

**SYNTHESIS REPORTS**

**SYNOD OF BISHOPS 2021–2023**



- I. Chinese Regional Bishops' Conference (CRBC)
- II. Catholic Bishops' Conference of Thailand (CBCT)
- III. Catholic Bishops' Conference of Timor-Leste (CET)

# Chinese Regional Bishops' Conference (CRBC) Synod (2021-2023) Synthesis

## Foreword

On account of the political upheaval in Mainland China in 1949, the government of the Republic of China retreated to Taiwan, thus began the separated governance of the two sides of the Strait. The Church in Taiwan would welcome hundreds of foreign and native priests and sisters fleeing Mainland China who incorporated the riches of the Universal Church. Thanks to the missionaries and their religious communities, parishes were quickly created and dioceses were erected one by one. Following the western missionary model of the Church, the Church in Taiwan invested greatly in school education, in medical care and in almsgivings in parishes. In a short time, not only the number of baptisms rapidly increased, the Catholic Church also enjoyed high esteem in Taiwan society.

Since 1980, the country's economy had grown rapidly and the living standards had improved, new religions began to prosper; consequently, the religious panorama in Taiwan also began to change. In recent years, the number of Catholics in Taiwan kept on dropping; the Church faces many challenges, such as:

- The revival of traditional Chinese beliefs (Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism)
- The rise of a social class, from poverty toward prosperity
- The widening of wealth gap between cities and rural areas
- Generalization of basic and higher education made accessible to all by the Government
- Low marriage rate
- High divorce rate
- Ageing population

- Openness of the people and diversity in society
- Social media becoming more sophisticated and personalized
- Increasing political tensions
- Low birth-rate impacting on Catholic schools, and insufficient vocations
- A lack of vitality in the Church
- The generation gap on faith and moral values (conflicts esp. in questions on family, sexuality, bio-ethics, etc.)
- The mixing of different ethnic groups: especially the new immigrants, foreign laborers, etc.
- The practical implementation of the Church's teaching on ethics and social doctrine
- The urgent issue of catechesis and transmission of faith on social media
- The lack of connection between the Church and society at large
- Strengthening the faith formation of the Christian faithful etc.

These are the important topics that have been discussed in the seven Dioceses

Moreover, a number of social works and the organizations of the Dioceses and religious communities need to be re-organized or re-orientated. These challenges lead to a dispersion of the limited resources of the Church in its management. Today the Church's missionary efforts urgently need renewal and creativity. The Church needs to set up its missionary goal and determine anew its responsibility in an unstable world and changing society.

In contrast to the increase of Taiwan's population, the Catholics in Taiwan are diminishing in number. In response to the challenge of evangelization, the Chinese Regional Bishops' Conference (CRBC) launched the following major church events over the last two decades:

1. In 1988, “Evangelization in Taiwan: Identity and Mission of the Lay People, Communion, Mission and the Signs of the Times.”
2. In 2001, “New Millennium, New Evangelization.”
3. In 2019, “Third National Evangelization Congress.”
4. In 2021, with the publication of the handbook “*Pastoral Guide for the Parishes of the Catholic Church in Taiwan*”. This handbook clearly points out 10 main topics for catechesis, responding to Church’s needs in Taiwan, including:
  - The basic principles of a missionary oriented pastoral action in the parish
  - The liturgy
  - Marriage and Family
  - Children/Youth in the Church
  - The involvement of the laity and the religious sisters in the leadership of the parish
  - The Christian Faith Communities
  - The pastoral care of the faithful who are distant from the Church
  - The adult catechumenate
  - Missionary spirit and direct evangelism

The latest National Evangelization Congress was carried out during a period of 3 years, in three phases: parochial, diocesan, and nationwide. Pastoral decisions were made by means of grassroots participation. The faithful experienced communion in Christ and in the Church’s mission of evangelization by listening to the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. The last two National Evangelization Congresses had a similar goal. And the latest one ended in August 2021, of which the diocesan phase finished just in time before the synodal process got started. And understandably, many ideas in this report were taken from the final report of the Third National Evangelization Congress.

In preparation for the Synod of Bishops 2023, CRBC translated all pertinent materials into Chinese in an extremely

short period of time, for all Chinese-speaking Catholics all over the world, in collaboration with the Dioceses of Macau and Hong Kong. That can be considered as an important contribution of the CRBC to the Chinese-speaking local Churches and communities.

Following the opening Mass in October 2021, each of the seven Dioceses in Taiwan began its celebration, including opening Mass, consultation meetings in parishes, deaneries, religious communities. The synthesis report of each Diocese differs in lengths and content. But the content is very rich, pointing out many Church groups' current problems, indicating suggestions and stating expectations. In spite of the differences in emphases on the one hand, the same challenges of transmission of faith on the other hand, a better coordinated cooperation and a clearer direction are outlined in this synthesis report after a process of discernment and listening to the Holy Spirit.

To prepare the synthesis of CRBC, a team of ten members was set up, which includes a bishop, three priests (among them there are also professors of theology), two sisters and one of them is a theology teacher, two lay men and two lay women. The group first studied the report of each Diocese, each member sharing his/her interpretation and feedback. After several meetings, this final report was drafted. This document is a convergent testimony of a spirit of communion; the Church is like a family, promoting the sense of mission and missionary zeal. As Jesus said, "*I am the Way the Truth and the Life.*" (Jn. 14:6), 'Synod' means walking together on the same Way towards the same Truth. This synthesis report is not an end, but the beginning of a new way of dialogue for a synodal Church in Taiwan.

## **I. Communion, Participation**

### **1. Creativity and Inspiration**

- The synthesis reports of the Dioceses echo a general response to Pope Francis' leadership in the preparation of the Synod of Bishops, and the sharing was based on "*Communion, Participation and Mission*" especially in "listening, speaking out and celebrating." In collecting and

processing the data, we consulted the report of Hsinchu Diocese because it had prepared specifically an easy questionnaire for the organizations and social services of the Diocese to facilitate responses.

- Our companions on this synodal journey include people of consecrated life, the laity, catechumens and families, the staff of the Church organizations, and people who are served by our church services, co-workers etc. So the meaning of companions has been redefined and the focus on them has been broadened.
- Catholic faithful may have different ministries, but all are children of God. We should appreciate, affirm and encourage each other. This improves the relationship between catechists, between the hierarchy and the laity, all becoming more pro-active and friendly.
- The local Church is structured at parish, deanery and diocesan levels. All these levels reflect, to different degrees, synodality, while their members, clergy, people of consecrated life and the laity, were organizing consultation meetings with the respective liturgical services, participating in the synodal process and discussing about the synodal process.
- Ecclesial communion includes diverse vocations: (clergy, people of consecrated life, and the laity), and different social and ethnic groups. If a group is full of vitality, nourished by the Word of God, the interpersonal relationships in the group is strong, everyone being able to listen to each other, caring for each other and supporting each other. To promote communion, it is necessary to care for one other, to listen, to build up relationships, to put aside rank and position, to be empathetic, to show respect, openness, acceptance, without criticizing and moralizing, and without prejudice. By avoiding prejudice and preconceived ideas, we learned to listen to the Holy Spirit, to discern the Lord's will.
- Generally, it is hoped that our pastors and the laypeople can hear the voice of young people, young families, the

unemployed and the elderly who live alone. Parishes can set up a “suggestion box” for them, following the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and let the people meet the Lord, come closer to the Lord.

- Create basic ecclesial communities, and enhance togetherness and growth in spiritual life, enabling the members of the communities/groups to use their talents to help the Church and to be at the service of society.

## **2. Attention needs be paid to:**

- Synodality must not be confined to the spiritual sphere. It should be incarnated in the organizations of Church in terms of parishes, deaneries, dioceses, and in the administration framework of the Bishops’ Conference. Then, it’s possible to effectively bring forth the Church’s leadership style, to find new ways and means of commitment and implementation in diversity, improving the discerning capacity and the effectiveness of meetings.
- The participation in consultation meetings should embrace a greater diversity and include some voiceless, marginalized brothers and sisters. The voice of the minority should be heard. Also, it is necessary to listen to voice of the Church’s social service organizations, schools and hospitals, and to know the views of those who are served by those institutions. By listening to people from various backgrounds/circles who have different views and opinions, the synthesis report will become richer, broader, more comprehensive, and reflect therefore more faithfully the real aspect of a particular Church.
- One should be attentive to the life of the clergy and their moral code. A clearer line must be drawn in the relation between priests and females. Priests should lead a simple life and exercise prudently their spiritual authority, and should not abuse their authority and the trust of the faithful. Bishops should have the courage to assume their responsibilities by taking disciplinary measures to help their

- priests, and should also care for the aged priests and their welfare.
- The Church should be courageous when it comes to expressing its standpoint on social issues, in clear and simple terms. The Church should dedicate itself to the ministry of youth, hear their opinions and prevent them from being influenced by secular values of the world, e.g. such as co-habitation, same-sex marriage, abortion, contraception, embryo freezing before marriage etc.
  - In personnel and financial management, the Church's organizations must be transparent as much as possible. This contributes to the communion and the credibility of the Church.
  - Taiwan has more than 500,000 new immigrants and migrant workers from various countries, cultures and languages. They come mostly as spouses or blue-collar workers. They face cultural, linguistic and legal problems, and have difficulties in adapting themselves to a new life, in a new family situation, in the education of their children, in the transmission of faith etc. A parish can provide them assistance by accompanying them, joining social and governmental resources, integrating them into the community where they can help each other.
  - CRBC has set up a Commission for the Service of Integral Human Development under the Section for the Pastoral care of Migrants and Itinerant People. It is necessary to understand the needs of the migrants, to work out a policy and directives for their pastoral care, and to provide them different services. Each Diocese should make available an office for contact and offer them spiritual and material assistance. A diocese may appoint a priest/sister and provide a suitable place for them to meet, thus offering them a sense of belonging and nurturing their faith, and having recourse to public resources; activities can be organized for those new immigrants and migrant workers to make them feel at home and get connected.

### 3. Cooperation at various levels:

- Cross connection of various organizations of the Church at various levels and mutual exchange and cooperation between them should be encouraged.
- The seven Dioceses in Taiwan have good cooperation. However, the number of indigenous people and foreigners, the number of inhabitants in urban areas and countryside of each diocese vary significantly. Cooperation needs to be more pro-active and constructive. For example, certain projects, like catechesis for adults, training programs for lectors and liturgical volunteers, questions and answers on our faith, catechetical training for various age groups, all these can be done by means of classes in person or on-line. Larger activities could also be adopted accordingly.
- A diocese can arrange encounters for the people of consecrated life, around the theme of *“For a synodal Church, communion, participation and mission”*, and to promote fraternity. Priests and sisters will become bridge-builders by attending those activities.
- In order to avoid overlapping in administrative work, and the dispersion of energy for pastoral care, one should make better use of the precious pastoral resources and foster the cooperation between parishes, as solution to the problem of limited resources of a local church.
- For a long time the Church in Taiwan has been dependent on foreign missionaries to support the local Church and has neglected the spiritual life of the few native clergy and religious. Maybe the Holy Spirit is inviting the Church in Taiwan to firmly acknowledge the vocation and mission of the laypeople, to overcome clericalism, to give the laity greater responsibility in the Church’s mission.
- To distribute more evenly the resources of a particular Church (personnel, goods, finances) the need for grouping and re-defining the territories of its deaneries has called for attention and discussion. For example, how to merge and transform

small parishes with less than 20 persons attending Sunday Mass, to become more effective.

- The different works of the Dioceses and religious orders, (e.g. Catholic schools, hospitals, social service centers) should pay heed to the richness of diversity, listen to the workers' and recipients' view on the Church. The Dioceses and the religious orders must re-evaluate the role of education, health care and social services in the Church's evangelization, adapting according to today's context.

#### **4. Communion, Celebration, Participation**

- The Church worships Christ and worships God the Father through Christ by means of liturgical rites. Christ our Savior continues His work of salvation through the visible forms and signs in the liturgy. Catholics should be able to read and understand the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Part II, its explanation on Sacraments and Rituals, especially the Holy Mass. Only when Catholics understand properly the Eucharistic celebration and Sacraments, will the deep meaning of "celebration" be manifest.
- In order to be led by the Holy Father, the Bishop's Conference has timely translated and published all the latest Church documents. The Dioceses, their parishes and lay associations should convene study groups, so as to integrate the Church teachings into the local culture, starting from the Bishops' Conference, then to the Dioceses, parishes, and straight down to each lay association.
- The homily of the priests at Mass is of the utmost importance.
- Establish platforms for cooperation between the Dioceses, deaneries, and parishes, share personnel resources and synodal spirit, to promote communication and inclusion through the platforms. Through these platforms, solidarity and communion can be fostered. Let resources and information be shared, to find common goals, to achieve the greatest effectiveness. Diocesan Committees and Episcopal

Commissions could also consider how to promote effective platforms.

- Within the present Church's framework, it is necessary to recommend excellent and professional laypeople to do the Church's administrative work in order to evangelize.

## **II Pastoral Care:**

### **1. Renovation and Inspiration**

- Each particular Church shows a different face of diversity by virtue of its characteristics and specific resources. Some parish communities emphasize the transmission of indigenous culture, and some emphasize the importance of the new immigrants.... Consequently, their liturgy and pastoral care services, aiming at their special needs, may be different from those of an average Church community.
- The Church proclaims that God is love. For a longtime it has been serving the needy, those who need social assistance, living in remote villages, and spending for them much effort and energy in areas of education, medical care and public services. Most Dioceses wish to care more for the vulnerable groups e.g. families, children, immigrants, migrant workers, those who live in remote areas, the elderly and the disabled etc., in order to hear the voice of such marginalized groups.

### **2. We need to pay attention to:**

- The Church's deficiencies in internal communion also have weakened its apostolic dynamism, even lessened the number of its members and their level of participation. We must pay more attention to the indigenous population, to the migrants, to all believers and the youth etc. who had been hurt... Those who were once in the Church and wanted to be heard but eventually got tired. Some have even left the Church.
- As for the lay associations of the parishes, their efforts of nurturing and caring are not so obvious. Their members cannot obtain assistance from their church community.

- In remote areas, there is even less concern for the new immigrants or foreign laborers.
- Newly-baptized Catholics need companionship to be integrated into faith communities, to live their Christian lives.
- It is necessary to offer companionship to married couples, for youths individually, for those who feel called to priesthood, and to visit regularly the lonely, sick and poor, etc.
- It is not easy for young people to commit themselves to the services of the Church e.g. in some places, young people are not allowed to serve as ministers at Mass or be in charge of parish activities. The Church needs to provide a platform for the youth.
- In response to the ageing population of the Church and in society, it is necessary to create a system to offer companionship for spiritual needs.

### **III. Evangelization and Missionary Challenges**

#### **1. Renovation and Inspiration**

- When their faith faces the political, moral and cultural challenges in society, the Catholic faithful do not have confidence in themselves. They are afraid to discuss face to face. They do not have the deep experience of encounter with the Lord and are afraid of failure or rejection, not willing to spend time to learn, and feel helpless on social and political issues.
- Help the Catholic faithful to know themselves, to know the Church. "Be together, walk together." We need to have empathy, to accompany, to dialogue, to guide and to help the Church's members to cultivate fraternity, not just giving assignment and order.
- The Church makes a comprehensive discernment in its evangelizing mission. We should listen to different groups: not only church-goers, lay associations, religious communities, but also non-Catholics, new immigrants, divorced Catholics, victims of domestic violence, singles,

lonely elderly people, the unemployed, the poor, homeless etc. all need our attention.

- Diversify the pastoral care for the youth, including: create channels and establish platforms for the youth to participate in the Church, provide faith formation, companionship for individuals, plan and concretize various types of activities for young people, such as “creative evangelization for the youth” (of the Archdiocese of Taipei) to encourage young Catholics to take more initiatives, in response to the needs of the Dioceses regarding the pastoral care for the youth.
- Make better use of Catholic institutions (schools, hospitals, social service stations) to propagate Christian faith values. One may consider promoting cooperation between the Church and local authorities, sharing the resources of the parish church and the neighborhood. For example, working with the Ministry of Education to promote family life education by setting up family life education centers. The Church cooperates also by also sharing the Church’s teaching regarding marriage, transmission of faith in the family etc.
- Parishes should emphasize evangelization, charity works and participation in public life. The parish church should, with an open attitude, make good use of its premises, land, space, human resources of the parish, making them open to the neighborhood. Stepping out in the neighborhood, also let people coming into Church, build good relationship, let the parish church be seen, be known and attract people for pre-evangelization. The parish church should have a visible sign; its doors should always remain open for evangelization, with a neat environment, old structures renewed, joining the neighborhood’s activities to strengthen the mutual bond. Good use of recreation space can be an advantage for evangelization. Otherwise it can be a burden for the maintenance. Parishes can be grouped. The Church’s cultural and social service organizations can be revamped, in order to create new opportunities for revival.

- As the population is ageing, the parishes can focus on services for the aged and disadvantaged children in cooperation with the district which has its office, police station, volunteers, activity center, non-profit association, social service organization, churches of other denominations, kindergartens, homes for the elderly, school, community college, schools, hospital etc. Mutual cooperation will create a win-win situation.
- The social service of the local authorities is attentive to the disadvantaged, much like our Church's mission spirit. The Church can cooperate with them, in the project of caring for the weak, evangelization and pastoral services can also be realized.
- Encourage the Catholic faithful to undergo professional training in social service, hospital pastoral care, so as to get involved in the social works of the local Church.
- In our era of social media, the Church should make good use of the media for evangelization, in order to spread Christian messages and values, to promote ecumenism, to carry out its mission. The social media of the Catholic Church in Taiwan (e.g., *Asia Veritas* and the Media Centre of Tainan Diocese) have set up some positive examples by inviting different speakers (e.g. Bishop, Priest, Sisters, laypeople) to share their life experience in a program. The Archdiocese of Taipei has also set up a media team, to spread the Catholic faith through their own YouTube channel.
- A parish can cooperate with other neighboring parishes, sharing and exchanging experiences, organizing activities together, such as concerts, prayer meetings, witness talks, March for Life, prayer for peace, for the pandemic and some joint charity services.

## **2. Attention needs be paid to:**

- Reconsider parish work in evangelization and pastoral care and review the role of the parish, the parish priest and the

parishioners: the priest's service in terms of leadership, coordination, communication, so that unity of the parish community becomes coherent with and in its activities. The parishioners' mission, duty and responsibility are also to be re-examined.

- Create a "pastoral plan" at the parochial level, to serve as a reference for the parish priest and parishioners. After discernment, map out the priority, its realization and evaluation. Encourage each parish to develop its charism. This pastoral plan can be elevated to the level of deanery or diocese, providing a common goal and direction. This requires a good communication channel and takes time in order to achieve consensus, e.g. any message from the Holy Father to the Bishops is clearly a priority matter and requires a proper channel to be spread and publicized. It also requires discussion in order to reach a conclusion, before it is concretized in each parish or Catholic institute and becomes a priority for all.
- Enhance the prophetic role of the Church in Taiwan. Taiwan has religious freedom but is not Christian country, and worldly values prevail over Christian spiritual values. Nonetheless, people still have a thirst for spirituality. The Church in Taiwan needs to connect itself more closely with society, to exert influence on Catholics and society.

#### **IV. Formation**

##### **1. Formation for synodality and leadership**

- Clergy and the laity all need be rooted in synodality, to foster respect, listening, openness, humility and the ability to discern, coordinate and communicate. Be able to discuss within the Church and in society, ceaselessly cultivating a close relationship with the Lord and caring for souls, and to proclaim the Truth with charity.
- Governance and development of the parishes: one can convene groups of professionals, valuing professionalism,

and using professional training, serving each other with love, so that the Church may become a lamp for the people in society, a school for the youth, an altar for the laity, regaining the trust of the believers and society in the Church.

- Clergy and the laity both have their specific duties and responsibilities, and should remain faithful to the Lord's mission entrusted to them. It is also necessary to train formators who are rooted in the Catholic faith, to develop a diversity of leadership styles, to conduct meetings more effectively, and to delegate properly, etc.
- Formation for the bishops: over the past 20 years, we have had two bishops who resigned during the first 6 months after their installation. We need to be more concerned about this.

## **2. Formation of the clergy**

- The Church in Taiwan has as its own institutions for theological and intellectual formation: the Major Seminary, the Fu Jen Faculty of Theology of St. Robert Bellarmine, and the Bachelors' Program of Catholic Studies at Fu Jen Catholic University. The Church should make good use of these rich educational resources, in order to raise the level of quality of the clergy.
- The Church must pay heed to the curriculum for the formation of the clergy and the laity. Aside from theology and philosophy courses, etc. attention should be given to pastoral care: evangelization, spiritual formation, scriptural studies, Church doctrines, sociological studies and church documents, leadership and management, good communication, homiletic and rhetoric training, crisis management, financial management, parish administration and operation, cooperation and discussion. Dialogue with other religions, management of non-profit organization, etc. Foreign missionaries and native clergy

all need suitable formation for their spiritual growth and personal development.

- Facing the multiple changes in society and the spiritual needs of the believers, priests must have ongoing formation. For parish priests who are foreign nationals, they need proficiency in the local language and be familiar with the local culture.

### **3. Formation of the Laypeople**

- Importance should be given to the life-long learning process of the laypeople, enabling them to be mature and committed Christians. It is hoped that a diocese or a deanery can conceive the faith formation systematically for people of different ages and of diverse backgrounds, such as indigenous people, new immigrants, migrant workers, etc., and to provide them the proper faith formation and development of personality, so that their needs at different levels are satisfied, and that they can discover their identity as children of God and accomplish their mission.
- Most Catholics do not have a spiritual director, or have nowhere to get help for their physical, psychological or spiritual needs. The Church should emphasize the formation of spiritual directors and encourage the laypeople to seek spiritual direction.
- It is suggested that the Dioceses can found “Catholic faith school”, making avail of currently unused space for establishing a formation center. More refined teaching materials and training programs for teachers are needed. Modular courses which are in accordance with the needs of all ages, must be implemented in all parishes as a coordinated learning program, including: Sunday schools, youth associations, associations for young workers, course for growth in marriage, associations for the elderly, catechetical class management, catechumenate, catechesis for newly baptized Catholics, spiritual formation for the elderly and new believers, lectors’ formation, choir formation, formation

of ministers of Holy Communion, prayer companionship for the dying, apostolic formation, etc., so that the relationship between each individual believer and Christ can be built, helping people to mature joyfully.

- The Church's institutions need to operate in accordance with the civil labor laws, to treat employees well, to put into practice justice and charity, to be professional, to offer a friendly work environment, and to gain the recognition and honor of their employees and the public.

## **Conclusion**

The development of a local Church starts from the parishes. The whole church body is vitalized when the parishes develop positively. The pastoral care foundation of the parishes in Taiwan should be laid according to the *'Pastoral Guide for the Parishes of the Catholic Church in Taiwan'* (2019-2021) and the reflection on the topics of the 16<sup>th</sup> Synod of Bishops, the process of laying the foundation of the parishes can be realized through 3-year, 5-year or 10-year plans. This is not only the realization of synodality, this is also an opportunity of transformation and development for the Church in Taiwan. From June 2021, the CRBC has invited representatives from all the Dioceses to revise the draft of *"The Statute of the Parish Pastoral Council"*, which we have discerned, discussed, and revised many times, in order to achieve consensus, as well as to implement a mission-oriented pastoral care, and to offer a platform for the parish priests and the faithful to journey together.

The Church in Taiwan plays an important role in the Chinese-speaking regions and has had fruitful exchanges with the Holy See from the pastoral and evangelization point of view: high-level reciprocal visits, translation of Church documents into Chinese, hosting international conferences in collaboration with the Holy See, the World Chinese Biblical Congress Meeting in Taiwan, organizing interreligious dialogue conferences with and for the Holy See, etc. It is hoped that the Taiwan Church can continue to make concrete contributions to the Universal Church, especially

for the Chinese-speaking regions. The peaceful co-existence of different religions and ethnic groups in Taiwan, the dialogue and the collaboration between them and with the local Church, the mutual respect, the religious freedom and tolerance of the followers of different beliefs, the brotherhood of the Bishops and the frequent collaboration between them, - thus creating a safe and stable environment for synodality, - can be a reference in the Universal Church. It is hoped that through the upcoming Synod, the Church in Taiwan can be an inspiration to the other local Churches by sharing its experience of pastoral care, evangelization and inclusiveness, especially for the vast faithful in Chinese-speaking regions.

The diocesan synthesis and reflections having been done, and after discerning the calling of Holy Spirit and what follow-up actions need be taken, here are some considerations which mean to facilitate the discernment at a continental level:

**1. Discover, trust, and cherish the wisdom of the masses from the faithful at the basic level**

The Catholic Church is entrusted the kingly, priestly and prophetic ministry, which for a long time has been exercised by the clergy and a handful of dedicated Catholics. Although the majority of the people of God is composed of laypeople, in the current situation of the Church, they are playing a passive or secondary role. Very few of them participate actively and take the lead by offering their service. In today's highly developed world, the Church has to interpret the signs of the times and is facing new challenges of evangelization. It is time for the dedicated Catholics and the average faithful who represent the grassroots to help each other. The whole Church is called to rediscover, appreciate and respect the wisdom of all its members, and open itself to them for making decisions, in order to lead, to shepherd them, instead of relying only on the clergy and a handful of dedicated laypeople.

## **2. Deepening and revitalizing the Church hierarchy's synodal nature**

Synodality is the very nature of the Church and should be incorporated in the bond between the Pope and the Bishops, in their bishops' conferences, among the Bishops and their priests and the presbyteral council of a Diocese, and among the parish priests and every believer and in their parish community, in view of the mission of the Church and different ministries in the church and the charisms freely given by the Holy Spirit (cf. Eph 4:11-12, 16). In the Church, as the mystical Body of Christ, the hierarchy has a particular calling and its members have their specific mission and responsibility of renewing the clergy in the context of the world today, reorganizing the structure of the Church and forming the Church's members starting from grassroots, so that the clergy may imitate Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit, and live a healthy and balanced life as servants of the Lord, and put into practice synodality in their concrete daily lives and pastoral ministries, making all feel being God's family (cf. Jn 13:35) .

## **3. In search of practical actions for building up the mystical Body of Christ**

One of the purposes of synodality is to search together the vision and blueprint of the Church in today's context, which are not self-evident and require discernment and finding in community and 'acting' as a first priority. In other words, it means to explore possible practical ways of "doing" and to make adjustments continuously while "doing". This implies that every believer is a protagonist and should learn the art of praying, listening, and encountering: the encounter with God, with others, and with oneself. "Action" is not the same as "activity". The Church does not lack for "activities". What she lacks is actions that are illumined and guided by the light of Holy Spirit, showing clearly the way to synodality which reflects by itself a synodal character.

*Taipei, 23.08.2022*

*(English translation of the original text in Chinese)*

# CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF THAILAND (CBCT)

## National Synthesis Document of the Pre-Synodal Meeting

### 1. Introduction

#### Reading the Synod Experiences

When the Holy Father Pope Francis announced the 16<sup>th</sup> Synod of the Bishops (2021-2023), he emphasized “The way of synodality” for the Church according to the Will of God in the third millennium”. He announced the theme: “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission”. He gave great importance to the process of listening to the people of God: “Each one listening to one another and all listening to the Holy Spirit”. He proposed that all the Local Churches participate in the synodal process with the Universal Church, starting the process of listening to the People of God for a real participation.

The Catholic Church in Thailand has held the essential principles from the Decree of the Plenary Council of the Catholic Church in Thailand A.D. 2015, as there is a very clear correspondence between those principles and the important points of this Synod: a Synodal Church, “in communion, participation and readiness to join the mission of evangelization.” For this reason, the Synod of the Thai Catholic Church this time is an important opportunity to review and renew life according to the above-mentioned decree, in order to create a process of learning, conversion and renewal of the Thai Catholics. Listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit and to each other will lead to the building up of a Civilization of Love and to the evangelization through the BECs (Basic Ecclesial Communities)<sup>1</sup> which are the main goals of that Decree.

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<sup>1</sup> *Basic Ecclesial communities or BECs are the gatherings of Christians living in the same neighborhood in the context of the civilization of love with the aim of a stronger concrete community life. Their members witness to a new kind of relationship born from the Gospel. They meet for sharing on the Word of God, for prayer, for celebrating the important moments in the*

In the first phase of the Synod at the diocesan level, every diocese participated by the bishop, priests, religious, lay men and women, children and youth, catechists, the poor, the disabled, the LGBTQ+, vulnerable groups and various other groups such as farmers, laborers, migrants, urban and rural poor including people of other faiths. The working process started with the propagation of this Synod, through various channels of the Church; translating the related documents on this matter and inviting all faithful to pray for the preparation of the Synod. There is a listening to the Holy Spirit and to the People of God in various ways, for example through small group meetings using the Word of God, preparing online questionnaires, and having focus groups discussion. All this led to a common reflection and reciprocal listening.

The Synod meeting started with prayer and Mass of the day to motivate the members to be aware of their role as Christians. The atmosphere of the meetings opened wide and fostered direct dialogue and sharing. It made everyone, especially the youth, to be able to open up and have the courage to express themselves with different opinions that helped each other solve problems in new dimensions, making them aware more of being part and having a role in the Church. Moreover, this Synodal process made the Church realize that it is necessary to walk seriously alongside the poor, when listening to the voice of various groups: the ethnic, workers and migrants, who reflected their feeling of being treated with prejudice and discrimination.

The process of all the Synod members in each diocese has been a learning experience, especially for the theological dimension, reflecting on the document “Synodality in the life and mission of the Church”. They understood the meaning of synodality in communion and participation, joining the mission in the same direction. They also realized their role as Christians

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*life of the members, for helping each other or their brothers and sisters in the neighborhood belonging to other faiths. In this way they witness to Christ and to the Love of God. Therefore the BEC is the important base on which to build the relationship at the level of the parish community, which can be considered as a communion of communities. It differs from the other groups that gather for common activities without stressing the community aspect. Hence the nature of the BEC is more than just being a group; actually it is a community.*

anointed by the Spirit. It shows the awareness of the common *Sensus Fidei* of all the baptized. It is the strength of the grace coming from the Holy Spirit that impels us all towards evangelization (Cf. *Sensus Fidei* 90) together with the Church according to our status and role.

The results of the meeting of the Synod in the diocesan phase were very fruitful proposals for the Catholic Church in Thailand, resulting from listening to God's people at all levels. In particular, the process of listening and dialogue from the grassroots of God's people (cf. Decree... 29) bridged the gap through peaceful communication. It brought reciprocal consolation and it introduced new ideas for participation in a variety of ways, such as person-to-person interviews, the use of modern communication technology, so that everyone can participate in giving their opinions, suggestions and experiences. This is an extension of the pastoral work and evangelization in accordance with the Plenary Council's Decree A.D. 2015. It has caused a ripple effect within the Thai Catholic Church, providing opportunities for different groups of people, Christians of other denominations, believers of other faiths and all vulnerable people to be included in the common journey of God's people in the third millennium under the guidance of the Holy Spirit towards a new horizon given by God, without leaving anyone behind (cf. Decree... 42).

Then the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Thailand has drawn on the results of listening to God's people, in the realities and the contexts of the 11 dioceses according to the 10 key points of the Synod Secretariat in Rome, processing and synthesizing for submission to the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) and the International Synod Secretariat in Rome.

## **2. Body of the Synthesis: Discernment of the Collated Contributions**

### **2.1 The Journeying Companions**

The journey of the Catholic Church in Thailand is a journey together with bishops, priests, religious men and women and the laity in the unity of the faith, religious practice and the

manifestation of the civilization of Love in reciprocal support, listening and good example through the cooperation of the 3 main pillars in the community, namely the family, the parish and the school (cf. Decree ... 22-25). The aim is for the Local Church to take special care in the pastoral care of the catechumens, the foreigners, the ethnic groups, the children and the youth, the vulnerable, such as the abandoned, the poor, the elderly, the disabled, the sick, those who wait for opportunities, drug addicts, migrant workers, refugees, etc. (cf. Decree ... 27). In addition, the Catholic Church gives importance to journeying with brothers and sisters of other faiths and cultures for mutual enrichment in the faith. As good friends we build unity with them by showing that we are good Christians, with a strong faith, a Christian testimony, respecting and honoring each other's faith, helping, sharing and participating in each other's traditional or religious activities (cf. Decree... 31).

Priests and deacons are assistants to the bishop. As pastors walking alongside their lambs and who must know all the faithful, they must review themselves in their participation in the work of evangelization according to the grace of their priesthood, ready to commit themselves to it with sacrifice and generosity, as servant leaders, with simplicity, politeness, humility, good human relations and being good examples as disciples of Christ. They pay attention to visiting all, especially the poor, supporting and encouraging the faithful to have a sense of belonging, to take part in the various activities of the parish, in the Eucharistic celebrations, pastoral ministry and the work of charity (cf. Decree... 18).

The role of lay faithful is to walk side by side with each other as "Missionary Disciples" (cf. Decree... 13) as the early Christians, living as witnesses, going out towards the others and proclaiming the Good News to brothers and sisters of other faiths and cultures, especially the vulnerable in churches, schools, parish communities, surrounding communities and everywhere.

The Church must choose to be with the poor and for the poor (cf. Decree... 26). She fosters a spirit of love and service, educating the faithful on the social teachings of the Church (cf. Decree... 28). She aims to a better life for all, respectful of the human dignity in

all dimensions, through the Works of Charity, helping disaster victims, the poor, the disabled, the sick, the prisoners, ethnic groups, migrant workers and sea travelers. She protects the human rights of the vulnerable, children, women, elderly, victims of violence and human trafficking, including building justice, equality for the underprivileged and caring for the environment – our common home.

## 2.2 Listening

The Church in Thailand must listen to the Word of God and foster good relationships among all her members living as a community of faith, capable of listening to each other with humility, sharing the burdens, flexible and respectful of different ideas. Reciprocal listening builds up a greater family atmosphere, more unity, good relationships, more openness to counseling, meeting and sharing in the parish community (Cf. Decree... 23).

The Church in Thailand intends to listen to all, for example people with different economic and social status, political ideas, different ethnic groups, languages, traditions and cultures, brothers and sisters of other Christian denominations and of other faiths, state organizations and offices working in the local communities. It also gives importance to listening to all groups, as for example the youth, the women, the elderly, the LGBTQ+, the marginalized as drug addicts, prisoners, refugees and also those that have impediments in receiving the Sacraments of the Church, being aware that their voice can also be the voice of the Spirit. All these are in order to develop appropriate direction on pastoral care for them.

Besides all these, in the midst of the crisis of climate change, She listens to the cries of the nature and realize that this world is our common home (Cf. *Laudato Si* 13, 49). She takes action by changing consumption behavior, preserving the environment, reducing waste, growing crops and organic agriculture at the family, parish, educational institutions and community levels.

The Church in Thailand listens to the various groups through listening and meditating on the Word of God, practicing

it in the daily life through visits to the people for reciprocal listening and evangelizing through the triple dialogue with the poor, religions and cultures fostered by the FABC, (Cf. Decree... 29). The listening process facilitate collaboration within the community among the parish priest, the pastoral council and the lay organizations, having more dialogue, coordination, integration and cooperation among them. So listening process can be considered a starting point of synodality process. It is an opportunity for priests and religious to reflect themselves from the point of view of the laity, leading to a change of attitude. They have become aware of the significance of on-going formation in order to become pastors for the mission of evangelization (cf. *Sensus Fidei* 126).

The Catholic Church in Thailand is also aware of the importance of modern communication technology, which is God's gift and an instrument for listening to all. Therefore, She is using it in a simple way to reach all, leading to an effective listening to the target audience and keeping up to the situation (Cf. Decree... 39).

### **2.3 Speaking Out**

The Catholic Church in Thailand fosters an atmosphere of fraternity through visits, listening, dialogue and immersions. She helps everyone in the parish community and the various parish organizations to find an extensive discussion forum among the laity, especially with the marginalized, those in difficulties and the poor. It builds up trust, encouraging them to express their opinions and speak the truth in an honest and direct way, daring to speak the truth and stating what is right that makes everyone in the parish community to realize the value, dignity, respect for human rights and dare to correct what is wrong for the common good. All are accepted and receive justice in society (Cf. Decree... 27)

In addition, opening opportunities and venues for dialogue with brothers and sisters of different faiths, especially those who suffer hardships in the community, which leads them to a change attitudes and discover new dimensions of pastoral work in the face

of ever-changing contemporary social problems. All these promote the atmosphere of moving together towards the civilization of love.

In a social situation where people, including Christians, have conflicts on political opinions, those in charge of the Catholic Church in Thailand support the freedom of expression among the faithful, with the Word of God and the Church teachings as the norm without rushing to criticize or instruct.

## **2.4 Liturgical Celebration**

The Catholic Church in Thailand responds to God's love by living in love and communion through a Spirituality of Communion. She is nurtured to constant growth by listening to the Word, participating in the Liturgy, receiving the Eucharist and the other sacraments. Therefore, concerning the celebration of the Sacred Liturgy, there should be a good preparation for the celebration of the Eucharist. Priests should give importance to the preparation of the liturgy and homily that is consistent with the Word of God. The people of God is encouraged to have a greater role and more participation in the Liturgy according to their abilities, such as proclamation of the readings, preparation of the offerings, arrangement of the church, singing, etc... Moreover, interaction before and after the Eucharist is equally important in order to build unity in the community's celebration of the Lord's Day (cf. Decree... 12).

When there is no assigned priest in peripheries, lay leaders, like catechists and prayer leaders, should be supported to develop a leading role in the Liturgy of the Word, to help the faithful being able to join in the Liturgy and to listen to the Word of God more regularly.

The result of the celebration of the Eucharist and other liturgies in the community is a true intimacy with God and a true communion with fellow brothers and sisters. It can be manifested by sharing faith experiences that come from the meditation of the Word of God and a life according to it; by the depth of prayer and the common worship of God in the various liturgies; by joyfully

living with all brothers and sisters; by the common discernment and resolution of problems and by providing assistance to the needy (cf. Decree... 12)

## **2.5 Sharing Responsibility for our Common Mission**

The Church should have regular and continuous dialogue within its structure, to create a network and work as a team in the parish, diocese, religious congregations and bishops' conference, especially within the parish community as a platform to meet and consult with the faithful (cf. Decree... 33, 34).

The local Church in Thailand embraces the example of the missionaries in the past, who evangelized by visiting, immersing and sharing life with brothers and sisters in the community, as a model for the mission of love and service, sharing, helping without discrimination and promoting justice.

Members of all status and levels in the Church must consider evangelization as a common responsibility, especially in the families and the parish communities, as well as in Catholic schools, which are bases and fields for evangelization to brothers and sisters of different faiths, cultures and economic status (Cf. Decree... 25).

The priests should nurture activities of the parish to be lively and coordinated among the various groups in the parish community. They should as well cooperate with the faithful to actively promote vocations in the parish community, to enable the children and the youth to respond to the call to be pastors and collaborators (Cf. Decree... 38).

The Christian family is a domestic Church, where parents are the first formators in the faith and the initial precious formation source of a complete Christian life. They are the most important starting point for proclaiming the Good News, a source of cultivation for the vocation and the transmission of faith. They are good role models in life for their children and grandchildren in the family and must as well encourage them to participate in the work of evangelization of the parish community (Cf. Decree...24, 38).

The Catholic Educational Institutes are the field for pastoral care and evangelization for all. They are places for cultivation of life values according to the Gospel by inserting Gospel values in teaching, in order to make them a field for the practice of morality, love and service in the community in a concrete way, building unity, sharing and developing the person in all dimensions of life, including helping the poor in the community (Cf. Decree... 25). In this way the Catholic Church in Thailand emphasizes promotion of the spirit of Youth Missionaries in schools to prepare Catholic children and youth to be evangelizers in society.

The process of BEC<sup>2</sup> encourages everyone to bear life witness and reflect on the faith in their own way of life through the Word of God. It helps Christians to see Christ in the faces of their brothers and sisters of other faiths and those in need, share, help and dedicate their lives to one another. It forms a group that help each other in the community and participate in the mission of caring for God's creations in their own parish community (Cf. Decree... 22, 23).

Homes, parishes and Catholic schools are areas where Christians in the parish community can participate in the mission of evangelization in cooperation with the social and pastoral departments of the Catholic Church in the area and with both public and private organizations in various practical activities in the parish community, as for example, doing works of mercy and development work, promoting justice, protecting human rights, preventing human trafficking and caring for the creation. The target groups of beneficiaries are the elderly, detainees, migrant

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<sup>2</sup> *A New Way of being Church stresses the community dimension of the faithful following the indications given by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (cf. FABC V, 1990, n. 8). In their statement the Bishops present a model of the People of God based on community at all levels, be it the BEC, the Parish Church Community, the Diocese or the whole Church. This new way has a specific spirituality: the Spirituality of Communion. It is a community in which all its members, no matter if they are priests, religious or laity, aware of being brothers and sisters, live as such. All share responsibility in the mission of the community, each one according to his/her role.*

*Therefore the way of life of the faithful who try to live as brothers and sisters in a community united in reciprocal love must reflect the image of the first Christian community of Christ's disciples (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35) and live according to the indications given by St. Paul to the Colossians (Col 3:12-17).*

workers, small farmers, etc. It also includes the promotion of the mission of love and service in the social context and the parish community (cf. Decree... 26-28).

In addition, in some dioceses where the majority of the population are ethnic Christians with their own identities and languages, there has been support for interested ethnic lay people to be trained as local catechists (Sala-the local catechist), to help priests in promoting the faith and fully participate in the mission of the parish community. The Local Church has always expressed her faith and responsibility in her mission in accordance with the cultural context of the ethnic groups in a harmonious way.

## **2.6 Dialogue in Church and Society**

The Catholic community composed of family homes, the parish church and Catholic schools, uses dialogue process with the poor, brothers and sisters of other faiths and cultures (triple dialogue) (cf. Decree ... 29, 31): (1) Dialogue with the poor through building partnerships with all sectors in the community through works of mercy, development work, protection of rights, the promotion of social justice and learning the truth of the life of the poor; (2) Dialogue with brothers and sisters of other faiths through various traditional activities such as Rocket festival or Boon Bang Fai, Loi Krathong, Buddhist Candle Festival, joining funerals of brothers and sisters of other faiths, theological discussions, and sharing religious knowledge and beliefs on various occasions; (3) Dialogue with brothers and sisters from other cultures, such as studying and learning the truth of brothers and sisters from different cultures and the transfer of culture and wisdom from the old to the new generation. In addition, the Local Church also attaches great importance to dialogue with God's creation by taking care of the creation in the local community and by incorporating valuable local cultural elements into local liturgies to make the faith celebration of each local community more meaningful, such as the forest ritual, the blessing of rice fields, the blessing of watersheds, and the blessing of fish. At the same time,

it states the communion with the Church in caring of the world, our common home (cf. Decree... 29).

In the context of the Catholic Church in Thailand, many families Catholics are married to people of other faiths. Therefore, there should be pastoral care of family life and family ongoing formation in all forms to instill faith, devotion and understanding of the roles and duties, strengthening the relationships and the unity in the family. Importance is given to the preparation for marriage, with an appropriate time, contents and process to learn the principles of Christian life and each other's religious experiences for mutual understanding and respect for differences. It will make the Christian faith a lively testimony and it is the basis of family unity even though with different faiths (cf. Decree... 24)

In addition, the increasing phenomenon of same-sex Christian couples reminds the Catholic Church in Thailand of the necessity to provide appropriate pastoral care for them.

Finally, the Church must evangelize by being a social conscience, through reflection on the Catholic Social Teaching, affirming human dignity as the image of God, what is right, justice, human rights and peaceful coexistence (Cf. Decree... 27).

## **2.7 Ecumenism**

The Catholic Church in Thailand realizes the importance of synodality with our brothers and sisters of other Christian denominations in the unity of the one faith in Jesus Christ, who is the center that makes it possible to coexist peacefully, respect each other as well as being a model for living as witnesses in a society where Buddhists are the main group. But in reality, there are still challenges in building relationships with Christians of other denominations. Open-mindedness, dialogue and learning from each other are still required.

In the past, the Catholic Church in Thailand has created a network, organized a forum to exchange and learn about social issues and has joined hands with fellow Christians of other denominations in the aspect of social conscience. She has taken the

right stance on issues of social injustice, organized prayer activities for unity, pray together with other Churches on important occasions such as Christmas Day, New Year's Day, Elder's Day and International Human Rights Day. In the latest health crisis the network of Christian Churches has been involved in social activities, such as distributing food and helping people in need during the Covid-19 situation. It has also been a joint network for environmental conservation practices in the community (Cf. Decree... 30).

## **2.8 Authority and Participation**

Every Diocese of the Catholic Church in Thailand has a clear administrative structure and works according to it. It has a bishop's council, a presbyteral council, a diocesan administrative committee, a diocesan and parish pastoral councils, schools, seminaries, and Catholic organizations. All carry out their mission in accordance with both short- and long-term Diocesan pastoral plans. There is continuous monitoring, evaluation, and learning from the practice, in order to develop the work process in accordance with the current situation. There is an integration of collaboration between departments, the building of networks and collaborations with organizations at all levels, both internally and externally and the use of resources together to continue achieving maximum benefit in pastoral work and evangelization (cf. Decree... 35).

At the parish community level, participation is encouraged through the BEC process. It is a New Way of being Church, a spirit or process for the renewal of the Christian faith, promoting participation through the Word of God, sharing experiences, living together as brothers and sisters and evangelizing by testimony and sharing with each other (cf. Decree... 23). There is decentralized management as a collaboration of priests and the faithful. There are various ministries, such as Liturgical ministry, the pastoral and the missionary ministries, BEC ministry, interreligious ministry, social ministry, etc, and concrete activities according to the context of the parish community. At the same time, there are groups

according to different Charisms, such as Legion of Mary, Cursillo, Vincent de Paul, etc., and charity work for evangelization, such as helping the poor, ministry for the elderly, etc., that are involved in leading and bonding in the Catholic community. Let's also notice that some dioceses have given roles to ethnic catechists and prayer leaders in helping the pastoral work of the priests in areas where these have to look after many Catholic parishes and it is difficult to travel for pastoral work (Cf. Decree... 33).

Moreover, the Catholic Church in Thailand recognizes that communication technology is a gift from God. Especially new media are suitable tools for communicating with each other, for creative pastoral work and evangelization. Therefore, it is necessary to be ready to develop and manage personnel for effective use of media in evangelization, capable of keeping up with the current situation and meeting the needs of the target groups. Everyone should also be helped to understand and access various media with conscience and prudence in sharing knowledge on media studies (cf. Decree... 39).

## **2.9 Discerning and Deciding**

The Local Churches and parish communities have taken participatory work through prayer and listening to the word of God before meetings, seminars, dialogues or exchanging ideas, and in reaching consensus they rely on the light of the faith for giving suggestions or opinion.

The Thai cultural element concerning respect and obedience to the elders/leaders is something good that allows lay people to focus on the leadership of the priests and it makes them ready to listen to their advice on liturgical ceremonies, religious doctrines and morals and the correct law of the Church. However, regarding the operation of the parish community in today's society, priests are requested to listen more to the opinions and suggestions from the lay faithful.

## 2.10 Forming ourselves in Synodality

The synodal process with the people of God at the diocesan level shows that Christians should listen more to each other and should live according to Christ's commandment of love. An experience of faith will blossom through the encounter with Christ. From having experienced His love, conversion (metanoia) will follow (cf. Decree... 11). The Catholic Church in Thailand is well aware of the renewal of the spiritual life of the faithful for a greater zeal of witnessing and evangelization. The priests have a duty to promote and support lay people for their spiritual renewal, to have strong and profound faith as mature persons and a personal encounter with God. Other than that, there is a commitment to lead the process for the development of Lay Faithful, so that the lay people, especially the catechists, can have potential, participation and a role for the evangelization in the Thai society (cf. Decree... 36, 37).

The Decree of the Plenary Council A.D. 2015, Articles 36-38 emphasizes the development of personnel and faithful as preachers and "Missionary Disciples". Therefore, it is very necessary to form the faithful to be a "Missionary Disciple". Priests should receive proper formation in the seminary from properly trained seminary formators, so that the seminarians can be aware of their role and become effective "Missionary Disciples". In addition, to enhance maturity of faith and being "Missionary disciples" in today's society, on-going formation should be promoted, both in terms of spiritual growth and missionary skills such as leadership, preaching, counseling, management, dialogue, missionary work, use of technology, communication, etc. The priests should be willing to train themselves through lifelong learning so that they can become true pastors in the mission of evangelization<sup>3</sup>. By the way, the Catholic Church in Thailand is in

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<sup>3</sup> *The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Thailand made a resolution to have a general assembly of the National Major Seminary Lux Mundi in order to study the document Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis "The Gift of the Priestly Vocation" to review and renew the formation of priests from the seminary level to the ongoing formation throughout the entire life of the priests.*

the process of developing a curriculum for the formation of Late Vocations and Permanent Deacons.

### **3. Conclusions**

The synodal process in dioceses is an opportunity for the Catholic Church in Thailand to listen to the word of God and also listen to the God's people in various ways, such as answering questionnaires, having focus groups, small group meetings and plenary meetings in order to reflect, to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit and to each other. The communication technology was used in the listening process, making it more effective. Opinions were expressed widely and freely corresponding to the target groups from members of all levels within and outside the Church. Recently, the Catholic Church in Thailand faced with various challenges to synodality in communion, building participation and carrying out the mission of evangelization amidst the rapidly changing social, cultural, economic and contemporary political situation. But this synod process turned into an opportunity that made her review and renew herself in line with the Decree of the Plenary Council of the Catholic Church in Thailand A.D. 2015. Moreover, it is an approach that gives the Thai faithful at all levels from bishops, clergy, religious and lay people, the opportunity to build close relationships and trust, recognizing and accepting differences of each other's opinions. It is like a ladder towards the building of communion, a sense of participation in the common mission of evangelization for the building of the Kingdom of God in this world.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Thailand intends to bring the results of the Synod to supplement the implementation of its Decree A. D. 2015 to a more effective results, by adhering to the essence of the decree. This means proclaiming the Good News to the Thai people in a "credible" way, that spring from the real life experiences of individual Catholics and the community, a Christian community starting from families, neighborhoods, parish communities and other forms of communities (cf. Decree... 6, 7). Their members are living in accordance with the faith,

putting in practice the Word of God, being united, sharing experiences of faith for reciprocal edification in the civilization of Love, helping and supporting one another both in the Christian community and with the others, according to the guidelines of the Bishops' Conference held since the beginning of the new millennium in the year A. D. 2000, that is, "A New Way of being Church".

In addition, the results of the synod of all dioceses are specific and unique to each place, each diocese, as a result of listening to the voice of the people of God which is also the voice of the Holy Spirit. And through the leadership of Bishop of the Diocese, they can be brought into practice to enhance the support for the guidelines of the bishops' conference, making these last ones more effective in the mission of evangelization of that diocese as well as being more reliable.

A good result of each Diocesan Synod is also a good result of the others, that they are able to adjust and adapt according to their capacity and local context.

#### **4. Appendices**

##### **4.1 The reality in Thai society from the economic, political, social, religious, cultural and environmental perspectives**

Thai contemporary society considers development mainly stressing the liberal economy and capitalism (material development). It changes according to the rapidly changing global social trends. As a result of communication and technology, it is easy to communicate with each other all over the world, leading towards a globalization trend, which is a mechanism for spreading both material and concrete factors for economic growth according to the theory of free competition, such as goods and natural resources, but also more abstract things such as knowledge, values, culture, development concepts, attitudes, worldviews, paradigms, ways of life and production methods. There is an

exchange of knowledge among a society with a plurality of races, languages and cultures.

About 20 million people are involved in agriculture. Most of them focus on monoculture, using many chemicals and pesticides. There are challenges from climate change, unstable production prices and the soaring price of production factors. The outbreak of COVID-19 in these last more than 2 years has affected the economy of the people as a whole, especially the poor, the farmers and small entrepreneurs.

These factors create challenges for the Thai society, such as the increasing income gap between the rich and the poor and migration to work in large cities, resulting in more and more social problems in big cities. Even though social media make it easier for people to stay in touch, it is just a connection in a virtual reality. People in society have high personal world. Paying too much attention to oneself (individualism) causes human relationship to be missing. Human dignity has been reduced. Ultimately, they lead a life imbued of secularism and ethical relativism (Cf. Decree... 2), which greatly weakens family and community institutions. Family ties of kinship have declined. Children and youth are confused in thinking and behavior. This affects awareness of moral and ethical values, which in turn affects religious values. They are reduced to just formal rituals, which lack the power to cultivate morals, ethics and religious doctrines into the life of the faithful. As a result, people's attitudes towards morality, ethics and cultural values are weakened, hindering the atmosphere of society in building a civilization of love.

However, we have discovered that Thai society is still full of the values of the Kingdom of God, namely the relational dimension based on kinship relationships. Although reduced, in rural society there is fraternity, good relationships and also generosity and reciprocal help.

The value of respect for the elderly makes the religious and cultural dimensions still powerful, because the elderly are the main religious and cultural stronghold. As a result, the Thai society can still maintain good traditions and beautiful cultures of

society and it also tries to continue passing them on to the younger generations.

Meanwhile in the midst of a capitalist and consumerist economy it can be seen that Thai society still pays more attention to a life according to an economy of sufficiency and sharing. Moreover, there are increasing efforts to turn to chemical-free crops or organic farming. There is also a greater emphasis on food security and safe food production.

#### **4.2 Some challenges to Christian life**

Christians are a minority in the community. They live scattered, whether it is a small or big parish, in the countryside and in the city. Only few parishes have settlements of Christians with a clear Christian community. There is variety, especially among the faithful in the city, where there are Christians from many parts of Thailand and foreigners, more and more migrant workers, Filipinos, Vietnamese, Myanmar, Laotians, Cambodians, etc., with different traditions and cultures, including also tourists. Therefore, Christians are challenged to open their hearts to dialogue and accept each other's culture based on love, justice and peacemaking, with the help of sharing.

Modern communication technology affects the way of life, religious practice and the cultivation of the Catholic faith among Christians, especially the youth, which are a vulnerable group.

Catholic schools in the community are likewise challenged to bear witness to evangelization and the teaching of catechism to make children and youth grow, live as good persons and practice the virtues.

In addition, some Christians have distanced themselves from the parishes for many reasons, such as going to work in the big cities or abroad, having impediments connected to marriage, conflicts and scandals. Most Christians are living among brothers and sisters of other faiths and some may have been swallowed up by them, making Catholics' attention to religious and cultural values even more neglected.

Ethnic Christian communities, mostly scattered in remote areas of northern Thailand, have their own diverse lifestyles, customs, cultures and languages. They also have good relationship with each other, are close to each other as relatives, help each other very well, coexist peacefully, give importance to the common good and offer support from one generation to the other. However, now they have begun to migrate more into the cities and with the changes of the present world the way of life of the people in the community is inevitably changing.

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# Catholic Bishops' Conference of Timor-Leste

## Conferencia Episcopal Timorese (CET)

### Synthesis for Synodal Process

#### INTRODUCTION

The Catholic Church of Timor-Leste has now more than 500<sup>1</sup> years of existence, with the Archdiocese of Dili 80 years old, the Diocese of Baucau 25 and the Diocese of Maliana 12 years old. The number of the faithful increased substantially during the Indonesian occupation. Today, the People of God is growing more and more and we are proud of the fact that the majority of the Timorese people are Christian Catholics. The vocation to the consecrated life has grown meaningfully among the faithful with ministries ordained from time to time. This reality has greatly helped the development of the Church's mission in Timor-Leste. Being the work of God, these facts show that the Holy Spirit works and motivates in the evangelization initiatives, enlightens, inspires, warms and permanently strengthens (*Preparatory Document*=PD, n. 1) the hearts of Timorese Christians to be faithful to the teachings of God the Most Holy Trinity (*Catechism of Catholic Church*, nn. 238-248). Through baptism (cfr. Mat 28,19), we are one people, the people of God who have always journeyed together (PD, II, n.10) until today. This 'journeying together' marks the process and the synodal spirit (PD, n. 1)) in the life of the Church.

Regarding the synodal process, the Church of Timor-Leste followed the procedures established in the Preparatory Document (Communion, Participation and Mission) and the *Vademecum*. Having received the two documents, the Timorese Episcopal Conference (CET) established a national team with representatives from the 3 Dioceses to coordinate the consultation process of the Synod of Bishops at the national level.

The Synodal process started from the bottom at *Bairros* (neighbourhoods) levels up to the Diocese or Archdiocese level.

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<sup>1</sup> Mission in Timor-Leste began in 1515. Archdiocese of Dili was erected in 1940, Diocese of Baucau was erected in 1996 and Diocese of Maliana was in 2010.

Through consultations from the bottom, we discovered the enthusiasm and the spirit of participation of the faithful which were really very gratifying. The priests met with their faithful, listened to them, shared the word of God and reflected with them; made discernment and *correptio fraterna* about everything that is good for the Christian life while improving or correcting the faults and gaps.

In this consultation process, the Church leaders and their people discussed the constraints and difficulties in the Christian life in the context of Timorese culture (GS, 57). Two important points were noted namely: a) the problem of globalization with its individualism and indifference, secularism and ethical relativism that instigated the way of life of the faithful; b) another fundamental problem is the religious syncretism that threatens the lives of Christians as the consequence of the lack of adequate, deep and true inculturation according to the rules and the context of the mission.

The synodal consultation approach by the Local Church of Timor-Leste involved individuals, categorical groups, religious, clergy, and the bishops of the three Dioceses with their respective parishes, in a total of 72 (seventy-two) parishes. All Dioceses had the opportunity to organize Diocesan Assemblies before submitting their respective summaries to the responsible team at the Timorese Episcopal Conference (CET) level.

The CET's synodal consultation team then gathered all the Diocesan consultation summary, and drew up a synthesis which was presented to the Assembly of CET gathered on may 6<sup>th</sup> in Dili, Timor-Leste. The participants of CET's Assembly made up of Bishops, Priests, Men and Women Religious, Leaders of State and Government bodies, Civilians and Military, representatives of different Religious Confessions and the representatives of the faithful from the 3 Dioceses.

## **I. THE COMPANIONS OF THE JOURNEY**

The Synthesis of the 3 Dioceses: The Metropolitan Archdiocese of Dili, the Diocese of Baucau and the Diocese of Maliana, which summarizes the responses to this particular theme, highlighted the journeying companions, starting with the Pope, Bishops, Priests, Deacons and Religious, leaders of categorical groups, animators, faithful and the society including marginalized groups.

It was well understood that the level of confidence of the Christian people towards the role of the Church hierarchy in Timor-Leste is still high. The Church of Timor-Leste is regarded as an unforgettable partner of the people in all situations. This awareness of the role of the Church hierarchy in the Christians daily lives, continually inspires them as a Church through the sacrament of baptism and the profession of faith in the context of a One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church (CCCh, 50-141). The “journeying together” in Timor-Leste is translated into the Church's active engagement, namely in the areas of: pastoral, education, social, cultural and political life of the people as in the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* no. 1 which says; “the joys and hopes, the sorrows and anxieties of people today, especially the poor and all those who suffer, are also the joys and hopes, the sorrows and anxieties of Christ's disciples” (GS, n. 1).

The responses of the faithful are based on the reality of the Church of Timor-Leste in the sense that the One who asks us to “walk together” is the Holy Trinity God who revealed himself in Jesus Christ and who wants us to love and serve each other on this “path together”.

Within this context of walking together, the participants remind the Church that there are still some excluded or marginalized groups in our society. These groups include: junkies, gangsters, NGOs, politicians, the *barlaquiados*, LGBTs, divorcees, minority groups, polygamists, and the disabled. These groups also need the Church's attention in their pastoral activities.

## II. LISTENING

The Church of Timor-Leste plays a very critical role in the society. This was the conclusion of the answers to the first question. The Church has become an unforgettable companion of the Timorese society. The “listening” as an important aspect of the Church in this “journeying together” with the faithful and the society, is visible in two parts: firstly, where they listen to the Church in the understanding that the Church represents the voice of the Holy Trinity; secondly, where the Church listens to her faithful and society in the sense that the Church needs to open herself to God, to the

faithful and to the society, because God has always spoken through people, through events and through the poor and miserable.

There are many ways in which the Church listens to her people, especially young people, as a friend through dialogue while sharing and giving her opinions through the diocesan assemblies. Another way of listening to young people is through the National and International Youth Cross activities.

The Church of Timor-Leste highly appreciates and values the contributions of consecrated men and women, giving them opportunities to take on parishes and other responsibilities such as running schools, colleges, clinics and orphanages as their pastoral and spiritual attainments. Through other available means, the Church of Timor-Leste continues to provide rooms to women's groups, minority, abandoned and excluded groups in the society to maximize the participations and contributions. In this regard, suggestions were made to improve the listening processes whereby the Church would need to go down to meet them, listen to them, making discernment and decisions.

### **III. WAYS OF LISTENING**

The hierarchy of the Church of Timor-Leste has always emphasised the imperative of an open and qualified listening in the evangelization mission. There are a number of ways on how the Church attends the people of God, listens to the Holy Trinity God who speaks to the faithful through meetings and formations at the levels of diocesan and parish councils (Priest Councils, Diocesan Pastoral Councils, Economic Councils in the Diocese and parishes etc.); meetings with different groups in the Dioceses and parishes to implement plans, review and evaluate pastoral services including visits, training, communications and collaboration with stakeholders and religious communities, and providing opportunities for participation of minority groups, the abandoned and excluded ones such as divorced, polygamous and LGBT groups.

It was also admitted that the Church's initiatives of listening are not maximum yet and therefore it is recommended for more dialogues, visits, communications and to implement more transparency within the Church. The hierarchy of the Church must approach and actively create a climate of trust so that the faithful can

participate more actively in the Church's mission. It was also recommended for these in the hierarchy of the Church to, not only meeting the representatives in the councils, but also listen to all members, search for ways of resolving internal problems of the Church, opening up themselves to the local problems that the members of the community and society may have. In this regard the attitude of listening to the people of God must become a vocation and compassion of the Church.

#### IV. CELEBRATING

The liturgical celebration must bring together the people of God to celebrate the Mystery of God, and in particular the Eucharistic celebration as the culmination of the sacraments. Through liturgical celebrations we found the sense of “walking together” through the active and conscious participation of all. In this way we can bring the pyramidal Church to the Church of all People of God.

The faithful recognize that liturgical celebrations, and in particular the Eucharistic celebration, motivates, guides and helps them to hear God's call, to make them discern to live together as a family through mutual respect and love in line with God's teachings. In this way people can live better the spirit of synodality or “walking together” in co-responsibility as a concrete participation in the services of the Church. Celebrations which involve the active participation of the faithful, include: the Eucharistic celebration, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, devotions, novenas, the days of the dead, pilgrimages, and national and international youth cross. It was recognized that one of the factors that really helped the participation of the faithful is the use of the ‘Tetum’ language as the *lingua franca* of the Timorese people. This has in fact greatly contributed to the liturgical celebration having a special place in the lives of the Christian Timorese.

On the other hand, the faithful also call attention to liturgical celebrations in a way that is live, enjoyable, richer and more contextual. For this, we need to provide ongoing formation as important means of building the ‘journeying together’, for the people, leaders of the Church, ministers, priests and deacons, pastoral agents and especially for candidates who will receive the sacraments,

allowing the process of strengthening their faith and commitments towards these sacraments.

However, it points to a reality where the promotion and formation of the lector-acolyte service is still far from what is desired to better meet the needs of the people of God. It is necessary to further expand the pastoral services that promote the role of the readership-acolyte in the Church of Timor-Leste; invest more in the ongoing formation of catechists on the Bible, liturgy and theology. The values of the Gospel must be contextualized in liturgical celebrations, and how to live in a more concrete life the belief in the Holy Trinity God, deepening pastoral activities through: the rosary, retreats, *lectio Divina*, praying with groups of married people, young people, children, and other groups in the Church. It is essential to invest in the formation of lay people: men and women and in the appreciation and communion of different services and ministries inside and outside the Church. The need to review the training of new priests with a more human perspective was also highlighted, for a more personalized service to the People of God, to be more present in the life of communities, closer to people, families and communities, seeking to make the Church increasingly part of communion, participation and mission. The faithful also want the priests to improve the performance of their duties and preaching, as they need to better prepare their homilies.

## **V. CORRESPONSIBILITY IN THE MISSION**

As missionary disciples, it is necessary for each one to live his or her vocation and be a protagonist in the mission. The moment a Christian receives baptism, he or she also receives the duty to be a prophet, a priest and a king. With the power of the Holy Spirit, each one has the responsibility of announcing/evangelizing, thus strengthening their Christian faith in Jesus Christ. To be a missionary disciple is to be filled with the joy of the Holy Spirit by sharing with the discouraged, marginalized, excluded, minority groups and so on, so that they, in turn, can also experience God's love in their hearts. The presence of the missionary disciple brings joy, peace, patience, humility, faith and love.

How to support committed members working in the society? Help them to better implement their mission, functions and

commitments through material and spiritual support, provide and ongoing formation and further training, and continuously praying and accompanying them; collaborate with them and support them, give them responsibilities, so that they can announce the truth and, in turn, they can create conducive environment for faith to grow while maintaining a good relationship with the Church. The Church must continuously give them instructions and guidance so that they can better carry out the mission of discipleship based on the teachings of Jesus Christ. Many believers work with love, for they know that those who work in the Lord's harvest will receive rewards in the Kingdom of Heaven.

All the faithful who truly live these commitments need to be provided with continuous information and training through seminars, conferences, etc. at all levels of the Episcopal Conference, Dioceses, parishes and religious communities. In this way, the faithful can mutually share their lives, experiences and knowledge, establishing the noble meaning of witness to the Christian faith.

All Christians must have the opportunity and room to participate, give them space, responsibilities and the ability, with the power of the Holy Spirit, to fully fulfil their missions. Every Christian fulfils his or her mission through groups he or she is part of in the Church. When the faithful truly fulfil their missions, they will be able to lead more people to feel that the Church is a place of refuge, of joy and hope through the presence, listening and acceptance of the word of God and the teachings of the Church that they receive from pastoral workers and through the celebration of sacraments.

The Theme of the Synod of Bishops on: "Communion, Participation and Mission" is really to live the role of discipleship. This theme indeed inspires the horizon and brings a new paradigm to the Church of Timor-Leste.

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

The Church, considered mother and teacher, becomes a mediator at all times, promoting dialogue with all entities in search of solutions to common problems. It promotes, first of all, internal dialogue in the Church through Diocesan Assemblies, where priests, consecrated persons, civil and military authorities, representatives of

groups and faithful within the Diocese meet. It should be noted that all together discern and decide on pastoral plans.

The Church through her prophetic mission also promotes external dialogue with the other brothers within the society. It appears that the dialogue that the Church is committed to promote with other religions and with non-believers is not yet intensive. There is a need for more tolerance and dialogue between religions and also with non-believers, as well as the need to promote ecumenical movements (cfr. John, 17,21; UR), to develop more collaboration with religious tourism groups, to respect religious festivals of other confessions, to value divergence and to establish joint charitable actions. The Church has been proactive promoting dialogue and learning from other sectors of society: the political and cultural world, civil society, business society and also from the poor. Regarding diversity, the Church is always available for dialogue with all entities, collaborates, listens and learns to seek balance and respect between different opinions. However, the Church firmly preaches and stands in Sacred Scripture, in Apostolic Tradition and in the Magisterium of the Church (DV, 7-10; LG 9 e 33).

Dialogue is considered an important instrument that the Church uses to meet, and “walk together” with the society which is marked by cultural, political and religious diversity. In this situation only dialogue brings solutions to the various problems of society. The Church promotes dialogue by identifying current problems which include the practice of animism that is still alive within members of the community, the superficial practice of faith, the loss of the will to the spiritual life and the influences of modernization and of technology within communities.

Dialogue is an instrument of mediation in searching solutions. The Church has long experience and commitment in dialogue with traditional leaders about traditional belief, traditional marriage which often precludes the Church's sacrament of marriage. In all of these, dialogue needs to be improved. The Church, on behalf of the people, also continually speaks with the authorities or bodies that have competences, at national or international levels, in the defence of the weakest, the marginalized, the excluded and the minority groups.

The Church also promotes activities with the other brothers including: praying the rosary together, visiting families, helping communities affected by conflicts or natural disasters. Through this synod of bishops the Church is committed to seek and find new paradigms for the continuation of this dialogue.

## **VI. DIALOGUE WITH OTHER RELIGIOUS CONFESSIONS**

The Timorese Church is open in its relationship with other religious confessions (cfr. Mc 9, 40) such as Protestants, Muslims, Confucianism, Hinduism, Buddhism and also with groups that have no religion. This “walking together” brings us tolerance, ecumenical dialogue, the celebration of mixed marriages (mixed religious) and disparity in worship (Paulo VI, *Motu Proprio Causas Matrimoniales*).

The Church strives to bring these groups together through dialogue creating unity, mutual respect, mutual help, tolerance among the people for the common good. The activities that can be seen and are part of this working together include joint prayers and pilgrimages. We also note that “working together” with other religious faiths and with other sects such as Geová, Baha’i etc, is still not maximum. The great challenge for the Church of Timor-Leste is that some of these groups are indifferent both in their thinking and in their attitudes towards dialogue.

The Church leaders, in performing their pastoral functions, need to pay more attention to dialogue, they need to socialize their programs to the faithful, evaluate, promote co-responsibility between the Catholic Church and the leaders of other religious confessions and groups in favour of peace, unity, fraternity and friendship, thus minimizing conflicts within the community.

## **VIII. AUTHORITY AND PARTICIPATION**

The Church, as mother and teacher, will always be ready to listen, receive and accommodate the critical ideas of the faithful, their problems and sufferings, identifying their abilities and talents in order to better involve them in the mission of Christ. Regarding the practice of work and co-responsibility, the Church of Timor-Leste has established a structure that includes: Prayer Groups in the Church's base communities; Neighborhoods, Pastoral Centers, Chapels,

Mission Stations, Quasi-Parishes, Parishes, *Vigararia Forâneas*, Dioceses, Episcopal Conference and the Universal Church. The Church hierarchy also promotes the ministry of the laity to assume responsibility as the faithful.

Within the Church there are religious communities that inspire and support to the lives of the faithful. The Church emphasises the importance of the involvement of religious men and women, categorical groups through diocesan assemblies, where they sit together to consider, plan and evaluate pastoral programs in all spheres. In the evaluation processes, everyone has the opportunity to freely speak and evaluate the results and challenges. Here we can witness the spirit of communion and co-responsibility of “journeying together” in the mission.

## **IX. DISCERNMENT AND DECISION MAKING**

In the decision-making process, the Church first needs to listen and gather all ideas through meetings and dialogues between Church leaders with Diocesan and Parish Councils as bodies that represent the faithful at all levels from the Neighbourhoods, Chapels, Mission Stations to Parishes. These bodies perform pastoral services in their respective localities and contribute to the life of the Church. From here, the Church seeks to understand the problems and make prudent decisions or even improve previous decisions if necessary.

In meetings and dialogues, ideas are shared with a constructive spirit and creative collaboration in search of good and just decisions for the Church and for all. Meetings, dialogues, reflections, retreats, formation for the many who participate are mechanisms that involve the faithful in decision-making for the common good. As usual, in case they cannot find consensus in their discussions voting is the last means of making decisions as the last resort.

An important step for good discernment and good decision-making is to take into account the person or people who are determinant centres of decision-making or decision-taking processes (*PD*, 9). Through, communion prayers, meditations and reflections on the life of the Church, which are all fundamental parts for good discernment, fair decision making can be made.

Regarding decisions on the financial state of the Church, the faithful request for more transparency and the use of available means

of communication for the dissemination of information to the faithful and the public. These means of communication to be used should include: bulletin boards; newsletters, radio and television; website and other means of communication. With the sharing of credible information to the public on financial management with accessible periodic reports the Church promotes accountability to the public and demonstrates transparency, accessible administration thus increases the trust of the faithful to the Catholic Church.

## **X. FORMATION IN THE SYNODALITY**

The formation of the Church's pastoral agents at all levels is fundamental for the life of the Church, particularly for us to understand and live a Christian life in the form of responsible synodality. As the faithful of the Church of Timor-Leste are aware of difficulties and obstacles that may prevent the realization of such meetings and training, they request permanent and continuous formation through regular meetings, congresses, seminars, dialogue, retreats and intensive courses in order to promote the spirit of mutual service in the life of the Church at all levels.

The formation as mentioned above must be promoted in an integral way of the spiritual and material life in favour of strengthening faith. For this it is necessary that the leadership as well as the agents know how to discern, how to listen, how to choose and how to exercise the functions that the Church entrusts to each one of them. Spiritual formations can be in the forms of: retreats, sharing of Christian faith, formation on Sacred Scripture, Apostolic Tradition, Church Magisterium, Theology, and Social Doctrine of the Church, Liturgy, Sacraments, and the Word of God. On the material or human formations: training for professional skills, formation on parish administration, and formations on the norms of the particular Church and the Universal Church.

In addition to formation, it is also important that the Church resolutely implements the approach and cordial dialogue with pastoral workers and the faithful, thus giving the opportunity and room to explore their human, intellectual, social and spiritual capabilities for the good of the community, which are key targets. Equally important are training the members of the Councils to take responsibility for their roles in the evangelizing mission. An

important tool, which is indispensable in today's life, is the use of the Internet and the social media for dissemination activities, including other sophisticated means of communication, as they are quite accessible in today's world.

For good discernment and good synodal governance we must: give the faithful the opportunity to express their faith through participation in pastoral activities, creation and promotion of communion with the particular Church. Likewise, in order to be able to walk together as the people of God, the Church hierarchy must avoid the imposition of teachings, but it is necessary to cultivate attitudes of patience, humility, dialogue, open to the opinions and suggestions of the faithful in regards to the service of the Church.

## CONCLUSION

The process of consultation of the Synod of Bishops over the last five months began in October 2021 and ended in March 2022, carried out from the neighbourhood levels to the Diocese or Archdiocese. The results of this process, which form the synthesis at the Episcopal Conference level, show that the Catholic Church of Timor is aware of the great work of God linked to the history of the People of Timor-Leste. The Church was part of the pains and sufferings, joys and smiles of the people. The Lord has since always accompanied the mission of the Catholic Church in Timor-Leste starting from the early missionaries and developed until today and will continue through to the end.

Through baptism they received, the Timorese are aware of their role as People of God. They are the living Church and together with the Church leaders they constantly grow and develop. The Church's existence becomes increasingly grounded in one spirit walking together as a people; listen to one another and always ready to discern all that is good and just. The Church, in its local scope, provides formative moments based on Tradition, Magisterium and Social Doctrine.

For good discernment and good synodal governance we must: give the faithful the opportunity to express their faith through participation in pastoral activities, creation and promotion of communion with the particular Church. Likewise, in journeying together as the people of God, the hierarchy of the Church must avoid

imposing teachings, but to start with cultivating attitudes of patience, humility, dialogue, open to the opinions and suggestions of the faithful regarding the service of the Church.

The results of the consultations of the synod of the 3 Dioceses: the Metropolitan Archdiocese of Dili, the Dioceses of Baucau and Maliana, show that the faithful have a great desire to collaborate with the mission of the Church in Timor-Leste. This guarantee is found in the suggestions and constructive criticisms presented in the reports, which may serve as references for the Church of Timor-Leste to discern and design its pastoral plans and strategies in the short, medium and long terms.

With this synodal consultation, the Church of Timor-Leste highlights the challenges that affect the life of the local Church, both the challenges within the Church itself as well as the challenges that come from outside. However, the Church of Timor-Leste reaffirms that these challenges are not meant to discourage, but are considered as stimuli to new horizons and paradigms for the Church's mission. The Church has great hope that the Synod of Bishops will bring changes from the pastoralist mentality to the Church of communion, participation and mission.

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