

**SYNTHESIS REPORTS**

**SYNOD OF BISHOPS 2021–2023**



- I. Konferensi Waligereja Indonesia (KWI)
- II. Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan (CBCJ)
- III. Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea (CBCK)
- IV. Catholic Bishops' Conference of Laos and Cambodia (CELAC)

# **I. Catholic Bishops' Conference of Indonesia**

## **Konferensi Waligereja Indonesia (KWI)**

### SYNTHESIS

#### **0. PREFACE**

With great joy the Indonesian Bishops' Conference welcomes the Synod of Bishops by setting up a National Committee of the Synod of Bishops that collects, translates and distributes documents published by the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops to the Secretaries and Diocesan Contact Persons.

On September 28th, 2021, all documents were sent to each contact person of the 37 dioceses, the Association of Indonesian Philosophers and Theologians and KOPTARI (The Conference of the Superiors or Presidents of Religious Orders in Indonesia) as well. The document along with its explanation in Indonesian is also published openly in social communication medias belong to Indonesian Bishops' Conferences and of Dioceses.

After receiving the documents, the diocesan contact persons gathered in one virtual room for the WhatsApp application group. In this virtual space, the contact persons share stories, stories, experiences about the preparation and implementation of synods in their respective dioceses and institutions following the roadmap suggested by the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops.

On October 17th, 2021, almost all dioceses held the Opening Synod celebration at the diocesan phase, some chose another day for very special reasons. Meanwhile, on October 22nd, 2021 all contact persons of dioceses and institutions together with the national committee gathered virtually to inspire each other in planning the implementation of the synod at the diocesan phase.

Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, 37 of dioceses in Indonesia work together to build fellowship, develop participation and mission, with their own styles and ways according to their respective situations, conditions, abilities and needs. Each diocese chooses one theme as the main focus without neglecting the other 9 themes based on ecclesiastical territory. Many dioceses use survey methods and tiered consultations, starting from basic communities

and even boldly going out to communities and members of other faiths in building conversations and reflection together.

The bishops set up a diocesan synodal team that discerning the path for the diocese: designs, disseminates, conducts and monitors spiritual conversations, prayers and reflections, discussions and surveys at the base and parish phases either virtually or in person. The diocesan synodal team publishes a manual for the synod prepared in accordance to preparatory documents of the General Secretariat and the National Committee of the Synod of Bishops. The virtual consultation process between diocesan contact persons is very helpful in the process of compiling synod guidelines in their respective dioceses. The process of journeying together and inspiring each other, guiding each other is very pronounced at this stage. The contact person who has finished creating the guide will post it virtually in the consultation room so that other contacts can get inspiration, guidance and good examples.

After 5 months of the synod, March 23rd, 2022, dioceses' contact persons reunited virtually and recounted the journey and the results of the synod in each diocese. The enthusiasm of the faithful to participate is very high; they really appreciated the synod process because they felt heard and welcome. The synod process brings closer the relationship between priests and people, brings to life values that have existed but have so far been hidden, and awakens local churches to the extent of the influence of social media today. Many spiritual fruits are really experienced by the faithful, the clergy and nuns especially when contemplating about who their travel companions are all this time, whether there are those who are left behind, are discarded and marginalized, and whose voice never listened to.

To culminate the journey of the diocesan synod, which has been extended by 4 months, the dioceses hold pre-synodal celebrations in the festive celebration of the Eucharist and diocesan phase conversations, then the drafting team formulates a synthesis which is sent to the National Committee of the Synod after it has been approved and signed by Diocesan Bishop.

The very wide area, the various grade of enthusiasm of the dioceses, the level of understanding which is not the same, and the needs and interests of the dioceses are diverse, become a challenge in

itself when finding variations in the results of the synthesis collected at the national phase.

These varied results represent the diversity of the Indonesian Church as well as the condition of the faithful who are spread over many islands, various ethnic groups and their respective contextual situations. Nevertheless, this diversity is a wealth of the Church. How the reflection of the Indonesian faithful during the Synod will be delivered in the following 10 themes.

## **I. THE JOURNEYING COMPANIONS**

In the Synod's perspective, the Church of Indonesia is increasingly aware that everyone, from various ages, ethnicities, cultures, religions, socio-economic statuses are a traveling companion. This awareness has not been fully understood by every member of the church. Some of the people still understand that traveling companions are close individuals and are involved in joint activities. Through the synod process, the Church realized that the church in Indonesia has not fully paid attention to and involved brothers and sisters who live on the periphery and away from the church: those with special needs, those living in marital irregularities, the elderly, people who are far and geographically unreachable, different tribes and brothers and sisters of different denominations and beliefs. The synod is an opportunity for every member of the church to actively embrace and involve everyone in the life of the church, and at the same time proactively welcome invitations and involve themselves in the lives of their brothers and sisters, because all are brothers (*Fratelli Tutti*).

This endeavor is not without challenges. In the church, an interesting phenomenon that occurs due to the influence of culture and the demands of social life is the growing active involvement of women and the elderly in church life which is greater than the involvement of men and those who are young. This situation brought about a change in the way of life and pastoral of the church. Externally, building an inclusive brotherhood is faced with apathy, rejection and hostility due to a narrow understanding of religion and belief.

However, we should be grateful that many people are actively involved in the church and build daily brotherhood in the community.

In the realization that personal goodness is not possible without the common good, to become more and more traveling companions requires leadership: communicativeness, dialogue, humility, proactiveness, sense of belonging, responsibility; abstain from the attitude of thinking about self-interest and good, the attitude of leaving those who are different and become a burden. The fruits of this awareness are respect for differences as a gift for living together, living in neighborhood and brotherhood.

## II. LISTENING

Through Spiritual Conversation starting from the basic community, the Church is increasingly realizing the meaning of listening. Everyone has the freedom to speak and to listen. All have the same status and rights. In listening, people not only understand more deeply about the thoughts, feelings and riches of life as well as the potential that exists in other people, but also know God who is speaking and conveying his message personally through that other person. Listening is the main key in finding and embracing people as journeying companions.

During the synodal process, through greetings and direct listening, the pastors of the Church are helped to become more aware of the real and precise situation, needs, and inspiration of the people. Greeting and listening are the first steps and at the same time the virtue of the life and work of the Church. Saying hello and listening will always bring about changes both in us who listen and, in the people, we listen to. So, there is always joy in the people when their stories and struggles are heard. This greeting and listening is not only for pastors but is a virtue for every member of the Church. The challenges that are often experienced in greeting and listening are prejudice, demands, unpreparedness to accept what they unwillingly hear. This is especially true when it comes to listening to those who are far away, who are weak, who have "had hurt", whose voices have been unheard of, and who have not been taken into account in pastoral policy.

In addition to listening to each individual, it is increasingly realized that the Church needs to especially listen to the life situation of the surrounding society, especially those who experience injustice and difficulties in life. The process of listening and speaking sharpens the Church's ability to grasp the signs of the times in social life and in preserving the integrity of nature. Listening not only enables the Church to grasp situations and problems but also makes the Church more aware of and recognizes various communities and institutions that have common concerns and dialogue to find a better solution.

### **III. SPEAKING OUT**

In the process of spiritual conversation during the synod, the congregation learned the importance of speaking, because they were convinced that no matter how simple it was said it would be important and valuable to others, and therefore must be heard. Talking starts from the family where in everyday life each member freely speaks and expresses himself as he is. This habit will also naturally be reflected in everyday life in the public sphere.

In the life of the Church, it is realized that there are many members of the Catholic family tend, so far, to be silent and do not speak much. It must be said that discussions about the life and work of the Church are mostly dominated by pastors and Church activists, who are more familiar with and know the dynamics of the Church's life. During the synodal process, it was realized the importance of finding a way and giving the people who remains speechless the opportunity so that they dared to express their opinions and aspirations. It is also important for pastors to respect every opinion, view, and suggestion of the people.

During the synodal process, it was also reflected that the Church is not only preoccupied with internal affairs, but also needs to be bolder in shouting a prophetic voice in the community- The prophetic voice of the Church can be developed collectively by pastors and laity through social and political institutions. Therefore, the Synod urges the importance and urgency of preparing lay cadres as the driving force of social life. The Church must pay attention to the substance (content) of information so that she truly speaks out the truth and justice, is not easily manipulated, and is at the same time a

counter-hoax. Tire interests and prophetic voice of the Church sometimes collide with the politicization of religion.

It is increasingly realized, especially during the pandemic, that the Church needs to make more use of technology and digital communication media as a way of preaching because digital media is an integral part of shaping human life. The Church needs to be more creative in proclaiming the faith, with interesting content according to the times and interests. Digital coaching is also important for pastors, Church functionaries, and especially the younger generation.

#### **IV. CELEBRATING**

The Eucharist is the first, central and highest place in the celebration of the life of the faithful. In this Eucharist all the faithful, both young and old and children, actively participate and find the meaning of their lives. The people's longing for the Eucharist is felt during the Covid-19 pandemic, when they can only participate in live streaming of the Eucharistic celebration. Live streaming mass and spiritually receiving the Holy Communion are not able to fully fulfill the people's desire to be directly present in the Eucharist and receive the Body and Blood of Christ. Fortunately, in the post-pandemic period, people regain the opportunity to participate directly in the Eucharistic Celebration, although there are still groups of people who prefer to celebrate the Eucharist online rather than offline.

We note that the attendance rate of the people is increasing now. However, during this process of synod, awareness also emerged that there are still some believers who still view the Eucharist as a celebration of formality, and not come into their heart.

Daily prayer becomes the breath in the daily life of the people. But, this habit of praying is more lived as a personal activity that gives spiritual strength, especially when facing problems or difficult life difficulties, such as during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, it should also be noted that in many places, the faithful have a habit of praying together, both in their families and in their neighborhood or community base. Through prayer, people experience God's help especially in difficult times.

The people's desire to read, study and meditate on the Scriptures is growing along with the emergence of various Bible reading movements and Bible study groups. People do not doubt the

truth of the Scriptures; but they raise questions that require satisfactory and understandable answers. The explanation of the Bible through the homily is experienced to be less moving people. For this reason, a simple and accessible model of the apologetic Bible catechesis is needed.

## V. CO-RESPONSIBLE IN THE MISSION

Within the Church, there is a positive image that all elements of the Congregation, because of the Sacrament of Baptism, actively take a part in the life and mission of the Church, especially in the internal activities of the Church: kerygma, liturgia, diakonia and koinonia or charitable actions. In almost every activity of the Church, the Congregation actively take a responsibility. There are many communities and groups of Congregation that thrive in the Church with all its activities. The image of priests and religious as main driving force of the mission of the Church is still very strong in the Congregation, although there are several missionary movements of the people and schools run by various religious' groups that have developed in some dioceses. Consecrated life communities and various groups in the parish need more attention. Their involvements need to be more developed and an assistance should be given for them as an integral part. Various forms of community mission formation are also needed, especially youth, and children.

The responsibility of the ad extra mission is more the responsibility of the Congregation, who publicly appear as representatives of the Church in the society. The role of the priest as a leader in the society still needs to be improved, so that it does not only focus on internal Church services. The people take part in the work of social, political and community services as administrators or figures. People's awareness that these works are part of the mission is still not very well formed, due to the limited formation of Christian faith and morals for professionals and community leaders.

The Church realizes as an integral part of the state and nation. Therefore, the Church also actively takes part in the responsibilities of society as part of the life of the nation and state. National development since childhood is an important part in building national identity. Cooperation between the Church and the government is growing and developing with various kinds of

collective activities and government policy making in seeking the *bonum commune*.

With the presence of religious issues that often-become potential conflicts in the society, the Church actively takes a part by building cooperation and dialogue with religious leaders and other beliefs. The collaboration between religious leaders was formed in a cooperation forum and manifested in togetherness in responding to community social issues. Many issues of conflict between religious communities have been handled because of this good cooperation.

## **VI. DIALOGUE IN THE CHURCH AND SOCIETY**

Dialogue is a way of life for dioceses in Indonesian. The dialogue, within the Church herself, takes place between various members ranging from individual members of the congregation, both in territorial and categorical groups as well. Dialogue also occurs at various levels. There is a dialogue process in determining pastoral policies at the parish level which is preceded by a process at the neighborhood or local level. At the vicariatus foraneus (deanery) level there are recollections, regular pastoral meetings; likewise, at the diocesan level, regular meetings involving pastoral officers are held.

In Indonesia which has pluralistic, dialogue between the Church and the community occurs at first in daily life (such as social services, family or social gatherings, safeguarding security when people of other religions worship, helping each other in a neighborhood when someone passes away or suffers, etc.). Dialogue is also a means of resolving conflicts in society, proclaiming the truth, justice and peace. Likewise, dialogue with the community often takes place in mutual cooperation to overcome the problem of poverty, help those who are suffering and fight against the destruction of nature. Interfaith dialogue and collaboration bring out positive impacts for individuals (better understanding of other religions, etc.) and for living together (harmony, peace, security, etc.). Christians at the same time, in this dialogue and cooperation, bear witness to their faith in Jesus Christ and His teachings.

Exercising dialogue, what a pity, does not always run smoothly. Lack of knowing each other, unfair competition, inferiority complex as a small group, suspicion of Christianity, indifferentism,

differences in political choices, politics of revenge are examples of things that complicate the dialogue, even lead to a conflict.

Within the Church, disobedience to collective agreements, social jealousy, considering that their group is superior to others, etc., may trigger conflicts between the people themselves. Conflicts may occur between the priest and the people as well; they are caused by the delay in worship services, lack of transparency in the management of Church finances and assets, burdensome development fees, favoritism in ministry, poor socialization of pastoral policies, pulpit of the word used to offend the people, fail to care for pastoral appeals, etc. Conflicts can be resolved through mediation and communication through various ecclesiastical institutions such as neighborhoods/Basic Christian Communities, stations, parishes, dioceses.

The Church also experience conflicts with other cultural, religious and belief communities caused by differences in the rules for ratifying interfaith marriage ties, religious worship practices that disturb public comfort, abuse of other religious attributes, changing religions for unnatural reasons, etc. The Church often plays an important role in resolving conflicts in society. This happens by participating in various dialogue forums. Efforts to overcome conflict can occur by forgiving each other, brotherly dialogue, praying for the parties in conflict, having open and respectful heart and mind toward ethnic, cultural and religious diversity, being actively involved in building cooperation in solving economic and political problems. Involving traditional leaders, religious leaders and the government is an important factor in efforts to resolve conflicts.

It is realized that we can learn from the experience of conflict as well. Conflict experiences may become a place to learn how to grow as a community. This requires a great spirit, mutual respect, compassion, humility, willingness to listen, and efforts to understand others better.

## **VII. WITH THE OTHER CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS (ECUMENICAL RELATIONSHIP)**

Dioceses in Indonesia have tried to realize what Jesus prayed for (John 17) for the unity of his followers. Ecumenical relations have been practiced in families whose members come from various

denominations. This requires a willingness to accept and appreciate differences. Ecumenical cooperation also occurs in daily activities (meetings in the working areas, living in neighborhood, community service/mutual cooperation). Various other forms of ecumenical cooperation occur in the field of spirituality and worship (i.e. ecumenical worship, exchange of pulpits, cooperation in translating the Bible), in the social field (helping the poor and suffering, forming cross-denominational institutions to help each other in times of sorrow, building peace), in the field of education (i.e. exchange of theology lecturers, cooperation in developing schools), in the field of cooperation between religious leaders across denominations, and in the health sector as well.

Ecumenical dialogue and cooperation bear good fruits, namely knowing and appreciating each other, learning from each other, sharing in joys and sorrows, fostering a sense of solidarity. In spite of considering the Catholic Church as a rival and a threat, Protestant denomination, which, in some places, is the majority of the community, it welcomes her as family granted with possibility to use village facility for worships and to build Catholic symbols.

Nevertheless, this praiseworthy ecumenical cooperation does not always run smoothly. We face various challenging obstacles and difficulties that must be continuously overcome, namely: (a) The anxiety over the migration of Catholics to other denominations; (b) Differences in teachings that are unwisely handled with fanatical attitudes, such as the Catholic Church's teachings about Mary, baptism for confession, the Eucharist which are often considered wrongly triggering a mutual hatred; (c) Religion is often used as a tool for political identity means, causing segregations; (d) There is no organized and continual plan due to the lack of a stable or permanent forum for dialogue; (e) There are amount of contents on social media fostering bigotry and lashing out certain Churches; (1) Low-understanding on the Catholic teachings causing many Catholics are afraid of having a dialogue with Christians from other denominations; (g) Sometimes, in Catholic-majority areas, there are those who act arrogantly, causing suspicion from adherents of other denominations, especially when accompanied by bad memories of relations from the past that were not harmonious.

The Church is, in the future, expected to foster participation of religious leaders in building dialogue. All the congregations need

also to be motivated not to be afraid to build relationships and cooperation with people from other denominations. Cooperation can be done, for example, by fighting for justice and truth together, struggling for the human rights come to real, fighting for the poor and overcoming ecological problems. The ecumenical movement needs to be catechetically promoted from the beginning to children, teenagers and the youths through a tiered formation so that they are then ready to participate and cooperate with their brothers and sisters from other Christian communities.

### VIII. AUTHORITY AND PARTICIPATION

On the one hand, in general, we can say that in various dioceses, authority and participation are experienced as two things that are not contradictory. Authority is exercised while maximizing participation. Broad participation is based on the awareness of the people as members of the Church by virtue of baptism. The authorities are egalitarian, willing to listen to the people, open to criticism, providing space for the people to be involved in various Church activities. In accordance with their respective authorities, duties and charisms, priests, nuns and parishioners make a real contribution through various activities (liturgical and non-liturgical) so that the Church is truly experienced as a “home for all”. It is important to note that together with the parish priest, the board (parish council), the people (directly or through their representatives) are involved in determining the goals and plans of pastoral activities. In situations like this participation in the life of the Church brings joy.

On the other hand, there is also an authoritarian and unparticipatory leadership style. There is experience that the proposals submitted by the people and community leaders (neighborhood administrators or members of the Parish Council) are ignored by the parish priest. There are also situations where the people do not dare to express their opinion because they are afraid of the priest who is fierce, cynical and authoritarian. Likewise, favoritism makes people reluctant to participate. It was also found that the people did not want to participate for various other reasons, such as lack of basic knowledge about faith and Church life, because of busyness, and other excuses.

To increase participation of all Catholics, the Church needs to listen more seriously to those marginalized. The voices of the poor, those who are not actively involved in the life of the Church, those who have problems (for example in marriage), and of the women often receive less attention. The participation of youths is also still often underestimated. It is recognized that young people are the hope of the Church, but the Church, contradictorily, often provides less opportunities and confidence in various activities. In this regard, it is proposed that a creative movement be held to stimulate the involvement of young people and leadership training to prepare cadres of leaders in the Church and in society in the future.

## **IX. DISCERNING AND DECIDING**

The synodal character of the Church can be seen from how it performs the discernment and makes decisions. Ideal decision-making in a synodal Church needs to meet the following elements: consultation and listening to Church members, cooperation among all involved, measurable data, transparent processes, discernment in the light of the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

On the one hand, the people in the dioceses testified about their positive experiences in doing discernment together to decide something. People are invited to get involved, to talk together, to express their opinions, and to listen to each other. An accurate social analysis is needed to provide truly accurate and accountable information about the situation, validated data, the needs, the dynamics, and pastoral challenges. Advanced technology are very helpful and allow more and more people to get involved and to get accurate information. On that basis, the community then performed discernment together, asking for the light and guidance of the Holy Spirit to make a decision. This requires attitudes such as humility, honesty, sacrifice, courtesy and gentleness, courage to take risks, deep faith, warm and open living together, full of love and brotherhood between the clergy and the people. It is also important to note from experience that various pastoral decisions need to be well communicated to all parties so that a common movement will be created. This joint movement also needs to be supported by adequate training for members of the parish pastoral council, district administrators, neighborhood and basic community.

On the other hand, there are a number of things causing difficulties. Geographical factors in the form of very far distances between regions and poor road access make it difficult for people to be able to gather together. Likewise, a poor internet network causes communication less smooth and makes participation insignificant. Synodal discernment and decision-making processes are also hampered by the dominance of certain parties or individuals, selfish and exclusive attitudes, authoritarianism, unwillingness to get involved, fear of expressing opinions, always blaming and judging others, hasty in making decisions, prolonged conflicts.

## **X. FORMING OURSELVES IN SYNODALITY**

In developing herself as a synodal Church, the Catholic Church continuously maintains togetherness with local customs and wisdom. For example: the habit of holding a forum in a traditional house led by a traditional leader to solve together various problems that exist in the local Church and community. Various customs that already exist with all the values of togetherness that exist in them can help the Church to strengthen togetherness among the Catholic Church and between the Catholic Church and people of other religions and beliefs.

Togetherness as a Church is also developed categorically through the formation of groups such as Catholic families, guidance for children and youth, development for Catholic Youth and Community Organizations (Catholic Civil Society Organization). Meanwhile, territorially, formation can be carried out through the environment (Basic Community), stations, parishes and the Regional Pastoral Team (RPT) or the deanery/vicariatus foraneus. No less important is the formation and training for pastoral workers so that they can convey the message of faith and pastoral policies appropriately in simple language that is easily understood by the lay people, while still paying attention to local culture.

Self-formation related to this synodality also requires other efforts such as pastoral conversion from pastors and lay people so that they can walk together and complement each other, maintain the integrity and unity of the community, especially by embracing those who are on the periphery and less welcoming, building a fair communication with leaders and other religious communities as well

as efforts to empower the people's economy for the realization of common prosperity.

Especially for pastors, in order to support the realization of the Synodality of the Catholic Church, it is needed pastors who are diligent in visiting the congregation or their families, have the humility to listen to the voices of the people, and are always generous in serving.

## **XI. CONCLUSION**

1. In the realization that personal goodness is not possible without the common good, to become more and more traveling companions requires virtues: communicativeness, dialogue, humility, proactiveness, sense of belonging, responsibility; abstain from the attitude of thinking about self-interest and good, the attitude of leaving those who are different and become a burden. The fruits of this awareness are respect for differences as a gift for living together, living in neighborhood and brotherhood.

2. The Church needs to be more sensitive to the situation of people's lives and the environment, especially those who are in unfairness and experience difficulties of life.

3. The Church needs to be more creative in proclaiming the faith, with interesting content according to the times and interests. The pastors and Church functionaries need a digital coaching.

4. After the pandemic period, when the people are still complacent to take part in the Eucharistic Celebration online and lack depth due to the influence of the busy and congested rhythm of people's lives, the Church needs to have more considerably and creatively efforts to embed the Eucharist as the first and highest place in the celebration of the life of the Christian.

5. Due to the presence of politicization of religious issues that triggers conflicts in the society, the Church takes an active part by building cooperation and dialogue with religious leaders and other beliefs as well as promoting religious moderation.

6. It is realized that we can learn from the experience of conflict as well. Conflict experiences may become a place to learn how to grow as a community. This requires a great spirit, mutual respect,

compassion, humility, willingness to listen, and efforts to understand others better.

7. The Church is fostering more and more participation of religious leaders in building dialogue dan cooperation. Likewise, all the congregations need to be motivated not to be afraid to build relationships and cooperation with people from other denominations.

8. The Church needs to listen more seriously to those marginalized, the youths. In this regard, it is proposed that a creative movement be held to stimulate the involvement of young people and leadership training to prepare cadres of leaders in the Church and in society in the future. The Church must become the voice of voiceless.

9. Considering an ideal decision-making in a synodal Church, it should be cultivated these following elements: consultation and listening to Church members, cooperation among all involved, measurable data, transparent processes, discernment in the light of the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

10. To foster synodality within the Church, an open heart and mind should be maintained during mutual collaboration and cooperation amid the members of Catholic Church and between Catholics and other denominations or religions as well as with local wisdoms and customs. Synodality of the Catholic Church needs, above all, pastors who are diligent in visiting the congregation or their families, have the humility to listen to the voices of the people, and are always generous in serving.



## **II. Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan (CBCJ)**

### **Synthesis of the Church in Japan for the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops**

August 15, 2022

#### **I. The Diocesan Phase: Gathering opinions in the dioceses of Japan**

With the global COVID-19 pandemic that began in the spring of 2020, Japan's Church was severely affected, including the cancellation of public Masses and the cancellation and downsizing of activities. Preparations for the Synod began in October 2021 and provided all 16 dioceses the opportunity to discern the current state of the Church, providing hope and great encouragement for the future. We thank God that the General Assembly of the Bishops in July 2022 was able to approve this response for submission.

#### **The situation of each diocese in relation to the Synod**

- A. About half of the 16 dioceses have reviewed their missionary policies in the past few years, either by holding diocesan synods or by formulating missionary policies using synod-like methods. So, many people in all dioceses have experienced a synod-like walk, and it is gratifying that the gathering of opinions by the Synod this time has given impetus to the progress of each diocese.
- B. Many commented that this was a great opportunity to deepen their understanding of synodality and the synodal Church. Each believer realized the importance of regularly sharing their "feelings for the Church," looking back on the origins of their own faith and experiencing the importance of reviewing the way the Church should be based on their own life experiences.
- C. In gathering opinions, each diocese prepared its own questionnaire according to the local situation rather than using the 10 questions presented in the *Vademecum for the Synod on Synodality*. However, in this Summary Document, the answers of the dioceses are arranged according to the questions in the *Vademecum*.

## **Challenges and difficulties**

- A. Under restrictions on gatherings due to Covid-19, opinion gathering could not take place in actual meetings but relied upon questionnaires. It was difficult to create the sort of new awareness among participants that would have emerged from the dynamism of actual encounters.
- B. In the run-up to sharing, the difficulties faced by the Church in modern Japan were discussed. These include a decline in the number of priests and religious and their vocations, a decline in the number of laity and an aging population, the absence of children and young people in the churches, parishes exhausted by conferences and events, lack of funds, Catholic institutions with few Catholic staff, disagreements within the Church, and declining public awareness of the Church. These issues vary in degree depending on the diocese and region but are common to the Church in Japan today.
- C. Although it became clear that the small number of members of the younger generation attending church did not create opportunities for young people to have a voice, on the other hand, it was notable that responses from non-Japanese believers included a comparatively young generation.
- D. Time constraints on the diocesan phase in many places were overcome by devising various methods, but the fundamental issue remains gathering the voices of those who did not respond this time. In addition, it is very difficult to gather the voices of people who even if they come to church do not want to speak. New materials for community building and evangelism must be found. All the dioceses share a missionary interest in believers who have distanced themselves from the Church for some reason.

## **II. Opinions from the whole country on the 10 questions**

### **(1) Companions on the Journey**

#### **Those who are left on the margins**

- A. Although believers can list "people in need" with whom they should "walk," namely the elderly, the sick, the needy, foreign nationals, the homeless, people with various disabilities, addicts, crime victims, inmates, LGBTQ people, divorced and

- remarried people, single-parent households, etc., it cannot be said that in general we actually walk together.
- B. In the process of gathering opinions, there was a growing understanding that it is important for all who have received the blessing of baptism to walk together, sharing and discerning the guidance of the Holy Spirit who calls them. There was a deep realization that in the synodal Church walking together is the way to become a missionary Church. This is the result of efforts by the Synod Secretariat in each diocese to create and explain various useful materials.

### **The difficulty of "Walking Together"**

- A. In fact, believers find it difficult to "walk together." There are "salons" within parishes, exclusionary tendencies toward new people, concerns about weakening relationships among believers, troubled relationships within the church, backbiting, discrimination, confrontation, strife, and judgmentalism. There were also voices that said they cannot afford mentally and financially to actively engage with people around them since they have their hands full with their own lives. The Covid pandemic has made these obstacles worse, making it even more difficult for people to socialize.
- B. It should always be noted that even though it is called the Japanese Church it includes people with foreign roots. Differences in the way Japanese and foreign believers think and feel affect the content of their responses. Many people feel that there is a lack of interaction with foreign believers. On the other hand, in many churches there is cooperation with each other through such activities as Japanese language classes and children's religious education. A major problem in recent years is that due to Japan's policies communication with parish communities has become more difficult for so-called "technical intern trainees" from Asian countries such as the Philippines and Vietnam because they only have relatively short-term (three-year) stays and thus are unable to acquire the Japanese language.
- C. Sexual and other forms of harassment by clergy and others in the Church was pointed out. Of course, each diocese has set up a point of contact for response, but the Church's response

has been hampered as major changes in society's understanding of harassment are happening. As a result, there are sometimes suspicions from inside and outside the Church that the organization is engaging in cover-up. Given the historical prevalence of clericalism, there are calls for those responsible to strengthen the relationship with laity in the formation of priests and religious.

### **Those who are separated from the Church**

- A. Many people are heartbroken over the number of those who have left or been driven from the Church. There is much concern for people who have left the Church for a variety of reasons such as relationship troubles, to escape the heavy burden of Church activities, or being unable to come to Church because of work or illness. Many believers in the missionary land of Japan are pained that people who have been invited by God to be bound to the Church are driven to leave.
- B. Similarly, many people are pained by the separation from the Church of children of those who converted to Catholicism. There are voices of remorse for not being able to fully convey the attraction of the Gospel. In addition, young people find no peers of the same generation in the Church, and their sense that the Church is unappealing has deep roots.
- C. Many spoke of the importance of ongoing formation after the baptism of adults. Activating the role of godparents, it is necessary to encourage participation in parish activities, and the entire parish must unite to cultivate the faith of new believers.

### **(2) Listening**

#### **Being a "place" (*ba*) to listen**

- A. Within the Church, many voices reflected the opinion that there is not enough "place" to "hear" the voices of lonely people, those who seek God, those who have difficulty speaking out, and those in vulnerable positions.
- B. To encounter people outside the Church, in some places private houses are rented or street spaces are secured to listen to the voices of the general public. In addition, many believers

are engaged in activities in cooperation with civic groups to prevent suicide and support people living alone.

### **Difficulties in listening**

- A. Individual attitudes such as self-centeredness, arrogance, prejudices, intolerance, indifference, the Church's sense of privilege, aggression, listener fatigue, fear of being hurt, closedness, passivity, lack of mental space, etc. were pointed out as sources of difficulty in listening. Other reasons cited included shaky relationships, lack of time, and a desire to be listened to oneself. Overcoming these difficulties requires a cultural transformation from a "talking" Church to a "listening" Church.
- B. As *Laudato Si'* calls for, the Church must aim to be a "common home" for all that can prayerfully and gratefully listen to all without discrimination and in solidarity.

### **(3) Speaking**

#### **Being a "place" to speak out**

- A. Within churches, a variety of activities are carried out, such as Masses, weddings, funerals, reception windows, outdoor bulletin boards, lectures, concerts, and other public relations activities, as well as online and social media, and the sending of letters and newsletters. Parishes also invite the local community to gatherings on major holidays such as Christmas and respond to local needs by opening parish facilities to community activities.
- B. Outside the churches, more non-believers can be reached at Catholic kindergartens and nurseries, schools, universities, Boy Scouts, social welfare and medical facilities, and Catholic bookstores. In these places, by communicating faith through Christian life and action, we can serve an encounter with God who does not impose. In addition, neighborhood activities such as cleaning and grass cutting, children's cafeterias, and eco-activities are also places to meet. There are also ways that parishes can support individual believers who are personally involved in the community.

#### **Difficulties in speaking out**

- A. Attitudes such as indifference, self-centeredness, closed-mindedness, emphasis on efficiency, and lack of courage have been cited as difficulties in "listening."
- B. In Japanese society, there is a sense that religion is something to be feared. There is a "religious allergy," a resistance to belonging to a religious organization. Christians can easily be looked upon with antipathy and suspicion. In this situation, there is a sense of isolation as believers and a reluctance to do face-to-face evangelization. For the Catholic minority to raise their voices in public and make statements that challenge society it is necessary to cultivate a missionary consciousness and lifelong faith formation.
- C. Foreign nationals are often placed in a vulnerable position and discriminated against, making it even more difficult for them to speak out to the public.

#### **(4) Celebration and the Reality of the Liturgy**

##### **Reaffirmation of the Mass as the source**

- A. Restrictions on Mass participation due to the Covid pandemic have reminded us of the importance of the Mass as the source of religious life and evangelization. There is a universal conviction that to fully experience this, study and formation in liturgy and prayer are necessary. Increased active involvement in liturgy by laity is needed.
- B. As society becomes more multinational, many people advocate praying together across nationalities and cultures. There are many challenges, such as developing prayer resources in multiple languages, sharing devotions from other countries such as novenas, and developing a more energetic liturgy in response to complaints that the Mass in Japan is "too sedate."

##### **Lack of "celebration"**

- A. The tranquility of the church and cherishing the clean and beautiful church space are expressions of Japanese spirituality. However, prayer and participation in the liturgy are primarily described as "celebration" and participation in the liturgy lacks a sense of "celebrating." There are also reflections that the liturgy has become obsolete and hollowed out. More than half a century has passed since the liturgical

- reforms of the Council, but if there are places where the liturgy does not resonate in the hearts of believers, revitalization is needed.
- B. Issues raised by respondents included the decrease in the number of priests, lack of preparation by priests, a decrease in the number of Mass participants, a weakening sense of solidarity, the busyness of the laity, inadequate lay formation, the limitation of lay roles to certain members of the community, and the prioritization of hobbies, work, and school over Mass participation.
  - C. The laity demands that preaching at Mass be improved. The significance of anniversary celebrations such as the dedication of a church was pointed out. More use of online tools for prayer and the creation of opportunities to pray with non-believers are needed. With fewer children and young people, more effort is needed to devise liturgy focused on them.

## **(5) Shared Responsibility in Mission**

### **Places of Mission in Japan**

- A. In Japan, there are many interfaith families and there are many cases where only one member of a family is a Christian. Reticence toward non-Christians may lead believers to distance themselves from the Church, or on the other hand there may be problems when the Christian gives priority to the Church and creates a rift within the family. However, such believers are also aware that the home is a place of mission, and they seek enthusiastic support from pastoral workers and warm involvement of the parish community.
- B. In Catholic kindergartens, schools, and institutions, relationships with non-Christian teachers, children, parents, residents, and neighbors are commonplace, and the feeling of walking with non-believers is more conscious than in parishes. Through prayer time, non-Christians come into contact with Christianity, and in medical and social welfare facilities where they are involved in issues of life, old age, illness and death there are many places where they feel Christian spirituality. In a missionary country like Japan Catholic institutions give effective testimony to the Gospel.

- C. Christians must respond to non-believers who visit the church and to catechumens. The warmth with which newcomers are met is also necessary for young people. There is a great need to create a system for evangelization and to provide opportunities to receive formation for that purpose. There is a desire to learn more about Scripture, mission, liturgy, prayer, and the martyrs. It is also important to present courses on Christianity that do not presuppose baptism, and to use public facilities other than churches for Bible courses, etc.

### **Difficulties in turning to mission**

- A. Many people hesitate to engage in evangelization because of indifference, negligence, a desire for comfort, lack of study, weakness of faith, and a feeling of being imposed upon. Because of their reliance on priests and religious, many believers are reluctant to evangelize. Lay believers are aware of the importance apart from church activities of evangelizing through their lives in the community and at work, while proclaiming their faith to those around them, but the reality is that things are not going well.
- B. There are cases where clergy prevent lay participation. If mutual support among priests, religious, and laity is weak, the Church will not turn outward. Due to the aging and declining number of believers, there is a shortage of Church workers, and in many places faith formation and community service activities have regressed considerably.

## **(6) Dialogue between the Church and Society**

### **Various Social Issues**

- A. In Japan's Church there are many believers who place importance on dialogue with society. They engage with socially vulnerable and marginalized people, such as the needy, disaster victims, the elderly, the sick, the mentally ill, the addicted, domestic violence victims, migrants, people without residence status and immigration detainees. They also take part in efforts to address environmental issues. In various places parishes work with civic movements and local governments. In recent years, understanding of gender, LGBTQ, and other issues has deepened within the Church.

- However, there are differences in the level of involvement in political issues among the laity.
- B. In Japan where Christians are a minority the presence of Catholic schools and institutions is important. Therefore, ongoing training of non-Christian faculty and staff to share the Gospel with students and users is essential.
  - C. Improved coordination between Catholic schools and institutions with dioceses and parishes will promote dialogue with society. The revitalization of peer groups beyond the boundaries of parishes such as those for medical personnel or teachers can also contribute to this.
  - D. The Catholic Church's teachings on divorce, gender, and bioethical issues sometimes differ from Japanese society's values, but we must continue to engage in dialogue with society on these matters.

### **Declining Church presence in local communities**

- A. Unfortunately, as the population ages and declines among pastors and laity, cooperation among parishes, religious orders, lay groups, educational institutions, etc. is weakening. Information sharing with believers from various activities is insufficient, and individual activities tend to be isolated.
- B. Although there is more talk about social issues within the Church than in the past, the awareness of environmental issues, social justice, and the social teachings of the Church has not yet deepened among some. There is apathy and passivity, and the Catholic Church's ability to communicate is not fostered.

## **(7) Connections with Christian Denominations**

### **Ecumenism through concrete activities**

- A. Christian Churches, which are a minority in Japan, can gain recognition for Christianity itself from Japanese society through ecumenical activities. The Catholic Church works with other Christian denominations at the diocesan and parish levels in joint services such as community Christmas celebrations, joint prayer such as Morning Prayer Meetings, and prayer gatherings in the Week of Prayer for Church Unity. In addition, cooperation in social service activities like support for the homeless and social issues (peace movements,

- discrimination against *Buraku* outcasts, support for refugees, etc.) are also carried out in various places.
- B. By getting to know others through concrete activities, denominations and their members learn that there are different confessions of faith, and thereby provide an opportunity to re-examine their own faith. There have been cases of Catholic parishes renting Protestant churches during the construction of parish churches.
  - C. On 21 July 2022, the bishops held a roundtable discussion and joint prayer service to hear opinions on the Synod from representatives of the Japan Episcopal Church, Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the Japan Christian Council (NCC).

### **Limited experience**

For lay people who have never participated in ecumenical activities, opportunities for fellowship with other Christian denominations are limited. Some Catholics are indifferent, critical, or reluctant to associate with other Christian denominations, often depending on the understanding and attitude of their pastors.

## **(8) Authority and Participation**

### **Rebuilding the Church's decision-making process**

- A. The quality of decision-making in dioceses and parishes is gradually improving. Diocese-level committees and economic councils have established a cooperative posture among priests, religious, and laity in many dioceses. Increasingly, priests and laity are collaborating on annual goals for parishes, diocesan and parish missionary and pastoral councils are becoming multinational, and the process of gathering opinions is being activated. The current situation and financial condition of dioceses and parishes is becoming more public, and their operations are becoming more transparent.
- B. Foreign-language Masses are sometimes held in different churches each week, so for foreign nationals there is often a weak sense of belonging to a particular parish. This is a situation that must be overcome in order to make joint decisions.

## **The consciousness of the laity overall is still priest-centered**

- A. Apart from laity who become members of parish councils, etc. the spirit of shared responsibility between priests and laity has not permeated the entire community. Decisions are left to the priests, and many of the laity are indifferent. The cause of this is the fact that the believers involved in decision-making are always the same, and there is a bias toward the opinions of the outspoken. Terms of office are important, but there are also worries that there are no replacements. There is also the dilemma of laity who want to take on a role in the Church but are unable to do so due to work or family circumstances.
- B. There are also priests who have a strong clericalist consciousness, so it is necessary to foster a willingness to cooperate with the laity. Sufficient dialogue between priests and lay men and women is essential for cooperation, but confusion can arise in cases where some laity seek absolute equality and unnecessarily oppose the hierarchy.

## **(9) Prayer and Unity**

### **Asking for the help of the Holy Spirit to become the community that Jesus seeks**

- A. In Japan, the term "discernment" is generally unfamiliar, and it is difficult to say that discernment has become established. First, we need to learn what discernment is. On top of that, there is a need for spiritual companions to help the discernment of individuals, and the training of those spiritual companions is required. In some areas, spiritual connections between contemplative orders and the laity are a great support.
- B. With regard to shared discernment by the laity and discernment by the parish community it is necessary to learn through practice although the reality is that clericalism remains and there are few laity who can take leadership. To do discernment with foreign believers it is necessary to devise measures such as overcoming language barriers.

## **(10) Synodal Growth and Self-Formation**

### **Activating the movement of the Synod**

- A. To stimulate the synod's movement to deepen sharing and explore spiritual discernment in each church, it is important

to comprehensively train in topics such as Scripture, sharing, dialogue skills, contemplation, joint prayer, and discernment. The passion to learn more is everywhere in the country. This makes it important that we continue the Synodal journey in dioceses and parishes.

- B. Nurturing Catholics throughout their lives requires that we not forget those who tend to be placed on the periphery of the Church, such as foreign nationals, people with disabilities, and people with other difficulties. Digital technology can be used to overcome various challenges for formation, but consideration must also be given to the generations who cannot use IT.

### **III. Looking ahead**

In the future, in order to live even more abundantly the "synodal nature" of the Church, it will be necessary to regularly make opportunities for exchanging opinions such as those held this time. What follows are some points for consideration.

#### **Evangelizing as a Minority in Japan**

- A. The estimated number of Catholics in Japan, including foreign nationals, is about 0.72% of the population. We have our own missionary path as an open faith community living in an internationalizing Japanese society with the background of the traditional spirituality and psychology unique to Asia and the East. The universal church should understand this.
- B. In Japanese society where Christians are a minority, Christian denominations want to promote mutual exchange and become one in order to disseminate the Gospel message, continue open dialogue with society, and contribute to the evangelization of society.

#### **Spiritual Support to "Journey Together"**

- A. We must reaffirm that our faith is nurtured through our communities. Therefore, we, including the clergy and religious, must cherish, care, encourage and help each member of the community of faith. Growth as such a community requires persons who support the faith community, spiritual companions.



### **III. Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea – CBCK**

#### **XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops**

#### **Synthesis of the Catholic Church in Korea**

##### **I. Introduction**

#### **The Synodal Path of the Diocesan Phase and the Episcopal Conference Phase in Korea**

With the opening Masses from October 15 to 17, 2021, the Korean dioceses embarked the journey of the diocesan phase of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops with the theme, *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission*. According to the suggestions of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, each diocese in Korea set up their own diocesan synodal team with the clergy, religious, and lay people. The dioceses gradually organized study, publicity and formation programs so as to help the entire people of God fully participate in this synodal journey with better understanding. They produced many kinds of printed and visual materials to help the faithful learn about the Synod. They also used a variety of new media, including Social Networking Service (SNS), to collect opinions from the faithful.

Some dioceses were outstanding in putting special efforts to listen to the voice of those on the peripheries such as the lukewarm Catholics, the people with special needs, migrants, refugees, sexual minority, North Korean defectors as well as to the that of believers of other religions and other denominations and the civil society. They held meetings with them and conducted questionnaire. The Catholic Pastoral Institute of Korea in the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea (CBCK) distributed a special workbook to encourage the children and the teenagers to participate in the synodal path. Some dioceses also offered them opportunities to express their opinions.

The Meeting of Diocesan Contact Persons in the Church in Korea was held from June 28 to 29, 2022 for the dioceses to share their respective outcomes and to help the CBCK to prepare for the synthesis of the Church in Korea through discussion on ten themes. 26 Participants in the Meeting were: the Most Rev. Simon Ok Hyun-jin, Auxiliary Bishop of Gwangju and the bishop representative of the Synod, the diocesan contact persons, two representatives from men and women religious, four lay representatives and others.

As the phase of the Synod in Korea began in the thick of the pandemic, the dioceses in Korea had difficulty in preparing for proper steps such as understanding synodality, offering formation, planning and fulfilling practical projects within such a short period. At the very beginning, the main obstacle to be overcome was passive attitude. This was especially shown in those dioceses where they hardly experienced meaningful changes through their own synod. However, in the process of gathering, listening and discernment, the people in many communities shared their experience of faith, listened to one another, and finally confessed that they gradually and strongly recognized the presence of the Holy Spirit among them. In addition, an emphasis on listening, discernment and prayer in silence allowed the diocesan synodal path to be experienced as spiritual process, not merely as a series of meetings, discussion and preparation of the synthesis. The greatest fruit was that many of the People of God in Korea participated in the synodal path, deepened communion and experienced the synodal Church. In result, the Catholic Church in Korea saw the stronger will and hope to carry out her mission emerging.

## **II. The Reality of Synodality in the Church in Korea**

### **1. Companions of the Journey**

As reviewing the diocesan syntheses and having the Meeting of Diocesan Contact Persons in the Church in Korea, the Church in Korea asked herself who were ‘companions of the journey’ and reflected on her attitude towards them. She confessed that the clergy, religious and lay people have not been true companions to one another and reflected that this has been the fundamental cause of many difficulties in the Church. She also realized that it has been not easy for the young, the elderly, North Korean defectors, migrant workers and their families, and the sexual minority to find their places in her.

Regarding the teenagers and young adults, most of the dioceses confessed that they have not been true companions to them. Although mentioning how important the role of the young is, the Church has not devoted enough efforts to approach close to them and make them sincerely feel how much she needs them. They are so absorbed in getting private tutoring, preparing college entrance examination and seeking for jobs. Such life style in the secularized

world eventually makes them turn away from the Church. However, it was raised to think over whether the Church has already left them by not giving meticulous attention to their lives, their faith and their voices.

The Church in Korea made it clear that no one should be excluded as companions of the journey towards God. Despite continuous and practical efforts in every diocese for the evangelization, blind spots were confirmed. Accordingly, it is required to concern about those in economic poverty, the elderly who live alone, single-parent families and the people with special needs. The Church also needs to stand up for those stripped of their human rights by social inequality and irrationality as well as to actively engage in various activities to show solidarity for them. She was asked to offer active support with great attention for the people with special needs so that Masses dedicated for them will be prepared, and the communities will become the places where they can participate.

*The Statistics of the Catholic in Korea 2021* showed those aged 65 years and more reached over 20% of the total Catholics in every diocese. A number of the elderly who live alone is increasing, and the rate of their poverty is also high. It is necessary for the Church to make room for them and provide them with programs so that they will not feel excluded. The high rate of families in crisis and divorce has led to the increase of the faithful who are restricted to participating in the sacraments and grandparents-grandchildren families. Thus, counseling centers, spiritual assistance and institutional (canon law) system need to be improved. It is also needed that the Church pays attention to those who experienced difficulty in living their life of faith, especially the lukewarm faithful.

In spite of the great participation of women in various ecclesial activities, they are often excluded in primary decision-making. Therefore, the Church needs to improve her awareness and institutional aspects on their activities. To do so, there should be programs, studies and supports to respect and enhance their dignity. In addition, practical aids are needed for those who suffer from domestic violence, sexual exploitation, sex trafficking and abortion. It was suggested that education on sex, love and life should be provided not only to the teenagers but also to the whole faithful.

On the part of migrants, they expressed gratitude toward the Catholic Church in Korea because they felt warm-welcome. They also

expressed the sense of responsibility to share good features of the Catholic Church in Korea with other migrants. They hoped that there will be more Masses dedicated for them and a variety of programs that help them adjust themselves to life in Korea.

The Church is asked to have courage and determination to be 'the Church of the poor', not the Church of almsgiving to the poor, so that the poor can be welcomed as our brothers and sisters. Furthermore, the members of the Church need to work together with associations in various areas that strive for the common good. Korea has been divided into North and South more than 70 years. In this special situation, the Korean faithful consider North Korean defectors as our companions.

## **2. Listening**

With difficulties in listening in relationships on diverse levels within the Church, the lack of awareness and mutual trust as companions on the journey led to the lack of listening. Therefore, the Church ought to be transformed into the synodal Church where people respect roles of others, listen to and communicate one another by building equal and loving relationships among them.

All the members of the Church as the People of God make relationships and walk together in God. Listening, dialogue and cooperation help them build up communion and carry out the common mission. Listening is especially required to the clergy and religious. In the Church in Korea, the clergy has been considered as a group with superior status because their specific authority has been acknowledged. However, given that the skeptical view on authority in the Korean society has influenced on the faithful, today the clergy is asked to pay more attention to the faithful as listening to them. For the 'communal discernment', the clergy, religious and lay people need to respect their respective roles and values, and do not spare themselves in listening. Only when they carry out their proper ministries and accept one another as companions who have the equal dignity, the synodal spirit can be realized in the community.

The faithful in parishes tend to hesitate to speak up their voices and avoid dialogue. Indeed, it is very difficult for the faithful to express their opinions in a parish. They usually just do what they are entrusted to do. The faithful are likely to gather to share their opinions only among them rather than with their pastors.

Authoritarian attitudes of the pastors cannot be overlooked. Blind obedience and reliance on opinions of the clergy lead to clericalism, which eventually denies the necessity of listening. When 'obedience', one of the great virtues in the Church, is misinterpreted as submission, it will be a hindrance of communion. However, it should be taken precaution to lay the blame for every community problem on the clergy. Consistent formation should be offered to the faithful to have self-directed attitude in their life of faith. Then, the community of the faithful will mature.

Communities sometimes do not welcome new comers and treat them as strangers. People build relationship with others in secular criteria and ways. These must be eliminated because they make the Kingdom of God on earth much harder to be realized.

When everyone - not only a certain group of people - has opportunities to speak up and to be listened to, the faithful will overcome wounds and sufferings.

It will be helpful that the clergy and religious first approach the faithful with evangelical and humble attitudes for them to have confidence as companions walking together towards the Kingdom of God. When a parish needs to make a decision on a certain issue, it will be appropriate to collect opinions from the faithful, not to ask what they need to do. A suggested practical way is that when a new pastor arrives, he would be better to collect opinions of the whole faithful before making the direction of pastoral care.

The Church was asked to take concrete actions to actively listen to the voices of the social minorities and the excluded. In addition, she was also asked to listen to the cry and suffering of creation who are 'all brothers and sisters' with the same Father, Creator, and to give help. It was requested to show more interests into life, ecology and environment and to promote the common good.

### **3. Speaking Out**

In the process of discernment, the Church in Korea noticed the necessity of 'the horizontal structure of communication' and its implementation. In particular, the importance of speaking with 'courage and honesty' (parrhesia) was underlined. As the vertical structure of communication placing the clergy at the center hinders speaking, the People of God need to deeply reflect on and realize their roles and identities. In this way, they all work together to establish

the horizontal structure of communication. To make the Church become a place where people want to go, where people can be consoled and taken care of, and where people can rest, the voices of lay people and religious should be listened to. In turn, more efforts should be exerted to widely reflect their voices into the decision-making structure.

What makes speaking courageously and honestly hard are followings: dioceses and parishes have a tendency to be managed by complex interpersonal relationships, not by evangelical values; the clergy are highly authoritarian, and there is psychological distance between the faithful and pastors; people are often only into themselves and do not care others due to the lack of communal spirit and strong individualistic tendencies. The young requested that they would participate, as at least 'an observer', in pastoral council or meetings to establish the pastoral plans. It was also asked to open up a channel for the young to boldly speak and to validly communicate their opinions to the Church.

Priests are members of the Church with responsibilities, but they mind speaking up honestly. They feel that they are not respected and listened to because of the hierarchical and vertical structure in the diocese. They often keep silence because they are afraid of having disadvantages and facing the opposition. The faithful also think that they are criticized or reprovved when speaking with courage. Conditions to make conscientious comments must be prepared. To do so, it is necessary to collect opinions in various ways such as suggestion boxes, proposals on SNS, and sharing time after Sunday Mass. It is necessary to create an encouraging, embracing, and listening atmosphere for courageous speaking. In addition, the members of the Church need to understand and care for others who have different opinions.

#### **4. Celebration**

An awareness was expressed that listening to the Word and the celebration of the Eucharist are the source of communion and a beginning point of the synodal Church. However, today, it is often witnessed that most of the faithful attend the liturgy in formal, mandatory and habitual attitude. In other words, the faithful are short of experience of synodality in liturgy. In this regard, when a priest formally celebrate Mass or homily is not properly prepared, it hinders the faithful from fully participating in Mass. There is still a

custom that men are appointed as liturgical ministries. The keys of a thriving parish should be both faith and liturgy, but, in reality, the liturgy is often considered secondary because the faithful is into promoting interpersonal relationships. It was suggested that there should be time for pray with special intention and liturgy when a community hold a meeting to make an important decision. This suggestion proves that pray and the liturgy are formal role in making a decision.

In order to draw more active participation of the faithful in the liturgy, all the members of the Church in Korea should exert more specific efforts to listen to and have authentic dialogue with one another.

In reality, the faithful with disabilities are excluded in liturgy. A mother who has a disabled son said, "I have a son with developmental disabilities. I deeply want to attend Mass with my son, but it is impossible. It is because my son and I were ones firmly asked to leave in the middle of Mass. My other son was shocked in the core. Since then, he has attended a Protestant church." It was suggested that there will more consideration for the faithful with special needs to be able to attend Mass with the other faithful. For example, the hearing impaired faithful asked to provide more sign language interpretation during Mass so that they can fully participate in Mass. For migrants and their families, they express their desire to attend Mass without feeling the language barrier.

## **5. Co-Responsible in the Mission**

Nowadays, many Catholics in Korea do not eagerly participate in the life of the Church, prioritizing their social life over Church activities, or otherwise due to family or financial difficulties. Also, prevalent individualism leads them to the strong tendency to focus on their own convenience and interests. Even when participating in the ecclesial activities, the faithful, in many cases, are absorbed in activities without prayer and even without faith. Therefore, their activities, far from being a place of announcing the Gospel, turn into just a place of some social relationships or self-satisfaction. On the other hand, issues about the lukewarm faithful were largely mentioned. Newly-baptized and newly moving-in believers in parishes often become the lukewarm because the lack of care by the community makes them difficult to experience the communion. It was also raised to ponder about how to care the lukewarm believers.

Furthermore, unexemplary attitudes of the Catholics in their daily life outside the Church cause evangelization to be challenge. Discord and disharmony in parish also make the Church harder to carry out her mission to proclaim the Gospel. The secularization of the Church, the authoritarianism of the pastors and the poverty in humanistic perspective were pointed out as the obstacles to fulfilling the mission.

As materialism, individualism and egoism are pervading in our society, people become indifferent to religious life. Facing this reality, the practice and sharing of love is commented to be urgent and essential. It was confessed that the lack of true encounter and listening led to the failure in maintaining communion with the Church and with God as well as the insincere life of faith. As the members of the Church, the faithful lived out the synodal journey where everyone should participate as protagonists, listen to one another and share lived-experiences of synodality in communion with God. Through this journey they figured out individual and communal problems, and began to seek the solutions together.

It was shown that the faithful positively considered the efforts of the Church in Korea to listen to, encourage and embrace the people in need. Specifically, consistent and continuous work on internal and external humanitarian relief and social welfare service of the Church in Korea and other relief work in dioceses or in religious communities were noted positively.

Moreover, it was painfully reflected that the Church in Korea did not sufficiently expressed on opposing the abortion, suicide, euthanasia, capital punishment, protecting environment and promoting the peace in the world. There were also other bitter confessions that she was indifference to practice love towards the neighbors and to show the solidarity to the society and expressed closed attitude to local community. These reflections gave the faithful a chance to clearly recognize their individual and communal mission and they eventually became to look at others, especially the people in great need, as the companions on the synodal journey of the Church.

## **6. Dialogue in Church and Society**

There are some invisible barriers that hinder the dialogue and communication in and out of the Church. In Korean society, conflicts in generations, gender, politics are worsening and wealth gap and regional imbalance are increasingly widening. In the Church in Korea, there are hurdles between groups, parishes, dioceses, the

faithful and priests, and the Church and the world. Along with the pervasive individualism, the COVID-19 pandemic has even worsened the communication within the Church. The faithful said that due to aforementioned situation, the gap between the ardent faithful and the passive ones widened. The young people said that the culture in the parish does not fit their mentality. In this regard, it is urgent to narrow down the psychological and physical gap among the faithful and contribute to renew the culture in the Church.

On the parts of religious, it was noted that secularism, individualism and generation gap among religious were considered as the main causes of hindering the synodal life, dialogue and communication among them. Some expressed a doubt on the presence and the role of religious in parishes. However, through the discussions, the significance of their presence in the Church was recognized, and the need of renewing the identity of religious was emerged. It is required for every member of the Church to deepen understanding of the identity of religious. It is expected that the dynamic of the Holy Spirit will be revealed more visibly by the lead of religious on this journey of the whole Church.

It was mentioned that the Church needs to be ready to participate in the current social issues. The voice of the Church is not often heard in proper ways because appropriate and sufficient discussions on social issues are not made in the Church. The Church needs to engage herself into deliberating on the social issues and overcoming them together in line with the social change.

Parishes generally do not make a close relationship or religious bond with other religions and do not feel the need of mutual exchange with them. It is seemed as an effective way to communicate with other religions through cooperation in expressing the unified voice on the current social issues with them. To date, the different religions in Korea have raised an united voice on the social issues in solidarity with one another, while adhering to their own teachings. However, because such a solidarity does not mean the relationship of accompanying one another, it seems necessary to reconstruct relationships as companions.

## **7. With the Other Christian Denominations**

The Christians who make different confessions but are united in one baptism are companions walking together with us in this journey. However, in reality, we still have a long way to go for a true

communion. Still in Catholic Church, there is prejudice against other denominations and even a sense of superiority to them exists. On the other hand, the fact that some Protestant churches regard other denominations including Catholic Church as heresies makes impossible to start a dialogue. Many Catholics in Korea think that ecumenism is significant matter, but do not have concrete ways to dialogue with other Christians yet.

To have dialogue with other Christians of different confessions, it is required to know the difference between the Catholic Church and them, and by doing so both sides can truly understand, respect and accept the difference.

The effort to meet and have dialogue with other Christians at the level of parish and of diocese is needed. It is important to listen to one another and focus on the realization of the common good, rather than to criticize or to have prejudice against others. It is also important to recognize, accept and respect one another.

Above all, we should strengthen our faith by praying and studying catechism and the bible. We also should live evangelical lives as light and salt of the world to reveal the glory of God. These efforts will help us to have true dialogue with other Christians. In an actual dialogue with them, we need to understand and respect one another as 'Christians,' rather than just to provoke the disputes about the difference of doctrines. In this way, we can be united in seeking for the common good and be together in making the solutions for the social issues such as migrant workers, migrant women, the marginalized, children issues, life, ecological problems and others.

## **8. Authority and Participation**

The members of the Church, in many cases, have misunderstood the concept of authority as the governance of the superior and submission to them. Therefore, 'being authoritarian' and 'authoritarianism' have been used instead.

The authority is not properly exercised if a priest does not perform his duties sincerely - praying and offering the sacraments just casually, preparing the catechesis or homilies without any biblical basis and neglecting to his duty of teaching - and it can lead to bad effect on both the faithful and the whole Church community.

Along with the authoritarian attitude of the clergy, that of the laity was also pointed out. When members of pastoral councils and

group leaders in a parish show the authoritative and domineering attitude and are partial to certain apostolates, it causes the division and conflicts in the journey together towards the one common goal.

In general, it was experienced and perceived that the relationships among the members of the Church are established in a 'top-down and closed manner.' The lack of communication and a priest-centered management, which make lay people difficult in the Church, were also mentioned.

To overcome these problems, it was discussed to have structure and organization which sincerely reflects the spirit of synodality. It was also stressed that as stipulated in canon law, presbyteral council, pastoral council and finance council at the parish and diocesan levels should be take their role more actively. In the parish or diocese that has the pastoral council, many of the faithful express that 'a few' members of the council do not reflect the voice of 'many,' and it causes them to feel divided and excluded.

Therefore, it was recognized that how to organize and manage these councils is important. First, many mentioned that we should deeply ponder on how to make the council more representative of the People of God. When the members of each council are appointed or elected, the Christian values must be concerned, not the secular values such as the wealth or social status of a person, so that those from different age and social 'classes' can participate in the council. Moreover, it was suggested that the Church needs to bring the professionals among the faithful when the she participates in the social issues, especially when she deals with issues that requires the knowledge of some specialty. Also, it was emphasized that the members of the councils need to be changed on a regular basis so that no one will be excluded.

Even though the key functions of the pastoral council are 'consultation and examination,' in the reality of the Church in Korea, the council only focuses on the 'execution and implementation.' Therefore, the council's original intention must be recognized properly. 'Making decision' and 'taking decision' should be balanced: the council participates in 'making decision,' while consulting with the pastors; the pastors always keep renewed mind and should be able to 'taking decision.' This system should be established not only at the specific level of the Church but also at the level of districts,

dioceses, the episcopal conference and even at the level of the universal Church.

## **9. Discerning and Deciding**

There is a great tendency to think that priests are at the center of or even own the decision making process in the Church. Mostly, in parishes, opinions from only a few among the faithful were reflected in decision-taking. That is, key decisions were taken by discussions between the pastor and the lay leaders of the parish rather than involving the entire parish community. It was diagnosed that the lack of fuller participation and sufficient discussion during the decision-making process generally causes cynical, critical and indifferent responses.

However, it was confirmed that the clergy were overwhelmed by undue responsibility in a narrow decision-making structure. Despite their desire to participate in dialogue, lay people hesitated to actively express their opinion when the need arose. Religious felt paralyzed when excluded from the decision-making process, and thus they expressed a hope that their role as one of protagonists in synodal consultation would be respected.

There also said that the larger a diocese or a parish becomes, the more difficult it is to exchange opinions at grass-root level. Therefore, the necessity to introduce a variety of methods was, above all, underlined to provide the faithful with opportunities to speak up and to foster a sense of responsibility and participation. It was hoped to gather wide-range opinions throughout the Small Christian Communities (SCCs), organized by age, living district, and other grouping. It was also underlined that the voice of minority and even the one of the opposed should not be excluded. In addition, it was suggested that atmosphere favor participation of the poor and the marginalized in the process of discernment and decision.

It was pointed out that with the aim of facilitating honest speaking, authentic listening, and fruitful dialogue holding well-coordinated meetings in the decision-making process is important: seating arrangement, appointment of the moderator (desirable that a lay person should assume it rather than a priest), and the time for prayer and silence. It was hoped that good examples and ways experienced during this synodal journey should be taken root in the dioceses and parishes.

In addition, it was highlighted to keep in mind that reliable ground for making a decision is based not on 'a consensus' but on 'the Word of God.' The spiritual good of the entire community must be prioritized over individual interests or claims of the members, constantly asking God what He wants us to do now.

Until now, the meetings have formally begun and ended just with an opening prayer and a closing prayer, respectively. It was desired that a liturgical celebration can be prepared with a special intention in an important decision-making meeting. The faithful must celebrate Masses with an united and consistent intention so that they can make right decisions under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In order to foster a sense of participation and of community, all the communities should be informed of how a decision is made through discernment.

### **10. Forming Ourselves in Synodality**

Formation is indispensable for properly understanding the synodal spirit and for carrying out the entrusted mission in our lives. However, unfortunately, it is not fully understood. In order for the synodal spirit to be the *modus vivendi et operandi*, not to remain merely as a theological concept, this synodal journey should not be a one-time event. Rather it should be a lived experience leading us to mutual understanding and formation by continued dialogue and sharing. Moreover, it is necessary to cultivate companionship to share burdens of others. Now, the members of the Church are aware of the importance of synodality and look forward to their formation and training for living it out. The clergy, religious, and lay people must follow the path of synodality in accordance with their identities.

To promote listening, participation and dialogue, all the members of the Church should know how to speak and listen as the children of God, and how to discern what the Holy Spirit is saying to them. Therefore, they need to be trained. There is also a need to provide them with appropriate educational programs to deepen their knowledge on the Church and cultivate the right attitude, so that they can grow a sense of equal and proper dignity as the People of God. It is needed that lay people are given more competence and a sense of mission so as to participate in these programs with zeal and willingness. Chances for encounters, conversations and experiences should be prepared to encourage them to actively participate in the mission of the Church by learning and sharing with one another.

It was noted that ongoing formation is necessary for the clergy to enhance their identity and mission. It was said that it is needed a series of formation planned with synodal spirit, starting with initial formation in the seminaries, to ongoing formation for living synodality, and up to formation with care for recovery from the illness or the exhausted state, by stage and by year. There was an opinion that, in order to understand the swift shift in society and encourage better communication with it, new trends and modern cultures should be appropriately utilized in formation of the People of God.

### **III. Conclusion**

The Church in Korea, through this synodal journey, realized what difficulties we have encountered in fulfilling our mission of evangelization in this region, and what has caused them. Along with it, she also discerned under the guidance of the Holy Spirit what to do with her sustained and collaborative efforts for evangelization.

Firstly, it was realized and reflected that the clergy, religious and lay people, as the members of the People of God, have not fully lived their own identities. In other words, they have not sufficiently carried out their roles and missions because the relationship between the members of the Church was understood in not a Christian but secular way. Therefore, it is necessary for each and every member of the Church to continue to reflect on that they are called to live their own identities and mission in communion and through synodal conversion, and at the same time, to pursue a common mission together as the People of God. Based on this reflection, the formation courses and programs should be provided to lay people, religious and the clergy so that they can gain deeper awareness of their identities, affirm the importance of mutual listening and accompaniment, and strengthen their capacity to practice what they will learn. In particular, the importance of the liturgy, especially the Eucharist, and prayer must be emphasized on this synodal path.

Today, the Church in Korea shows a great desire to celebrate the liturgy with utmost care on the basis of the Word of God and the Eucharist. However, the formal and stagnant dimensions still remain. From the beginning of catechumenate in preparation for baptisms, all the members of the People of God should be instructed to realize they are participants and servants who fully and actively take part in the liturgy. Especially, they need to be formed with systematically

designed programs on 'education in the meaning of the Sacraments' and in concrete ways to foster active participation in the liturgy. Secondly, the People of God in Korea should communicate more with one another for synodality to be realized in the Church in Korea. To this end, pastors, lay people and religious should devote themselves to the evangelization of the local Churches, listening to and communicating with one another. In addition to facilitating the pastoral councils, indicated in many documents of the Church as well as the canon law, various channels of communication must be established as a true institutional instrument to listen to the voice of the People of God.

Thirdly, the People of God is entrusted with the fundamental task of the evangelization through living synodality, exerting themselves to 'go forth to the peripheries.' 'Good Samaritan's way of acting' promotes fraternity with witness on love. It urges us to accept the suffering of those on the peripheries as an invitation that needs our dedication, and thus to 'reach out to the peripheries' to make them feel welcomed and accompanied on the synodal journey. We must realize that concerns and practice of the Church going forth to the peripheries are her fundamental mission. For us, those on the peripheries are the marginalized, in particular the voiceless people overwhelmed by many difficulties and sufferings, the poor, migrants and refugees, North Korean defectors, the poor and lonely elderly, single mothers, victims of violence perpetrated by the government, children and youth, lukewarm Catholics for various reasons, followers of other religions and Christians of other confessions, men and women of good will who resist against all secular tendencies that undermine the value of life. The Church should manifest God's love among the vulnerable and people in need, staying awake to reach out to them and accompanying them towards the synodal journey. As engaging in dialogue with society and accompanying those in difficulty in line with the teaching of the Church on God's justice and the common good, the Church in Korea will be renewed and transformed by loving experiences gained from them.

Fourthly, Korea has suffered for a long time from the Korean war and division of the country. The existing ideological conflict is still a cause of division in Korean society. In such a specific situation, the Church in Korea, as tireless witness of peace, is determined to move

forward reconciliation and reunification of the Korean people, supporting and cooperating for evangelization of the North Korea.

Fifthly, the Church in Korea is called to more actively participate in practices and movements for the protection of environment and ecosystems, recognizing the earth as a common home and undergoing an ecological conversion. The Church does not exist only for herself. The People of God cannot separate themselves from the world and all creation of God. As nature, the world, and human beings are connected in organic bonds, the People of God must read the will of the Holy Spirit within the world, communicating one another and being united in communion with all creation.

Through this journey of listening and sharing for synodality, the Word of God has nurtured the People of God, and the guidance and gifts of the Holy spirit have grown us in life of the baptized in Christ. The People of God in the Church in Korea felt the joy and vitality together with common mission and responsibility during this synodal journey. That joy is included in this synthesis, in the conviction that it will be a driving force for the Church in Korea to move forward a synodal Church in communion, participation, and mission with the universal Church.



## **IV. CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF LAOS AND CAMBODIA (CELAC)**

SYNTHESIS ON THE PART OF THE SYNOD  
4th AUGUST 2022

### **The remark of the President of CELAC His Eminence Louis Marie Cardinal Ling Mangkhanekhoun.**

The Synod that opened recently in Rome is based on the three key words: Communion, Participation and Mission. Clearly, bishops, priests, religious, laity, catechists and all of the organization of the Church entered with enthusiasm with each of the stages of the Synodal process. The people of God have made its voice heard whether through its hopes, faith, concerns and love for the Church. Various expectations have been addressed to pastors. Most of the stories shared sparked joy and hope of the people of God. They also showed their fears and anxieties as well as a real concern for the future of the Church.

At first, the synod took place of the level of the villages where Christian met on several occasion. We are now reaching the national synthesis. This document is made up of the contributions from the churches of the two countries: Cambodia and Laos, which closely collaborate within the same Bishop Conference. One part is dedicated to Cambodia, another to Laos, in order to preserve the specificities of each Church.

On behalf of the President of the CELAC, I would like to thank you all (both the participants and the leadership teams of Cambodia and Laos) who dedicated their times and talent to make a great effort and contribution to the success of this synthesis.

Our concern is to know how to involve the people of God in the construction of the body of Christ, so that this body grows according to the capacity and the situation of each one. We hope and believe that the grace of God will help us to journey together, to deepen our relationship with God and with our brothers and sisters, because we all have the same Father, according to the teaching of the encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* by Pope Francis.

Let us give thanks to God for this Synodal Church, May God bless the Church around the world; namely, the Church in Laos and Cambodia.

## *PART ONE*

### *LAOS CATHOLIC CHURCH*

#### **Introduction**

Since October 2021, the Catholic Church is engaged in a broad synodal process, with the aim of listening to all Christian people and bringing together their experiences, ideas and suggestions for the good of the Church and that of the world.

In collaboration with the organizing committee in Rome, Pope Francis proposed the following theme for reflection: “For a synodal Church: communion, participation, mission”. Like other particular Churches throughout the world, the Catholic Church in Laos has set out, not without some apprehension, we must say. Indeed, the implementation of such a process was something new for us, and we had to face many challenges, whether our lack of experience, the poverty of our human and financial resources, or the need to take into account the local context. Despite our weaknesses, we nevertheless responded to the Pope's call and we realized that we too could be “a synodal Church”, able to implement communion, participation and mission. The process of consultation and sharing was thus experienced as an invigorating process in each of the four Apostolic Vicariates of Laos, thanks to the blessings and guidance of the Holy Spirit, and it produced unexpected fruits: the people of God expressed themselves; they shared their joys, their hopes, their concerns, as well as many criticisms in which we discerned the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking to the Church.

Concerning the “practical aspects” of the process, we started by translating the preparatory document and the vade-mecum into Laotian language. We then prepared three questions inspired by these two documents, adapting them to the local culture and the experiences of Laotian Christians. These three questions are:

- 1- what are the happy experiences of your Christian life? What are the difficulties and obstacles that prevent you from living your faith? (= in order to share on the life of faith)
- 2- how important is your relationship with God, your Christian brothers and sisters, and people of other faiths? And as a child of God, what should you do to strengthen those relationships? (= in order to share on one's relationship to God and to others, with the aim of improving oneself)
- 3- how do you see the cooperation between bishops, priests and religious in your Vicariate? What needs to be improved or changed to move forward together in the future? (= in order to share on the future of the Church in Laos, so that she may deepen the dimensions of communion, participation and mission)

From 2000 to 2021, the number of Catholics in Laos has seen a very slight increase of 1%, including 20% of Vietnamese migrants who came to seek work. Otherwise, the Laotian Catholic population is largely made up of ethnic groups living in remote mountainous areas, whose livelihoods are still very basic. As a result, most Catholics have a low level of education. Due to a shortage of priests and religious during the years 1978-2000, some of them could not receive the sacraments or continue their catechetical training. This is one of the reasons why some Catholics are now indifferent to the faith or turned to other religions (or practice two religions) – a point which clearly appeared in the different diocesan synod reports.

That said, despite difficulties and adversity, most Catholics have a firm faith and the desire to be truly children of God. Through exchanges, they expressed their expectations with regard to the Church, their dream of seeing her grow, be more alive and more united, while never ceasing to help them to advance in faith. Above all, they want the Church to be close to them and tangible. Many groups have also expressed their desire to collaborate more in the mission of the Church, provided that they are given the opportunity and that they are prepared for it, in conjunction with the bishops, the priests and the religious.

After having reflected on the reports of the various vicariates, we propose the following synthesis in six points:

- 1- companions on the journey

- 2- participation
- 3- living the Christian faith in the midst of Laotian culture and society
- 4- the relationship with other religions
- 5- the mission
- 6- the formation

### **Companions on the journey**

In our particular Church, those who “walk together” fall into three main groups:

#### 1) Consecrated persons

This group is made up of bishops, diocesan priests and religious, whether Laotians or foreigners. It is a very small group with many responsibilities.

Most synodal contributions show that

- relations between priests and Christians are not as harmonious as they should be. In particular, many Christians would like a priest or a sister to live permanently in their villages or at least visit them more often, in order to encourage them in the faith and to create greater closeness with them. Such a closeness is expected by all those who have a wavering faith or do not dare to come to church;
- the relations and the cooperation between the different religious congregations are not yet optimal, probably because of the culture specific to each group, but also because of a certain reluctance to work with others;
- concerning the way of life of priests: groups of Christians would like priests to model their lives more on that of the Good Shepherd and to correct certain behaviors which can be a source of scandal;
- concerning foreign priests or religious: communication with Christians is sometimes difficult because of linguistic and cultural barriers.

#### 2) The laity

The laity are by far the most diverse group of our particular Church in terms of language, culture, standard of living, education and faith, which explains why their participation in the mission and their expectations towards the Church are so different. Some humbly

recognize that their faith is not yet very strong and deep, and that they lack doctrinal foundations, especially with regard to the sacraments. Some admit to practicing two religions at once and indulging in superstitious beliefs or divination. Some are lured into materialism or consumerism, while others seduced by the fashion of the moment. That said, most Christians show a real attachment to the Church. Although their faith is still imperfect, they long for the Catholic Church in Laos to grow, to be lively, and to help them have a strong faith and be ever more united. Some remember the past with nostalgia, which reflects their concern for the Church today. But they must also remember that each period has its own challenges.

Judging by the conclusions of each Vicariate, it appears that special attention must be paid to families and catechists among the different groups of lay people.

- family
  - o some parents do not take the Christian education of their children seriously enough by not encouraging them to study catechism or to receive the sacraments and by emphasizing material matters more than the practice of faith;
  - o couples who married outside the Catholic tradition: some of them are ashamed and no longer want to come to church or practice their faith;
  - o mixed couples (marriage with disparity of worship): some Christians tend to abandon their faith or to practice two religions at the same time;
  - o young people: they seem to be much more interested in new technologies and trends than in faith. It also appears that young people who go to school or work in villages other than their own gradually abandon their Christian faith.
- catechists: in our particular Church, they play an extremely important role in leading Christian communities alongside priests and sisters. Even if they are not well trained and lack educational tools, they are most often ready to accept the task.

### 3) The surrounding society

Catholics do not live in a “bubble”, isolated from the surrounding world. On the contrary, they move forward in

connection with the diverse components of society, whether members of other religions or public-private organizations, through meetings and contributions on various occasions. The Church in Laos is thus involved in the coordination of many projects and receives support from organizations (Vocational Training Center, Community Development Project, etc.).

However, for activities more related to the mission, like visiting certain villages or organizing specific celebrations, prior permission is generally required.

## **Participation**

According to St. Paul, the Church is like a human body made up of many members, all of whom are essential to its proper functioning (1 Cor. 12:12-31). One of the most important results of the synod is perhaps that Christians understood more deeply the meaning of the expression “to participate in the mission of the Church”. And they now want it to be true in their own lives!

In Laos, participation in the mission of the Church is expressed in various forms:

- through the pastoral work and service of priests, religious and catechists;
- through the work of various groups such as the Legion of Mary, groups of young people, groups of elderly and retired persons, groups of mercy, groups of charity (AIC, SSVF), the Couples for Christ (CFC) and other groups which play a central role in promoting the faith, visiting the sick and helping the poor;
- through the family life. Indeed, parents participate in the mission of the Church by raising their children in the Christian faith and teaching them to become responsible adults in society (CCC 2223);
- through various activities organized by Christians within the parishes (collection of money and offerings, maintenance and decoration of the church on special occasions, support for the construction of churches in or outside the Vicariate, etc.). This common involvement of Christians truly contributes to

creating a family spirit and promotes harmony within the group, which is very important;

However, the participation of Christians in the mission of the Church still faces many difficulties, which fall into two main categories:

- difficulties which depend on the individuals. For example, some Christians remains indifferent to the faith and refuse to be an active actor of the mission of the Church; others do not dare to openly declare themselves Christians out of shame or fear to be rejected;
- structural difficulties concerning
  - o living conditions: many Christians are forced to travel to other cities to earn money and thus support their families. Those who are civil servants or employed in private companies do not have much time to join and participate in the Church activities;
  - o adequate understanding of the mission: some Christians still think that evangelization is the task of the clergy only, not theirs, which makes their involvement superficial.

A point of attention for the future could be to help Christians to better discern their charism and thus to better participate in the mission of the Church (see 1 Cor. 12:1-11).

### **Living the Christian faith in the midst of Laotian culture and society**

The Laotian population is made up of many ethnic groups that have different religions and beliefs. The only religions recognized by the government, however, are Buddhism (64.7%), Roman Catholicism and Protestantism (1.7%), Islam (0.01%) and the Bahai religion (13,960 people). Many Laotians also believe in spirits (traditional beliefs).

#### *Catholic faith and Laotian culture*

After the Second Vatican Council, the way of living the Christian faith in Laos changed radically. In particular, certain local customs such as the *basi*, the watering of the statues of saints during the New Year, the prayers for mothers at the end of their postpartum

rest or the offering of food during liturgies, became authentic places of expression of the Christian faith. Today, Christians are happy and proud to have the opportunity to manifest their faith through the language of their culture.

Yet, if such adaptations are not accompanied by careful explanations, some people may feel confused and fall into syncretism or superstition. This is an important point of attention.

### *Christianity in Laotian society today*

In the Gospel, Jesus warned his disciples that who wants to follow him must be prepared to face obstacles (Mt 10:20-23). This is absolutely true and corresponds to the experience of many Christians in Laos, as expressed in the synod report of each Vicariate.

Many students and young people of working age, when they enroll at a university or apply for a job, are indeed under pressure from institutions. If, during the interview, they recognize that they are Christians, they are most often refused. And if they are not immediately refused, they can be asked to renounce their religion and become Buddhists. As a result, many Christians see themselves as “second class” people, and hold positions that do not correspond to their real capacities. Some do not renounce their faith, but they fear to say that they are Christians. Others pretend to be Buddhists just to survive.

Beside this, many who know nothing about Christianity delight in deriding and mocking the Catholic faith and the sacraments, especially the Sacrament of Reconciliation. They say, “See, Christianity is good: you can sin as often as you want! You just have to go to confession and sin disappears!” Some say sarcastically that coming to catechism class to prepare for marriage is “first sleeping with a priest”. Such words make Catholics uncomfortable, ashamed and reluctant to act as Christians.

### *The problem of the Christian faith diluted in other beliefs*

This question is particularly sensitive for the Church of Laos. Many Christians, when they are sick, indeed turn to God, to the Virgin Mary and the saints. But if they do not heal, they go to sorcerers or seers, and do whatever they tell them. Some go so far as to leave the Church. Other Christians apparently have a perfectly

regulated life of faith, but when a Buddhist feast day comes, they hasten to offer food to the monks in order to transmit merits to their dead. Note also that the search for auspicious days to celebrate a marriage or build a new house is still practiced (even by devout Christians).

Despite these difficulties, the Catholic Church in Laos rejoices to see that most Christians are aware of what sin is, that they believe in the existence of the soul, in life after death, in paradise and in hell. When seriously ill, even the less assiduous Christians like to invite groups to pray at home. Some receive the sacrament of the sick and express their desire to be reconciled with God and with the Church. Of course, repentance takes place in the last days of life, but the Church is always ready to manifest God's mercy for the salvation of souls. Some families who have rejected the faith aspire to bury their dead according to Catholic tradition, and they often offer masses for them on various occasions, such as All Saints' Day.

### **The relationship with other religions**

Since the Second Vatican Council, the Church has invited bishops to concretely support and encourage relations with other religions. Actually, the main purpose of this dialogue is not to convert non-Christians or Christians of other denominations to Catholicism, but to promote mutual understanding, respect and love, as well as the unity of the humanity, which is one of the fundamental missions of the Church<sup>1</sup>. In a sense, the Catholic Church is interested in and dialogues with other religions, as Jesus himself was interested and dialogued with everyone he met (see Jn 4:7-27).

If we now look at the situation of the Church in Laos, it appears that inter-religious dialogue is not yet organized in a systematic way and that it is very limited. But it does not mean that it does not exist! Two levels of relationships can be distinguished: the community level and the family level. Another dimension of this dialogue is the relationship with brothers of other Christian denominations.

---

<sup>1</sup> See *Nostra Aetate* §1-2.

### *Dialogue at the community level*

It is mainly practiced with Buddhists and those who believe in spirits (traditional belief) in the form of courtesy visits on diverse occasions. For example, during the village festival, the villagers gather for the preparations, they cook together, share the expenses, participate in the festival, etc. If there are any, the income from the festival is shared according to what has been agreed. There are many opportunities to practice this kind of dialogue (construction of a house, weddings, *basi*, etc.). On Catholic feasts such as Christmas or the feast of the patron saint of the church, the same applies. In other words, there is mutual aid without distinction of religion.

Inter-religious dialogue practiced at the community level is important insofar as it contributes to resolve many problems and lead villagers to unite, know and respect each other better.

### *Dialogue at the family level*

Mixed marriages are increasingly common in Laos, giving many couples the opportunity to share their knowledge or faith experiences. The Church recognizes the freedom to believe. Thus, non-Christians do not have to convert to Christianity to marry a Catholic. The Church simply invites the Catholic spouse to do everything possible so that the unborn child may receive baptism and a Christian formation.

In general, non-Christians do not prevent Catholics from practicing their faith and allow their children to study catechism. Inside the couple, the faith of the other is seldom despised or rejected.

### *Dialogue with other Christian denominations*

We must admit that it is not yet of very good quality. Indeed, Catholics are often accused of teaching false beliefs, especially regarding the Virgin Mary and saints, and accepting Lao customs as media for the expression of faith. These accusations come from a misunderstanding of what the Catholic Church truly is and make us sad. Through that experience, this synod shows the importance of the relationship between Christian brothers.

For our part, we only hope that inter-religious dialogue will go further than it is at present, through seminars, exchanges on faith and spirituality, as well as cooperation in the service of the development of society.

## The mission

The Catholic Church in Laos was born in 1886 thanks to the missionary work carried out by the priest of the Foreign Missions of Paris (MEP). Since then and through the circumstances of each period, God has not ceased to inspire the hearts of Laotian Christians to bear witness to the Good News. Actually, evangelization is the mission that Jesus himself entrusted to every Christian (Mk 16:9-15); it is the very nature of the Church<sup>2</sup>.

The synodal process that we experienced throughout the four Apostolic Vicariates enabled us to draw up a state of the mission in Laos and to formulate some proposals for it to be more fruitful in the future.

*The proclamation of the Good News as a testimony of God's love and mercy*

This way of living the mission is carried out mainly through charitable activities organized in the church area, such as visiting and helping the poor, the elderly, the sick, the handicapped and orphans. It is about improving the quality of life and the rights of our brothers and sisters, as well as caring for the environment which is a gift from God.

The proclamation of the gospel as a testimony of God's love and mercy is also manifested through the good example Christians can set within society and the love they have for their neighbors, without partiality, because we are all brothers and sisters created in the image of God (Gn 1:26).

*Evangelization and renewal of the Christian faith*

Clearly, technology and the various trends of society are transforming the mentalities and behaviors of the Laotian people. The practice of ancient traditions is gradually fading away. Christians are no different: they live and work in the same environment as others! The trends of society also affect their ways of living, especially those of young people and children. For example, an increasing number of couples deliberately choose to marry according to Laotian custom, without worrying about the Christian sacrament of marriage, then come a bit later to regularize their situation. This example illustrates

---

<sup>2</sup> *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 14.

how important it is to announce and re-announce the Good News, whether the time is favorable or not favorable (2Tim 4:2). To solve this problem, some Christian groups suggest:

- that each Apostolic Vicariate set up a committee to follow up on pastoral work, in order to study possible plans for announcing the faith and to help the bishops to give clear pastoral orientations;
- that the laity be more involved in the life of the church;
- that special attention be given to families, especially those who are in difficulty, neglected, poor or remote;
- to stimulate the faith of young people, through catechetical or spiritual formation.

#### *Preaching the Good News to the non-Christians*

Most Christians live in villages with different religious denominations, which can be a real test for their faith.

The preaching of the Good News to non-Christians is relatively effective. It often takes the form of sponsorship in various fields, particularly in the social field (expertise, material goods, contribution to community activities).

The difference in faith is therefore both a challenge and a good opportunity for Christians to witness to the Good News.

### **The formation**

Formation is an important aspect of the life of the Church, whether the formation of children, young people or adults, because it enables Christians to understand what they believe in a deeper way, which contributes to make their faith firmer and more mature.

Formation has an even greater importance for the Church in Laos which is a young Church. In particular, the faith of many Christians is still impregnated with Buddhist or superstitious practices. In an environment marked by religious diversity, we are convinced that formation is the most appropriate means of helping Christians to emerge from confusion and above all to avoid behavior that is contrary to the teaching of the Church. At the same time, it could also help the Good News to better penetrate Laotian traditions and culture.

All the participants in the Synod agreed that formation must be the object of serious attention on the part of the Church, whether the formation of ordinary Christians or that of community leaders (priests, religious, catechists, etc.):

- 1) the formation of Christians: it must be centered on the transmission of the faith within the family
- 2) the formation of leaders, especially that of the catechists, who have a great responsibility in transmitting the contents of the faith to children. It is the same for priests and religious for whom it would be appropriate to set up a serious ongoing formation, both spiritual and intellectual.

Actually, the reality of faith in Laos demands that formation be conducted in two parallel dimensions:

1. Basic formation, that is to say the study of the various elements of the Christian faith according to the Catholic tradition;
2. Re-formation, that is to say the identification, analysis and correction of behaviors which are not in accordance with the Christian faith.

In the recent past, the Catholic Church in Laos has endeavored to respond to the formation needs of Christians, without always succeeding. The reasons are many. But we have to recognize that we lack the essential elements for the transmission of the faith, starting with well-trained staff and quality teaching material (Bible, catechesis manuals, pious books). This situation makes us all the more motivated to move forward!

## **Conclusion**

The preceding synthesis gives an idea of the subjects which nourished the exchanges between Christians throughout the Synod. It is now time to conclude by returning to a few salient points.

First, it is quite surprising to note that the themes and issues highlighted during the Synod are very similar from one vicariate to another, even if the contributions come from very different groups of people. These reactions reflect the interest of the Church for the various aspects of the daily life of the children of God.

Many Christians had the opportunity to express their attachment to their faith and to the Church during the Synod. They were also able to express their hopes and concerns. In short, they lived together the joy of being Christians, the joy of being children of God.

Their greatest desire now is that their voices be heard and taken into account in building the Church of tomorrow. The Church of Laos will thus truly be a synodal Church. That Laotian Christians have dared to share what they think and hope testifies to their maturity and their capacity to accept changes that will be beneficial to the local Church.

In general, all Vicariates, and within them, all the groups of Christians, show that they are ready and eager to contribute actively to the mission of the Church.

The synthesis suggests that the local church must make an effort to adapt even more to the local culture. In this sense, support for continuing education must be granted more particularly

- to catechists;
- to leaders of youth groups;
- to heads of families;
- to community leaders;
- to priests and religious.

Finally, we must seek to broaden the scope of our missionary activities. The Church of Laos will then be a Church on the move, determined, ready to face the challenges of the third millennium.

## **Propositions**

Prayer was at the heart of the Synod that we have just experienced. We asked God to guide our meetings and our exchanges, so that the process bears fruit both for our local Church and for the universal Church.

Now there are four issues that require further consideration. They concern:

1. the ongoing formation of Church personnel, priests, religious and lay people, here in Laos or abroad. It is proposed that the local church seek funds to support this work;
2. marriage (in particular mixed marriages and customary marriages subsequently regularized according to the principles of canon law), as well as divorce and polygamy. These are important questions. The Church is asked to give clear orientations which will serve as references for future pastoral work;
3. the practice of faith in connection with local cultural traditions. Many things are still unclear, such as customary weddings or the celebration of the Lao New Year which often falls during Holy Week. The Church is invited to reflect on clear pastoral orientations that can be implemented in the future;
4. catechists are the main missionaries of the Church in Laos and they have played an important role in its recent history. The Church is invited to reflect not only on their training, but also on how to reward them with a decent allowance.

## *PART TWO*

### *CAMBODIA CATHOLIC CHURCH*

#### *Introduction*

Notwithstanding the covid-19 pandemic, it is with “joy” that the Catholic faithful of the Catholic Church in Cambodia, namely **Phnom Penh Apostolic Vicariate** (Bishop Olivier Schmitthaeusler, mep - Apostolic Vicar), **Battambang Apostolic Prefecture** (Msgr Enrique Figaredo, sj - Apostolic Prefect), **Kompong Cham Apostolic Prefecture** (Msgr Bruno Cosme, mep - Apostolic Administrator and Msgr Hangly Suon, Apostolic Prefect elected) welcomed Pope Francis’ invitation to hold the Catholic Church in Cambodia Synod in unity with the universal Church, as the Catholic Church takes on the challenges of the future.

After opening the Synod in each apostolic circumscription, during the succeeding seven months, the different Catholic communities and mission areas of the Catholic Church in Cambodia held its parish mini synods. Participants to the synods in the different parishes were a mixture of both priests, religious, lay faithful, and foreign lay volunteers. Aside from the local parishioners, other groups, such as, the combined Youth Group of Students residing in our student centers the English Group as well our Buddhist friends also joined the synod process.

By the end of June 2022, all the parishes and mission areas of the Catholic Church in Cambodia have finished the synod process, with a total of more than 2500 participants. During the synod process, the delegates from Catholic communities have three (3) main questions to be reflected, namely:

1. *How this journeying together is happening today?*
2. *What joy did they bring? What difficulty and obstacle have they encountered?*
3. *In our experience or journeying together in our own community, what are the points to be changed, to be grown in proclamation of the gospel to our brothers and sisters?*

*This is the synthesis of Phnom Penh Apostolic Vicariate, Battambang Apostolic Prefecture and Kompong Cham Apostolic Prefecture:*

- I. **What should we do to help our Catholic Church in Cambodia grow and be sign of the Love of God for all?**

1. **Personal Conversion:**

- make an effort to change the way of living and personal mindset
- take time as priority to join regularly Sunday Mass
- listen to Word of God and join the retreat program

- open one's heart honestly, be honest, respect time (punctual), don't discriminate, Non-partisan, fight selfishness.
- live out the Gospel with forgiveness to others, and tolerating each other with love of Christ
- eliminate disputes among pastoral committee's member
- join the Church's activities
- accept personal weakness and other people.

## 2. **Catechesis and on-going formation:**

- Pay much attention to educate and train church leaders such as priests, religious, lay missionaries, and pastoral committees to get well knowledge about catholic rite liturgy and teaching of the universal church.
- Help the faithful who are isolated to return to church. Set common program for listening and sharing lives experiences, and encourage each other. Faithful should realize that this is their mission not only for the priests. Catholics should be able to receive critical ideas from each other. Encouraging Catholics to share the gospel through their daily lives based on Jesus Christ is the truth.
- Catholic Church in Cambodia should reflect clearly on how to improve catechism. The Church should have a fulltime catechist in each pastoral sector in the diocese because the volunteer catechist cannot continue in the long term. Reduce rule and pressure on people to attend church's activities because it would make them unhappy with the church.

3. **Charity in Action:** encourage the catholic family to serve society and church with love from Christ in several sections such as education, health... especially motivate the sick, widowers, the poor, people with disability, loneliness, hopeless and orphan children.

4. **Communion and Unity among our communities (Khmers and Vietnamese), more effort of the missionaries to be**

**reborn in Cambodia:** the Catholic Church in Cambodia has missionaries from more than 20 countries are serving the Good News. More effort must be ask to the missionaries to be “re-born” in Cambodia because foreign missionaries cannot instead the local priests or local missionaries.

5. **Pastoral for Children, Teenagers and Youth:** we have to strength our pastoral for children and teenagers especially. Many of them are not catholic (especially in the villages) but through our scout program, children and teenager camps, children’s rights international day, Christmas, we can gathering so many of them and give opportunities to the youth to be responsible and strength their leaderships too. The collaboration with the Youth Diocesan offices and the parishes is crucial. Human formation, spiritual initiation could give to the children and teenagers as a first announce of the Good News and encourage our youth to be apostles.
6. **Local Vocations:** the pastoral of vocations is a most important challenge. The majority of our baptized are Christian of the first generation (since 2000... about more than 250 Khmer adults are baptized each year in whole Cambodia)... and 95% of the priests and religious are foreigner! How to help our youth to have a deep roots in their faith and find a model in Jesus and in local priests as well in missionaries to answer to the call of God?
7. **Pastoral Care of the Families:** family formation about faith and general knowledge is very important. Family strong faith will better help for proclamation of the Good News and vocation. Please help the new couple who married with other religion to be strong in faith and family life, because they have formation only before the marriage, nonetheless no meeting or formation. We should have a program for catholic families: Family meeting, on-going formation in each parish with listening to the Word of God, short reflection, and sharing happiness and joy together. The Church should establish some groups like: Teenagers, Youth, and elderly groups at parishes level and take some time for visiting catholic families in their place.

8. **Integral education through our schools:** Catholic Church at diocesan level as well religious congregation have dedicated for building schools and lead private institutions (from kindergarten to higher education) to provide general knowledge, vocational training and integral education at all levels to Cambodian children and youth with high quality, ability and morality as part of mission for the evangelization in Cambodia.
9. **Improvement of our Social Communications means:** should improve the relationship within the church among staff, Parish committees and catholic families, especially the families who are away from the church. Sharing information between church and church widely. Develop diocesan offices for communications in service in the field of media according to the needs and social context.
10. **Strengthen our Inter-Religion Dialogue:** We should change our behavior and open our eyes and hearts for our neighbor. God gives us the beauty of this world as stewards. We are also called to take good care of the relationship with other religious and different nationalities. So, the inter-dialogue must strengthen and enhance peace and harmony among religion in our own community. Inter-religious formation will allow us to know and understand each other, which will allow us to learn to live peacefully with each other. Collaboration between different religions, especially in solving together common community problems. The encounter between the Catholic Church in Cambodia and the Buddhist Monks and lay Cambodian Buddhists “creates a new culture.” All our activities affect each other and affect the whole world. We may differ in religion, but we all seek the common good.
11. **Integral Ecological conversion:** We have a beautiful country that God has given us, rich in natural resources. We have to help our communities to understand about the common good by preserving forests, protecting the natural environment,

water in villages, districts and provinces, as well as the whole country.

12. **Catholic identity:** Help the catholic faithful to understand the meaning of loving, encouraging, and respecting each other. Be responsible in their own church and care of all activities. Help them to understand their roles to be catholic in the society, encourage them to proclaim the Good News about Jesus. Should help them to love the church, come for prayer, keep an eye on church, and feel at home in the church. Encourage them to proclaim the church doctrine through their daily living, with Christ and full of God's love.

Identity is very important! How should we use Khmer culture, tradition, morality, civilization, Buddhist education we have received to proclaim the Good News which is our special treasure and strange to be full of value and full of meaning for others? Our lives are valuable because of God's creation. How can we make people realize the presence of Jesus in our daily lives and see that we are different because we love in different ways as Jesus Christ? We have to develop also KHMER SACRED ARTS!

13. **Community decision-making and collaboration:** The Church is the body of Christ, each of us is His member. Bishops and priests must not make decisions alone but must discuss before planning what to do for the betterment of the Church. They must respect the desire of members of the Church. Church must have good governance. On the other hand, we must collaborate with local Churches, priests, missionaries, faithful, religious congregations, pastoral sectors, Catholic schools, Catholic NGOs and Catholic offices in the Catholic Church in Cambodia. Collaboration is very important in order to make us in communion, participation to proclaim the Good News. Our mission is only "collaboration with each other". In society, the Church must collaborate with the people in their living places and works places; collaborate with the local authorities, with other religions, with ministers and ministries. Working together guides us in applying the

commandments of Jesus, to love one another as he has loved us.

**14. Walking together to find New Ways to proclaim the Good News:** we are the priests, missionaries, Catholics people 24/24hrs. We are a small minority. We must open new ways to proclaim the Good News. We are the minority in this country. We must think about a new way to proclaim the Good News.

We have started some programs by setting up a Welcome Center for vulnerable people, HIV/AIDs, disability people, school for autistic children... Those are special places to serve families who suffer and are poor in society, help them to find hope in life. We fulfill our lives' role to open the new way to proclaim the Good News in each parish. We also reflect on evangelization through art. This way, we can go deeply in the heart of people by our shows for Jesus' birth, the Resurrection of the Lord and Passover with Khmer Art (Yeeke, Ba-Sak, Lakhon Khol, and other performances). Through hymns, the Word of Jesus goes deeply into their heart because what they hear is their own language in their own art performance. The recent presence of the Church in Social Enterprise provides benefits to many people through handicraft and services. Caring for nature brings many people joy and hope to see God's wonderful creation through the presence of the Church.

## II. **What kind of Church do we dream for?**

1. That the Church will grow more not only in number but also in faith to our Lord Jesus Christ.
2. That the church continues to improve its catechetical formation program and make it more available to more children and adults alike. And may there be a prefecture-wide catechetical program to give equal and uniform catechetical formation to children.
3. That the church will continue its programs for the poor, persons with disability (both physical and

mental disability), those who are neglected and abandoned, for those who are marginalized.

4. That the church will continue its commitment to education, specially providing scholarship for the children coming from poor families.
5. Catholic parish communities that can sustain itself in prayers and devotions, and pastoral works even in the absence of a priest.
6. There are enough priests to celebrate Mass and other sacraments.
7. Regular Mass in every parish during Sundays.
8. A church that helps us become more like Christ.
9. A more participative church.
10. A self-sustaining church, financially and otherwise.
11. Better dissemination of information within the different communities of the catholic church.
12. More faith-related programs and activities for all ages – adults, youth, children.
13. Create programs that will help continue the relationship and formation of the young-adults who physically need to leave the parish in order to study in the city – e.g., inter-diocesan program between Battambang, Kompong Cham Prefectures and Vicariate of Phnom Penh where many of our young-adult Catholics migrate to study and look for jobs.
14. A church committed to inter-religious dialogues and promotes peace and friendship among peoples of different races and religion.

Published September 2022

## **FABC Papers:**

174. Country Reports: FABC 50 General Conference, submitted by the Diocese of Hong Kong, Diocese of Macau, Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan (CBCJ), Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea (CBCK), Chinese Regional Bishops' Conference (CRBC – Taiwan), compiled by the FABC Central Secretariat, September 2022
175. Country Reports: FABC 50 General Conference, submitted by Missio Sui Juris Afghanistan, Apostolic Administration of Kyrgyzstan, Apostolic Administration of Uzbekistan, Prefecture Apostolic of Ulaanbaatar - Mongolia, compiled by the FABC Central Secretariat, September 2022
176. Synthesis Reports, Synod of Bishops 2021–2023, submitted by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Bangladesh (CBCB), Catholic Bishops' Conference of Central Asia (CECAC), Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI), Syro-Malabar Church, Syro-Malankara Catholic Major Archiepiscopal Church, compiled by the FABC Central Secretariat, September 2022

**FABC Papers is a project of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), published continuously since 1976, designed to bring the thinking of Asian experts to a wider audience and to develop critical analysis of the problems facing the Church in Asia from people on the scene. All of the FABC Papers are freely available on-line in pdf format on the FABC website: [www.fabc.org](http://www.fabc.org). To facilitate access and research of all of the FABC Papers, various indexes are available in FABC Papers Nos. 100, 125, and 150. The opinions expressed are those of the author(s) alone and do not necessarily represent official policies of the FABC or its member Episcopal Conferences. Manuscripts are always welcome and may be sent to: [fabccentral@yahoo.com](mailto:fabccentral@yahoo.com)**