non-judgmental Christian community to fall back on. It is important to give special focus to ministry among young people and children to foster a sense of belonging to the Church, offering them space to use their talents and

capacities and to grow in leadership. Young people are asking the Church to involve them further in mission and humanitarian work.

11. Psycho-spiritual counselling, career guidance and entrepreneurship opportunities are required. Counselling cells could be started to listen to people. There is a need for catechesis and accompaniment for young people and young married couples.

12. By using means of social communication and advanced technology, parishes can strengthen ties and serve their communities. Greater listening and service from the priests and religious could enhance communion within the Christian community. Reconciliation at all levels is needed for the Church to become a community of love, peace and service. A special attention to overcome the attitude of indifferentism in the community is the need of the hour. The diversity within the Church – on account of caste, culture, rite, language, region and ethnicity – must become a space for celebration instead of division.

## **ii. Participation of the Lay Faithful: Roles and Responsibilities**

13. *Lights*: The lay faithful, recognising their authentic call in the Church by virtue of baptism, actively collaborate in the administration and share responsibilities in the life and mission of the Church when given the opportunity. They are involved in faith formation of children and adults, assisting in the liturgy, evangelizing in villages, taking leadership roles in BECs, animating the pastoral activities through various commissions and assisting in the day-to-day running of the parishes and institutions. Co-responsibility emerges at the time of celebrating feasts, helping the needy and offering relief services during emergencies.

14. *Challenges*: The hurdles for the participation of the lay faithful are both within and without. From within, they have a sense of fear, reluctance and diffidence to take up participatory roles; from without, there is resistance and indifference towards their participation. Often it is the same dominant few who take up multiple leadership roles without leaving space for others to get involved. A large number of the lay faithful limit their participation to Sunday liturgy. Sufficient opportunities are not given to the lay faithful to hone their skills for active participation.

15. *Journeying Ahead*: Called to be members of the one Body of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 12:12), all the lay faithful can contribute significantly to the growth of the Church. The training and empowerment of the lay faithful need to be seriously considered. Effective modules for various aspects of Church involvement need to be developed and implemented. A paradigm shift from considering the lay faithful as inferior to the clergy to accepting them as co-responsible collaborators in building the Christian community has to be envisaged.

16. A clear pastoral plan when shared with the lay faithful optimises the use of their gifts and charisms. The lay faithful must be made aware of their rights and duties, mission and apostolate, as stipulated in the Code of Canon Law. The members of the Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) are to be elected by the parishioners with fixed terms, prescribed by the statutes of the diocese. All participatory structures in the parish and diocese should be more inclusive, representative, accountable and transparent.

17. Care must be taken to provide leadership roles to women, women religious, young people and those at the peripheries. In addition, various commissions and groups for women, children, young people, migrants, differently abled as well as for the ecology must be established in all the dioceses, to ensure greater participation.

### **iii. Leadership, Governance, Decision-making**

18. *Lights*: The Church in India has had, and continues to have, many leaders – both men and women – who are outstanding examples of service and sacrifice. Many are consulted in the process of discerning and deciding. At the diocesan level, the Diocesan Bishop, in consultation with the priests, the religious and the lay faithful, draws up the pastoral plan and involves them in its execution. There have been moments of collective discerning and deciding in the appointments of the priests and the religious, in the erection of new parishes, in taking up new projects and in addressing financial matters. There are many decision-making bodies in the Church at various levels – parish, deanery and diocese. Structures, such as parish/diocesan pastoral councils, parish/diocesan finance committees, college of consultors, council of priests, reunions of

priests-religious, movements and pious associations, facilitate listening and speaking out.

19. *Challenges*: At times, women, young people and women religious feel left out in the decision-making process. In addition, the competence of lay faithful in law, finance, accounting and management is rarely recognised or utilized by the hierarchy. Clericalism exists to some extent in the Church. In a few cases, it appears in verbal, sexual and monetary abuses. Some lay faithful have had hurtful experiences of abuse of authority and power by the clergy as well as by ordained and non-ordained leaders of religious congregations and institutions. The situation has worsened due to the long tenures in positions of authority and, in certain instances, due to absence of ecclesial leadership.

20. *Journeying Ahead*: Jesus' message "I am among you as one who serves" (Lk 22: 27) is the principle by which Church leaders ought to be identified. Pope Francis speaks of the servant-model as an 'inverted pyramid' where the leaders are at the bottom rung serving the faithful. Journeying together involves co-responsibility, discerning, decision-making and decision-taking. For effective leadership and governance, there is a need for decentralization and collaboration at various levels of planning, decision-making and execution. The strong desire of the faithful is that the Church should evolve from an overly hierarchical mentality to a genuine synodal mindset, where all understand that, by virtue of their baptism, they are one among equals, with Christ as the head of the Church.

21. The synodal path requires leaders who can journey with the people, as Pope Francis says, "sometimes being ahead, sometimes behind and sometimes in the middle." For this, leaders must delegate authority, listen to all, lead prudently and be ready to be led. They need to ensure that a clear vision and mission with long-term and short-term goals emerge from the community. People expect Church leaders, especially ordained ministers, to be role models – humble, spiritual, approachable and marked by a spirit of self-sacrifice, and they are grateful for the many who lead exemplary lives.

22. There is a need for radical revamping of the structures for consultation at all levels. At the family level, decisions are to be taken

by both spouses, while including others in the household. At the parish level, an appropriate representation of women and young people in the parish council and finance committee is to be ensured in accordance with the particular norms of the diocese. In particular, considering the prevalence of the caste system and the numerous members of the *Dalit* faithful, proper representation needs to be ensured for them in the consultative structures of the parishes and dioceses. There must be forums for feedback, evaluation, interaction and communication among the leaders and the members of groups. Accountability and transparency are necessary for managing the finances of the parish and the diocese.

#### **iv. Faith Formation, Spiritual Growth and Evangelization**

23. *Lights*: The sacramental, liturgical and spiritual life make the Church in India vibrant. The faithful thirst for the God-experience and come together to worship the Lord through family prayers, personal meditation, popular devotions, frequent Eucharistic celebrations, novenas, sacramentals and pilgrimages. The faith is nurtured by pious associations, movements and retreat centres.

24. Wherever Bible study, theology for the lay faithful, youth programmes and catechism for the children are offered, the faith is strengthened and passed on. Through the BECs, Catholic families in neighbourhoods come together to pray and reflect upon the Word of God. During the pandemic, online Masses and devotions sustained the faith of the people. The efforts of innumerable missionaries over the years are visible in particular churches and, in some dioceses, the work of evangelization continues through the words and actions of priests, religious, catechists and lay missionaries.

25. *Challenges*: There are times when faith practices border on the superstitious and people tend to be swayed by other fringe groups that draw them away from the Catholic faith. Some practices of church life, like family visits by priests and religious sisters, religious instruction by local catechists, regular faith formation classes, etc., are waning. The Church has also become institutionalised with the result that priests and religious are busy with administration of institutions, leaving them with little time to be spiritual ministers responding to the faith needs of the community. Moreover, lack of proper

transmission of faith in families, consumerism, the stranglehold of the social media and comfort-seeking lifestyles have led to an indifference towards faith practice. There is a significant decline in vocations to priesthood and religious life.

26. Liturgy and the celebration of sacraments have become a matter of routine and disinterest. The Eucharist, for instance, is perceived as a Sunday obligation with limited participation of the lay faithful. At times, priests are seen as not preparing homilies or delivering them with little reference to Scripture and no relevance to the daily life of the people. In some places, priests are not available for the sacrament of reconciliation. The evangelizing zeal is diminishing due to various factors like a weak faith foundation, lack of a personal encounter with Jesus and fear of existing socio-political situations.

27. *Journeying Ahead*: "Like living stones let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 2: 5). Faith formation must be given top priority, beginning with the awareness of the Catholic home as the cradle of Christian life. Catechism teachers must be provided with special training to become effective faith formators in schools and parishes. 'Couple catechists' can be of great help in faith formation. Adequate remuneration to catechists and other volunteers in pastoral ministry is to be ensured.

28. Religious instruction must not cease after one receives Confirmation, but is to continue through adulthood and married life. In addition, pastoral care is to be sensitive to the 'signs of the times' and to be offered to those most in need – young people, single-parent families, widows/widowers, the divorced, divorced and remarried, Catholics distanced from the Church and also to LGBTQIA+ Catholics.

29. The participatory, communitarian and celebratory dimensions of liturgy are to be fostered not only by ensuring that all take part in the liturgy according to their roles and charisms – choir members, altar servers, lectors, acolytes and ordained ministers – but also by Indian forms of art, music and dance as the diverse contexts suggest. Care must be taken to ensure that our gatherings reflect and are celebrations of the prodigality of God's love for the undeserving, the

sinner. Each parish must have a liturgy committee to reflect and plan on how best to celebrate the Sunday liturgy.

30. Living a life centred on the values of God's kingdom is the best way for evangelization. All the members of the Church are called to be 'missionary disciples' and evangelizers by the very witness of their daily lives. Pilgrimages and feast day celebrations are good occasions of faith formation and motivation towards being evangelizing families and communities. Catholic schools and institutions need to become evangelizing platforms in a new way.

31. The Church in India rejoices in the witness / martyrdom of St. Devasahayam, Blessed Sr. Rani Maria and Jesuit Stan Swamy, to name a few, who gave their all to God and God's people, especially to the 'least' among them.

#### **v. Mission, Collaboration, Visibility**

32. *Lights:* The Church is missionary by nature. The synodal process in some dioceses has helped revisit the pioneering works of the missionaries, finding value in the practices initiated by them. Mission in India takes many forms and specially focuses on those most in need of the Church's ministries. Besides taking care of the orphans, elderly, differently abled and destitute, the Church also responds through services like prison ministry, legal aid, care for victims of human trafficking, migrants and street children. The apostolates that the Church engages in – particularly education, health care and social development – are appreciated by members of other faiths and by those who have benefited by her services.

33. The 'dialogue of life' goes on continuously in neighbourhoods and parishes, since people live in close proximity with those of other faiths. Besides, people of other faiths visit churches, especially during festivals and devotions which promote opportunities for interreligious dialogue. At the national level, there have been attempts by the Episcopal Conferences and, at the regional levels, by the Bishops' Councils, which have sought to dialogue with other churches, ecclesial communities and religions. Ecological initiatives are being promoted at various levels.

34. *Challenges:* Although the Catholic Church in India has attempted to foster ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue, there is a feeling

that the mission in this realm is minimal. The dialogue efforts drew only a handful of elites and remained mostly as cerebral exercises limited to the realm of ideas and concepts rather than becoming a movement of the masses and becoming also a dialogue of life, love and action at the base, by getting people of various faiths and ideologies to discern, plan and work together for common causes.

35. Religious fundamentalism, fanaticism, anti-conversion laws, fear and suspicion of others sully the attempts to dialogue. Though the Church has contributed a lot to the education and healthcare of the nation, her voice is not audible when it comes to evolving national policies for education, health, etc. The alleged 'foreign' character of Christianity hinders dialogue with civil society. Ecumenism is often limited to coming together annually for the 'Christian Unity Octave' or some functions during Christmas, Easter and the like, rather than coming together to collaborate and learn from each other. The caution, silence and slow response of the Catholic Church against socio-economic and political issues of the country are disturbing. The Church's initiatives have not had the desired impact in the ecological sphere. At times, people feel left out and find themselves in a lonely battle when they have to face consequences of ecological crises.

36. *Journeying Ahead*: "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Mt 5: 16). Society is the place where the Church makes herself visible through her apostolates and ministries.

37. *Migrants*: The Church needs to ensure advocacy of just policies and processes, so that there is protection of migrants' rights to life and livelihood. The parish communities must connect with the migrants in a concrete way, reaching out to them, meeting them in person and being attentive to their material and spiritual needs, so as to ensure their integration into the community and society.

38. *Ecumenism*: A good relationship among Christians is a witness to Christian unity. Goals for ecumenism can be set by each parish and diocese. The lay faithful need proper orientation about the Church and other churches/ecclesial communities. This would also enhance collaboration and present a united front as a response to difficult situations.

39. *Ecology*: The Church can initiate environmental awareness programmes and eco-clubs with children and young people, to motivate the community to be ecologically conscious through planting trees, promoting organic farming and installing solar panels wherever possible. The Church also needs to address regional ecological concerns in collaboration with like-minded Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and ecological movements.

40. *Health and Education*: The Church is called to actively engage in ensuring access to basic healthcare for the poor and the vulnerable, including the elderly. Free education for children of migrant labourers and the under-served is to be considered. Educational institutions are an excellent avenue to create consciousness and sensitivity in children to learn to co-exist peacefully, irrespective of religious backgrounds.

41. *Socio-Political Participation*: The Christian community needs to address socio-political issues in a timely manner. Training lay faithful for public life, speaking up against injustice and violations of rights of the marginalised is a prophetic role that the Church can espouse more actively. The Church can also collaborate with other faith communities and authentic and legitimate NGOs to promote fraternity and social justice.

42. *Church as the Conscience of Society*: The Church is invited to be the conscience of the society and collaborate with persons of goodwill in eradicating the evil effects of the caste system, child labour, illiteracy, gender discrimination and abuse of minors and vulnerable adults. Firstly, with conscientisation on the socio-political issues of the day, the Church could initiate dialogue with civil authorities and like-minded organisations, other religious confessions and individuals on different human realities. Secondly, a liaison team can be established in each region to collaborate with the State in matters of common concern and to place the resources of the Church for the common good. Thirdly, mechanisms are to be established to cater to the emotional needs of the marginalised, immigrants, differently-abled, broken families, divorcees, unemployed, addicts, persons affected by mental illnesses, homeless children and LGBTQIA+ people.

43. *Technology and Media:* The Church needs to capitalise on her media and technology potential by identifying capable personnel to make her presence more visible and to carry out its evangelizing mission at the service of humanity.

44. *Structures for Collaboration at the Base:* As a massive and inclusive process of dialogue, participation and collaboration on a sustained basis would call for relevant forums and structures along the lines of Basic Ecclesial Communities, we need to collaborate with all involved to build Basic Human Communities everywhere. People at the base working together for the common good would be the best way to fight divisive tendencies.

### **III. Steps for Greater Communion, Participation and Mission**

45. The synodal process of the Church in India brought about better bonding and a renewed yearning to journey together, to share responsibility and to participate more actively in the life of the Church. In keeping with Pope Francis' synodal exhortation to listen and learn from each other, the Church in India, having collectively discerned the promptings of the Spirit and the voices of the faithful, religious and priests, puts forward her dreams and plans for greater communion, participation and mission.

46. **Communion:** The most significant experience was that all those who participated in the consultation realized their communion with one another. Some ways to build and sustain communion within the Catholic community are:

47. *Pastoral Care:* Regular home visits are essential to be in touch with the faithful and to be sensitive to their needs. Pastors, religious, lay catechists, BEC leaders are to visit families at least once in six months. The Commissions for Family and Youth need to draw up plans to accompany the vulnerable families and young people.

48. *Inclusion:* To address issues of discrimination based on caste, gender, language, ethnicity and social status: (i) Evolve an inclusion and diversity policy at diocesan/parish levels; (ii) Create a database to identify such persons and groups; (iii) Give them equitable representation in participatory structures and leadership roles, and

(iv) Establish 'listening' forums and grievance cells at deanery, diocesan, national and Universal Church levels.

49. *Collaboration*: There is need for greater collaboration among priests, religious and lay faithful within the Church as well as among different churches. The lay faithful are to be included in consultative bodies towards decision-making processes.

50. **Participation**: The entire synodal exercise was one of active participation at diverse levels. For this process to continue, a change of mindset and a renewal of existing structures are needed.

51. *Motivation and training*: The parish team needs to devise a plan for the lay faithful to take up specific roles in the parish and accordingly identify, motivate and train them. Create a 'policy of participation' with fixed terms to reduce the domination of a few in leadership roles.

52. *Participatory structures*: New participatory structures such as forums for teachers, doctors, lawyers, finance experts, etc., need to be created at the parish level to involve the expertise of the faithful. An inventory of human resources could be taken in each parish so as to identify and enable people to participate.

53. *Representation of women and young people*: More women and young people need to be involved in the Church's ministries, with adequate representation in the different participatory structures and commissions of parishes/dioceses. More women religious and lay faithful need to be appointed both in major and minor seminaries as formators, mentors, spiritual guides, counsellors and professors.

54. **Mission**: If the Church is involved in the lives of the people, the people remain involved in the Church. This can happen as under:

55. *Ongoing formation*: (i) More immersion and exposure programmes are needed for seminarians, priests and religious to instil a synodal and missionary spirit in them. Their human formation needs to be strengthened to develop qualities of listening, transparency, integrity and compassion; (ii) A resource team is to be created at different levels to support ongoing formation of the lay adults in order to concretely live out their faith in their respective contexts. Exposure

programmes for the lay faithful are needed to enable partnering in mission.

56. *Basic Ecclesial Communities*: BECs are to be established in all parishes. In addition, Basic Human Communities need to be promoted, in order to engage with people of all faiths and traditions and strengthen socio-political involvement and collaboration.

57. *Ecological sensitivity*: A strategic team needs to be set up at the diocesan level for the formation of eco-policies, creation of resources, investment in research, etc. An eco-audit must be done once a year.

58. While most of the diocesan synodal reports already contain proposals for the way forward, it is strongly recommended that these proposals are set in motion by appointing a team for a continuing collaboration with the local Synod team, to formulate time-based action plans and monitor their progress. The fruits of these initiatives can then be shared with the local community. To organize, execute, monitor and evaluate the above-mentioned plans, it is necessary that a Synod Watch be set up at the national and diocesan levels.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

59. The Synod for a Synodal Church 2021-2023 has been a moment of review, rediscovery and renewal for the Church in India, awakening us to the promptings of the Holy Spirit to deepen communion, to enhance participation and to revitalise mission.

60. The angel of the Lord has come now the second time to touch and tell us, 'arise, eat, the way is too great for you' (cf. 1 Kgs 19: 7).

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**THE SYRO-MALABAR CHURCH**  
**SYNOD OF BISHOPS 2021-2023**  
**SYNTHESIS REPORT OF**  
**INTRODUCTION**

The Syro-Malabar Catholic Church, the second largest Eastern Catholic Church with 4.6 million faithful made an extensive and grass-root level study of the *lineamenta: Synod on Synodality* published in view of the preparation for the upcoming XVI Synod of Bishops to be held in Rome in 2023. As the Church *sui iuris* the modalities of the Synodality are maintained well in the Syro-Malabar Church.<sup>2</sup>

***Modus Operandi***

As per the instruction from the General Secretariat of the Synod, Rome on 20 May 2021, every bishop in the Syro-Malabar Church celebrated the opening of the Synodal process in his eparchy on Sunday 17, October 2021, except a few who chose other days convenient for them. All the 35 eparchies inside and outside India and one Apostolic Visitation in Europe appointed one contact person for the Synodal consultation in each eparchy who acted as a liaison and point of reference. Mar George Cardinal Alencherry, the Major Archbishop appointed Mar Sebastian Vaniyapurackal, the Curia Bishop as the contact person of the Syro-Malabar Church for liaising with both eparchial officials and with the General Secretariat of the Synod. He participated in the online meeting convened by the General Secretariat on 17 November 2021.

The *lineamenta* was subjected to a thorough study in the Church. The Major Archbishop intervened in the XXX Synod of the Syro-Malabar Church held at Mount St. Thomas, Kakkanad, from 07-15 January 2022 inviting the attention of the Synod Fathers on the theme of the Synod of Bishops to be held in Rome in 2023. The copies of the preparatory document with questionnaire as well as the *Vademecum*

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<sup>2</sup> There are altogether 4,684,626 (4.6 million) Syro-Malabar Catholics within the 35 Syro-Malabar Eparchies and one Apostolic Visitation in Europe and approximately 5,60,000 members live as migrants outside any Syro-Malabar Eparchy. There are 62 Bishops, 10,223 priests (5061 eparchial and 5162 religious), and 35,444 women religious and 3225 Major Seminarians. Many Bishops, priests, religious and laity of the Syro-Malabar Church are present all over the world and play an active role in missionary and pastoral life of the sister Churches.

for listening and discernment in the local churches were made available in the vernacular languages to the priests, religious and the faithful and it did enhance the effectiveness of the discussions.

The discussions were made on five levels:

1. Family Unit Level: Each unit contained 20-30 families that gathered monthly in a home of the unit with the parish priest leading the prayer and animating the discussion. The *lineamenta* was discussed primarily in these Basic Christian Communities. After the presentation of the major themes of the *lineamenta* by an expert, fruitful discussions were made by all the participants. The Syro-Malabar Church is having more than 200000 family units. Consequently, we can sincerely claim that the themes suggested by the *lineamenta* were made available to all the faithful of the Church.
2. Parish Level: Summarising the fruits of the discussions at the family unit level, every parish council discussed the issues in detail and prepared a detailed report to be sent to the higher ecclesiastical bodies.
3. Forane Level: The various reports at the parish level were studied in detail by the forane council consisting of the priests and representatives of the religious and the laity of the region. The forane level report approved by the forane council was sent to the eparchial curia.
4. Eparchial Level: Every eparchy had a fruitful discussion on the *lineamenta* in its respective pastoral council bodies. After summarising the findings of the discussions at all the previous levels, each eparchy prepared a detailed report on the *lineamenta* and presented it to the Syro-Malabar Synod.
5. Synodal Level: A synodal level discussion on the *lineamenta* was organised by the Commission for Doctrine of the Syro-Malabar Church as *instructed* by His Beatitude George Cardinal Alencherry, the Major Archbishop of the Church.

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic hindered the coming together of the people in groups in various eparchies. As a whole the faithful enthusiastically responded to the questions given for discussion. Active involvement, speaking out boldly, creative suggestions, self-criticism from the part of the laity, the consecrated men and women and priests were amazing. We also experienced a

genuine interest in the people of God to listen each other, the courage to pinpoint the aspects of Christian life that needed improvement and genuine and creative ideas that would make better our ecclesial life. Moreover, we could recognize that the synodal process is a precious God-given gift as well as a challenging task for all of us in journeying together for communion, participation and mission of the Church as a whole.

The Commission for Doctrine conducted a Webinar on the theme “Synod on Synodality” and many eparchies benefitted out of it. The Commission also offered continuing help for training the eparchial team for facilitating discussions in the eparchial level. The Synod then decided to entrust a Committee of Bishops with the Curia Bishop as the convener and the Bishops of Doctrinal Commission as its members with the help of the members of the Theology Forum to prepare the final report of the Syro-Malabar Church.

The Curia Bishop convened two on line video conferencing (1 and 18 July 2022) of the synthesizing committee to discuss the *modus operandi* of the codification of the reports of the various eparchies as per the guidelines and suggestions for the preparation of the synthesis given from Rome. The synthesizing committee in the presence of Mar Sebastian Vaniyapurackal, the Curia bishop and Mar Tony Neelankavil, Chairman of the Commission for Doctrine gathered together for the codification of the eparchial reports on 28 July 2022 at St. Joseph’s Pontifical Seminary, Manglapuzha, Alwaye. The synthesizing committee discussed the details of the codified report and suggested some modifications and additional notes to be added in the final report. As a whole, the discussions were made with true spiritual discernment and the proposals made are in view of finding out concrete solutions to so many problems and challenges that the Church must confront today.

## **BODY OF THE SYNTHESIS**

### **I. Journeying Companions**

As people of God, the parish community moves in communion by sharing and by listening each other. The Church should journey inclusive of everyone, regardless of age, marital status, financial status, background or disability. For such an inclusive journey:

1. All meetings of the faithful (*Palliyogam*), family units, parish councils, pious organizations and associations must be more active and creative in their functioning. Take steps to ensure the participation of every member of the parish in one of the associations. Participation of “all” in the parish activities will help avoid partiality.
2. Give special preference to the children, women, elderly, widows and widowers, isolated alcoholics, and those addicted to drugs etc.
3. Ensure active participation in every mission of the Church of the laity from all walks of life, especially those having higher education, leadership quality as well as love and concern towards the Church.
4. Promote higher quality education for deserving Catholic students in Catholic institutions and prepare them for public services. There should be platforms in the parish to help members to secure government aids, projects and strengthen the minority cells to attain constitutional rights.
5. Give importance to the higher education for Catholic youth; Orient and organize the youth and youth centres for more effective and creative action and outcome and help them to find out suitable marital alliance.
6. Set apart a portion of the income of the parish for helping the financially backward, homeless, orphans and the sick. Implement special projects for them with follow up.
7. Create more common platforms to share the journey of faith experiences and catechism for the children should be more experiential. Prime concern of Christian families must be listening, sharing and the proclamation of faith.
8. Hold together those who differ from the Church and wounded by some Church authorities.
9. Laws must be made to avoid same people continuously holding the leadership positions in the pious associations; decentralize the powers and duties and take lower authorities in confidence.
10. Forced fund collection is one of the hindrances for journeying together.

## **II. Listening**

The Church needs to be a good listener than a speaker. To be a good listener:

1. All gatherings should start with invoking the Holy Spirit. Discernment of the Spirit is to be sought before taking any decision.
2. Attention has to be given to build up rapport among everyone even if all opinions are not acceptable. Be reasonable and respectful in accepting and rejecting another's opinion.
3. Give proper consideration to the opinions of the poor, the voiceless, the indifferent, the marginalized and those with low self-esteem. Seek the lost and listen to those who are in the peripheries especially differently abled, transgender, the convicted, the mentally and physically challenged, Dalit Christians, newly baptized etc.
4. Listen to people who are keeping themselves away from Church life and those who dissent to Church views and standpoints. Parish priests must visit them frequently giving special care to them.
5. Give respectful roles, equality, and freedom for women and women religious.
6. The Church leaders should become more open minded, trustworthy, impartial, compassionate, understanding, available, sensitive, generous, simple, humble and empathetically listening.
7. Listen those who are unwilling to be corrected regarding faith or moral affairs.
8. Promote 'we' feeling among newcomers in the established parishes by welcoming them unconditionally.
9. Every member of the community should have the opportunity to ask questions about faith and to have discussions and exchange of ideas to clarify their concerns on a regular basis.
10. Promote effective communication skills, languages, and avoid addiction to social media.

### **III. Speaking Out**

The following reasons of *Not Speaking out* should be addressed: Inferiority complex, fear of the authority, fear of criticism, fear of acceptance, indifference, groupism, favouritism, lack of recognition and appreciation, egoism, autocracy, male dominance, secularism, disparity in accepting the opinions of the rich and poor, Isolating tendency to those who speak out, separating and victimizing those who speak out.

Therefore, we have to

1. Provide opportunities to share their views to those who are silent or less heard.
2. Create occasions for the faithful and authorities for self-correction and self-understanding.
3. Create conducive atmosphere in the Church to express their opinions and suggestions and welcome constructive criticism and opinions and make parish council and parish general assembly, Basic Christian Communities, Family Units, Home Missions (House Visit) as good platforms for the parishioners to express and hear their opinions frankly.
4. Give a patient listening to all concerned as well as to differing views. Hear the voices of the youth and reach out to the people.
5. Give training to the faithful to speak in the family units, parish and eparchy. Prepare and train the leaders to speak out for the Church.
6. Place complaint box in the parishes and other ecclesiastical institutions.
7. Ensure active involvement of pious associations like *Mathruvedhi*, *Syro Malabar Youth Movement*, *Jesus Youth*, etc. in the parish activities and administration.
8. Speak out boldly in the Church circles regarding the issues like Love jihad, Disparity of Cult, etc. Church leadership should be flexible to hear the faithful, respond to them from the perspective of the Church and hold the faithful together.
9. Due to the inefficiency of the Church to present the position of the Church, form PROs from qualified persons to speak for the Church on various issues like problems of farmers, drugs, diminishing birth-rate, migration, etc. and give them proper training.
10. Give proper knowledge about the social media and its apostolate for the effective evangelization to the faithful and coordinate the talented people to preach the Word of God using the social media. Create a strong media team in the parish and eparchial level to speak for the Church in the media.

#### **IV. Celebrating**

1. Eucharist, the source and summit of the Christian life (SC 10), should be made fruitful to all.

2. As part of adult catechism, youth catechism and family catechism, introduce the theology of Eucharist in the family units, the altar boys, youth, etc.
3. Catechize and encourage the laity to assume more participatory role in the Eucharistic celebration in order to safeguard from an overly clerical performance.
4. Celebrant, choir and faithful join together for the active participation. Assign each day to a family or family unit for the week day celebration of the Holy Eucharist. It will be helpful for the active participation in the Eucharist.
5. Empower the faith formation of the people in view of inculcating adequate knowledge of liturgical celebration. To this effect, priests and the religious may conduct liturgical orientation classes and study circles for the active participation in the liturgy.
6. The Online Eucharistic celebration should be replaced with that of the Offline celebration which ensures its sacramental celebration.
7. Timing of the liturgical celebration may be rescheduled considering the special needs of the parish community.
8. Revise the present mode of faith formation into a balanced combination of theological, liturgical and action oriented perspectives. That is to say, the faith formation should be theological-faith formation, liturgical-faith formation and action-oriented faith formation.
9. Retreats, Eucharistic adoration, novena, night vigil, family prayers etc., help the people to foster spiritual life. But the popular pieties and rituals which are not resonant with the Christian faith are to be abrogated.
10. Liturgical services should not only be in Malayalam but also in English especially on Sundays. Bilingual liturgical services are to be promoted in the mission regions. Besides, transliterated liturgical texts should be made available for the migrants.
11. Provide permanent place of worship and full time parish priest in the mission regions.
12. Arrange pilgrimages in the family units, encourage the faithful to read the Bible regularly at home and promote occasional celebration of the Eucharist in the family units, and for the youth.

13. Safeguard the unique traditions and rituals of the Church and also allow to do a few adaptations in the liturgical celebrations respecting the traditions and customs of the place.

14. Now a days liturgy has become a matter of dispute. Disunity, conflicts and difference of perspectives regarding the mode of celebration in the Eucharistic celebration should be immediately addressed by the Church authorities.

15. The disinterestedness among the faithful and the clergy towards the sacramental life, and the personal differences in the liturgical celebration have caused scandals before the public.

16. Sunday homilies should be moderate and it is good to give a small homily on week days and feast days too.

17. Give proper training to the choir members and reduce the over domination of the musical instruments.

#### **V. Co-responsible in the Mission**

1. Evangelization is a collaborative ministry. It is our prime duty to proclaim the gospel individually and collectively. Proclamation of the Kingdom values is our mission and social apostolate is the ministry of the Church.

2. Empower the basic structure of the parishes in the mission regions and highlight the importance of the lay participation in the mission work. Proper coordination between the priests and laity is needed for the effective execution of the missionary activities.

3. Find out the reasons for the lack of missionary zeal among the faithful and missionary vocation. Favouritism, money and profit orientation, lack of holiness, scandalous life, unhealthy competitions among the religious and eparchial missionaries are the major reasons in this regard.

4. Introduce the mission centres of the Syro-Malabar Church to the faithful in Kerala and reach out new mission centres in Africa and Latin America.

5. Provide proper catechism to the people about the missionary apostolate and provide the lay people opportunities to visit and work in the mission areas.

6. Since every member of the Church is a missionary by baptism and has a vital role to play in the mission regions by their own life witness,

inculcating the life style of the early Christians is an urgent need of time. This is to be done with proper conscientization on the importance of evangelization through life witness.

7. Conduct mission orientation classes, study circles, competitions, social activities, camps, etc., to know more about the mission regions and missionaries. In this regard, organize open forums (e.g., in Sunday catechism classes, seminary, family units, etc.) to share the anxieties and apprehensions of the missionaries and the faithful in the mission regions, and provide Bible to every family in the mission regions.

8. Promote the *koinonia* of missionary couples and the *koinonia* of mission apostolate in the parishes and constitute a commission for evangelization in the eparchial level.

9. All bishops may write circulars and pastoral letters highlighting the importance of the mission.

We should be ready to face the missionary challenges of the present time. Due importance should be given to the evangelization.

10. *Khrist Bhaktas* who are visiting the mission stations and the Churches are to be supported. Priests, religious, seminarians and laity may visit the mission regions of our Church.

11. The priests should encourage the laity to be active in the process of evangelization. Missionaries should be encouraged spiritually and should be supported financially (eg. Sunday Collection for mission).

12. Coordination and collaboration of three Churches *sui iuris* in mission regions are needed. Share the places of worship and resources of different Churches *sui iuris* in the mission regions.

## **VI. Dialogue in the Church and in the Society**

Dialogue and mutual listening should become the style of functioning of the Church from the grass root level. The mission of “journeying together” assumes an on-going dialogue within the Church and with other religions.

1. Listening without prejudice is the first step of this journey together. Avail all opportunities of listening and discernment in the dialogue process.

2. Dialogue and discussions in a friendly atmosphere with mutual respect and acceptance will enrich the positive understanding of each other and enable peaceful co-existence
3. Do not consider laity as only listeners, they need to be listened. They look for an experiential participation in the life and mission of the Church.
4. The spirit of familial sharing in the Church at all levels (parishes, communities, institutions etc.) is to be reinforced. Church cannot always follow the democratic model that is solely based on the principle of majority.
5. In the journey together with other communities in the society, an attitude of sharing and accepting the virtues in others has always been the tradition of the St. Thomas Christians. Thus, common endeavors and celebrations need to be promoted.
6. Church has to be always in dialogue with the society based on faith and morals listening to one another, being open to the signs of the time, listening and discerning to what the Spirit tells us.
7. Church has the obligation and responsibility to dialogue with the society to become the voice of the voiceless even in places and times where her voice is not accepted. The political position (not party politics) of the Church has to be made public in the society
9. We have to mobilize the opinion on socially important issues like education, public health, social services etc., at the organizational, parish and eparchial levels and give the responses accordingly.
10. Teach our people to interact with people of other religions with prudence and respect and to lead a dialogue of life. Dialogue has to be used as a means for evangelization.
11. Educate our children the values of secularism and at a very young age convince them of the fundamentals and uniqueness of Catholic faith.
12. Make use of the places and modes of dialogue such as common gatherings and meetings, marriage functions, funeral ceremonies, religious feasts, cultural feasts, inter religious meetings etc.
13. Proactive leadership such as the hierarchy together with the laity especially women, dalits, youth and tribal people of whom the Church is largely composed of, be included in all forms of dialogue.

14. In the mission context it is good that the parish priest and the parishioners meet each other and enquire about their sorrows, joys and their whereabouts of life. Listen each other with a tender heart.

15. All the pertinent issues that the Church and the community face today are to be made themes for dialogue in the society. All should pray for the Holy Spirit to discern the divine voice before and in the process of dialogue.

16. Those who speak with a differing tone and content in the ecclesial forums are to be treated with tolerance and their voices are to be respected duly without compromising the fundamentals of the Church. Authorities have to promote fearless sharing.

17. Initiatives are to be taken to bring the dissidents back to the mainstream. There has to be a mechanism in the Church to verify whether anyone is discarded.

18. Opportunities for Biblical and theological studies, media awareness and ethics etc., should be provided to all for authentic dialogue in the society.

19. Strengthening of Family Units/ Small Ecclesial Communities (SECs) is one of the all-important matters identified for on-going dialogue at the grass-root. They (SECs/BCCs) have to be developed as a platform for active discussion on matters ecclesial and secular.

## **VII. Dialogue with Other Christian Communities**

1. A cordial relationship exists between the Catholic Church and other Christian Churches. Some eparchies take initiatives to conduct ecumenical gatherings on various occasions (viz. Unity Octave, Christmas celebration, and regional ecumenical council meetings).

2. However, some think that the Catholic Church needs to improve on its approach to other Churches and communities and that the ecumenical movement must be further empowered through practical and visible activities. Some such activities suggested by the eparchies are the following: i) ecumenical dialogues, social and charitable activities, fight against injustice; ii) public interventions at local levels; iii) common retreats; iv) proclamation of the common Christian identity that comes from Jesus; v) joining hands in the mission common to all the baptized; vi) common celebration of feasts and festivals; vii) cooperation in relevant aspects of cultural and social life, common efforts to empower the downtrodden; viii) creation of a local

Helpline for the benefit of the public; ix) restoration of traditions and practices of the days the Churches were in unity, if they are not in conflict with the Catholic faith today; x) Issuance of a joint statement on the unified Christian standpoint when it is demanded by certain political and cultural situation such as the difficulties engendered by farmers.

3. Christian unity is essential, especially when religious fundamentalism is rife.

4. Each parish priest shall take initiative to unite all Christians in the area of his parish.

5. Traditionalist and elitist tendencies of the Church shall not prevent her from coming out to relate with the ecclesial others. The Church needs to be more inclusive and accommodative on the one hand and vigilant in avoiding unhealthy debates on the other.

6. Those who enter into dialogue need training lest they dilute the Catholic faith. Specificity of each religious and ecclesial tradition, virtues and uniqueness of each non-Catholic community must be understood, maintained and respected.

7. Some eparchies find the theology and pastoral practice of Pentecostal communities very difficult to accept. Apart from various prejudices and lack of mutual understanding and trust, the fear of sheep-stealing prevents Catholics from relating with Pentecostal groups.

8. The Church needs to wholeheartedly accept those who come to the Church through marriage and the Church needs to converse with those who left the Church.

9. Catholic canon laws concerning the marriage between Catholics and Jacobites as well as Orthodox faithful may be simplified.

### **VIII. Authority and Participation**

A synodal Church is a participatory and co-responsible Church. For a better participation in the administration of the Church:

1. Identify the goals to be pursued through discussions and deliberations in the basic ecclesial communities, parish councils, joint meeting of the representatives of each family, and eparchial level councils and the ministers of the Church.

2. Make the faithful sufficiently aware of the synodal nature of the Church and guide them to find out more and more effective ways to reach the goals and particular steps to be taken to accomplish them.
3. Avoid all types of one-sided, autocratic, clerical and hierarchical style of administration in the Church. The respective canonical institutes should function according to the mind of the Church.
4. Foster synodality among the faithful by way of taking them in confidence and giving them more responsibilities and practicing team work in the administration of the local Church.
5. Examine keenly whether the canonical institutes function in the proper way they are envisaged to be by making periodic evaluations regarding the mode of function and implementation of the decisions.
6. Authorities should have endurance to cater even the negative voices of the people.
7. Avail the proficiency and expertise of the qualified men and women and particularly of the youth in our community for the building up of the Church.
8. Respect the principle of subsidiarity in the administration of the Church. Adopt modes of decentralization and strictly avoid bureaucratic and biased approach at every level of governance.
9. Utilize the canonical mechanisms to practice synodality not limiting it only to the temporal administration of the Church, but for the all-encompassing dimensions of the ecclesial life and pastoral affairs.
10. Respect and follow the synodal decisions once synodally made.
11. Respond to the needs of today taking into consideration the special, cultural, moral situations of the present Church.
12. Avoid following every secular style of administration in the governance of the Church.
13. Make sure the participation of all in the functioning of the Church and strictly guard against the vested interests, financial motives and political agenda. Administration should be transparent.

## **IX. Discerning and Deciding**

1. In a synodal style we make decisions through discernment of what the Holy Spirit is telling through our whole community. In any

decision making we should invoke the power of the Holy Spirit. We need to listen to all because the Spirit may speak through anyone.

2. Even if it is not possible to implement all the opinions of the faithful, it is good to listen to all. Particularly the voice of the women and youngsters should be heard without fail. If the Spirit moves us in the direction of the opinions of the majority, we should never forget to hear the voice of the minority as well.

3. For any proper discerning and deciding, there should be unity among the laity and hierarchy. In case of any conflict, open talk can be held under the guidance of the authority.

4. Discussions should be facilitated in a familial manner, and decision should be based on consensus arrived at by the Holy Spirit, upholding the doctrines of the Catholic Church. To make common decisions, the issues must be discussed in various forums such as family units, associations and departments and Parish-Forane-Eparchial councils.

5. All should be given opportunity to participate in the decision-making process using the established organizational structures of the Church like family units, parish councils, pastoral councils... etc. In the eparchial level the curia, priest conferences, presbyteral council, finance council, the college of eparchial consulters are the forums used to discuss the matters of the eparchy.

6. Laity participation should be increased. The Church has to listen to the voice of the faithful. Different categories and types of people are to be involved in the decision-making committees.

7. Proper communication about the actions or decisions should be provided to the faithful and all feedback should be respected and reviewed.

9. There should be transparency in the economic matters of the parish/eparchy. It is good to appoint suitable persons to be more transparent and accountable in the parish and in the eparchy as well.

10. Promote various traditions or methods of discernment and get them familiarized.

## **X. Forming Ourselves in Synodality**

1. Empower the existing Synodal structures in the Syro-Malabar Church: The ancient Synodal structures and ecclesial processes existing in the Syro-Malabar Church, *Prathinidhiyogam*, *Palliyogam* and

*Desayogam*, express the Synodal nature of the Church at the local, regional and universal level and are useful for forming ourselves in synodality. They are at the service of the parishes and communities, which discover collaborative exercise of the pastoral ministries to move forward by listening to the Holy Spirit. Moreover, there are some new initiatives and attempts which try to empower the synodal structures of the Church (ref. appendix).

2. Other than the traditional and canonical institutions and structures, new lay movements and associations are to be encouraged in the Church. Such lay initiatives are not to be suspected and thereby suppressed. Instead, the eparchy has to impart sufficient and open support to them, especially in the contexts of social and political issues that have currently unseen but powerful impacts on religious life in the long run.

3. The concept of Synodality could be implemented in our formation houses. It will help the future priests and the religious to welcome the difference in human nature and allow the Holy Spirit to form the individuals through walking together, listening to one another, participating in mission, and engaging in dialogue. The synodal nature of the Church involving its communion, participation and missionary dimensions need to be inculcated into the syllabus of the seminary curriculum.

4. The concept of Synodality should be included in the on-going formation of the priests.

5. Promote the Spirituality of Synodality: The spirituality of journeying together must become the educational principle for the formation of a human person, a Christian, a family, and the community.

6. Leadership training and personality development coaching should be imparted to all the faithful especially children and the youth.

7. Renew the Catechetical Formation of the Church. It is good to include charitable activities, care for the sick and counselling in the catechetical formation of the Church. There has to be timely updating and modifications in the catechetical syllabus and text books. Catechists should be models of faith life. There should be programmes to help the renewal of the catechists.

8. Communication media are inevitable tools to deepen and strengthen synodality in the modern world. Utilization of all available social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Blogs, and You Tube to reach out is important. Allocation of adequate funding and resources to create a dedicated media cell are the needs of the time. Social media can be used to educate and raise awareness on the Church teachings and activities.

## CONCLUSION

The participation of Syro-Malabar Church in the Pre-Synodal processes has been self-reflective, self-critical and providentially relevant to her time. Almost all structures and sections in the Church were involved in the synodal process. Organizers and participants expressed that they were seriously involved in the processes aimed at shaping the Church in a synodal way. It strengthened the Church's strives for renewal at all fronts. The expected renewal is at the level of relationship and mission within and outside the Church, which will bring about change in attitudes, the quality of services, and the fruitfulness of various ministries.

The participants in the Pre-Synodal sessions across the local churches in the Church *sui iuris* expect the Synod of the Syro-Malabar Church in general, each eparchy in particular and the responsible persons at all levels to pursue the required guidelines for action in concurrence with the discernments. More than orientations and teachings, actions are to be initiated. Church-in-synod looks forward to the genesis of a synodal Church, built on the sincere commitment to listening to the Holy Spirit in renewed efforts of walking together "as fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone" (Eph 2, 20). Deliberate efforts are to be made to impart and ensure a "we' feeling in the whole Church.

### **The major discernments are the following:**

1. Journeying together happens in a culture of respectful listening. The hierarchy and superiors on different levels need to be more approachable. Everyone in the Church should have a participatory sense and role in the life and mission of the Church. Decentralisation will help the Church to become more participatory than now.

2. Concrete steps need to be taken to inculcate the awareness of the spirit of the Syro Malabar community among the members in this *sui iuris* Church. The Syro Malabar Church has been blessed with indigenous ecclesial structures like *Prathinidhiyogam*, *Palliyogam* and *Deshayogam* which express the Synodal nature of the Church. Everyone in the Church, especially priests, is to be trained to live and relate with others in the spirit of Synodality.

3. Along with those who faithfully follow and joyfully participate in the life of the Church, people who are keeping themselves away from the Church-life and those who dissent with the Church must be heard. Women and women religious must be heard, and steps must be taken to ensure that they enjoy freedom and equality.

4. The soul of the synodal style of being the Church is the process of decision making through the discernment of the voice of the Holy Spirit that resonates in the community of faithful. Listening to the Spirit through listening to the faithful at all levels is very essential in this process. All the structures and bodies in the Church are to become spaces for authentic discussions.

5. All accrued hindrances in speaking out in the Church are to be addressed. The major reasons identified for not speaking out in the Church platforms are inferiority complex, fear of the authority, fear of criticism, fear of loss of acceptance, indifference in ecclesial affairs, groupism, favouritism, lack of recognition and appreciation, egoism, autocracy, cultural superiority, male dominance, secular interests and experience of being victimized for speaking openly. The Church needs to train the faithful to speak openly in the family, family unit, parish and eparchy, and identify and train leaders who can speak for the Church in the public sphere.

6. The Church needs to orient the faithful to the Holy Eucharist by educating them about its theology and liturgical and spiritual significance. Faith formation needs to be strengthened by inculcating adequate knowledge on participative and authentic liturgical celebration. Anxieties and disputes regarding liturgy pull back the faithful from liturgical experience and make the journeying together difficult.

7. Efforts must be taken to impart the conviction that every Christian is and has to be a missionary. People need to be conscientized on the importance of evangelization through life witness. Priests, the

consecrated men and women and the lay people in the mother Churches who desire to visit and work in the mission areas shall be given opportunities for the same.

8. Dialogue shall be the style of functioning from the grassroots level in the Church. Dialogue and consultation practised in an atmosphere of love, respect and acceptance will enrich positive understanding of each other and facilitate peaceful co-existence as well as common mission. Church has to be always in dialogue with the society. The common people practice dialogue of life through cooperation among different religions and communities in matters of human and public interest. Initiatives need be taken to bring the dissidents back to the mainstream in the Church and society. Family Units/Small Ecclesial Communities are to be strengthened and motivated as platforms for dialogue within the Church and with other religions and communities.

9. The Catholic Church has to improve on its approach to other Churches and communities and the ecumenical movement must be further strengthened. Explore the programmes and tasks which could be jointly done for common witnessing in the society. Those who enter into dialogue with other ecclesial communities and religions need training lest they dilute the Catholic faith.

10. The general impression of the faithful that the style of governance and exercise of authority in the Church is one-sided and autocratic, extremely clerical and hierarchical is to be concretely addressed. Synodal integration of the lay faithful is to be promoted by taking them into confidence and giving them more responsibilities in the administration of and ministries in the Church. The expertise and various talents of both men and women, especially the youth, have to be identified, organized and utilized for the building up of the Church.

11. Lay movements shall be promoted. The catechetical process is to be rejuvenated in the light of the new challenges of faith. Media and communication are to be given due priority in the Church and leaders are to be trained in them.

Reflections on Synod and practices in Synodal process have to continue at various levels until the Church becomes truly synodal. The Syro-Malabar Church *sui iuris* in communion with the Major Archbishop, its Father and Head, all archbishops, bishops, priests,

religious and the faithful join with the Holy Father and the entire people of God in prayer for the discernment in the Church on her path of the sanctification of souls, evangelization of the world and the glorification of the Holy Trinity.

## **APPENDICES**

Syro-Malabar Church, in the course of her long history, has developed ecclesial structures such as *Prathinidhiyogam*, *Palliyogam* and *Deshayogam* which promote synodal character of the Church. The diocesan reports reflect some recent initiatives to empower the synodal structures of the Church and some lay movements which serve as the praxis of synodality at local as well as eparchial levels. Though there are many more such initiatives, we mention those referred to in the individual reports.

### **I. Recent Initiatives Which Try to Empower the Synodal Structures of the Syro-Malabar Church**

#### **1. Pastoral Animation and Coordination Team (PACT)**

PACT is a participatory structure evolved in an eparchy after a three-year long synodal process (2015-2018). PACT in parishes is structured as a sub-committee of the *Palliyogam* / Parish council. It consists of parish priest, elected members and nominated experts of the Community at parish level and representatives of clergy, religious and laity led by the bishop at eparchial level. PACT collects and analyses the socio-pastoral data from the community, facilitates the preparation of pastoral strategies and action plans through the collaboration of all members of the community, monitor its implementation, empower the stakeholders in the community for effective implementation of the pastoral plan. It is an organ that facilitates the listening of the voices of the entire community through effective and systematic dialogue and discernment.

#### **2. Pastoral Animation Research and Outreach Centre (PAROC)**

It is a Socio-Pastoral Research Centre that aims at enhancing the pastoral vision and ministry in the Church. The Institute has developed a socio-pastoral methodology, known as 'PAROC Method' which is inspired by current advancements in

interdisciplinary research in general and Psycho-Social and pastoral-theological in particular. The Institute has undertaken several micro and macro level studies in the parishes, eparchies and in the various particular Churches. Some of the socio-pastoral interventions initiated by PAROC were pioneering efforts in the field of participatory pastoral ministry. Three objectives of the Institute are pastoral animation, pastoral research and the outreach programmes for the dissemination of the research findings in the pastoral scenario.

## **II. New Lay Movements**

### **1. Home Mission**

It is an outreach programme focusing on the families. Trained personnel especially nuns and lay volunteers visit the families as a team of two each in a particular parish, listen to the family members, clarify their doubts with regard to faith and morals and pray for the family. It is a compassionate sharing of the Christian love and care. Special cases are brought to the attention of the parish priest. We come across with amazing results: Family feuds are resolved, those who are in spiritual lethargy are energized, marital problems are solved and their bond is strengthened and people become more interested in sacramental life. The family rediscovers its lost warmth and stability and family members are able to enjoy the joy of love.

### **2. Judith Forum Movement**

Judith Forum is a movement of and for widows named after Judith in the Old Testament. It aims to empower widows and employ them for the wellbeing of other widows. The Forum helps widows to accept widowhood and live in union with Christ as a continuation of their sacramental marriage, to renew their family relationships and to become agents of evangelization. It realizes its objectives through 'Rise Up ministry' which assists young widows in their journey from grief to grace, intercessory prayers, various residential and non-residential training programmes, single parenting retreats and befriending visits.

### **3. Missionary Couples of Christ (MCC)**

Missionary Couples of Christ is a venture in which couples themselves function as agents of pastoral care for the families. Their charisma is the empowerment of family relationships which they live in a special way and serve families. They get trained for the ministry through 'Grace Ripples Fellowship' which lasts for 30 months and at

the successful completion of the training they take the oath for a lifetime to serve the Lord in the Church by engaging in the pastoral care for families. Its services include different training programme for couples, parish level seminars on specific family skills, intercessory prayer for the broken families, family visits, etc.



**THE SYRO-MALANKARA CATHOLIC  
MAJOR ARCHIEPISCOPAL CHURCH  
FOR A SYNODAL CHURCH: COMMUNION, PARTICIPATION  
& MISSION**  
*An Overview of the Synodal Experience*

**Introduction**

The Clarion call of His Holiness Pope Francis for synodality in the church begins a new Epoch in the history of the Catholic Church; to become truly synodal- to walk together as a people of faith. The Syro-Malankara Catholic Church, set out the synodal journey, focused on the call, engaging in prayer, discourse, discernment, and listening to explore how we could open up to as many people as possible within the stipulated time. The Holy Episcopal Synod of Syro-Malankara Catholic Church organised a team, under the leadership of the Professors of St. Mary' Major Seminary, Trivandrum to facilitate programmes of awareness, discussions and dialogue to fully involve in the modalities of this process. At the behest each Eparchial Bishop, the resource team conducted Orientation sessions on the Preparatory Document and discussed the *modus operandi* of the theme

This report compiled is an attempt of our determination to represent the voice of the Holy Spirit working through the people of God in the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church. All the Eparchies of our Church conducted the Synodal interaction process through the following phases: i. Family; ii. Parish; iii. Diocese. This illuminating process has brought us to engage in animated conversations about the living of our faith in our Church. This document is the summary of our submission to the universal synodal path, and we do hope it will also be a keystone of our faith community in discerning the growth of our Church in the coming years.

**1. Synodal Process in the Dioceses - the First Stage**

- **Inauguration:** The synodal Process for a listening and inclusive Church was initiated at the local level on October 17, 2021, with the Inaugural Holy Mass in the Syro-Malankara Catholic Dioceses.
- **Formation of Synod Team:** A Synod team was formed in each diocese with the Proto-Syncellus, the Chancellor, a lay

representative (Pastoral Council Secretary), two priests as experts, a religious to guide this process.

- **Orientation Sessions:** Orientation Sessions, in person and online were conducted in all the Dioceses of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church to create an awareness among the parish priests, lay leaders (Pastoral Council members), and the religious on the Synodal path. This process aimed at training of facilitators during November 2021 - February 2022. The structure of the training was as follows:

- a) Inaugural session, b) prayer, c) inputs, d) group discussion, e) presentation of the reports, f) general discussions, g) clarifications and conclusions.

- **Listening:** After carefully studying the *Lineamenta* and *Vademecum*, some questions, that are relevant to our context were discussed group-wise.

- b) **CONTENT SYNTHESIS: Living out Synodality in the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church**

### 2.1. Living out Synodality in the Family

An enriched and true synodal journey begins only by an analysis of the basic social unit, family in the Church. The synodal path can only be mapped by understanding the contributions of family. Knowing well this parish priests were asked to conduct various sessions of discussions among the parishioners, primarily with the aim of listening them.

The summary of these discussions are summed up as follows:

- In the post-covid world, families were torn apart by the psychological and socio-economic conditions. The synodal style of the Church presented through these discussions opened for people an outlet to vent out their struggles, anxieties, fears etc. The laity was once again made to realize “we really matter for the Church.”

- These discussions helped us to understand the new moral concerns of the families in the modern world and their view about the faith life. It was a grim fact that many expressed a failing enthusiasm to participate in the Holy Mass. In a digitalized world, the spiritual life of most of the families was at stake and affected the spirituality of the community.

- The Syro-Malankara Church, has always taken pride in the tradition of evening prayer in families, where all the family members came together to sing, to read the Bible and to pray. However, it was noticed that the mobile phones, social media, web series etc. have encroached into the sacred space and time of family prayer time.
- In some families, the women and the children expressed their concern about the problem of alcoholism of the head of their families. The wives and the children of alcoholics were deeply affected, and they suffer intense psychological, physical and social trauma.
- In some places, especially in the city parishes, the Sacrament of Marriage has been belittled by the new generation as obsolete and leading to bondage. Young men and women have shown reluctance for married life. This led to several socio-cultural problems and rendered the existence of lively parishes at stake. In particular, there are questions on rise asking why is it necessary to marry a catholic or a Christian and not a non- catholic or a non-Christian. It was also noted that there is a rise in the number of marriages between non-Catholics and non-Christians.
- The Church needs to listen to the voice of those who left the Catholic faith due to ecclesial and personal reasons. She needs to take serious effort to bring them back to her.
- Proper adult catechesis must be imparted to the laity. It may help people to solve issues regarding emotional immaturity, family planning, strengthening marital relationship, and to shun modern negative trends etc. Awareness needs to be raised in matters of internet addiction, pornography, mental stress etc. among children. Children must be encouraged to take part in faith activities through 'edu-tainment' i.e., learning through quiz, dance, games etc.
- The families expressed their joy at the synodal exercise, as they could speak freely and listen to each other in the family. The children were glad that they were listened to by their parents, and the spouses understood the importance of mutual listening and the value of inculcating virtues to the children by their examples. The parents respect for each other will definitely influence and inspire the children to treat women with respect and care. They also realized the importance of saying 'please,' 'sorry,' and 'thank you.'
- The families loved to continue this synodal experience.

## 2.2. Living out Synodality in the Parishes

The parish renewal is a keystone for building a synodal church. As people of God at the parish level receives the discernment to listen together to the Spirit, to scrutinise the signs of the times and interpret them in the light of the Gospel.

Living Synodality at the parish level helped to discover the following concerns:

- Major challenge that stressed the life of parishioners at the parish level was the relations and interaction with the parish priests. Many people recalled experiences of strenuous relationships with the parish priest. In relation to this, many demanded the need to overcome clericalism. Many recommended the need to build up a personal relationship between parishioners and the parish priest. Judgementalism, siding with the rich and domineering attitude of the parish priests had to be get rid of. Unfortunately, there were reports of some wounded by the priest's words or attitude. They had to be healed and brought back to the flock.
- Some people opined that the parish priest must concentrate more on developing worship-oriented community than organizing fund raising programmes for social welfare.
- Worship in the parish should ensure the participation of all the people. The Parish church should create an ambience of prayer and silence. The choir in the Divine Liturgy must facilitate meaningful worship, it should not relegate the worshipping community to the role of bystanders.
- A communitarian worship culture has to be developed. This can be fostered through regular carrying out of prayer meetings.
- Parish boundaries must be redefined to include the non-Catholics and non-Christians of that area. Welfare programmes, health campaigns, social awareness etc. should ensure participation of all the people within the parish boundaries. The activities of the parish must cater to the needs of the people of the particular parish.
- On shifting the focal point to the parish administration many suggested a need for increasing the role of parish committee from the role of financial administrator to a faith promoter. Building up a community grounded in faith and love, where we live out the communion must be fundamental aim of the committees. Election to

the parish administration must not be reserved for the elite few. The term of office for the elected members in the committee must be clearly specified and checked. Transparency must be maintained in the financial undertakings of the parish.

- Some of the parishioners complained of the imprudent use of wealth in the parishes. Often parish feasts are celebrated with much grandeur, extravagance and luxury.
- Catechism and youth ministry are to be encouraged. Catechetical classes should grow from mere academics of theology to an experiential level. Youth and their concerns must be addressed through faith discussions. Youth must be given an opportunity to express their opinions in the consultative body meetings of the parish and their views must be respected.
- The focus must be on building up a community grounded in faith, love and hope, where we live the Christian love in communion, where the participation of each and every member is ensured.
- The parish community under the leadership of the parish priest must take every effort to uplift the marginalized people.
- It is an encouraging sign that in few parishes, the women are serving as Secretaries/ Trustees in the parish committee. Women should be empowered and brought to the mainstream.

### **2.3. Living out Synodality in the Dioceses**

#### **Pious Organizations and Lay Movements**

The discussion on synodality in the Diocesan Level for various pious organizations and lay movements opened the possibility of getting responses from various age groups.

a. **Malankara Catholic Children's League (MCCL) and Catechism:** There was a number of responses to upgrade the structure and improve the content of the books of catechism. It is a fact that the catechism books become lack lustre to the modern generations; neither have they spoke the language of the kids nor appeal to them. Proper orientation courses have to be imparted to catechism teachers. They need to get equipped with adequate resources to handle the catechism classes. Old chalk and talk method should give way to incorporation of modern pedagogical approaches. Serious awareness must be raised among the parents on the importance of faith formation.

**b. Malankara Catholic Youth Movement (MCYM):** Youth expressed their concerns through their offbeat reflections. The primary concern was regarding the updating of the Ecclesiastical structures. Social media must be given more room for the transmission of the faith. At times, it has to be sharpened as an apologetic weapon. Youth also ask the Church to speak up the truth when she is attacked from all sides. Unemployment among the youth raised as a serious issue. Though they have proper education and skills, yet they fail to get employed. It has increased the mental strain of the young ones. In turn it has affected their confidence in life, faith in God, trust in the Church and its hierarchy. Increasing number of unmarried youth is also a consequence for this.

**c. Malankara Catholic Mothers' Forum:** Detailed discussions with the mothers in the church gave a new perspective in the development of the synodal nature of the Church. Many demanded the need for mothers to be encouraged to give more responsibilities in the Church. Due participation of women must be ensured at the diocesan levels. Proper conscientization of the changing trends in the world as well as new Parenting techniques must be introduced to mothers.

### **3. The Bishop and the Priests**

The priests in their discussions voiced their expectations of their Bishops:

- Bishop must stand as a Father-figure in the Church. His concern must be like a father to the child. A Bishop needs to be approachable, available and ever-ready to listen. He should encourage the priests, religious and laity to speak out with *parrhesia*.
- The Bishop should accompany his priests in their pastoral life. Servant-leadership model must be adopted by all the Bishops.
- The Bishops should promote a culture of dialogue and consultation with the clergy in the Dioceses.
- He should sort out solutions to problems that must be in consultation and formed out of dialogue.
- There must be transparency in the financial dealings in the Dioceses.
- Some priests opined that the Bishops should avoid nepotism/favouritism.

## **Relationship between Bishop and Priests**

- Pope Francis' exhortation for a "Synodal Church," has provided an opportunity for Bishops and priests to reassess their relationships with each other. The relationship between the Bishop and the priests has a profound significance for each Diocese and for the whole Church. Since, the sacrament of Holy Orders is constituted for the service of the people of God, right relationship between Bishop and Priests is inevitable for living out the true calling of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

- Priests must be ready to accept the Bishop as a true father, listen to him, and to recognize God's will in obedience.

### **Priestly *koinonia***

- The spirit of fraternity and communion must be developed among the clergy. All the priests are united in His priesthood. Therefore, they need to support each other and collaborate in the building of the Kingdom of God.

- The sins of calumny and jealousy must be rooted out from the life of clergy.

- The priests must take the responsibility of communicating the Pastoral letters of the bishop to the parishioners.

- A growing materialism, worldliness and tendency of indifference seem to have marred the life of some of the priests. Instead, the primary concern of the priests should be his true mission of preaching the Good News and serving the Community. Thus they should nurture the pastoral zeal.

### **Priestly Formation**

- Drawing reflections from the contemporary world many have argued for a radical revampment in the formation of future priests. While giving much emphasis to the intellectual formation, the candidates for priesthood have to be taught to translate the facts and information from theology courses into actions in the pastoral ministry. An intelligible and insightful awareness needs to be inculcated in the candidates of priesthood about the exigencies of modern people.

- At this key juncture, the formation must teach the candidates to priesthood to connect and experience the transcendent in their

concrete life situations. Spirituality must not be watered down giving importance to social actions. Attention to the relationship between sacramental life and real-world life should enable an aspirant to priesthood to realize how sacred emanates and purifies the profane world.

- Diversity of means for evangelization gives an extra mileage for experimenting new approaches for evangelization. Many believe in the power of social media and other modern innovations to spread the Good News. Hence, an adequate room must be provided for aspirants to be friendly and at ease with these modern innovations for the greater good of the Church. Quality education must be provided in this respect. It also points to the reform of the existing formation structures.

#### **4. The Religious**

As repositories of rich ecclesiastical culture and spiritual heritage, the religious life necessitates a brief reflection on each of these three terms: communion, participation, and mission. The outcome of these reflections can be summed up in the following points:

- The religious are not called to concern only about their personal holiness and individual salvation. They must embody the merciful love of Christ in the lives of others.
- The religious life must be animated by personal and community prayer.
- The religious houses should continue to remain as a hospitable house. Every guest must be honoured without looking into their social standing.
- A religious house must be a place of unity with a loving bond between superior and the community.
- Mission orientation, passion for the people and an attitude of sacrifice must be the hallmark of a religious. Visiting the families must take precedence over running an institution. Quality time has to be shared with the people. They must be prepared to expend their time and energy for the growth of the Church.

#### **5. Ecumenical concerns**

- Uniqueness must be delineated without compromising the fraternal co-operation between the Catholic Church and the other

Christian Churches. While, holding on to our identity, we should learn to respect other expressions of Christian faith, through charity.

## **6. Relationship with People from other Faiths**

- The Joy of the Gospel must go beyond the boundaries of the Catholic Church.
- One of the clear reminders on this ground is our ability to engage in dialogue with the people of other faith and other affiliations. Many were of opinion that the need of the Church to present itself its uniqueness in the present day world.
- In the multi-religious context of India, the Church should promote inter-religious dialogue and universal fraternity.
- There is a growing concern among the faithful that the Church must not try to silence others by establishing their supremacy. In the spirit of dialogue, she must champion the cause of eradicating poverty, racial discrimination, environmental conservation etc.

## **7. Mission**

The Church exists in the world with a Divine mandate “to go forth and proclaim the Good News to the entire creation” (Mark 16:14-16). This mandate envisages the missionary nature of the Church. What is desired of the Church is to move forward into missions. As time progressed many new paths have been offered in the synodal discussions to promote the missionary thrust of the Church. A summary of the matter is the following:

- The Church must redraw the old maps and cliched axioms in her missionary approach. Promotion of lay leaders to the mission regions is considered as an ideal strategy for the growth of missions. The diversity of each mission region from the other had to be understood respectfully. Proper respect of the culture and traditions of the indigenous community is a necessary prerequisite for a heart-to-heart relationship with the people. Only this in turn provides a fertile soil for evangelisation.
- New strategies and methodology should be applied in mission regions only after a proper survey and understanding of the peculiarities of the culture and social background of that region. In addition to this, proper training must be imparted to those involved in mission activities. Missionaries are also checked of their genuine

desire behind involving in mission activities. Only a missionary grounded in the Gospel values can be a harbinger of change and faith formation in a mission region.

- Development of the missions needs a shift from the conventional model of hierarchy (Bishop, priests and religious) to a missionary model of service. An attitude of distancing from the older missions in search of new missions had become the trend of the Church. This had resulted in the nominal increase of the faithful rendering them without any firm foundation in their faith life. Hence, periodical examination and evaluation of the missions are necessary.
- The Church must chalk out proper plans for development initiatives in the mission regions. New initiatives should not destroy the age-old cottage industries of the people or discourage them from the same. No compromise should be made in teaching the faith and moral life to the people, at the same time, appropriate pedagogical methods must be used to communicate the same.

## **8. Church and other Institutions**

- The Church should sustain missionary consciousness, for she is “missionary by nature.”
- The Church’s educational and health care institutions should be a means for the advancement of the Kingdom of God. Christian culture and values should be propagated and promoted through them.
- The priests who head them should see themselves as servant leaders and not merely as executive officers or rulers.
- The Church should never lose sight of the mission of evangelization.

### **Conclusion:**

The overall understanding of synodality among the faithful have created a new awareness to be with the Church to strengthen not only spirituality but also their understanding of the institutions of the Church and mission of Our Lord Jesus Christ to continue the spreading the Good News through love of God and love of our neighbour which is a great calling with a new perspective. Discussions at different levels have been very fruitful it has created a new vitality in the parish life and faith of the community. The influence of Holy Father Pope Francis and his dynamic and spiritual

leadership has emerged as a new hope to the world which is divided in dissension and war, pawing way for a new world without boundaries to inclusive culture and structure.

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