

SYNTHESIS REPORTS

SYNOD OF BISHOPS 2021–2023



- I. **Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei (CBCMSB)**
- II. **Catholic Bishops' Conference of Myanmar (CBCM)**
- III. **Pakistan Catholic Bishops' Conference (PCBC)**
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I. Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei (CBCMSB)

SYNOD SYNTHESIS REPORT



Introduction

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei (CBCMSB) consists of three countries under one conference, distinguishing it from most other conferences worldwide. Singapore is one state and one archdiocese; Brunei is an apostolic vicariate; and Malaysia consists of nine dioceses: three in Peninsula Malaysia (Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, Diocese of Penang, Diocese of Malacca Johore), and six in Borneo of which three are in the state of Sarawak (Archdiocese of Kuching, Diocese of Miri and Diocese of Sibiu), and three in the state of Sabah (Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu, Diocese of Keningau and Diocese of Sandakan).

The Process

The CBCMSB discussed the correspondence and instructions received from the Vatican, Rome, on the Synod at its conference in August 2021. Each diocese then launched the Synod on synodality around 17 October 2021, the week after its launch by Pope Francis in

Rome. The Conference opined that each diocese is best left to their own initiative to understand the synod documents, craft questions and decide how to present these. In all dioceses, small teams were established and a synod contact person was appointed by the local bishop. Coordination at the national and Conference level was launched in late October. (8) priests, (1) sister, (1) lay woman and (2) laymen were appointed as diocese synod contact persons. The CBCMSB executive secretary – a lay person – was appointed overall coordinator.

The CBCMSB secretariat created a special page on its website to promote coordination, exchange of news, and sharing of resources from Rome and the local dioceses. The Malaysian Pre-Synod assembly was held successfully on July 11, Singapore had its on June 10-11, and Brunei on 19 April 2022.

A questionnaire based on the 10-point thematic nuclei from the *Vademecum* formed the basis for consultation in all the dioceses. The questions were diverse with varied modes of administration employed, including face-to-face and online surveys, and physical meetings with parish reps.

A synthesis report from Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei is provided below from:

- ✓ *geographical frontiers* – urban cities to rural interiors without adequate infrastructure or internet access;
- ✓ *existential peripheries* – young people, women, children, Orang Asal and Asli, differently abled, LGBT, rural poor, and others;
- ✓ *various language & cultural groups* – with different ways of perceiving the world, church and expression of needs;
- ✓ *diverse vocations & ministries* – single, married or separated, clergy, religious, laity across various ministries.

MALAYSIA

A SYNTHESIS OF THE SYNODAL REPORTS

Process taken

Briefings, training of facilitators and regular meetings were held. Most of these were virtual due to pandemic restrictions. Catechists and prayer leaders were trained to facilitate consultation in rural parishes and communities.

- In the Archdiocese of Kuching, 4,787 parishioners participated in the process, the majority (62%) were from rural parishes, while 38% were from urban parishes.
- In the Diocese of Miri, 2,450 responses were received from 8.2 % of total Mass attendees.
- In the Diocese of Sibü, the range of those who were consulted in the Synodal process in the different parishes was from 1.8%-80% of the parishioners who regularly attended mass during the Covid-19 pandemic. Specific numbers could not be provided.
- The Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu had chosen 4 sets of questions. Of 19 Parishes, only 16 submitted their responses. Of these 7 are urban, 6 sub-urban and 3 rural parishes. The estimated number of participants is more than 12,000 in total – made up of adults, young people and children aged between 7 to 12.
- The Diocese of Keningau divided the questionnaire into four categories according to age. Approximately 16,342 participants consisting of 3,026 parishioners aged below 14 years, young people between 15 to 45 years (5,781), general parishioners (5,405) and senior citizens aged 60 and above (2,130), took part on the exercise. Migrant groups were also included in the synodal process.
- The Diocese of Sandakan received approximately 1,700 responses.
- In the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, the Synod team conducted briefings for parishes, groups, congregations and clergy. More than 22,000 submissions were received.
- In the Diocese of Penang an approximate number of 2,000 individual responses and 50 group responses were received. A total of 24 parishes submitted responses online.

- In the Diocese of Malacca Johore all parishes participated in the consultation. More than 5,000 people responded to the survey conducted via print and online questionnaires.

The Experience

The consultation process provided participants, especially those whose voices are seldom heard, an opportunity to express thoughts and opinions on church-related matters, and helped raise awareness and understanding on synodality. It also brought parishioners from all walks of life together, and exposed church authorities to their grievances, joys, hopes and sufferings (cf. GS#1). Virtual consultations were relied on heavily because of pandemic restrictions. This was, however, a limitation for people unfamiliar with digital technology, and those living in rural areas with limited internet accessibility.

There was still hesitation among some participants who had a strong fear of being judged or treated differently for voicing their opinion. There were varied opinions owing to the diverse race, cultures, languages, and differing faith levels of the respondents. Some negative comments and lukewarm reception may have been due to a lack of knowledge and understanding on the synod, synodal process, functions of the parish, diocese and the wider church. Some skepticism was expressed on the whole synodal process with respondents expressing doubt that their views would be taken seriously by the church, as there seemed to be a lack of regard for findings of past assemblies. Others felt guilty or disloyal if they were to raise issues against the church or clergy.

The consultation process however raised some level of awareness that the church is not the sole responsibility of a few or privileged ones but of everyone. The feedback and realisation that there is unity in diversity, allows the local church to continue God's mission, and serve its congregation via more innovative approaches. Some priests and lay leaders seem to have fallen into the snares of favouritism and politicking in their zeal for establishing parishes and ministries. Impure motives, fear of rejection and danger of populism are some of the threats identified, in addition to the tendency for lay leaders to work easier under the authority of a clergy, rather than among themselves.

The Feedback

Despite the negative responses, the respondents hope to see the church move forward as a united, loving and truly Christian community where parishes are vibrant, joyful, supportive of consultation, and recognise the importance of BECs in promoting the spirit of synodality. The feedback falls broadly in seven areas of concern:

1. *Relations with clergy*: While there is a recognition of the positive experience with priests in terms of their dedication, prayerfulness, kindness, inspiration and leadership qualities, there were also critical comments related to questions of authority, clericalism, arbitrary decision making and favouritism for the rich and influential. There is a desire for a familial relationship with the clergy, and for homilies to inspire, rather than chastise and lecture parishioners; and for leaders to be more open and non-judgmental towards diversity i.e., gender expression and individualism.
2. *Spiritual care*: As a consequence of the pandemic, there is a renewed sense of appreciation for the Mass and a renewal of faith. Some felt that spiritual care and concern were lacking during the pandemic and more could have been done. There is also a growing concern that the shortage of priests would jeopardise access to the sacraments. Access to Holy Communion is denied to the divorced and remarried, and they expressed hurt at this exclusion. Some expressed the view that the church should be more flexible, but others felt this practice should be upheld.
3. *Faith & Formation*: Many perceive that faith formation is generally poor. This is a shared concern in the regions of Sabah and Sarawak. Many would like to see more flexibility when it comes to attending religious instruction sessions. Some felt the process of becoming a Catholic should be simplified, while others wished to see more being done to support and journey spiritually with those in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) programme. There is also a recognition that parents should be trained to be the first catechists to their own children. There is also a notably lack of seminars and conferences in recent years to help address current issues like premarital sex, marital breakdown, and concerns of the

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) group – with the mercy and compassion of Jesus. The threat of Islamisation and conversion of the young and minors remains a very real issue.

4. *Outreach to the marginalised*: Pastoral care and outreach to newcomers, the elderly and those living in remote areas are often neglected. There is a renewed focus on mission centres and outreach to those on the peripheries, especially the wounded, the abused, divorced, remarried, single parents, the LGBTQ, the poor, the widowed, orphans, the differently abled and migrants. Malaysia's poverty rate spiked in 2020 as a direct consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic.
 - a) In journeying together, the voices of 'women with stigma' were heard - divorcees, separated or single again, stories of them being treated like outcasts. Gossips and outrageous accusations have scarred them for life and they refused to return to church for being shamed and hurt. Gender discrimination occurs in parishes when women are not invited to be extraordinary ministers of communion or given leadership roles.
 - b) The *Orang Asal & Orang Asli* participated actively in the synodal process, voicing problems courageously to synod representatives. They raised their plight of being deprived of basic rights to education & opportunities. The church can work with NGOs and others religious bodies to safeguard the welfare and needs of the marginalized.
 - c) The elderly feel abandoned, neglected and forgotten by their children, family and even the church. They want the church to know the pain of being lonely and their struggle with health issues. They yearned for the company of their BECs and friends. They want the church to remember them as they were once active and contributed as leaders.
 - d) The pandemic laid bare the existing social disparities and the number of 'new poor' jumped. The poor in this context includes single parent households, urban and rural poor, migrants and refugees – all those who have no equitable access to employment, education, healthcare, and even digital content that can be addressed for a more holistic development.

- e) While integration of migrants into local communities and parish structures is to be lauded, the ever-increasing number of undocumented migrants, refugees and victims of human trafficking calls for the church to deepen her pastoral care, humanitarian and spiritual assistance towards them.
5. *Young People Matter*: The young people in general felt used as labour and not listened to by the church. They expect more inclusivity, be given a voice and allowed to be involved in decision-making. Many of those consulted felt concerned about attracting and keeping the young people; and suggested the formation of the young must be a priority to prevent losing them to other influences. They suggested to include church teachings on interfaith relationships and advocate community development for the underprivileged young people through collaboration with other bodies.
6. *Ecumenical and interfaith initiatives*: Not many ecumenical or interfaith consultations were carried out in the dioceses. The few conversations highlighted the need to find common ground through opportunities to initiate interfaith discourse, to promote understanding of each other's faith, as well as learn of each other's practices. This is important to strengthen national unity and harmony, and to speak up against religious extremism – which in recent decades, has been used as a tool for political expediency. It also offers a common ground for fighting corruption and rejecting political propaganda that does not build trust among peoples. The push of Islamization and policies restricting religious freedom has left an imprint upon the Christian community and all minorities.
7. *Leadership, Empowerment & Collaboration*: Favouritism in leadership and power struggles among the laity need to be addressed. Leadership in general was pointed out as a potential cause of the downfall of the Malaysian church, if not taken seriously. Leaders need to have formation to be more of the pastoral servant type rather than being “boss”. There should be transparency and accountability in all financial matters of the parish, allowing for parish resources to be shared within the diocese. There is also a recognition of the need to collaborate with other faiths in order to promote national unity.

Current Reality

From the responses and feedback received, synodality seems to revolve around relationships within the church. The church is viewed as lacking in compassion, rigid and inconsiderate to the needs and situations of parishioners. The church should adopt a merciful approach particularly to those who are divorced, LGBTQ, single mothers, the lapsed and the marginalised. The congregation wants to be a part of the church decision making process, and want church authorities to share information, and listen to their opinions before plans are finalised and implemented.

The church seems to be very inward-looking with a lack of focus on mission. Given the various challenges and uncertainties, some clergy and leaders promote a strong orthodox approach. Strong spiritual and emotional support from elders and peers are very much needed to help the young and vulnerable to be resilient be it in dealing with temptations of interfaith conversion, or diversion from church teachings. Inculturation should be practiced at every opportunity to initiate mutual enrichment between Christianity and local peoples and cultures. Interfaith and ecumenical initiatives on common concerns can be widely promoted.

Growth in Synodality

- 1) *Communion* - Church leaders and community can sustain this spirit of synodality by embracing and advocating the space and openness for participation. Regular consultation of the people of God should be carried out to create mutual trust, respect and love. The church should have an avenue for parishioners to air their concerns and seek emotional and spiritual guidance in a safe, trusting and empathetic environment as this is central to the spirit of synodality.
- 2) *Participation* - Cultural differences can be addressed by having more activities which showcase unity in diversity. Leaders should be neutral to all parties regardless of race, colour or gender and particularly financial status and public influence. Contributions of the young people should be recognised. The differences between urban and rural churches in spiritual development and infrastructure should be avoided. This could also involve a visible sharing of resources.

- 3) *Mission* – The church and the local communities can work alongside creatively, rejuvenating its missionary purpose, and instilling Christ-centred faith deepening programmes. It means that the church can reach out to people in rural areas, provide livelihood opportunities and avenues for people to voice their opinions. It also means that lay organisations should be more engaged and responsive in rendering assistance (finance, facilities, people, etc.) to those in need.

Cultural Image

The unique and inclusive qualities of the local “longhouse” culture, the spirit of “gotong-royong”, and the culture of dialogue and cooperation, can surely be promoted in the synodal journey, despite social hostilities caused by politics or government policies restricting religious freedom.

Conclusion

Efforts to maintain harmony, integration, respect, and religious tolerance amidst a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural landscape, illustrates the synodal journey that the church can embark on to become vibrant, caring and progressive. This will draw more young people to serve the Lord and reach out to those on the peripheries.

ARCHDIOCESE OF SINGAPORE

A SYNTHESIS OF THE SYNODAL REPORT

Key Synthesis

Singapore’s synodal conversation returns started from November 2021 and closed on 5 May 2022. A total of 16,898 Catholics submitted 4,140 unique forms during this period.

The Process Taken

The fundamental and thematic questions given in the *Vademecum* were simplified and made sufficiently broad based. Training sessions were held via online, and were attended by more than 200 people. A digital online form was created and launched for individuals or groups.

Groups that were already in touch with Catholics on the fringes were engaged to aid in the consultation process e.g. *Courage Singapore* with same sex attraction, and interreligious dialogues led by the Archdiocesan Commission for Inter-Religious Dialogue.

The Feedback

Many of those who responded were older Catholics, especially those from the 51 to 65 years age group, followed by those in the 36 to 50 years age group.

Overall, the responses were clustered into seven themes. The theme that resonated with most participants was 'Parish Life', followed by 'Discipleship and Christian Living'. The theme on 'Relationships', forged either within the family, the parish or church communities, had the third largest number of participants, while 'Liturgy, Prayer and Spirituality' had the smallest. However, the importance of prayer as a tool of communicating with God was very much shared in relation to other themes, such as 'Discipleship and Christian Living' and 'Relationships'.

The majority of participants, professed to be close to the church. About 25% of the participants who claimed to be either neutral, not close to the church or do not belong to any church communities, were by comparison, less positive.

What was clear was that this Synodal process had reached out to a wide spectrum of people, including those who have been hurt by the church. Calls were made for the church to be more welcoming and transparent with the people as well as to be genuine with the faithful.

Overall, the responses showed a deep desire to be better Catholics, to have a stronger faith life, a better relationship with God and His people. There is acknowledgement that our faith formation can be better strengthened; as can our church structures and governance to be a more welcoming, transparent and non-judgemental church.

Two polarities emerged, one side citing that the church was too hierarchical and rigid, and needed more flexibility; while the other side wanted to see more reverence and tradition brought back to church as they felt too much accommodation was made to modernism.

Communities were cited in many instances as good structures that can be used to form and build meaningful relationships amongst the faithful, as communities can be a source of strength in the faith journey when properly organised.

Further Discerning of the Responses through the Archdiocesan Assembly

Based on the Synodal Responses submitted, some 500 Catholics across 132 organisations and parishes were nominated to be delegates at the Archdiocesan Assembly held on 10-11 June 2022. All delegates were placed under an oath of secrecy and fidelity to ensure confidentiality. Alongside the reflections, delegates also deliberated on the possible recommendations for the church to consider. More than 900 recommendations were received.

The Current Reality

The community was inspired to discern and recommend the following order of priority:

1. Discipleship & Christian Living
2. Formation & Education
3. Liturgy, Prayer & Spirituality
4. Relationship
5. Governance & Structures
6. Parish Life
7. Evangelisation

Growth in Synodality

There are several points of learning from the initial slow take up of the synodal conversations:

- The awareness that we have among ourselves people who are at the margins and are left out in our consultations in the past.
- It took time for the church to find and build trust with this audience to convince them that their views are important and we want to hear them, however challenging or difficult.
- While the participation across the archdiocese only involved 16,000 people, the posture of a listening church has given enough hope to people to come out to share their concerns and hope for the future of this church.

- Comparing the responses from the synodal conversations and the outcome from the Archdiocesan Assembly, there is a strong need for the many parts of the local church to be in communion with one another in the mission of the church – in oneness of purpose and mission.

The Cultural Image

We want to encourage dialogue and collaboration. Even if the topic is difficult, we are called to listen and respond in a loving way that reflects God's love. We are invited to consider how we can collaborate and build trust with the larger society, and also with other Christian denominations because of our common love for Jesus.

Conclusion

Cardinal-elect William Goh announced that an Archdiocesan Pastoral Council will be formed to take a deeper look at the recommendations and work towards coming up with a pastoral plan by December 2022.

APOSTOLIC VICARATE OF BRUNEI

A SYNTHESIS OF THE SYNODAL REPORT

The most challenging experience of the consultation process was getting the message of the synod to as many people as possible and getting them to participate in the survey. The consultation process targeted specifically Catholics and lapsed Catholics to find out how they can work together to build up the church in the Vicariate and how we can build each other up. During the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, they discovered many Catholics (through food assistance programmes) whom they have not seen in church.

The Process Taken

The Synod Working Team came up with 5 general questions for everyone and six questions for Catholics and six for lapsed Catholics.

The Experience

There was also 7 “Yes or No” type questions for Sunday School children. They were also asked to draw and color what they think Jesus is asking them to do better in his church.

In addition, there is also a separate online survey of other Christian denominations and people of other faiths.

About 275 of the 370 respondents answered the survey directly online (74%). The rest either answered via physical forms or via interview that was subsequently entered online on their behalf. The survey did show that over 73% of the children were not involved in any form of church ministry.

The Feedback

The responses show that the faith of the people is still thriving despite being a small community in a Muslim majority country. Catholics also appreciate the freedom to be able to go to church and to practice their faith relatively freely. However, the majority of parishioners are just in and out of Mass and have little connection with the parish.

There is a sincere appreciation and gratitude towards the three parish priests who serve across the 3 parishes. There is a general recognition that the three priests listen and cater to everybody’s needs, especially the children’s spiritual development. The Vicariate experienced a great sadness and loss with the passing of the late Cornelius Cardinal Sim as a strong shepherd in the community.

The expat community felt very welcomed, at home, safe, and supported by the church and its community and applauds the church support for the less fortunate especially during the pandemic (without publicizing it). A number of them expressed that the Catholic church in Brunei have brought them (expat) closer to God.

The Current Reality

There is a feeling that the community is less tight knit than before and that the church could do with more spiritual programs (in the native languages) for the laity. Adult Faith Formation and Bible Studies programmes are very poorly subscribed due to materials being all in English. There are criticism of clique and the Bahasa and

Chinese communities felt that they are being neglected possibly due to language barrier. In addition, there is a general consensus for a greater effort to analyze and bring lapsed Catholics back to the church.

Whilst the people felt that the church listens to voices of the people and take their ideas and suggestions into consideration, some disagree with this, citing some leaders only serve their own agenda, are arrogant, and lead an inconsistent life. There is a need for some leaders to be more selfless, humble and to listen more attentively to the parishioners. Respondents also recognizes that listening has to be both ways and that the clergy and laity must work together as a team.

Respondents also recognize their gifts and talents, their duty to be charitable and kind, to serve & support the church and the wider community, be good role models, be good parents, lead by example, their duty to evangelize and encourage their children and family, help in vocation discernment and promotion. Some remain Catholic because of family obligations.

Young people felt unconnected with the church as she does not reach out to them enough. However, frustrations with church leaders are not enough to push them to leave or to embrace other religions. As part of the Vicariate's vision, there is a need to look at the young people who will form the future pillars of the church here in Brunei Darussalam, whilst ensuring that they continue to stay with the church and not easily stray from the faith. More time and investment can be put into building a stronger Catholic identity among young people by engaging in open communication on the Catholic faith, especially as they embark on their journey through life as teenagers and working young adults into adulthood.

Growth in Synodality

The Holy Spirit is asking the church to look into more formation, retreats and seminars - for couples, family, singles, mothers, fathers, women and men, children, and young people; and for more social, charitable and missionary/outreach activities. Listening sessions, road shows, and elderly activities were also suggested.

The COVID-19 pandemic has prevented many activities and gatherings to be held. They are thankful for the livestream Masses

and online devotions. COVID-19 has also helped one realize that life is short and reminded us to stay close to Christ.

The church has survived the pandemic and is a very different church today in that it has to keep adapting and changing its ways of spreading the gospel and to serve the parishioners. Children's religious education, meetings and prayer gatherings have gone online. We have also seen an increased participation in online prayers than usual church gatherings. The online daily Rosary prayer has enabled parishioners from the three parishes and beyond to participate.

In conclusion, the Vicariate Synod Working Team hopes that the fruits of the Holy Spirit discerned through this consultation process will lay the groundwork for the church here in Brunei Darussalam to achieve greater synodality.

The Cultural Image

As a church consisting largely of migrants, expatriates and locals, it is seen as a melting pot of different races and cultures. There is a commendation for the strong "spiritual sense of community worship" that was "palpable when compared to that of the Catholic churches in countries that have become somewhat passive. This unity benefits the church as it creates its own identity as a Bruneian Catholic.

Synthesis

The synthesis helps bring together the various diocese / country reports and conversations into one visual framework and narrative:

- a) *Reassessing Leadership & Institutional frameworks* – Poor leadership practices and values in church was highlighted as a potential threat to the church if left unchecked. Across all dioceses, concerns over repercussions for speaking up against authority, clergy and hierarchy was inhibiting progress. There are calls to switch current models of leadership and governance to a more decentralised, collaborative, and empowering model based on the person of Jesus. There were also calls for leaders of the church to address urgent problems

of the people, especially ones frequently raised at pastoral assemblies but have yet to be addressed. There are calls to re-examine existing structures, policies, systems and the church's Canon Law – if they do not support the synodal journey, particularly ones that stifle growth, charisms and talents, and ones no longer coherent with the dioceses vision-mission. There are also calls for Parish council members to be nominated and voted by parishioners, rather than just being appointed by the parish priest. There is a serious need for inter-parish, inter-diocese, inter-ministry collaboration and the reduction of disparity and individuality among parishes and dioceses.

- b) ***Empowering communities & Inculturating our way of being church*** – Vocations to clerical or religious life are stagnant or diminishing, and there is a need to mobilise the larger people of God. Key points on engaging and moulding the young people into leadership roles in their own unique way were raised. A strong call was made to give greater space to women (who make-up a large portion of those who serve in various ministries), young people, the separated, divorced, LGBT community, the poor and indigenous peoples. Many dioceses appreciate the multi-cultural and multi-ethnic presence within their churches and they can tap into the traditional resources and wisdom of their people; like the traditional longhouse culture of dialogue for decision making, and resolving difficulties, as a synodal way of being church. Inculturating the local church will benefit both faith and nation building.

- c) ***Modelling Christ-centered discipleship & Compassion for the margins*** – Christian discipleship invites us to set out as missionary-disciples to all the peripheries of our society. Prayer, liturgy and spirituality are important facets of the faith, and need to be actively cultivated. This will require life-long and on-going formation for all states of life. A number of dioceses used the word to be a compassionate church. This will require cross-ministry efforts and programmes. This effort has to include “pastoral work” with other faith communities. Are we communicating the common goal of

growing the Kingdom of God? We have to open pathways for those in the 'peripheries' to be included in the church community and to bring their experiences and insights. The church is tasked with producing disciples not just members. Catholics are sacramentalised but not often catechised on their mission responsibility. During the Covid-19 lockdown, parishes discovered the presence of Catholics, not seen regularly in church, through relief or outreach programmes. There are in the church community people who are marginalised and are left out in previous consultations. The posture of a listening church encourages people to share their concerns and hope for the future of this church. The need is for compassionate churches, not administrative centres. Even village communities have expressed their desire and willingness to handle ministry works. Many wish to bring forth their identity as disciples through mission and engagement. Young people are struggling with their identity – the challenges of society and demands of economy cause many to migrate, and at times sadly leave their faith. It is a challenge to retain the young, yet alone to grow them. There has to be regular and creative activities to keep them engaged and journey with them. Mission exposure is essential for the young, including to develop their Catholic identity. They need belonging, livelihood and the larger community development to be looked into. There were also calls for clergy and lay leaders to grow in holiness and purity, and discernment based on the Word of God. Some diocese made mention of addressing sexual and financial abuses. The people long for well-prepared and relevant homilies.

CONCLUSION

In summary, for *participation* to grow we need to review our practice of leadership and institutional structures; *communion* invites us to empower local communities to take the lead for mission and service – and inculturate our way of being church locally; and *mission* requires us to build up missionary-disciples with a compassionate heart for the peripheries. All three converge on a conversion of hearts and structures. We are invited to inhabit this space of vulnerability – that is to know the truth of our lives and the life of the church today,

to be listening to the cries of our brothers, sisters and creation, and to the promptings of the Spirit. We are invited to *learn-grow-trust* and go beyond. Faith without such a vulnerability can become rigid and extreme.

We need to put in place new approaches and structures. Traditional vocations and ministries are no longer sufficient. We are called to journey as one people of God: bishops-priests-religious-laity - *inter-connected* in our vocation and mission towards a synodal church.

Mary, the mother of Jesus and mother of the Church, accompanies us in this journey, as she once accompanied Jesus and his disciples - to help incarnate a more synodal church.



Catholic Bishops' Conference of Myanmar (CBCM)

NATIONAL SYNTHESIS

FOR A SYNODAL CHURCH: COMMUNION, PARTICIPATION AND MISSION

INTRODUCTION

The union of Myanmar covers an area of 677,000 square kilometers. It is a land of hills and valleys. The country is ethnically diverse with 135 ethnic groups recognized by the government. Religion in Myanmar is spread across Buddhist with 87.9%, Christian 6.2%, Muslim 4.3%, Animist 0.8%, and other 0.8%.

There are now (16) Archdioceses and Dioceses with (15) active Bishops and (4) retired Bishops. Catholics remain a minority with the estimated numbers of (713,695), Diocesan and Religious priests (1078), Religious men and Women (3052), Foreign Missionaries (8) and Catechists (3339). Most of the Dioceses are very extensive; some have extensive jungle and mountainous areas with extremely poor transportation and practically non-existent telephone or internet services except for city areas.

After several decades of independence (1948), many challenges continue to confront Myanmar and could upset the country's rehabilitation into the mainstream of international politics. The main ones are widespread poverty and underdevelopment, a lack of administrative and institutional capacity, a governing system that continues to lack true accountability and transparency, ethno-nationalist movements that have yet to fully make peace with the state, and political instability.

Catholic Church in Myanmar is a small minority, literally the Biblical "small flock", but promising in her education and socio-pastoral services which aim at the benefit of the whole society.

The Church in Myanmar aims at bridge-building in the midst of a plurality of cultural, ethnic and religious traditions which will further diversify if a nation opens its doors to the worldwide civil society and gets closer links with international networks. Such a "service of unity" may present a promising challenge for the "small flock" of Myanmar's Catholic Church.

To face such challenge, the Church in Myanmar needs well educated, competent and experienced lay leaders and therefore it is necessary to organize formation programme for the capacity-building of the lay people for the specific tasks of dialogue with people of other faiths and beliefs including mediation in conflictive situations. In Myanmar context, it is mainly the task of laypeople to move and to be engaged in civil society organizations.

His Holiness Pope Francis announced the Synod on Synodality on March 7, 2020. He officially opened the synodal process on 10 October 2021 at the Vatican. The Diocesan phase of the synodal process was opened on 17 October, 2021. It was followed by the Diocesan Synodal Consultation that was run from October, 2021 to February-March 2022.

Dioceses across Myanmar invited individuals and groups to reflect on and respond to a series of questions across the Synod of Bishops' three key themes: communion, participation and mission.

Despite the danger of the widespread COVID 19 pandemic and the unstable political situation, members of synodal team of each Archdiocese/Diocese visited communities, groups or individuals and listened to the participants discovering how the Holy Spirit's call to the Church has been understood in the local context. These participants have ranged in age from 18 years to old age including the children; almost equally divided between women and men. The participants come from diverse ethnic groups that characterized our local Church. In certain Dioceses, some parish communities were not accessible due to the restrictions of COVID 19 pandemic and political instability.

We concluded the local consultation stage in February-March 2022. The content that has been gathered over the past five-six months was augmented by other process that has considered the role of synodality in the life of the Church.

Having listened with diligence to the voices of the people of the 16 Arch/Dioceses and attempting to discern the Spirit within those voices and the circumstances of this local Church, we submit the following synthesis based on the results of the National level consultation.

1) COMPANIONS ON THE JOURNEY

In our local Church, the companions on the journey are all baptized catholic faithful, lapsed Catholics, our Christian Brethren and people of other faiths, the disables, the sick and the elderly, people from all walks of life and organizations, regardless of race, color, faith, and other status.

Our Brothers and sisters who live in extreme difficulties (IDPs, Refugees, unjust situations, and desolation) on the account of armed conflict and disaster (man-made and natural) are our companions too.

Those who seem further apart from the Church are some who are married to non-Catholics and their children, divorced and remarried, live-in partners without the benefit of sacraments, orphans and children from dysfunctional families, people with anti-social personality, families under grinding poverty, the sick, the elderly, people with mental and physical disability, people addicted to social media, people with inadequate faith formation, people who have no interest in church activities, some of ex-seminarians, former priests and religious, victims of discrimination, those who are so preoccupied with education and economic gain, people with low self-esteem consider themselves marginalized, Catholics who are barred from certain sacraments, drug addicts, hedonists, materialists, gamblers, anti-faith practitioners, and people who left the church due to bias, partiality, financial abuses and scandals of some church leaders.

We are called to grow as companions under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, by frequent reception of the sacraments with faith and devotion, active participation in the liturgical celebrations, mutual respect and fellowship, solidarity with the poor and the vulnerable, treasuring the legacy of faith of the forefathers and the spiritual leaders, participating in ecclesial movements and associations with love based on the Word of God, participating in faith formation programs and charitable activities, taking part in the cultural festivals, promoting the human resources through the capacity building programs for the faithful, giving recognition and appreciation for the contribution of each member, showing good examples and welcoming attitudes of the respective leaders, and collaborating in carrying out religious duties and responsibilities.

The groups or individuals who are left on the margins are: the divorced and remarried, the ideologically/doctrinally strayed, who decline to take part in church life, arbitrary individuals and groups, the poor, the needy, the uneducated, the elderly, the marginalized in different forms, the prisoners, physically and mentally disabled, those with language barrier, the migrants, drug dealers and users, people considering themselves marginalized due to their past negative experiences, the workaholic, people with personal resentment against clergy and others. These individuals and groups are in some way discouraged from being seen in the Church.

After listening the voices of our people carefully and after having discerned them, we noted the followings:

Our people expressed their concern for those on the margins of the Church. There is a need to include them in Church's life, a need to walk with them as companions instead of talking about them. Through Baptism, we are called to walk together with all regardless of their race, color, faith and other status. Our availability to walk with them as their companions gives us an opportunity to share the Good News through our words and good examples.

We discerned the sense of commitment and responsibility that individuals and communities have for the Church and their desire to contribute to building of the Body of Christ and their desire to care for others and ensure they are enabled to find a home within the Church. We also discerned the impact of secularization in society and the growing perception of irrelevance of religion to individual's lives;

2) LISTENING

God is speaking to us through voices we sometimes ignore. For instance, God speaks to us through the signs of the times, the elderly people, the poor, women, children, broken families, the sick, the marginalized, through our enemies even, and created things. It can also be through silence or natural and man-made disasters, the weeping of the oppressed, the suffering and the vulnerable.

Lay people, especially women and young people, are listened to by counseling with empathy, positive and inclusive participation, giving them equal rights, solving problems together and comforting them with acknowledgment and acceptance of their views. The laity are also listened to through conducting awareness trainings and

holding meetings, helping them when they are in need, making them know their needs, encouraging them, forming ecclesial groups among them, sharing responsibilities, accompanying and giving our time for them. We need to put more effort in this regard.

The factors that enhance the facilitation of our listening are: being attentive to others by inviting the Holy Spirit, humility, patience, friendship, availability, respect human dignity, consideration, cooperation, mutual respect, welcoming attitude, optimism, transparency, moral awareness, compassion, fraternal care, generosity, constructive consultation, acknowledging one's capacities, abilities and gifts.

The elements that inhibit our listening are: corruption and abuse of authority, lack of interest, impatience, language barrier, discrimination, prejudice, radicalism, favoritism, fake news, ancestral religious practices, unpleasant past experiences, poor communication, personal conflicts, indifference, pride and disrespect.

We listen to those on the peripheries by holding annual meetings and praying with them and for them, visiting and comforting them, negotiating with dissidents, helping their needs.

The contribution of consecrated men and women is integrated by pastoral-social activities and praying together according to their charisms.

Some limitations in our ability to listen, especially to those who have different views than ours are: inability to accept the differences, lack of human respect, selfishness, lack of mutual trust and understanding, impatience, language barrier, lack of empathy, lack of time and interest, unwillingness to compromise, inability to articulate well, judgment based on prejudices, pessimism, hatred, hostility, pride and arrogance, low self-esteem, superstition, different family backgrounds, poor education, cultural differences, discrimination and tribalism.

There is space for the voice of minorities, especially people who experience poverty, marginalization, or social exclusion. For instance, helping the vulnerable and providing equitable opportunities, visiting and listening to them on special occasions. But it is for sure that there are areas for which more space should be given.

3) SPEAKING OUT

We receive inspiration and strength from the Holy Spirit to speak out on our faith and the teachings of the church courageously, candidly and responsibly in the church and society. We obtain self-confidence from trainings, gatherings, positive feedback, parental support, invitations from associations, and mutual listening to one another openly. By participating in the celebration of the Holy Mass and listening to the priests' sermons, we come to live the teachings of the Church, of Jesus and a powerful life - to dedicate ourselves to God, to help others, to give a warm welcome, to equally provide people in our organization with an easy way to get to know each other, keeping suggestion boxes, and to give everyone opportunity and courage to speak out.

On the other hands, no occasions for meetings, fear to be blamed and not being recognized, inferiority complex, distrust, misunderstanding, gaps between the faithful and clergy, between the poor and the rich hinder speaking up courageously, candidly, and responsibly in our local Church and in society. Barriers to open communication are having little knowledge, being enslaved despite competence, feelings of shame and embarrassment, restrictions by the community, giving priority to those who are well off and prestigious, authority controlled by one particular person or group, discrimination, one-sided criticism, scandalous behavior and leadership of some religious leaders, and putting their interests always ahead of those of others.

When there is something important to us, we call emergency meetings for discussion, decision and instruction openly with mutual understanding and respect. We can also directly contact with parish priests, responsible persons from pastoral councils, and parish associations within the Church community. With the grace of the Holy Spirit and depending on the situation of the area, we can speak out courageously about truth and love. Social media can also be an effective tool.

We are friendly with the local media to certain extent. Catholic social media outlets such as Radio Veritas Asia in local dialects, the Sower, the CBCM Herald, the *Kyese* (CRCM bulletin), the Gloria News Journal, live streaming from some parishes, the diocesan offices

of social communications (OSC) update us with the Catholic theological, moral and social teachings. And yet due to some difficulties in the Church, the flow of the information is delayed.

On the national level, a spokesperson is chosen by Bishops' Conference and on the diocesan level, by the diocesan Bishop. In general, on parish level, priests and representatives of pastoral council speak on behalf of the Christian community. They are normally chosen by the members of pastoral council in coordination with the parish priest.

People appreciated the opportunity to openly discuss their experiences of the Church and their hopes for the future:

Our people expressed their desire to foster a deeper dialogue with each other and with God to realize the weaknesses and strength of our Catholic community and wider society, they wish to be included in the life of the Church regardless of gender, family circumstances and social status, they desire to engage in inter-religious dialogue, participate in the ecumenical services, express greater solidarity with those who live on the margins and welcome them so that all may call the Church their spiritual home, bring diverse people together respecting diversity of thoughts or views so all feel heard and respected, broader participation in leadership, make building up the Church a priority by becoming less clerical and less focused on rules and protocol, allowing lay people to take on leading roles, building a stronger community by reaching out to children, youth, young adults, and those who have left the Church, provide opportunities for faith formation and fellowship.

4) CELEBRATION

“Walking together” is only possible if it is based on communal listening to the Word and the celebration of the Eucharist.

Prayer and liturgical celebrations inspire and guide our common life and mission in our community to be united and makes our common life and mission clear. Communion of communities inspires and guides us in our important decisions, especially in helping the needy, praying for others and in our doing the mission of Jesus.

Singing and chanting in liturgical celebrations creates more active and alive participation. Prayer is the sources of strength and

energy by which we can resist various temptations and helps overcome difficulties.

Liturgical celebration inspires us to become Christ-centered and to go on a journey together with new initiatives to be evangelizers. We receive abundant blessings in joining celebrations, growing in the sense of commitment, deepening in faith, getting rid of anxiety and preparing for a good death, and listening to the sermons of bishops, priests, consecrated men and women and laypeople. It motivates us to spend more time with God and to make correct decisions in our lives.

We promote the active participation of all the faithful in the liturgy by teaching them emphatically according to their age the importance of the liturgical celebration in the Christian life. We also give them opportunities to participate in the liturgical celebration by asking and inviting them to sing psalms, to read the liturgical texts and to serve the altar.

Inculturation, prayer books and religious songs in vernacular languages and cultural musical instruments, appreciation of regional music and local costumes, participation in reading and singing and regular gathering like saying rosary and monthly recollection, motivation to be responsible person and mature Christians are the ways we use to promote the active participation.

In our local community, when and where lectors and acolytes are not available, those who are well trained and have good reputations in the community, for instance, catechists and other lay people, are given space to participate in the ministries of lector and acolyte.

On-going faith formation and catechesis on the liturgy is needed to encourage active participation of the faithful in the liturgical celebrations and be nourished by it.

We heard the voices expressing the appreciation for the liturgy as the expression of our faith and as the source and summit of the Church's life.

Some faithful yearn for the integration of culture in liturgy making it more relevant and attractive for a given cultural group. The challenges of integration and inclusion of many cultures in the

celebration of liturgy are very complex but need to be addressed as we journey together towards synodality.

There was a call for liturgical texts in vernacular languages in some dioceses even the lay people, especially the catechists and prayer leaders of the communities, can use.

Many people would like to see our liturgies not reduced in clericalism but become more vibrant and inclusive encouraging parishioners to serve in a variety of liturgical ministries such as lectors, acolytes, musicians, cantors and choirs, ushers, extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist.

People reacted negatively to the homilies with emphasis on the sins and failures of the people who are taking part in the liturgy instead of on the joy of being children of God.

5) CO-RESPONSIBILITY IN THE MISSION

Every baptized person, with the lives received from God, is called to participate in the mission of the Church, social and pastoral, in order to spread the good news of the gospel such as serving in families, in small Christian communities, parishes, schools, in societies and among the people around.

Insufficient religious knowledge, especially in regard to their respective vocations hinders the baptized from being active in mission. In addition, some people rely too much on priests, sisters and catechists when it comes to the question of doing mission. In other words, some of them are not really aware that they are missionaries.

Time constraint, poverty, less dedication, poor health, conflict, insufficient support for both material and spiritual needs, materialism, secularism, irresponsibility, influence of Mass media, lack of missionary zeal and encouragement, social exclusion, disunity among the leaders of mission, unhealthy relationship between clergy and faithful, discrimination among races, weaker people in the society, people who are struggling for their lives, negligence and poor leadership of the parish leaders, egoism, growing up in non-Catholic environments, not being able to ponder on the graces of God, less interest in the church matters, limited good examples and little encouragement from the families, drug addiction, regional places with poor infrastructures, living in the insecure areas, spread of the

global pandemic, bias on respective parishes, no warm relationship among the faithful are also some hindrances.

In our mission, we sometimes neglect the poor, the needy, the marginalized, the elderly people, divorced and remarried who cannot receive sacraments, and those who are in remote areas with difficult communication and those who are living among non-Christian majority. Some areas of faith formation, evangelization, and vocation promotion are also neglected.

The community supports its members who serve society in various ways by collaboration and giving financial and material supports, awareness trainings, awarding appreciation certificates, encouragement and by spiritual and moral supports.

The Church helps its members who serve society in various ways: by holding yearly on-going formation on Christian guidance, leadership programs and responsibilities, providing spiritual and financial supports to live out their service to society in a missionary way. The Church, after discerning the capabilities, employs them in the mission field; and networking with those who can assist them.

There are many and various missionary choices when it comes to the question of the mission of the Church. And as different gifts are given to different people, the missionary choices made are also different. Generally speaking, these choices are made by bishop, priests, sisters, catechists and elders of the Christian community.

Depending on local and cultural contexts and diocesan situations, women are given leadership role, but in some places, they are not encouraged.

After hearing our people, we discerned that our people identified the following issues: the co-responsibility and greater empowerment of the laity, a lack of transparency on the part of the hierarchy and the need for greater consultation of the laity, lack of missionary zeal, need for new evangelization taking culture into consideration, all the baptized need to acknowledge their baptismal call to be missionary, the Church needs to rebuild itself in such a way that people of all ages and cultures will come back to Christ; Commitment to those on the margins: the poor, the homeless, the IDP and refugees, the divorced and remarried, the lapsed Catholics, needs to be the primary concern of our evangelizing mission.

The world today is characterized by increasingly rapid and far-reaching changes. Our Dioceses are affected by these changes and the accompanying challenges.

After listening to the participants, we have the following synthesis on Mission. In order to be truly at the service of God's peoples in our Dioceses, there is a need for a new evangelization.

The first need for new evangelization is a renewal of the motivation for mission. The works of evangelization should not be limited to the ordained ministers, religious and catechists. We all need to understand and accept the fact that the name "Christian" is synonymous with "evangelizer." We need to train our lay people and empower them to play an active role in the works of evangelization.

Second, we must recognize and make use of the evangelizing resources available to us. Today, there is the rapid growth of ecclesial movements filled with missionary dynamism. When these movements humbly seek to become part of the life of the local Church and are welcomed by Bishop and priests within the diocesan and parish structures, they represent a true gift of God for new evangelization. In some Dioceses, Church leaders are slow in accepting such ecclesial movements, preferring to stay only with their accustomed organizations and ways. This has resulted in the loss of much evangelizing potential. Thus, there is a need to allow that the ecclesial movements be spread, and that they be used to give fresh energy, especially among young people, to the Christian life and to evangelization.

And thirdly, as the people of our Dioceses are composed of multi-cultural races, we must all work for a true inculturation of the Gospel and the evangelization of our cultures so that there will be no dichotomy between our respective cultural identities and our Christian life. It is of the utmost importance in our Dioceses for people to see that they do not have to abandon what is best in their culture in order to embrace the Christian faith, but that the Gospel affirms the best in their culture while it challenges those cultural elements that dehumanize people.

Based on the above, we can summarize the on-going works of evangelization in Myanmar under four activities:

- proclamation of the Gospel by word, by action and by silent witness of Gospel life lived faithfully among others;

- dialogue with the people of other religions: Buddhists, Animists, Muslims and Hindus;
- inculturation;
- the challenge of the poor and the social issues surrounding them.

6, 7) DIALOGUE IN THE CHURCH, WITH OTHER CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS, OTHER RELIGIONS AND SOCIETY

The people of our country are marked by the diversity and differences by reason of ethnicity, culture, and religion. Being in a multi-cultural society, there is a need for inter-cultural dialogue that entails the sharing of ideas and differences with the intent of developing a deeper understanding of different perspectives and practices.

The Church in Myanmar practices inclusion and openness to the others who are culturally or professionally diverse. Our people acknowledge their limitation in dialogue in many aspects. They seldom meet except there are issues to discuss and occasions to celebrate.

In order to be a good listener and to create a genuine dialogue, everybody needs to open themselves in sincerity, truth and love.

We occasionally hold inter-diocesan gathering for priests, associations and other organizations. We promote collaboration with neighboring dioceses by participating in their festivals, such as Diocesan Marian Feasts and other occasions through traditional music band and cultural dances.

Dialogue between the local ordinary, priests, religious and other sectors should be intensified.

Parishes, educational institutes, catechism classes and families are normally the places for dialogue within our local Church.

Our parishes have many groups and activities that allow parishioners and newcomers to feel welcomed and involved in a community of faith. Our parish planning includes ways to reach and attract children, youth, adults, singles, members of minority communities, widows/widowers, divorced, remarried and has found ways to foster their inclusion. We also have specific ways to reach out to those who are not active or have become less active in our parish.

A few voices raised the necessity of having close and working relationship with other Christian denominations and promote the ecumenical activities. There is a need to establish a working relationship among Christians as well as with people of other faith for the social welfare programs especially during the time of the pandemic and political instability.

In Myanmar, drug problem is a big issue that affects families and communities. Church leaders and leaders of our religious groups can come together to discuss common issues and concerns and promote a joint venture that will advocate in drug abuse prevention and control, and help minimize drug problem.

We welcome the children belonging to other Christian denominations and other faith to benefit from our educational program.

Differences in understanding and interpretation of the Bible and articles of faith are some of our difficulties in regard to ecumenical dialogue. Some members of the other Christian denominations express their desire to receive the Holy Communion of the Catholic Church.

With a large multi-faith population who live around us, there are voices calling the Church to accept and recognize the rich tradition of all peoples and to consider ways to walk and live with them in respect, mutual understanding, harmony, and peace. An emphasis on inter-religious dialogue with our brothers and sisters of other faiths and those with no faith is so important as we live in a very multicultural and multi-ethnic society.

We have less difficulty in having fellowship with other Christian denominations. However, there are some obstacles in dealing with Buddhist religious leaders because of their rules and regulations. In-depth dialogue with the religious leaders of other faith is still far from realization.

In Myanmar, we, together with the other Christians and with the people of other religions, need to pay more attention to the issue of conflict resolution, reconciliation, lasting peace and justice.

There is disbelief or mistrust among the ethnic tribes because of the trauma and wounds inflicted by the past experience.

Sometimes, the diverse peoples in our community come together for dialogue without any discrimination of religions, race, color, class and gender with understanding and patience. However, it has to be done more frequently and creatively in this regard.

We experience the importance of respect, perseverance and understanding in dealing with believers of other religions. We also experience unity with those who have no religious affiliation in some aspects. In addition, we feel that our faith is being challenged when we come to dialogue with other Christians and with the people of other religions.

In political aspects, we co-ordinate with government officials to hold inter-religious prayer meetings for peace - to value customs and respect dignity - to help with each other - to work with Civil Society Organizations that are helping the poor and the needy without discrimination in the face of man-made and natural disasters to support food items and other basic needs.

To make our society a better place to live, there is a need to dialogue with nature and cultures too. There is a need to have a network for creative conversations about how we live, learn and work in dialogue with nature. We are in a community that is not content to simply appreciate the nature; we are concerned with the opportunity the nature affords for a better place to live.

8) AUTHORITY AND PARTICIPATION

Some of our people who participated in the synodal process perceived that synodality is a way of being Church towards which we strive. The Church is always in need of conversion and good leadership. Church's leaders were seen as critical to the formation and promotion of culture in the Church, as in any organization. They should pay more attention to public scandals such as child abuse, corruption and partisan politics.

There is a strong call for a shift in culture in the local Church so that the communion of all the baptized is more evident and their co-responsibility for the Church's mission recognized and given expression in structures and practices especially at parish level. The results of consultation specially asked for the greater inclusion of women in leadership and in ministries, and a culture of welcome to the divorced and remarried.

Some respondents voiced to allow the faithful to contribute to the choice of Bishops, to remove the gaps between the faithful and clergy, leadership that is accountable and transparent, leadership that encourages a greater involvement by the faithful, with all their gifts, in the mission of the Church.

Some respondents said that all the faithful share in the leadership for mission by virtue of their baptism. Some feel blocked from exercising this leadership; some say Church leaders should welcome suggestions on how to exercise leadership.

Leadership that is welcoming, humble and service oriented, mutual listening, united in mission and ready to reach out to the margins, especially at the local parish level, is possible.

Some respondents remark that synodality is providing to be the preferred means of preserving the unity of the Church. In governance and decision-making, synodal way is preferred.

Synodality is a spiritual process in which every baptized person is called to participate actively.

Members of Religious Institutes have much to offer the Diocese and its people as they learn how to grow in communion and participation in the mission of the Church.

Partnership between clergy, parish co-workers (members of parish-based organizations and catechists), and other parishioners leads to co-responsibility for decision-making and enables creativity in liturgy for the community and working out a very effective pastoral plan. Some people raised their voices to have diocesan vision, mission statement and lay empowerment enhancing active participation of all the faithful by welcoming their feedbacks, making evaluation together the strength and weakness of the community, and openness to changes.

Some Church leaders exercise their authority after consultation but still lack skill of true listening to the consultative voice of the people. All dioceses in Myanmar have established in principles the structures mandated by the Church. However, in some dioceses these structures are neither in function nor empowered to function.

Insufficient pastoral care on the part of some Church's personnel paves the way for other religious fundamentalists to proselytize the Catholic faithful on account of poverty and ignorance.

9) DISCERNING AND DECIDING

Some Catholic faithful commented that those priests and Bishops who are willing to share their power through the pastoral, diocesan and parochial councils, are successful in their ministries. Our people are not open enough to conversion and change following the bidding of the Spirit. They are not committed to discerning decisions. They need on-going formation and they need to be updated with the trends of mission in this changing world and circumstances surrounding us.

At diocesan and parochial levels, there needs to be transparency and accountability in financial process and all decision making. Lay people should be well informed about the affairs of the Church and included in decision making thus utilizing everyone's gifts and talents.

Some disappointment was expressed regarding Parish Pastoral Council. The purposes of parish council are not well articulated. It has no mission statement. Parish Pastoral Councils do not exist in some parishes. In such parishes, the parish priest makes all the decisions by himself. When a new pastor takes possession of the office of a parish priest, he abandons existing parish pastoral plan arbitrarily.

Despite discrepancy in views and ideas, possible conflict and disagreement, Church's leaders should be able to play a leading role in realizing the consensus and right decision.

In decision-making, the use of the following methods and processes are encouraged:

- a) We pray relying on the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
- b) Facilitators explain to all participants about the matters concerned for more understanding and clarification.
- c) We listen to the voices of individuals with appreciation.
- d) We have to give the opportunity to everyone in the meeting to speak out and encouraging the rest to listen so as to grow in spiritual discernment.
- e) We work and discuss in groups.
- f) All the discussion points and minutes taken down by the team are decided by the agreement of majority.

10) FORMING OURSELVES IN SYNODALITY

For our good and for the good of the local church community we, with the spirit of synodality, reshape and renew, if necessary, the activities being carried out by those who hold roles of responsibilities in a synodal and systematic way. By this synod, we make ourselves become more capable of journeying together and get closer to the Lord. Moreover, we become more friendly and optimistic to each other and able to listen to individual needs of the community without complaint. We become aware of the uniqueness of the individual.

Communication and networking skills are improved, and new ideas are gained. We learn to appreciate the value of teamwork and collaboration, and have the courage to speak up and get engaged in dialogue. We are able to analyze ourselves for a responsible leadership and to make sacrifices for others. In addition, we are able to correct our weaknesses as needed and to serve all without finding one another's fault.

Synodality entails receptivity to change, formation, and on-going learning.

For the realization of the said elements of synodality, there is an urgent need for the education and formation programmes for clergy and lay people for developing a shared understanding of synodality that is so vital for journeying together in the local Churches. This requires the Diocese to find out a relevant resource person with the skills to conduct such programmes.

Our people have never heard of synodality as a nature of the Church until the opening of this Synod. Formation on synodality is necessary for our local Church to foster synodality, especially when it comes to making decisions, consulting and governing in the Church.

CONCLUSION

After having concluded the national level synodal consultation, we discerned the experiences in the followings:

- National General Situations that are in need of conversion and synodality; and

- Recommendations for further discernment by the Universal Church.

I. National General Situations that are in need of conversion and synodality

Here are some characteristics of the local Church in Myanmar:

The image of being a foreign import results from the fact that the Asian churches are the outcome of missionary activity originating from Europe. The missionary enterprise was at its height during the colonial and imperialistic expansion of Western powers in several Asian countries including Myanmar.

The Catholic communities are small minorities, living and operating within multi-cultural and multi-religious societies. Our Christians, therefore, have a special responsibility to develop new forms of living together with brothers and sisters of other religious traditions.

The divisions within Christianity are strongly felt to be obstacles for giving a credible witness to the Gospel. The denominationally divided missionary enterprise of the Christian churches caused the divisions.

Local Church in Myanmar still needs to depend, in various ways, on the mother Churches in Europe. There is the financial dependency on yearly subsidies to run different institutions and functions. We set sustainability purpose of the Archdioceses/Dioceses as our priority pastoral project and yet it is still far from realizing it.

More than half of the people of our country still live below poverty line as there is lack of job opportunities, the issue of drug affects both the young and the adult, and armed conflicts that hinders development.

Among our people, the true universality of the Christian faith as well as the new way of being Church has still to be discovered and realized.

II. Recommendations for further discernment by the Universal Church

Throughout the consultation process, there are voices calling for action in a number of areas that are beyond the control of the local Church:

Sympathy and compassion towards the divorced and remarried so that they can regain their Sacramental life;

To put into practice the concept of Synodal Church so as to allow the lay people to involve in decision-making in local Church;

To emphasize on the New Way of Being Church having the Bible and communion of communities as the model of Christian life;

To appoint Bishop from the clergy of the Diocese concerned after having consulted the opinions of local Bishops' Conference;

Assistance (financial and personal) be given for the cause of saints who are renowned of holiness of life from among the People of God of the local Church.

As the outcome of this discernment process, the faithful of the local Church in Myanmar will have clarity on the mission of Jesus Christ and an opportunity to respond to him in a new way.



Pakistan Catholic Bishops' Conference (PCBC)

Synthesis Report - Pakistan

1. INTRODUCTION

"For the word of God is living and active" (Hebrews 4:12) and "it has power to build you up and give you your heritage among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32; see 1 Thessalonians 2:13)

This Synthesis is representation of journey started in October 2021 with inaugural Masses all over the world. Diocesan phase of synod on Synodality conducted between November 2021 to March 2022; this is for the first time that People of God around world including Pakistan involved in Synodal process. The People of God - clergy, bishops, Lay, religious people, associations, organizations and movements from all dioceses in Pakistan engaged in this phase with their distinct roles and responsibilities. Reports of the diocesan phase were shared with national contact person and team of Synodal journey in Pakistan for synthesis.

The diocesan phase is characterizing with consultations among faithful by discussions on a preparatory document and questionnaire that Synodal Secretariat of Rome sent to local Churches. Then Pastoral Letter by His Grace Archbishop Dr. Joseph Arshad, President of Pakistan Catholic Bishops' Conference (PCBC) sent to all dioceses. The Pastoral letter was read in all parishes and Churches of Dioceses in Pakistan. Teams from all over Pakistan attended series of consultations and meetings (Online and in-person) for Synodal Journey of shared Mission, a space of listening, discerning and sharing stories towards process of Synodality.

Documents as roadmap also shared for diocesan phase Synodal process, which includes; Guidelines for diocesan focal persons, guiding points for organizing Synodal consultation meetings, Diocesan Pre-Synodal meetings and preparing the diocesan synthesis. Two more documents also shared with dioceses including;

- Guiding Questions for Diocesan Consultations
- Important Guiding Points for Diocesan Consultation Process

Translations of Preparatory Document, "Vademecum" developed in local language for ensuring full participation of faithful

in Synodal journey. These informative documents helped Diocesan Consultations process at different levels of dioceses in all over Pakistan. Then a comprehensive plan was developed and shared with all dioceses for consultation process of the Synodal journey. Dioceses further organized inaugural Masses and events in their respective Parishes. The diocesan consultations were concluded, then members of the Pakistan Catholic Bishops' Conference had period of discernment to listen, what the Spirit has inspired in churches to entrusted to them. Reports were received from all dioceses comprises of views from different minority and marginal groups which were normally remained unheard in society.

Synod 2021-2023 National Synthesis

During the Synodal process Parishes were engaged and focused on ignored groups like women (home maker, domestic Workers, single mother and working women), differently abled person, youth, tribal community, representatives from church groups, migrants, elderly, people who live in poverty and also those Catholics who rarely or never practice their faith, etc.

The purpose of synthesis is to gather and express the fruits of Synodal process in a way that is understandable even to those who did not participate, indicating how The Holy Spirit's call to Church has been understood in local context. The Synodal journey enabled Church more fruitfully to fulfil mission of evangelization.

Synodal journey have opened Church to the fruits of Synodality. Through synod, faithful have called for "The Holy Spirit is asking us to be more Synodal." It is felt that Synodal process should be rooted in dioceses and parishes, the structure and formation should also be introduced at every level in diocesan phase.

There is a consistent call for formation in Synodality, including a better understanding of how it was lived in early Church and developed in different Christian traditions. In spite of many challenges, participation and engagement in process was outstanding I diocesan phase at different levels of church. It allowed people of GOD to share their thoughts and listen to each other. Reports from dioceses aims at listening, discerning and collating them together to give a description of the Synodal process in dioceses in Pakistan.

The Catholic Church in all dioceses of Pakistan has been following the Synodal Process called by Pope Francis, reflecting on

theme "For a Synodal Church: communion, participation, mission" is now covered and completed its diocesan phase.

Diocesan reports were submitted to the Pakistan Catholic Bishops' Conference (PCBC) and team assigned at National level worked on producing "Synthesis" on National Consultation on Synod in Pakistan reflecting on reports received from all dioceses. The discerning of main themes has emerged from the listening and journeying together to provide a path for people of God in Pakistan. This assembly and consultation reflected on first draft of synthesis and inputs from diocesan teams, comments, corrections and refinements on it were made to produce final synthesis of the first phase of Synodal journey. Bishops have been kept well informed of this work and the diocesan phase report was submitted to National Contact Team for consolidation. The final synthesis report was shared with all Bishops for their feedback and inputs on the report prior submission to Synod Secretariat, Rome.

2. BODY OF THE SYNTHESIS

"Let's walk together as a Church with the Holy Spirit" In Pakistan, PCBC invited all faithful to participate in the Synodal journey of consultation with zeal and dedication. In order to be true communion within the Church i.e. all baptized and everyone affianced with Church to participate, each according to his or her function and roles.

2.1 COMPANIONS ON THE JOURNEY

The Holy Spirit invites us to journey together, speak together, think together, dream together and listen to each other about how we entire Church, carry out mission given by the Christ. "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as stewards of God's grace in its various forms". (1- Peter 4:10). The Holy Spirit asks us to take initiatives to be more courageous and responsible. As we journey together through Synod, The Holy Spirit wants to inflame our hearts and equip us with God's grace. "I will instruct you and teach you in way you should go". (Psalm 32:8)

Being in multi-religious context, it is strongly felt that journeying together is an essential need of time, therefore, we are called to be like first Christians, united in Christ, beard all sort of difficulties and

challenges. Likewise, we as a Church need to be firm and strong in our faith to response faith based challenges in our social context. It was a process of discernment, with the help of the Holy Spirit, which involves Catholic Bishops, priests, religious, nuns and laity, each according to the gifts and charisma of their own calling. This journeying together reinvigorates true spirit of togetherness and innovation in life of the Church. It will be inspiration for faithful to give their lives in service of the Church.

- This was a sensational moment for entire Church in the world, including the Catholic Church in Pakistan. Our dioceses have joined diocesan phase in parishes, other commissions and institutes of Pakistan in process of organizing sessions for listening from various communities and special groups.

- First and foremost, it is church, then our near and dear ones, different teams, different professions as Doctors, Nurses, para medical staff, Teachers, and sanitary workers journeyed together. Those who are neglected in society, uneducated, drug addicts rejected by their families and non-believers who are far away from the church.

- It was difficult to engage people who are not regular to go to Church, therefore, meetings were conducted with brick kiln workers, farmers and other neglected groups. After regular contacts and series of consultations, they shared information, their problems and expectations to the Church. In present time community is exploring new ways and opportunities for growth and development.

- This Synodal process in itself was a revolutionary step to engage community taking responsibility and awareness of the Mission of local church. Besides that, Intra / interfaith harmony is also being promoted at all levels. Journeying together created a sense of one family, in which everyone is united in mission with mutual understanding, spirit of cooperation, coordination, acceptance and mutual respect.

2.2 LISTENING

Listening process of consultation exhibited maximum involvement of facilitators and participants. A great deal of commitment has been witnessed. In few cases, the members in consultation meetings were observed to be judgmental. At times, the community shared their opinions regarding immense pressure faced

due to prevailing economic conditions in country. The responsibility of state seemed to be overlooked by them. The community mostly expressed involvement of Church to enhance their economic conditions.

It was a call for all the Catholics and people from other denominations in Pakistan, an invaluable opportunity to share their reflections, in this way everybody learnt how to build communion with one another and carried out our mission in the world. Then men and women participated in process and young people were also encouraged to share their experiences of living with church. In listening, people experienced new closeness to others is being listened to Synod meetings "opened up deep reflection".

- Parishes were actively engaged in all activities conducted during Diocesan phase. Schools across all of the dioceses took part; their submissions of findings and discussions formed a strong element in reports.

- National organizations also organized their own listening exercises and submitted separate reports. A number of parishes and individual submissions were also received; all were taken into account in this synthesis.

- In Religious communities community Superior should also create the opportunities for listening to their fellows in order to maintain peace and harmony in communities. Religious men and women are well listened with respect. Their participation is accepted as well as appreciated.

- Through education we try to help people to stand on their feet, we catechize them and prepare them for Sacraments, we help them to be strong in their faith, and during the Synodal process, and it was strongly felt that there should be increase in numbers of people who can receive help in future.

- Many times voice of the youth is not properly listened due to lack of participation from youth and other factors which kept our Youth away from the Church. Increased opportunities should be provided to youth to make them involved in Church while highlighting their presence has significant importance in the Church. The process of involving youth should be transparent and accessible for the youth of remote areas as well.

- There are many hurdles in our listening including deep rooted social and cultural environment for which tribal Parishes and

Dioceses should work more to engage more people in the Church. It was also felt that more efforts are required to ensure that neglected and marginalized groups have more opportunities to share their thoughts. Most of the times social and cultural environment are ignored and there is very little space for its acceptance.

- Synodal processes need to create enabling environment for listening to those who are left behind for struggle to be heard. Beyond the impact on particular groups or individuals, the joy of experience lay in experiencing how the Holy Spirit is poured out on each person and encountered in spiritual conversation. “Listening and speaking to each other under guidance of the Holy Spirit proved joyful, liberating and encouraging.

2.3 SPEAKING OUT

Being a minority community, living in a state of fear, in preaching and practicing our faith freely in the Islamic society creates huge challenge; religious discrimination, forced conversion, misuse of blasphemy laws, forced and underage marriages, discrimination at work places, poverty, lack of opportunities of education and livelihoods, under representation in politics, inaccurate census of Christians, mob attacks on Churches and Christian colonies. All these scenarios create insecurity among Christians.

- Some opinions and thoughts in people were experienced and observed in Church throughout this Diocesan phase. In various events and sessions in parishes as well as other religious institutions carried out by Clergy, lay, Commissions' Heads, teachers and other people in communities responsible for the Synodal journey.

- People of God remarked on uniqueness of speaking freely and being heard in organized conversations that were open-ended and attentive with guidance of the Holy Spirit. They spoke of how, after decades of church going, they had been asked to speak for first time.

- It was also learnt that Church should be more open to culture and social aspects and enculturation in Church. So, that rapid changing routines of people impacted by information technological advancement do not affect the involvement and participation of the people in practicing their faith along with Church.

- This is the age of social media, which is doing a wonderful service to church and its evangelization as well. At the same time, it

is also used to create a negative impact as well when wrong ideas and theology is presented and spread. Sometimes, people find their way up through wrong channels but the Church has the obligation to provide accurate knowledge about the use of Social Media in Church context.

2.4 CELEBRATION

Many parishes and dioceses made efforts to reach beyond the parish through catechists, and other group members of particular groups: Youth, Women, transgender, survivors of drugs addiction and other issues, homeless as well as Catholics who no longer practiced and left the church and traditional activities of Church in parishes and fruits hardly visible in reports.

During the diocesan discussions there were religious people who took part in consultation process which includes people from other Churches, but seldom from other faiths or denominations.

- People of God has special and designated role in liturgy. There are ministries for them to perform and then today they are more and more encouraged for greater participation as well. The role of catechists and Sunday school teachers is getting more important today.
- Liturgy and Eucharist are source of summit of life of the Church and life of people of Pakistan. They help us grow in faith, find strength from God and keep us going on the way of the Lord. Liturgy and Eucharist generated power of Holy Spirit to guide us take decisions that matter in our lives.
- Amongst the ministries that are becoming more important are the acolytes and lectors. Their role is highlighted now with more stress through seminars and preparatory sessions for them. They are encouraged to be rooted in prayer as well.
- As a community, we experienced unity in the Church, which strengthens our faith and transforms our lives to become more Christ like. By active participation in different programs of diocese (commissions, institutes, schools, parishes etc.), we come across different religious and social realities of life to bridging communities and the Church in journeying together.

2.5 SHARING RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR COMMON MISSION

People enjoyed meetings so much they want to continue these type of meet ups every few months to have a similar session where they talk openly about faith. There was "sadness and disappointment that more people had not engaged" because "the Synodal process provides an opportunity of bringing us closer together and closer to God". Parish priests and catechists were very open, collaborative and empowering. They encourage people to get involved in decision-making and leading locally.

- Mostly priests were supportive during consultation process, but some of them did not participated in parish conversations. Because they were of the opinion that their presence would influence people's freedom to speak. Priests and head of commissions use to normalize their people's perspective with the purpose to create harmony.

- Those who did join groups found that parishioners wanted the priests' presence in process so that he can hear what people are saying and sharing in consultation process.

- Clergy would like their own opportunities to come together to talk about their dreams for the Church.

- Each baptized person is a missionary. They are called to witness the Gospel through exemplary character. They can do it with being honest with responsiveness entrusted to them. By embracing religious life, they share in the mission of church.

- Selfishness and worldly oriented lives are hurdles to acceptance of mission, formation of lay missionaries. Our lay faithful who are involved in social work are to be encouraged from the church platform. We need to pray for them and support them with our presence in their work.

Synod 2021-2023 National Synthesis

- To make them missionary we can equip them with necessary skills to be a missionary. We can share with them responsibilities suitable to them and we can trust them. There are new opportunities of involvement of lay faithful in pastoral and Catechetical activities of the local Church. There are new opportunities of promotion of local congregations and lay movements within the local Church.

- There are new opportunities of engaging neglected groups through pastoral care e.g. women, non-practicing Catholics, children,

persons with disabilities, drug addicts, transgender. There are new opportunities of cooperation between the ordained minister and religious working within particular parishes in the local Church. There are new opportunities for youth through arranging classes for preparation of Competitive exams and vocational trainings to prepare them to compete in society to take higher positions in government / private institutions.

- The need for revival of family value system was deeply felt as society is shifting towards being self- centered after technological revolution. Especially, mobile phones which have revolutionized communication but it has also made individual physically disconnected from social interaction. Physical activities of children have been limited as video games have taken the place of sports which is leading to many behavioral changes in people, especially children and youth.

- Divorce and second marriage in community is prevailing issue. This is mostly due to being unconscious while their vows are taken receiving the sacrament of matrimony. Another reason couples doubt each other's fidelity. Families are more materialistic and do not pay attention to the blessing they have received through the sacrament of matrimony and companionship of each other.

2.6 DIALOGUE IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY

We created openness to listen to people, so we started dialogue at grassroots level starting from parish and communities, dialogue with poor, cultures and religions. Sometimes priests get more involved in discussion and parishioners think that they are controlling and insensitive. So, Priests acted in a way that parishioners felt that Church belongs to all having shared responsibilities, not alone to Priests or parishioners.

- We as a church need to be opened to others for dialogue. Today we need to be careful of fanatic groups, which is creeping in our churches as well as where we close doors and windows of church for others, for other religions and other denominations.

- We need to listen to people, especially other denominations so that there could be one flock and One Shepherd.

- Females were taking keen interest in Synodal process and opportunities must be provided to them.

- We have reached to those corners and experienced a beautiful Synodal journey.

- When we deviated from teaching of the church on ecumenism and start implementing our own version of church teaching, we ourselves become a hurdle in process of dialogue with other churches.

Synod 2021-2023 National Synthesis

- Youth focused initiatives in development of community and decision making should be welcomed at all levels. Engagement of youth as volunteers and youth leadership role should be encouraged in church.

- In a challenging environment of our country, Education is indispensable for obtaining equal opportunities by participating in open competition to live with dignity and respect. In modern day society we need to adopt a pro-active, constructive, positive, meaningful and inclusive approach in use of different mediums of communication. We need to work hard for social and spiritual formation of our youth; being closer to them, to understand their needs and problems and involve them more in the life of Church.

- While going through religious extremism, burning of Churches, mob / suicide attacks, bomb blasts, this leads to Christian community under great state of fear. Lack of pastoral care (few number of Churches, Priests and Catechists) for people who live in a far flung areas creates a vacuum in life of faithful which causes great threat to the Church. These threats force faithful either to join other denominations or covert to other religions.

- The Synodal process provided us opportunities to think and discuss how the Church can grow together with people in challenging environment.

2.7 AUTHORITY AND PARTICIPATION

Synodal church is a participatory church where authority is shared. Authority is to share as church advises.

Team work is need of hour and we are to encourage it with forming groups in parishes and sharing responsivity with them.

- Vatican II has asked us to build a participatory church not only in liturgies but also on levels of administration.

- Work needs to be done on developing second line leadership in our churches. Leadership not only from clerical circles but from

people of God as well. Encouraging lay faithful and entrusting them with responsibilities can help the cause of Synodal church.

- The experience of journeying together bears fruits such as living in joyful co-existence, forgiveness, strengthen relationships through sharing and listening to one another, tolerance and sensitivity towards the needs of others.
- Through effective participation and involvement, community is playing a vibrant role in the development of the Church with sense of ownership that they are the Church. In local context, majority of Christians are from the low segment of society, therefore fruits of continuous hard work, patience, persistent efforts and strong faith can urge us to be a more participatory Church.

2.8 ECUMENISM

Mainly in case of foremost category Young people, Women, and different denominations were also represented by others as effected or marginalized, because of either church teaching or because the Church is observed to lag behind society's recognition of these particular groups' equality and value in society.

- Such groups are speaking on behalf of caution and discernment are needed in seeking to understand the nature of exclusion and its causes in communities.
- The primary call in reports is for greater attention to be paid by People of God to these groups. The place of women within Church was cause of "passionate, repeated and strongly expressed concern" in the synod listening.
- Different initiatives should be initiated for the betterment of the people following the ecumenical approach as journeying together.

2.9 DISCERNING AND DECIDING

Listening, discussions and dialogue are factors that can lead to discernment and decision making in Churches.

The Holy Spirit inspires all decisions in Church. Being open to prompts of the Holy Spirit.

- Decision making also involves consultation and participation. They can be done through pastoral consultation at parish level and diocesan levels as well. Our decision making needs to address issues related to signs of times.

- Decision making and consultation go hand in hand. All decisions and especially concerning people of God need rigorous consultation and they should reflect the authentic teachings of church. We are inspired to realize that joy of living in communion with one another reveal a true spirit of unity in diversity.
- We believe that Christian teachings are basic human values therefore, in local multi-religious context, we are not converting others but sharing with them Christian values in human language.
- These experiences invite us to make decisions with mutual understanding and in light of the Holy Spirit. These bitter experiences teach us to learn from our past mistakes and take corrective measures to overcome shortcomings. It helps us to face all these challenges with courage and to open new horizons, so that we could work collectively as one flock under leadership of our Shepherd.
- Accountability and transparency should be given priority while decision making. Being rooted in God and being open to prompts of Holy Spirit can help us in decision making at all levels.

2.10 FORMING OURSELVES IN SYNODALITY

Synodality is a gradual process. To achieve it, we need to rigorously work on it. Walking together is ultimate goal of church today and we need to renounce all forms of egoism, nepotism and complexes both superiority and inferiority.

- The idea of participatory church advocated by Vatican II would be road map for forming people for synodality, which requires ownership and ownership requires complete knowledge of stewardship. Ministerial priests must form the baptismal priests in becoming full, active and conscious participant in the Church in its governance and liturgical celebrations.
- Church should provide opportunities to those who are facing difficulty while engaging them for consultations. As these people are facing many problems, society is ignoring them and if they come to church; face discrimination, "Why a transgender is in Church"
- There is a less knowledge about the Church and Clergy amongst people. However, Catechist and Priests are contributing towards community engagement with Church by providing opportunities to faithful in community (Especially Education sector). Every single individual should play their role to tackle problems in communities and Church.

- The path to a Synodal Church requires reviewing and removing obstacles to listening and participation of people in Church.
- There is need to inspire new methods of prayerful listening and discussion, as well as formation in Synodal practices and methods. It must be continued in Church, which will lead us to bright future and listening one another and Holy Spirit. We must be open to all and do not ignore anyone.
- This is also the time to establish or consolidate mechanisms for listening to overcome distance between church governance and life of faithful.
- Church must be a beacon of light for all and salt to earth. We are not owners, but responsible for Church service. We should emphasize more on neglected and abandon ones.
- The Challenges will keep on coming but the Church has to respond in these Challenges, according to present time and situation.
- In Baluchistan particular and in Pakistan in general, there has been great examples of involving females (Nurses and Doctors), nuns and others for Synodal journey for maximum sharing and participation.

3. CONCLUSIONS:

On completion of the Diocesan Phase, the people said that Synodal process should continue even if we have completed the phase. People of God, Catholics and non-Catholics having successfully completed first phase of the synod 2021-2023. Bishops and teams passed their heartfelt gratitude for taking the Synodal process serious, accepting the given responsibilities and putting their efforts.

Even though, the reports acknowledge the progress made by the Church in addressing issue, they call for the Church to be honest and transparent to listen better and more often to know the actual thoughts and opinions of People in Church. "Victims and survivors of different sort of abuse, youth, women sufferings' and transgender facing discrimination in communities, these groups believe that listening is a flawed and pointless exercise unless transparent opportunities for dialogue are created, and difficult conversations take place". As this was an opportunity for listening each other, especially those people who always left unheard or ignored in Church.

Synod reports confirm centrality of the Eucharist in lives of Catholics, which is often considered in same breath as "communion" in broader sense.

The love of Eucharist goes hand in hand with passionate care for parishes, schools and Catholic institutions, and a felt desire for these to develop stronger bonds of belonging and solidarity. Now synod asks us to make good that truth. The journey calls us out into the deep, into a more active faith stirred by an attentive listening to the Holy Spirit.

In reports, it proves that its call for people to be allowed to express faith and commitment to the Church through greater involvement along with a fear that they do not always feel welcomed valued or encouraged to do so in the Church in front of people of God. There was demand from people for continuation of the Synodal journey, that reflects a strengthened relationship between priests and lay faithful of collaboration and co-responsibility, and for structures that facilitate dialogue, discernment and participation in decision making processes, while respecting that decision-taking is task of designated authority.

One of the discussions, was expressed key decisions shaping life of the Church at all levels need to be rooted in processes of discernment involving as many as possible. There were also discussion on plans for local synods and assemblies, and there are proposals from many reports announce diocese-wide conferences over next year to reflect on fruits of the synod listening, stressing that such reflection should not need to await the outcome of synod's conclusion in Rome in October 2023.

This was a long process; dioceses presented all the findings from ground level. The life, spirit and enthusiasm showed by people have reflected a passion and encouragement for all in one journey. We must remember this; we have done homework but still a lot to do for community.

There were concerns of youth for our future; Now, Holy Father, again providing us opportunity, it is an extension of Youth Synod, what direction on which He is taking us all as participatory Church. H.E. phrased "Journey to Emmaus" this is the journey of Jesus, how people recognized Jesus.

We also provide rights to women and youth, because without youth we are nowhere, they are future of Church can bring change in Church. This forum is providing the opportunities.

We are still at marginalized level and more towards materialistic for ourselves. Reflection on sociology is very important, family cultures have been changed and now it is important to work on families in society, such changes becomes after every twenty-five years and world changes after every fifty years.

We have street children and street people; it is a chance to evaluate ourselves, how can we be vibrant. The church in Asia asked to read it in its own context and then offer suggestions and observations to General secretariat for Synods of the Bishops, so they can prepare the 2nd Instrumentum Laboris, that will be brought to Synod probably that will be helping in 2023. So, this is a phase of journey for the Continental phase, of consultation.

Archbishop Dr. Joseph Arshad, President of PCBC said "Communion, Participation and Mission" naturally communion is very important, participation is important and the mission will continue ever after us. We are present and discussing about challenges faced by the Church in current time. I think we have contributed, talked and shared each other a lot, as committee a lot to do, work with FABC.

Special Thanks to all Diocesan Contact Persons, National Contact persons and Bishops for taking keen interest for the Synodal Journey at Diocese level. It is also commendable that People in consultation process shared openly at Parish, Diocese and National Level Consultation process about the theme of Synodal journey "Mission, Communion and Participation".

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Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP)

Salubong
(Welcoming Encounter)

SYNODAL REPORT
AUGUST 15, 2022

SALUBONG (Welcoming Encounter)

Jesus is risen indeed! Our synodal consultations in the Philippines were an experience of Easter. Like the traditional Filipino *Salubong*¹ which we celebrate annually on Easter dawn with a reenactment of the encounter between the Risen Lord and grieving Blessed Mother, our own encounters became an experience of new life. Somehow our strongly Marian Filipino spirituality has drawn inspiration from the Gospel narratives about the Easter encounters between the disciples and the Risen Lord. We have indeed experienced Jesus alive in each other, and the veil that keeps us from recognizing him has been lifted. We have seen the Lord and this is our story.²

PAGSALUBONG (Welcoming)

The act of reaching out to those in the peripheries mimicked the *Salubong* ritual of the women and men meeting each other. We were coming from different directions and yet we welcomed one another. In one diocese, the bishop personally wrote a letter of invitation to the sectoral groups. Many organized sessions per sector, while others preferred multi-sectoral gatherings giving due attention to different voices in the community. Some conducted the consultations

¹ In most parishes in the Philippines, the Easter *Salubong* begins with two processions coming from opposite directions: one with a group of women accompanying the image of the sorrowful Mother covered with a black veil, and the other with a group of men accompanying the image of the Risen Christ. The much-awaited main event in the encounter is the lifting of the black veil of the Blessed Mother by a child acting as an angel and singing the *Regina Coeli*.

² See attachment 1 for the Synodal Process adopted by the Philippine Catholic Church.

alongside the preparations for baptisms, marriages, and the other sacraments. Although most dioceses reported that the majority of the parishes succeeded in conducting orientation sessions, there were some that mentioned the disinterest of a few. In one diocese, twenty six of the forty one parishes did not attend the orientation sessions, expressing that it was just going to be another activity from above and that nothing concrete would emerge from it anyway.

Those who participated ranged from one to fifteen percent of the total Catholic population of the parish and/or diocese while a few required thirty to fifty percent participation. Most of them consulted different sectors, with one diocese reported reaching forty five sectors in all. Some dioceses relied on the members of their ministries and regular Sunday Mass-attending faithful as respondents. A combination of different approaches were developed by most dioceses: survey questionnaires, one-on-one interviews, FGDs (focused group discussions), house visitations, and online sessions among many others. Questions were translated, put in context, and simplified as well as pilot-tested. One parish reimbursed the sectors' foregone day's labor since they lost their income when they attended the consultations.

Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, our people met Jesus in one another through the synodal consultations with "their hearts burning within them," as they shared to one another what happened on the road. The encounters with the different sectors were faith experiences, deepening people's love for God and strengthening their desire to follow Jesus' compassionate love. Growing in empathy and acquiring the spirit of consultative judgement, we learned to embrace the "poorest of the poor." There was a touching story of a team that visited a remote area, which unknowingly turned out to be a 'rebel community' (where military and rebel groups engage in violent gunfights). They continued their session, which became one of the most enriching encounters they have ever had.

As people shared and listened to one another's experiences and insights, it was the Holy Spirit who spoke through each one of them. The communal process was characterized by listening and discerning at every step – from tabulating to collecting data, to categorizing, writing, and validating them with the people they interviewed. Some parishes convened separate assemblies with sectoral representatives; these consultations included other stakeholders whose task was to

present to them the initial results as well as to engage them in a deeper reflection on the data. Some involved only the parish synodal teams, while in other dioceses, only the diocesan synodal team unpacked the results for deeper reflection together with writers who were tasked to develop their ten-page synthesis reports. Some collected the stories and included them as an appendix, while a few others integrated the stories in the main body of their report. There were a few dioceses that made use of quantitative research designs. Some included the tabulation of the responses in the attachments.

Food and fellowship were always part of the experience. From the initial gathering to every consultation in the parishes and chapels, there was “*salu-salo*” (sharing of food). As it was also an opportunity for invited participants to enter the church premises, it became an opportunity for them to get to know parish/diocesan services as well as groups they can be involved in as members. Many remarked how the consultations positively affected the celebration of the liturgies. Special liturgies were also created such as the lighting of synodal candles, which were used in all the consultation meetings held. One diocese ended the consultation with a three-kilometer walk which highlighted the significance of a church walking together.

There were various reactions to the process. In some dioceses where similar consultations have already been done in the past, people were not surprised as they willingly participated and got engaged all throughout. Majority of the respondents appreciated the encounter and the opportunity to share and to listen. Some expressed confusion regarding the wide spectrum of synodality on account of the questions the participants were being consulted about. With very little orientation on the purpose and goal of synodality, participation in some of the assemblies was not as active and as dynamic as expected.

Participants continued to share the fruits of their synodal journey. As an exercise of leadership and humbled to be chosen to listen, they have been empowered to contribute to building a more synodal church. Some confessed feeling ashamed after listening to people’s stories and their complaints about the church, especially about the clergy. Others felt pressured because after listening, they felt responsible to take action. They realized the challenge of breaking down power structures to hear the real cries of the voiceless. As they climbed mountains, crossed rivers, and built bridges to reach out and

to embrace “the least, the last, and the lost,” they grew in their understanding of being church. We are church together with them!

SALUBUNGAN (Meeting of Hearts and Minds)

The synodal process (parish, diocese, metropolitan and national) was indeed a *salubungan* - a meeting of hearts and minds. In the Philippine setting, when one says “*Nagkasalubungan na kami*” it means after having been through conflicting moments they have finally found a common ground and can now move forward together. Although diverse in personalities and backgrounds - socio-political, cultural and religious, as well as different in theological mindsets - the spiritual conversations brought forth joyful as well as painful realizations about our church’s life and mission. It took a lot of courage to face the shadows of the Philippine Church experience! But like the Easter *Salubong* ritual, how joyful Mary was as her black veil was removed and she was allowed to see her Risen Son face to face! We believe Jesus stayed with us and spoke to us in our attempt at communal discernment, and as we listened to one another.

Below is our ‘Emmaus walk’, what we were discussing as we walked along the synodal roads at the diocesan, metropolitan, and national levels. On the pathways where we stumbled (we were not who we proclaimed ourselves to be), Jesus gently ‘explained the Scriptures to us’ prophetically pointing out to us where we missed the ‘signs of the times’. Jesus’ gaze on our humbled countenance helped us also to rise up and walk on new pathways.

Companions on the Journey

Majority of those who were consulted were the usual Church leaders - clergy, religious, lay leaders, members of church organizations, ministries and commissions, and the BECs (basic ecclesial communities). The synodal teams (diocese/parish) made efforts to reach out to those who are in the ‘existential peripheries’ - those whom we do not see or engage within the usual church activities. Representatives from the sectors were consulted.³ One

³ The sectors include the following: LGBTQ+ (lesbians, gay, bi-sexual, trans-gender, queer), farmers, fisherfolks, PWDs (persons with disabilities, including deaf mute), PDLs

diocese called all those who were consulted as '*kamanlalakbay*' (companions in the journey).

All the dioceses expressed that the consultation was a 'synodal moment' because for the teams, it opened up insights about a life and a world they did not know about. Of the people who had been interviewed, especially the sectoral representatives, many said it was their first time to be consulted and to be listened to. Someone said "*Nakikinig talaga ang Obispo sa amin!*" ("The Bishop is really listening to us!") It made them feel they belong to the church. They believed such experiences of companionship and belongingness were the fruits of the spiritual conversations (some followed *lectio divina* or Bible-sharing methods) which were employed in the consultation. They said that it was a no-holds-barred conversation, and they felt free to express their hurts and wounds (especially those that had been caused by Church leaders, clergy and lay alike) as well as beautiful moments of grace / experience of God especially in their most difficult moments.

"Kasali pala kami!" ("We belong!") Many of the respondents perceived communion to be associated with liturgical celebrations and pious devotions. While many regarded those who are baptized as companions, the mention of BEC and stewardship program, life groups, as well as "*daupang palad ng mga sektor at taong simbahan*" (hands linked between the sectors and church pastoral ministers) indicated that only those who are engaged in ministry or are members of task groups and associations are considered as companions. However, in areas where Catholics are a minority the

(persons deprived of liberty), government officials, *barangay* (village) leaders, politicians, single parents, unwed mothers, cohabiting couples, people recovering from substance abuse and other forms of addiction, youth, students, teachers, school staff, public transport drivers, laborers (miners, construction workers, carpenters, ranch workers), daily wage earners (vendors, laundry women, candlemakers, etc.), media people, medical frontliners, members of other Christian denominations, IPs (indigenous peoples), OFWs (overseas Filipino workers) and their families, inactive Catholics, those who have left the Catholic church, women, street children, street families, those afflicted with HIV-AIDS, other religions (especially Muslims), migrants, elderly, broken families, atheists, CICL (children in conflict with the law), children with special needs, policemen, *barangay tanods* (village watchmen), civic organizations, NGOs (non-government organizations), undocumented people, business people, house helps. See attached graph.

parishes extended their gaze towards other Christian denominations and nominal Catholics, as well as the Muslims and IPs (indigenous peoples) as their synodal companions. They came up with different levels of engagement as Church – interreligious, ecumenical, political, and social. One suggested that their diocesan profile reflected different sets of people to journey with depending on their localities. In one part of the region of Mindanao, the eastern vicariates were less confrontational and their involvement was limited, while the central and the western vicariates tended to be more open and aware of socio-political realities even from the grassroots level.

“Marami ang nakikilakbay, ngunit mas marami ang naiiwan” (“Many are journeying together but many more are left behind.”). Many dioceses acknowledged the failure of the church in general and the priests, in particular, to journey with their flock and to reach out to so many people, especially *mga nasa laylayan* (existential peripheries), the poor, and the marginalized. It has also been noted how the lifestyle of the priests either inspires or turns people off. In the words of one of the participants, *“Bigyan nyo naman kami ng pari na handang bumabad sa aming kalagayan!”* (“Please give us priests who are willing to immerse in our situation!”). Some have pointed out that their priests are becoming too secular, hooked to vices, engaged in business, own vast properties, and use parish funds for every personal need. Such priests, they say, are offensive to people and drive them away from the church. On the other hand, priests who live a rich pastoral ministry, not in love with money or properties, have no vices and celebrate Mass with dignity, deliver good homilies, inspire people, and draw them to the Church. The same comment is noted with regard to lay leaders.

“Hindi kami kagayak!” (“We are not of their kind!”) Many of the underprivileged and those who were marginalized in society felt that they were also left out in the church. As the church is seen to be for the rich, the economically poor as well as those who are deprived of social acceptance are being left out. Dioceses with Catholics as minorities felt however, that they can identify more closely with those who were marginalized and persecuted, and for this reason they embodied a Church of the poor and those suffering from bombings, intimidations, and persecutions.

“Ayawan na!” (“We quit!”) Those who were demoralized or felt excluded have left the church and no longer find the need to be part of it. Another very painful reality that makes people leave the church are some priests who have committed sexual abuse and those who have sired children. They have wounded not only the reputation of the Church but also the credibility of their fellow-priests. Some male parishioners have gone to the extent of prohibiting their children or their wives from being actively involved in church ministries and activities presumably to protect them from abusive priests. But sometimes it can also be a mere assertion of patriarchal authority. Many found the pastoral statements and programs of the church irrelevant to their own concerns; to these they responded with indifference.

Listening

The structures for listening are: social media, church radio station, pastoral visitation by priests and bishops, pastoral assemblies, BECs, prayer gatherings, catechism and home visitation. The Eucharistic celebrations and liturgical activities are foremost among the occasions where people hear the voice of God. Some also say they hear God more during times of hardships, poverty and calamities.

Those who have expressed that they have been listened to, especially during the synodal consultation sessions, were grateful and felt blessed because *“naipadama ng simbahan na mahalaga kami”* (“the Church has made us feel that we matter”) and they have been given the opportunity to understand what it means to be church and to actively participate as a member. It is for this reason that many had felt that the “synodal journey had left them with a treasure.” Social action programs were also identified as spaces for listening that lead to concrete responses to the needs of the poor. Among them, programs such as housing, scholarships, physical and mental health care are sound indicators. In relation to this, house visitations and immersion activities allowed voices to be fully heard and listened to. Listening is facilitated when church leaders open pathways to encounter and to welcome others. Among the examples given are the establishment of mission stations in grassroots communities, willingness to dialogue regarding difficult and challenging issues like those of the LGBTQ+, and the sincere efforts to ensure a balance

between “administration of the sacraments, evangelization, and care of the flock”.

However, many also regard “poverty as a major obstacle,” and “distance as a hindrance” to listening to one another. They perceive the ‘Church’ to be *malayo* (distant) from the faithful especially from those in the existential peripheries. Among the factors that are seen to block the Church from fully listening to one another are language, cultural diversity, lukewarm acceptance of those who are stigmatized in society, such as the LGBTQ+, single parents, separated families, etc., as well as negative attitudes like pride, greed, domination, indolence and unreasonableness, selfishness, intolerance, sloth, self-righteousness, lack of interest, self-pity, and close-mindedness. Likewise, inadequate responses to their needs further distance the Church leaders from them; so also does the “unfelt presence” of those in the peripheries, and the lack of “visible signs of concern.” Also cited were situations when Church leaders do “not represent the voice of the people, such as in issues that have to do with corruption, political dynasties, gambling, illegal fishing, etc.” These indicate their unwillingness to listen fully.

There is no proper channel or structure for the people, especially the sectors, to be listened to. It was also reported that listening has been selective and with favoritism, listening only to those who are close to the parish (like the pastoral workers, the members of organizations) but especially the rich. Someone asked “if we do not listen to the excluded, are we even listening to God?” Furthermore, there is a need to evaluate existing spaces of dialogue and discernment in the church. Some lament over “consultations that are devoid of real conversations,” and meetings as mere venues for “information dissemination whereby the lay are heard under the guise of consultation but in reality, it is only a means for ratification and immediate execution.” Communal discernment is not a common practice in many dioceses and parishes.

Speaking Out

Some respondents shared that there are spaces in Church life that allow people to speak out, like the weekly BEC meetings and prayer gatherings. Regular pastoral programs such as *Alay-Kapwa* (Offering for the Neighbor), the annual *tontongan* (in Ilocano,

dialogue or discussion), ministry meetings and parish as well as diocesan assemblies. While BEC meetings are opportunities to speak out, much also depends on the capacity of the facilitator/leader. The PPC (parish pastoral council) meetings are also venues for speaking out as all church groups are represented. Occasionally, non-officers & non-members are allowed to join and speak up. Lay leaders, the educated, and those who are active in the church, have the courage to express themselves.

In the synodal consultation, participants shared freely their joys, pains, dreams, frustrations, and hopes in and for the church. Some among the sectors were timid or even afraid, or lacking in confidence to speak up because of their social status. Openness took some time as people were not used to the opportunity that was being given to them to speak. It was also important to reorient the facilitators about their listening role since they were used to lecturing.

The consultation made it possible for the unheard voices to be heard and for people in the margins to share their views regarding the Church. It also gave Church workers the opportunity to raise their concerns regarding “work overload, the inadequacy of operational resources, discrimination, health issues, retirement security, attitude problems, allowances, and infidelity of priests to their vows, especially to chastity.” But Church pastoral workers also became aware of their “maintenance mentality” and were challenged to move out of their comfort zones. Dialogue with local government officials was most welcomed. They said the Church only engages with them when they commit mistakes; they don’t feel that the Church has anything to do with them.

Some dioceses reported that there is a gross lack of dialogue. They reported that they were only listening to Church leaders, especially the priests. When the poor speak out or try to voice an opinion, they are simply ignored or set aside as unimportant. Many people feel that only the donors and benefactors (dubbed as the “owners of the church”) have a voice or are entitled to speak out. There are many references about the Church focusing only on collections and contributions but failing to initiate and implement pastoral programs that include meaningful encounters and dialogues.

There are many blocks that prevent authentic dialogue from happening: fear of being judged, feelings of unworthiness and low self-esteem rooted in the lack of understanding of the Christian faith, *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude) and connivance, bribery, as well as blind obedience to authority. Politics and gossiping severely divide families. Some people shared that it is better not to speak out (“no talk, no mistake”), while others, the persuasive ones or the ‘oppressors’ among Church leaders, tend to dictate what others have to do.

Certain sectors expressed their concrete needs and grievances and challenged the Church to fight with them and for them. A farmer questioned why the Church is not doing anything to address the increasing price of fertilizers and farm implements. A fisherman lamented that the seashores and beaches were desecrated because of ongoing coastal road construction. The perceived politicking of the clergy especially in the recent elections gave rise to contrary feelings and opinions among those involved. IPs (indigenous peoples) see themselves as “objects of missionary help” but they are neglected in the area of evangelization. The church’s inattention to the environment also indicates its lack of understanding on the plight of the indigenous peoples and their needs. In one diocese, they have appealed for the church to “oppose destructive activities like open pit mining and coal-powered plants.” Church and *barangay* (village) should also speak out about conflicts among tribes, between military and NPA (the New People’s Army, an insurgent group), and also those caused by drunkenness and gambling.

For the Church to facilitate people’s capacity to speak up or speak out, there is a “need to explore helpful mechanisms to encourage honest and open exchange of views, to be proactive while keeping all informed, engaged and empowered in all matters of decision-making.” In one diocese, children and youth were able to speak about the Church through images or illustrations. The members should also be able to motivate one another to speak up by entering into conversations with a humble heart and open mind. Among the poor and marginalized, there is a need on their part to feel that they are valued and trusted. More than anything, Church members should “walk their talk”. In challenging situations of oppression and injustice, especially when people are in danger or

they feel powerless, they feel the need to ask the guidance of the Holy Spirit and support one another in speaking out the truth.

Celebrating

People appreciated the meaningful celebrations of the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist. They felt the need to be enlightened and nourished spiritually and to find strength in facing challenges such as vices and conflicts, and making decisions. These inspire humility and charity and strengthen our feeling of belongingness in the family of God, as well as our desire to keep our own families together. People have also become more used to online Masses and liturgies which also present many new opportunities and new methods of facilitating God-encounters in the community. Several dioceses also mentioned the gift of popular religious practices as important ways of experiencing God.

Participants are grateful for the well-prepared liturgies and homilies of priests, especially when priests celebrate Mass in the far-flung areas of the diocese. There was a touching story of a priest washing the feet of the members of the family left behind by a suicide victim on Holy Thursday. He did so especially after the synodal team had listened to their story and had discovered that the one who committed suicide did so after another parish priest did not appear four times to his supposed visit to the family.

Whether face-to-face or virtual, worship remained as the best venue for experiencing synodality. However, the consultations called for priests to reevaluate their understanding and formation regarding the celebration of the sacraments as people have observed that they are merely “dispensers of the sacraments.” The homilies of the priests have received a lot of negative comments as well as some attitudes that hindered participation (e.g. pulpit abuses like scolding people in public, criticizing parishioners, engaging in character assassination of fellow priests during homilies). Unclear policies regarding the arancel system for the celebration of the sacraments, funeral Mass for suicide victims among many others, tend to keep people away from the church. In a diocese affected by the bombings of churches by religious extremists in the area, people live in a “threshold of vulnerability,” and their trauma keeps them from attending Mass in the Church.

The BECs have been important spaces for building up the life of worship of the baptized, through regular Bible-sharing, popular devotions and other community liturgies, like the Service of the Word led by extra-ordinary ministers on Sundays in places that cannot be reached by priests.

However, only a very small portion of the baptized community are actually attending Sunday Masses, and an even smaller number participating in other religious programs or activities, which are available only in the main parishes. The elderly are usually unable to attend Mass in the parish center. Moreover, there is a clamor for more meaningful, new and inculturated approaches in the Church's evangelization efforts and not to be content with rituals and methods that have lost their relevance and attractiveness. There is a clamor to provide the sacraments with no charges. In the BECs, the communities contribute for the stipend of the priest when he comes to preside over Masses. They hope to remove the perception that the sacraments are for sale and that only those who have money have chances of having the Eucharist celebrated in their places.

To increase participation in the celebration of the Mass, they suggest the following: celebrating it where the people are like fishing ports, distributing tasks and responsibilities, having a more aggressive approach to encourage youth and non-church goers to attend, conducting regular formation for liturgical ministers on the meaning of the Eucharist and popular religious practices. In one diocese, people commented that the priests have a lack of appreciation of the deeper motivations of people who practice popular devotions lovingly.

Dialogue between Church and Society

Dialogue exists within the structures of the Church. But it is generally limited to those who are active in the various Church organizations, in particular, between the clergy and some lay leaders. Such a dialogue does not extend to the laity in general, to the poor, and the marginalized in particular. There is also not much dialogue about the social and political issues between the priest and the laity.

There are partnerships with government agencies, both national and local, such as the UBAS *Ugnayan ng Barangay at Simbahan* (Barangay and Church relations), including networking with NGOs

to promote community welfare. Collaboration with the various sectors is happening in the many institutions and ministries that serve the poor and the marginalized. Despite this, effective collaboration mechanisms for poverty reduction, ministry to dysfunctional families, caring for our common home, addressing moral disintegration are lacking. Likewise, there are no comprehensive programs to address materialism, secularism, and consumerism.

Opportunities for dialogue with LGBTQ+, the poor, abandoned, those suffering from substance abuse, the youths, PDLs (people deprived of liberty), laborers, and other marginalized sectors are also inadequate. Some members of the LGBTQ+ feel that they are not only abandoned but also highly misunderstood and condemned by the Church. Moreover, there is also a confusing position of the Church on politics since some bishops and priests have remained non-partisan, while others have taken a more partisan political stance.

The Church should facilitate dialogue on the following: political issues such as election fraud and vote buying, human rights violations, corruption in government, environmental issues, social issues such as broken marriages, gender identity, same-sex union, relativism, sex scandals, gambling (e.g. *jueteng*), discrimination, cultural bias and stereotyping. The Church has to address the common perception that it is the Church of the rich, the influential and the powerful, as well as the perception of the young that the Church has become outdated or irrelevant.

The MSPC (Mindanao-Sulu Pastoral Conference) and the Bishops-Ulama Conference diocesan desks in Mindanao are avenues of active dialogue with Muslims and the Indigenous peoples. However, more space for dialogue needs to happen with and among indigenous peoples throughout the country. Some note that although IPs are already part of the BECs, there is little attention given to recognize their unique culture and identity. In some areas, the IPs are caught in the crossfire between rebels and the military and they have no one to turn to for help except the Church. In other instances, the Church turns to the IPs to concretely address the urgency of caring for our common home.

Dialogue with Christian Denominations and other Religions

Other Christian denominations are seen as more aggressive because of their house-to-house preaching. They are also perceived to be more Bible-centered, more lively in their praise and worship fellowships, more close to one another and more generous in giving tithes to their churches. Some of their pastors are more engaging and inspiring than our priests. In general, according to reports, their goal is to proselytize. The fundamentalist attitude of some Christian denominations is a hindrance to ecumenism and dialogue, and it sometimes leads to conflict, division, and misunderstanding, which happen even within families and clans, and among their members.

The faithful are not equipped to dialogue with other Christian denominations and other religions primarily due to lack of a deeper understanding of the Christian faith. Interestingly, dialogues with Christians are seen during the annual celebration of the Week of Prayer and Christian Unity through programs and activities organized by the local government units, collaborative partnerships in response to the victims of natural calamities, and common prayer services during disasters and other important socio-political or cultural events. In general, such dialogue encounters are limited to the leaders and active members of the various Christian churches.

Some dioceses have good programs of collaborating with other religions like *Duyog-Ramadhan* (Ramadhan fellowship). However, many reported that these programs are active at the diocesan level but are not being practiced at the parish level. Most Catholics in their area, according to them, are not even aware of the presence of other religions and Christian traditions and that they are called to learn to relate with them. One diocese mentioned that we cannot discount the dialogue of daily life that happens at the neighborhood level; living life as good neighbors.

The Church is willing to work to end violence and conflicts and is called upon not to retaliate or take revenge in times of discrimination and persecution. The Church opens its doors to other Christians and people of other faiths in times of natural calamities and other emergencies. Catholics welcome them into their homes.

Sharing Responsibility

There is a general perception that sharing responsibility in the mission of the Church is about active participation in the Mass and devotional practices. Many do not have a clear understanding of the Christian mission, and in most cases it is perceived as an *ad-intra* commitment only.

Many good and holy priests have become an inspiration to the people especially during the pandemic in their heroic acts of anointing the sick and giving comfort to the people during the wakes for the dead. Still, people are longing for good priests who do not only dispense the sacraments but act as companions of the faithful in their journey towards peace, justice, and social harmony.

Although many priests would celebrate Mass in difficult-to-reach places by traversing mountains, still many far-flung areas are neglected. Some people have never seen a bishop visiting their place. Masses are held once a year only during their patronal fiesta. Participants expressed the need for the clergy's increased and visible presence in the parish, especially in remote areas. The people desire that the priest stay after Mass and spend quality time with them. There are very few volunteer catechists and pastoral workers who serve in the *barangays* (villages) and other remote areas.

In terms of temporal management, the laity expect the clergy and their leaders to be more transparent, especially in financial matters. Many parishes are demanding transparency especially from the Parish Finance Councils. They also expect a stricter implementation of policies and guidelines, and express the need to eliminate ecclesiastical red tape (unnecessary bureaucracy in the Church). They question the implementation of the policies of the local Church such as the system of tithing and collection. Furthermore, they also report about having authoritarian church leaders, and some who are involved in alcoholism, as well as others among them who are meddling in political affairs and supporting political candidates.

The BEC is the flagship program of most dioceses. It is frequently mentioned as a key factor in building up the faith and mission at the local level. The BEC has been an effective approach in building communities through various programs and projects such as financial aid to the needy, construction of houses for the homeless

poor, relief work for victims of natural disasters, source of refuge for mutual assistance especially during the pandemic.

IPs are forced to sell land due to poverty. The uncritical confidence in government assistance like cash for work and other subsidies for the poor, the deceptions of “populist politics” and “partisan political leanings”, and the “ideological distortions of sinister groups” which sometimes creep into the systems of the church, are factors that undermine the works for the mission for both the settlers and IPs.

The contribution of the youth ministry has been commonly felt especially because of the need to set up social media ministries and to provide backup support for a more organized distribution of “*ayuda*” (financial help), food and medicines during the height of the pandemic.

Cultural practices & traditional rituals sometimes clash with Church teachings, causing confusion and conflict among people.

The active participation of women in the Church is evident in all activities and groups, but the participation of men is sorely lacking. On the other hand, people have also expressed the need to make the Church into a safe space for abused women and children. They call upon the Church to help “unbox structures of society” that are not gender sensitive and continue to hinder their growth.

In certain dioceses there were several politicians and LGU (local government unit) officials who were interviewed. They asked why the church leaders engage with them only during elections and why such engagements always tend to be negative or confrontational/critical. Some said they still dream of a Church that would welcome them despite ‘the dirt’ that they get tainted with when they serve in the political realm. They say “when the Church does not put a wall for politicians, the Church’s mission to evangelize politics is possible.” Some politicians asked that they be allowed to serve in ministries in their parishes.

Authority and Participation

Although the Church is experienced by many as a mother in providing the spiritual needs of her children, it is also seen as authoritative and powerful. Clericalism, elitism and unapproachability dominate the relationship between the laity and

the clergy. Interestingly, lay leaders also tend to imbibe this clericalistic way of handling authority in relation to the rest of the faithful. Church authorities should be more open to constructive criticism and must learn to do appreciative inquiry. Authority tends to rest solely on the priests and bishops. There are also some lay leaders who tend to monopolize leadership positions and make succession very difficult for the younger generation of leaders. Church management is perceived to be fraught with irregularities and inconsistencies, and tends to be authority-centered, inefficient in the administering of temporal goods, and dismissive of the views and values of the marginalized poor. People feel that in general, there is hardly any consultation with the faithful before appointments for church leadership roles are finalized.

Parish organizational meetings, pastoral assemblies – diocesan, vicarial, and parish levels, and including BEC prayer gatherings and regular meetings are seen as structures that allow for active participation in the life of the Church.

Discerning and Decision-Making

Decisions are hardly ever made based on collective discernment. The final decisions are usually made by the church leaders, in particular by the bishops and priests, and that, in most instances, decision-making processes tend to favor the opinions and preferences of the affluent and powerful. They also note a lack of transparency on issues and on how decisions are being made.

The main structures in the Church that allow for collective discernment and decision-making are in the PPCs (Parish Pastoral Councils), which are involved in pastoral goal setting, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Almost all matters having to do with the life of the Church are characterized as top-down in their approach. There is a perceived lack of spiritual conversations. The common impression is that church administration does not give as much importance to prayer and communal discernment.

Impunity and unilateral decision-making result in confusion and disorientation during the “changing of guards” (reshuffle of parish priests). The sustainability of pastoral processes does not seem to be a major concern.

PASALUBONG (Gift of Mission)

Filipinos often come home from a place of encounter with *PASALUBONG* (gifts for the welcomer). They bring home some food and tokens to share to their families and friends, like the disciples who returned to Jerusalem to share the Good News. Meeting the Risen Jesus, in the familiar and unfamiliar roads of their dioceses and with hearts burning at what they have encountered, they come home with a new mission; ready to break new grounds and blaze new trails. As the consultations have deepened the desire to “walk the talk” and “walk the walk” together, many reports point to the need to “think diocese.” A pilgrim Church that is “co-responsible, transparent, and accountable,” a “communion of communities,” and a Church that “leads us to the fullness of life.” Through a revisiting and/or a conscious reformulation of their diocesan vision-mission statements, it will be possible to come up with more comprehensive, realistic, and responsive pastoral plans. While this is not new to many dioceses in the Philippines, many are convinced that integrating the principles and the fruits of the synodal process will enable them to move forward to embodying synodality. Synodality and the new ways of listening have expanded their perspectives and have challenged them to enter into new pathways. One suggests that the Church “open their ecclesiastical windows to welcome fresh air of reforms and conversion.” Such reforms will also enable them to “bridge the gaps between church leaders and the people of God, liturgy and social engagement, social services and social transformation, faith and justice.”

Many have articulated that the vision of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippine Church as a “Church of the Poor” will find more concrete expressions through synodality. In line with this, the majority of the dioceses mentioned that among their top priorities is to revitalize and strengthen the BECs. As the “new way of being Church,” BEC is the proper space on which we can cultivate a culture of encounter and through which we can reach out to sectors, especially those marginalized and neglected.

The synodal journey has brought out the innate synodality in the Filipino culture. Indigenous symbols and images help explore the

depth of communion, participation, and mission in Filipino culture.⁴ With Filipino traditions and values being awakened by the synodal process, several dioceses propose that it be strengthened through the exploration of cultural values and their integration in the practice of the faith. For example, how can practices such as “*bayanihan*” (solidarity) and hospitality promote prayer and sacramental life? How can the Filipino value of “*malasakit*” (compassion) find concrete expressions in our ministry to the marginalized?

Synodality is manifested especially in practical concerns such as the management of finances. With the repeated clamor of many respondents for more transparency and accountability, many recommend putting financial structures and processes in place. One diocese sees the need to implement “a standardized living allowance” for the clergy. In one metropolitan province as well as in many other dioceses, it is the synodal process that has succeeded in pushing them to finally implement the abolition of the arancel system and to have a “no-fixed rates policy” for the administration of the Sacraments.

Through the synodal process, they have also urged for the renewal of ecclesiastical structures, ministries and the necessity of giving due attention to different groups within the church. To improve the coordination of pastoral programs, vicariates can help “expedite communication, consultation, monitoring and evaluation of ministries.” Likewise, they have appealed to support mandated organizations and Catholic movements so that they can reconnect with the local Church and discover how they can put their particular charisms and gifts at the disposal of the Church. They also call for the creation of new ministries such as the social communications, research, and community development, as well as the clustering of existing ones. Some dioceses are setting up desks in parishes to receive complaints and suggestions from the people, following the spirit of the synodal consultation.

Structural renewal may not find deep roots if it is not grounded on spirituality. Forming ourselves in synodality calls for conversion and a renewal of catechesis and faith formation for both the clergy and the laity. Synodal methodologies and approaches can renew

⁴ See Attachment 3 for the National Synodal Consultation - Metropolitan Cultural Symbols

catechesis, and our manner of conducting retreats and recollections, as well as the formation of lay ministers. Communal discernment which has been found to be lacking in all levels of ecclesial activities can be strengthened when every pastoral activity is seen to foster deeper listening, inspire communal discerning, and facilitate collective action.

Synodality can also be mirrored by transforming church activities as spaces of dialogue inspiring communion and participation. They recommend that regular meetings of ministries and groups should become opportunities for people to listen not only to business concerns but also to personal stories and the discernment of societal issues in the light of the Word of God. In this way, they develop practices of communal discernment and communal decision-making. One suggests the need to pay particular attention to parish frontliners and to equip them with skills to inspire dialogue and develop friendships with the people they are in touch with. Parishes can also create spaces for healing and reconciliation especially in instances of conflict and misunderstanding, and where discrimination, elitism, and divisiveness have been experienced by some sectors.

The celebration of the Sacraments, liturgies and prayer form us in synodality. "A well prepared and meaningful celebration of the Eucharist is a source of inspiration and renewal of faith in the parish." An urgent call is to make the Eucharist accessible to all especially to those in the peripheries. The creation of liturgical teams is being considered, in order to assist the presiders in coming up with well-prepared homilies and facilitating the "full, conscious, and active participation" of the faithful in the liturgical celebrations. In the same way, it will be good to also revisit how lay leaders can facilitate Services of the Word with Communion so that the community can be more dynamic in their life of worship and liturgy. There is a call to go back to the Catholic traditions, which have kept the faith alive especially during the pandemic. In addition, fostering popular religious devotions can inspire deeper communion and promote synodal values already present in the Filipino culture.

Dioceses strongly recommend that programs be adopted that can further develop ecumenical and interreligious dialogue in our ecclesial life. Aside from celebrating with other Christian denominations and other faith communities, especially on their feast

days and respecting their tradition, many sectoral needs and issue-based concerns can be best addressed through collaborative endeavors with them. Religion is usually not an issue when we are faced with life and death situations, when we respond together to calamities, when we fight for justice, and when we care for our common home. We need one another.

The synodal process inspires all to look, listen and discern, as well as walk together with those not heard, with the voiceless, and the marginalized sectors of Church and society. During the national synodal consultation, some of these sectors were revisited to facilitate a new way of looking at them with the guidance of the Spirit.

In the conclusion of the national synodal consultation, after sharing the fruits of the synodal journey and discerning the Holy Spirit speaking to us as a local church in the Philippines, the bishops, priests, and lay delegates representing eighty six dioceses in the country stand firm together as they manifest their convictions.

Loving Father,
you have awakened us by the call to become a “corporate Christ”
and to “make a way where there seems to be no way,” together.
As we opened the door of dialogue through the experience of
friendship,
mutual listening, discernment, and prayerful worship,
you gave us the grace to enter into life-defining doors
that embolden us to traverse unexplored and promising pathways.

Today, the walls are broken down!
Our Faith has been awakened! Our hope has come alive! The fire of
love is burning!
May this *kairos* become for us the seed for
deeper communion, more authentic participation, and border-
crossing mission.
Make us disciples together to become a renewed Church,
redefined, reaffirmed, and revitalized – a Synodal Church!

We implore the prayers of Mary, *Ina ng Simbahan* (Mother of the Church) to lead us in this difficult but fulfilling journey.

We ask this in the name of Jesus our Lord, *ang aming Dakilang Kalakbay* (our great Companion in the journey), and the Holy Spirit, *ang aming Lakas at Gabay* (our strength and guide). Amen.

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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
177. 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

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