

- DRAFT FRAMEWORK -

ASIAN CONTINENTAL FINAL DOCUMENT ON THE WORKING DOCUMENT FOR THE CONTINENTAL STAGE

Kindly note that this “document” is only a framework that is intended to assist and promote deeper discussions among the delegates at the Asian Continental Assembly (24-26 February 2023 at the Baan Phu Wan Pastoral Training Centre, Sampran, Thailand).

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Introduction

Asia, the largest and most populated continent, is blessed with diverse cultures, religions, languages, and ethnicities. While Christianity remains a very small minority in most parts of Asia, the vibrancy and richness of the individual cultures bring joy to the life of the church. Though the systems of beliefs, values, and symbols vary from place to place, the interconnectedness of the human community draws the Asian peoples together. The Asian value of being relational (with God, self, neighbor, and the cosmos) brings with it the unity of the human family and the unity of the people of Asia.

Despite the benefits that unity and diversity bring to Asia, it is also entrenched with many challenges that directly affect the church and the lives of the people of Asia. Some of the challenges are the widespread poverty across Asia, the ecological threat that has brought disequilibrium in the lives of people, the challenges of systemic corruption, the waves of economic migration in search of better lives, the political instability that causes internal disruption to peace and harmony, and much more. All of these have a direct impact on the church as she seeks to reach out to all peoples.

The call of Pope Francis to the universal Church to a process of synodality through a process of listening has been generally received positively in countries throughout Asia despite reservations from some quarters in the church. There is a sense of gratitude and feeling privileged for the opportunity to take part in the renewal and revitalizing of the universal and local church. This is indeed an expression of the universal church and the local churches walking together as one. The positive effects of bringing people from all walks of life, both within and outside the church into a process of praying with one another, listening to one another, and discerning the voice of the Holy Spirit bring forth in

them a new experience of vitality and dynamism to the life of the church.

Despite the challenges, the synodal journey has been considered a moment of grace and healing for the church. The image of the 'church as tent' projects it to be a place of refuge that can be expanded to all in a spirit of inclusivity. It also expresses that God can pitch his tent wherever the Spirit of God blows, including in places where there is violence, unrest, and suffering. Most importantly, in the tent, there is room for everyone, with no one being excluded because it is a home to everyone. In this process, those who in the past felt "left out" now realized that they have a home in this tent - a sacred and safe space. Most of the responses responded positively to the image of the tent.

The image of the tent also reminds us that Jesus pitched his tent among us through the incarnation and therefore the tent also is a place of encounter with God and one another. The tent, now seen as the common home, also has rekindled a sense of belonging and sharing in the common baptism. The synodal process has brought about a greater awareness of the importance of walking together in the church as a communion of communities for the organic growth of the church.

The continental consultation in the respective countries took varied forms. Some countries were able to involve many people from different walks of life while others were only able to gather smaller groups of people. As mentioned earlier, the challenges of time and language became an obstacle for some countries. Nevertheless, those who took part in this process of reflecting on the DCS contributed constructively in a spirit of prayer and discernment for the betterment of the church.

The involvement of such a vast number of people in the synodal process has revealed a profound love for the church despite the shortcomings and weaknesses of the church as an institution. In reflecting on the DCS, it was highlighted that the short period of time that was given prevented the possibility of having an extended discussion and consultation. The inability to translate the DCS into the vernacular languages was another limitation

experienced by the churches in Asia. However, the FABC 50 General Conference that was held in October 2022 was indeed a blessing in preparing for this stage of the synodal process.

Many of the conversations that were held prior to and during the General Conference already provided indications regarding the context of the church and Asia. In “listening” to the reports, it has been noted that on the horizon, there remains a sense of hope and joy for the church to move forward because of the love of God for his people. We are convinced that the Holy Spirit neither stops nor fails in inspiring the people of God to move in the direction of personal, communal, and structural conversion. We also acknowledge that the process of having the synodal conversations as requested has sometimes been painful and unsettling, while at the same time, making us vulnerable to each other.

The DCS in a succinct way has been able to capture the hopes, aspirations, desolations, and challenges of the people in a way that opens the door for a greater renewal in the life of the church. The invitation to listen to people from all walks of life demonstrates openness to one another and the spirit of dialogue facilitates moving together as one unit: “Enabling this encounter and dialogue is the meaning of the synodal journey” (DCS, 6). What the DCS has been able to do is be the catalyst for deeper and more profound spiritual conversations. In many places it was indeed experienced as a moment of living synodality in the church through a process of shared identity and shared responsibility.

The general sense of concern for the church as demonstrated in the participation of all in this process reflects a natural or organic inclination to authentic synodality. In some countries, the “process of listening” itself was not something that was totally new because there were already mechanisms to implement pastoral plans of local churches and communities at a variety of levels which brought about synergy and convergence with the spirit of synodality. This indeed captures the sense of walking together as members of the Body of Christ towards the reign of God and in that process, being able to widen our experiences and enlarge the tent.

Considering these general observations that have provided not only the *locus* for the church in Asia to reflect on the DCS, but we also acknowledge the vast diversity of views and experiences across Asia has made it challenging to synthesize every single opportunity and challenge raised by the different countries. Guided by the Holy Spirit, the following paragraphs provide insights into the resonances, tensions, and priorities as articulated by the churches in Asia. The discernment team has also taken the liberty to identify some of the gaps (*lacuna*) that we felt were either absent or not sufficiently treated in the reports sent by the Bishops' Conferences but were key points of discussion at the FABC 50 General Conference. It is our prayer and hope that the following insights are faithful to the mind and heart of the respective processes undertaken by the countries in Asia.

ASIAN RESONANCES

After having read and prayed with the DCS, which intuitions resonate most strongly with the lived experiences and realities of the Church in your continent? Which experiences are new, or illuminating to you?

The resonances that the churches in Asia sensed while reflecting on the DCS are underlined by the fact that there is a deep love for the Church. In that deep love for the church resides varied emotions like joy, sadness, vulnerability, and woundedness. Despite this potpourri of emotions and the diversity of Asia which encompasses ethnicity, race, culture, language, and religion, the spirit of synodality as called for by the church challenges us (church) to have the courage to “walk together” (Indonesia) despite the challenges and even resistance within the church.

Although the process has been well received and facilitated throughout the countries in Asia, a few reports mentioned that the process of consultation and listening brought about by the synodal journey could cause some disenchantment and disappointment due to an absence of clear explanation and acceptance of the goal

of gathering and listening. The temptation to engage in this process could be described as a more political or, even, ideological lens (i.e., as resembling more a forum for “parliamentary-type” discussion) rather than as a truly synodal endeavor from a Catholic-Christian perspective. (Central Asia). Some faithful are skeptical regarding the purpose and the prospective outcome of such a synodal process (Syro-Malabar).

There were also some dioceses that maintain this lingering doubt if the voices of those living in minority settings and traditional Christian communities would have equal influence on the synodal process and even its outcomes (Central Asia). It was also mentioned that listening is a difficult task (Vietnam) because many people would prefer to be praised rather than be criticized or commented on. Those who speak had the courage to speak up were considered to be antagonists by some sections of the community because their comments and opinions were considered to be not mainstream or negative.

The Experience of Joy

It must be noted that the synodal process called for by the universal church is both a spiritual experience and a spiritual journey. For this reason, “we need to put our egos aside, empty ourselves, and listen to God so that we can constantly be renewed under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and to go deeper in the spirit of synodality” (Hongkong). The dynamics of listening as widely as possible which is entrenched in the synodal process, have indeed motivated the church as a whole to listen more intently and discern wisely where the Holy Spirit is leading us toward embracing and becoming a more synodal Church. This journey that we have initiated helps us “realize the true nature of the Church and the ability to see the situation of the church” (Bangladesh). The experience of joy is heightened because the synod process is certainly a place of “grace, encounter, and transfiguration” (Philippines).

The Experience of Walking Together

The process of walking together brings forth to the local churches greater awareness of their own unique contexts and rich cultures

across Asia, including that of the indigenous communities that are often neglected and forgotten (India). This wealth needs to be nurtured through communion and dialogue as an experience of walking together. As Asian Catholics living in diversity, we seek to enhance the quality of our friendship with one another by listening to, respecting, and caring for each other, so that we can be a “good mother” and an example to bring peace and unity to the world (Timor Leste). Faith formations that are founded on the living word of God, are foundational to synodal spirituality.

In walking together, “the synodal journey has gathered us at the table of the Lord, so that through him, in him and with him, we have realized our natural and organic inclination to synodality and are inspired and strengthened to traverse and discover new pathways for the Church in Asia” (Syro-Malabar India). It is heartening to read repeatedly of the profound love for the Church from so many local Churches across the world. This love and commitment to the faith *resounds* throughout the DCS and certainly reflects the almost universal sense expressed by Catholics throughout the world (Central Asia).

The experience of walking together is also marred by external threats that make living the faith challenging. It has been noted that in several countries across Asia, there are still many Christians who suffer from various threats because of “keeping their faith” (Korea). Despite these new forms of “martyrdom”, many still are faithful to the faith and are even willing to give up their life for it (Pakistan). In some areas, threats and violence against Christians have been noted while in other areas there are different ways where Christians are discriminated against.

The Experience of Wounds

The reports also resonated with the vulnerabilities and wounds of the churches in Asia. Among the many wounds of the church are abuses related to finance, jurisdiction, conscience, authority, and sex. These would have certainly put the church in a bad light that has led to some leaving the church because of the lack of credibility. At the level of governance too, the lack of transparency and accountability has led to a crisis of credibility in the church.

The reports also point to the fact that due to these abuses, there is growing intolerance, resentment, and negativism against the church. These are expressed through social and print media, and other public domains (Syro-Malabar). Responsibility for the church must belong to all and therefore everyone should be afforded the opportunity to “participate actively in the process” of making decisions through communal discernment (Indonesia).

There is also a deep concern with the lack of sufficient inclusion of women in governance and decision-making processes in the church. Women in consecrated life, despite being committed in the various ministries of the church, experience a sense of alienation and whose voices are not often heard sufficiently in the policy decisions of the church. They are actively involved, and their committed services are very much evident. The synodal conversations have called for a “rethinking of women’s participation” in the life of the church given that women played an important role in the Old Testament and at the time of Jesus (Macau). There is a need in the church for a renewed means of renewal of governance that will allow the meaningful participation of women in all aspects of the church.

The reports acknowledge the church’s lack of understating and failure in providing sufficient pastoral care to “some groups” of people who are part of the church and are often struggling to feel welcomed, namely, single parents, people in irregular marriage situations, mixed marriages, the LGBTQ, as well as migrants and others. Many reports raised grave concerns about the lack the presence of the youth in the church and especially in the decision-making process. At the same time, the young people continue to inspire and challenge the whole church to “have the courage to take risks and make changes” (Hongkong).

Very sporadically some reports make a passing mention of the plight of the indigenous peoples. It has been noted that many of their aspirations and voices were not sufficiently highlighted in the DCS. At the same time, listening to the cry of the poor and of the earth were issues that were not treated adequately given that these are grave concerns for the peoples of Asia. It must be the role

of the church to listen to these vulnerable communities and works towards protecting them” (India) and their environment, rights, and privileges.

Some of the wounds experienced in the churches were brought about by the infiltration of ideologies such as individualism, consumerism, and materialism, that is caused by the rapid economic growth and freedom of access to mass media. Though much of these may have brought about development in many parts of Asia, “the church is also influenced by its various side effects” (Korea).

The voice of the church has been silenced by oppressive regimes to an extent that it has not been possible for the church to play its prophetic role. The silence has also led to passive complacency compounded by fear and sometimes even apathy. The need for churches across Asia to support churches under oppressive regimes in ways that do not threaten or jeopardize their existence.

The Call to Embrace New Pathways

The experience of joys and wounds across Asia can only be seen as opportunities to explore new pathways toward a synodal church. Standing together as a united Body of Christ calls for a new vision in the pastoral mission of a “new church”, a synodal church. The church must begin in a spirit of inclusion where everyone feels both welcomed and a sense of belonging inside the tent: As a people of God, no one should be excluded; even if they are frail and weak, “inclusivism within the Church is a must for the synodal church”. (Sri Lanka).

The diversity of religions in Asia makes it almost compelling to engage in ecumenical and interreligious dialogue as a way of building peace and harmony. Many reports speak of fruitful engagement with other Christians and persons of other religions. Despite the diversity of religions and cultures across Asia, there are still limitations in matters concerning ecumenical and interreligious dialogue (Vietnam). In some places, this push for dialogue has been the initiative only of the Catholic church and there are times when reciprocity is not forthcoming. It has also been seen as the “work” of the clergy rather than of the laity

(Vietnam). There are some who expressed reservations about these dialogues for various reasons including mistrust and suspicion regarding the motives for such dialogues.

Though very little is mentioned about safeguarding (minors and the vulnerable) in the Asian reports, there is a need to develop and nurture the environment of a culture of safeguarding in the church, at all levels.

The synodal process has called for widespread listening to one another to bring about transformation at all levels of the church. Together with the laity and consecrated women and men who have been saying that they have not been heard or given a voice in the church, there were also priests who felt that they were not sufficiently heard and even to a point of feeling neglected (Myanmar).

Reading the reports, there is a strong sense of an inward-looking church that must cast its nets further and wider. The mission *ad-extra* must be at the core of the churches in Asia: “We have the task of transforming an inward-looking, individualized and polarized approach to spiritual life towards a more missionary, communitarian and integrated approach” (Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei). The tent needs to be expanded in ways best known to the respective churches in Asia so that we can move in promising ways that fulfill our mission as a church (Hong Kong).

The churches in Asia have been able to relate and resonate with much of what has been said in the DCS. This only indicates that there are many similarities with the churches in other countries and continents, for which we give thanks to God, and we are all on this journey together. We also recognize that some of these issues may be peculiar to certain regions, but we take consolation that as we walk together, there can be a renewal in the church and the expansion of the reign of God.

ASIAN TENSIONS

After having read and prayed with the DCS, what substantial tensions or divergences emerge as particularly important in your continent's perspective? Consequently, what are the questions or issues that should be addressed and considered in the next steps of the process?

Having prayed, studied, and read the different reports, we are filled with hope that this synodal journey will bear fruit in not only extending the tent but also recognizing the work of the Holy Spirit in churches throughout Asia. In reading the DCS, the churches in Asia also recognized some tensions that are universal and some that are particular to the context of Asia. Keeping in mind that some of these tensions are far more intricate than they seem, our task is not to seek solutions at this time but rather to acknowledge these tensions and divergences and to further reflect on what the Holy Spirit is saying to the church in Asia.

Tensions in Living Synodality

The church is composed of people from all states of life (clergy, religious, and laity); yet there seems to be a kind of “divide” between the clergy and laity as indicated in many of the reports. In the spirit of a participatory church, the experience of leadership in the “servant model” needs greater attention for living synodality. The challenge to become more participatory is often hindered by leadership styles that hinder (sometimes even exclude) others from living out their baptismal call to be authentic disciples. The servant model leadership is hindered and sometimes counter-witnessing when priests tend to dominate and even come across as imposing, domineering, and authoritative over the laity. Reconfiguring the role of the laity includes expanding spaces for possible lay ministry through the “variety of charisms (Philippines).

Acknowledging the tensions between clergy, religious men and women, and the laity, the theme of co-responsibility of all in the life and mission of the church has been raised time and again in the reports.

Tensions in Decision-Making

It was noted that in some places, collaborative responsibility in the decision-making process was lacking; often left to only priests or bishops. The voices of the minority and even the laity are not considered in this process. Some churches consider this a form of clericalism.

The lack of accountability and transparency in decision-making and financial matters in the church has led to a further divide in walking together in the spirit of a synodal church. Those who question these matters are sometimes excluded from the church. The authoritative and domineering styles of leadership do not only exist among the clergy but there are also leaders among the laity that exhibit such traits. This tension continues to hinder the journey towards being a participatory church in a synodal way.

In the Asian context where respect for leaders is an inherent value, there are times when the laity are overly deferential to the clergy and there is a high possibility that this respect can be abused, and power and control become the *modus operandi*. This further undermines the “non-clergy” in being co-responsible in the mission of the church, as well as with its governance.

Tensions in Priestly Vocations

It was also noted that the excessive critical view of the clergy has contributed to the decrease in vocations to the priesthood in some parts of Asia. There are areas in Asia where there is a growing need for priests to serve (Laos-Cambodia) and for the faith to continually grow. The need for priests is real and for the spread of the Gospel.

Together with this, some reports also acknowledged the influence of a secular and materialist culture on priests and even lay leaders. This often challenges the witnessing of Gospel values in the mission of the church.

Tensions in Women's Involvement

In many of the churches of Asia, the participation of women in the everyday life of the church is significant. However, there is a lack of the presence of women in leadership roles and in some societies,

their voices are hardly heard. Some attribute this to the cultural differences and the traditional patriarchal structures of Asian societies.

In some places, women in leadership roles are not very welcome due to the cultural mindset (Myanmar). It would seem that men make decisions or lead the group and the women simply implement the decisions or work under the guidance of men. The role of women is considered secondary or simply discarded as being an assistant to men. However, there are countries that report that the men are not in the church, and in these circumstances, it is the women who take on leadership roles effectively.

Tensions about the Youth

A common phenomenon noted in the reports is the absence of youth in our churches. Given that they form a significant number in our population (65%??), they are relatively absent in the life of the church. Though there are some who are present in the life of the church, there needs a greater inclusion in the leadership roles and decision-making processes. The church as a “mother” needs to extend her loving embrace around the youth and reach out to those who are lost, confused, and have disconnected themselves from the church. Though the reports state the youth is missing in the church, perhaps a point to ponder is that the youth are possibly saying that the church is missing in their lives.

While the youth are more tech-savvy in parts of Asia where digital access is more easily accessible, the reports also call for greater investment in the fields of media and social communications so as to be able to reach out to them for the purposes of evangelization and proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, there remains the challenge of engaging with the youth in the dialogue between the virtual world and the real world.

Gifted with a large population of young people, the Church in Asia could envision herself as a "digital tent" (Japan) to be where the youth are and minister to them effectively. Synodality with the youth also means experiencing the tensions they are bearing in the fast-changing world today. Notwithstanding the benefits of the digital world, the negative impact of social media was also

highlighted (Laos) - people spending more time with gadgets than with people; how it is used to spread hatred, prejudice, and fear in society (India); some say social media is swaying people away from the faith (Vietnam).

Tensions of the Poor

Like a mother in a poor Asian family with many children who struggle and at times not adequately cared for, the church in Asia also struggles and painfully embraces a great number of poor and marginalized people who need special accompaniment in this process of synodality (Korea, Thailand, Sri Lanka). Various are the faces of the poor in Asia: the materially poor such as the minority ethnics, the migrant workers, urban slum dwellers, fleeing refugees, etc.; the spiritually poor such as the uneducated, the indifferent youth, the persons with disabilities, persons deprived of liberties, etc.; the socially poor, those often neglected by the church and society, such as the those from lower castes, divorced and remarried, single mothers, and the LGBTQIA+, etc.

Despite some cultural barriers that may exist, the Church in Asia must desire to courageously direct her eyes on the faces of the poor, to lovingly recognize, acknowledge, and welcome everyone as God's children who now deserve our attention. We recognize the tensions to be inclusive and yet be faithful to the Gospel values and the moral faithfulness to the ways of the church - perhaps even a scandal if there are welcomed in the Church (India).

Secondly, the church must strive to find ways to incorporate the poor into her life and mission, so that, being healed, nurtured, and formed in *sensus fidelium* within the framework of our apostolic tradition and Catholic identity, they could be equal partners and respected companions with everyone else in the Church. As mentioned by several of the reports, some of these changes will require canonical revisions that would facilitate the inclusiveness of the church towards the poor.

Thirdly, the church must also be the voice of the poor. There are times when the church remains silent about the plight and cry of the Dalits, tribals, and the poor. The tension of not wanting to cause trouble with the authorities or being silenced, the church

may have alienated these people and turned a deaf ear to the 'cry of the poor'. The voice of the church must defend the voiceless and powerless.

Tensions of Religious Conflicts

Even though there is a diversity of religions across Asia, there are also growing religious conflicts and even persecution (subtle and direct) in some areas. The politicization of religions has made it difficult to practice the faith of minorities. Among the challenges include political oppression, dictatorial governments, corruption, and unjust laws. The churches in Asia are always having to walk this tightrope of balancing between being faithful to the Gospel and yet not putting the Christians in a position of being threatened. Even what is taken for granted in many places like giving a child a Christian name is sometimes an obstacle in another place (Pakistan). There are times in situations such as these, what is required is patience and hope that things will change. The church in Asia constantly deals with such tensions and there is a need for mutual support in walking together with courage and love.

Tensions of Clericalism

Clericalism, like in many parts of the world, is also a concern in Asia. Many of the responses indicate clericalism as a tension in their regions and some also state it as one of the causes of a lack of synodality in the church in Asia. However, it has been noted that clericalism means different things to different people. Some do define while others only many general statements. Therefore, the word clericalism seems to cover a wide range of issues, while at the same time, some regions are more specific. Among the expressions of clericalism is the lack of consultation in administrative styles, domineering attitudes toward the laity, a sense of entitlement shown by the clergy, overexertion of power on the people, etc. The lack of adequate formation for a synodal church may be among the primary reasons for such "abuses".

On the other hand, the clergy feel overly criticized by the laity so much that some feel lonely, isolated, and scrutinized all the time. This further leads to demotivation among the priests and apprehension among young men who might be considering and discerning a vocation to the

priesthood. Some attribute the lack of vocation due to the unreasonable demands that are being made by the people.

Asian Realities and Divergences

Being aware that Christianity is a minority in Asia (it is estimated that Catholics are only 2.5% of the Asian population and in several places less than 1%), there is a great sense of love for Jesus and his church. The joy of journeying together in this synodal renewal is palpable. Our faith energizes our relationships not only among Christians but also with peoples of neighboring faiths in our quest for harmonious living through a process of bridge-building. In places where discrimination and violence are more pronounced than in other places, it is the faith in the Risen Jesus that keeps us strong and hopeful amidst these adversities.

Asian spirituality is interwoven with a deep sense of piety and popular devotion. These devotions at times animate the faith and draw people to the church, Catholics and non-Catholics alike. Our embodied expressions of worship and prayer – encompassing the human senses, dance, art, poetry, and silence – sometimes find tension in the formal manner of celebrating the sacraments. Several reports pointed out the need to creatively rediscover the essence of the liturgy, that is, to draw people to God.

It was also noted that in some places, Catholics were more engaged in popular devotions rather than reflecting on the word of God, spiritual discernment, or personal prayer. Overall, the need for liturgies to be more alive and relatable - text they can understand, the music they can sing, and rituals they can relate to, were expressed in a variety of ways in the reports.

We also recognize that the Asian *ethos* that has long been part of its peoples (for example, reliance on God, communal interaction, relationality with God, self, neighbor, and the cosmos, etc.) is now being eroded by the globalized cultures of individualism, secularism, and relativism. There is a growing tension between traditional (spiritual) values and modernity even among the clergy, the religious, and the families. Some of the effects seen due to this global invasion are that faith is relativized, priests are

drawn to a materialistic and individualistic way of living, and a lack of credible witnessing, which is among the reasons for the erosion of the spiritual life. In the end, the number of people not practicing any religion will increase due to modernism, materialism, and secularism (Thailand).

Family (nuclear and extended) is very important in many Asian societies. Filial allegiance extends to the point where many will make generous sacrifices for the sake of the family unity and peace. The role of families in the synodal renewal of the church and its witness to societies is therefore very important. They will be the first formation space for the synodal renewal that we are envisioning.

Several reports cite their concern for marriages and family life today - domestic violence, unwed mothers, single parents, delayed marriages due to the dowry system, divorce and nullity, etc. (India). Christian families are broken due to lack of awareness about the faith and anxieties brought about by poverty and economic conditions (Pakistan). There are also tensions about belonging to the Church and their own family relationships (Syro-Malabar, India). In the midst of such a vast array of challenges, the church in Asia needs, more now than ever, to hear the voices as families, especially of interreligious-intercultural families that are becoming the norm in many places across Asia.

Coming from our communal *ethos*, the common life in Asian communities and neighborhoods is the locus where the joys and struggles are lived. The common spaces are opportunities for informal dialogues and convivial living (dialogue of life). Fought with socio-political, economic, and ecological challenges, we not only survive but there are situations we thrive in the strength of this relationality at the grassroots. However, in recent times, we also see a growing division among the peoples of Asia - people divided based on caste, language, ethnicity, and socio-economic status.

Even if we are community-oriented people, the rapid economic growth resulting to material abundance has also resulted in more people suffering from emotional, spiritual, and mental

impoverishment. In some Asian societies, the secular appearance and lifestyle in church leadership also cause tension as it is opposed to *evangelical poverty* and a mission to be the church of the poor in Asia.

In a continent as diverse as Asia, interreligious dialogue remains an integral characteristic of the church in Asia. Despite bridge-building efforts, we noted that religious and social intolerance was on the increase, which leads ultimately to persecution and the worsening conditions of the lives of the people (Pakistan). In extreme situations, false blasphemy accusations and terror are the main issues faced by Christians (Pakistan).

Gaps Identified in the Asian Responses

The FABC 50 General Conference in its Guide Document and Final Message had identified some concerns that we felt were either not captured in the country's responses to the DCS or not given sufficient consideration. Studying all these documents side-by-side, we have taken the liberty to include the gaps that were identified and have included them in this report in the sure hope that there will be given consideration in the 2023/24 Synod Assemblies.

1. *Care for our common home*: Ecological crisis always has an impact on vulnerable communities and the Asian continent is one of the places where the impact of climate change is alarming. The Asian responses did not capture sufficiently the intensity of the ecological crisis in this region. There is a great need to listen more intently and profoundly to the cry of our land and our people, especially among the poorest who are most affected and to preserve the environment.

2. *Sharing of resources*: Many countries in our continent with poor resources mostly depend on international financial assistance from donors and financial institutes. This surely encourages the socio-economic uplift of the poor segment of society. However, the Asian churches also need to be aware of the need to share our own resources (even if it is limited) with sister

churches in the region. By sharing our resources, not only we share our material gifts but also the spiritual gifts that we receive from one another which enrich us. We stand together, as a synodal church, with one another as peoples of Asia.

3. *Youth for the present:* The youth are often spoken of as the future, but the youth are also the present. Our *preferential option* for the young should include personal experience of God's love within the church, holistic formation, vocation discernment, and accompaniment. The youth look for authentic and credible witnesses within the church – they need a synodal community to walk together. By knowing who they are in front of God through their hopes, dreams, realities, struggles, and limitations that they face in life, they experience that they are supported and not alone in their path and can also encourage others to walk together in the journey of life.

4. *Poverty, corruption, and conflict:* Poverty across Asia is a major problem (World Bank estimates more than 320 million people in Asia live in extreme poverty). The church has been at the forefront of working tirelessly among the poor and for their upliftment. Yet there is little mention of the growing poverty across Asia and how that impacts being a synodal church. We also recognize that corruption is a major problem in Asia and is somewhat connected to the poverty of the Asian people. This systemic corrupt conduct at all levels of society affects the lives of ordinary citizens. The responses to the DCS have not given this “problem” much consideration. The Church in Asia is a demographic, socioeconomic, cultural, and political minority and therefore, we are becoming more vulnerable to progressively oppressive or fundamentalist regimes as well as to political conflicts. In such situations, what does it mean to be a synodal church?

5. *Indigenous peoples:* Nearly sixty percent of the world's indigenous peoples, call Asia their home. Bearers of traditions that are rooted for thousands of years, the indigenous peoples manifest how humanity can live in harmony with creation. We acknowledge that many indigenous peoples have embraced the Christian faith, yet even in the Church – wounded by tribalism

and prejudice – they struggle to be respected. Despite the large populations of indigenous peoples in Asia, very little is spoken about them in the responses.

6. *Church in the world:* The church exists in the world and for the world. Yet many of the responses have been very insular – looking within the church only. There is a lack of reference to how the church transforms the world (Asia) so that all people will enjoy the fruits of the kingdom of God. The church in Asia must constantly keep asking how can the *missio ad gentes* be recognized and lived in a synodal manner as one way of enlarging the space of our tent (*Is 54:2*)?

7. *Migrants, Refugees, and Displaced Peoples:* The issues related to migrants, refugees, and displaced people is fast growing in the Asian regions. The primary drivers for the movement of such large numbers of people include conflict, the desire for better economic opportunities, environmental destruction, victims of exploitation, etc. The political instability in some parts of Asia has made people to be refugees and asylum seekers. How does the church become a “welcoming tent” to these people who seek peace, security, and harmony?

8. *Peacebuilding:* In countries where there are internal conflicts due to oppressive and dictatorial regimes, the church has to play an integral role in the work of peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Among the many other roles of the church, the peace and harmony of all citizens must be among its pastoral priorities. Working towards peace and reconciliation could be among the new forms of evangelization. Apart from seeing the church as a “tent” of inclusivity, the church also must be a “bridge-builder” in the work of peace and reconciliation.

9. *Safeguarding:* The protection of minors and the vulnerable is a concern for the church in Asia. Despite the low rate in the number of cases being reported (partly due to cultural reasons), it is a major concern. There is very little mention in the responses to the DCS on this matter. However, this must be prioritized in terms of training all church personnel. The church in Asia must hear,

watch over, protect, and care for the abused, exploited and forgotten children, wherever they are.

PRIORITIES FROM THE ASIAN RESPONSES

The Asian responses were varied and diverse, encapsulating a variety of issues and challenges, each peculiar to one's region. However, there are some commonalities that we see in the responses. The following are some key priorities that have been identified through a process of prayer and discernment with the hope that they reflect the Asian heart's desires.

1. *Formation*: For a synodal church, there needs to be formed at all levels, for all people. Seminarians, priests, and bishops must be formed to live synodal leadership styles, communal discernment, and decision-making – the promotion of a culture of synodality. The laity needs to be formed to take active roles, according to their baptismal call, to serve with generosity to God and a love for the church and its people. Formation for a synodal spirituality must be at the heart of the church's mission and vision.
2. *Inclusivity & Hospitality*: The women, youth, those marginalized or excluded, the wounded and victimized, families that are fractured and those struggling with gender identity, the displaced and the persecuted, and a whole spectrum of many others must find their place in this tent (church). Structures may need to be revisited so that everyone feels a sense of belonging in the church and each person becomes an ambassador of Christ, an ambassador of inclusivity and hospitality.
3. *Accountability and Transparency*: The call to be accountable and transparent not only in financial matters but also in decision-making processes and governance. A spirit of collaboration and co-responsibility must be promoted with each embracing the other's vocation and state of life and the many fold charisms in the church.
4. *Prayer and Worship*: Our prayer and worship must reflect and touch the Asian hearts. Liturgical celebrations must be more

“synodal” (participatory, inculturated, and convivial) so that everyone can find a sacred and safe space to worship God.

5. *Environment*: In the care for the common home, the church must be at the forefront in not only protecting Mother Earth but also towards healing. As Jesus came to redeem and reconcile all things, the church must seek to renew the face of the earth. As members of the one Body of Christ, we are called to live in solidarity and to respect, protect, defend, and nurture the oneness of all of God’s Creation.

6. *Missionary Disciples*: In the context of Asia, we must learn how to “whisper” the Gospel to one another. Recognizing that Christians are a minority, the sensitivities of other Asian peoples must also be at the heart of the Church. Interfaith families are becoming a common sight and therefore how do we bring Christ to others? We need to embrace a culture of encounter and bridge-building so as to bring Christ to the world. At the same time, in this post-pandemic era, the hybridization of the Church’s life is a reality that we have to embrace and maximize opportunities to evangelize.

