



Towards a New Commitment to the 'Great Commandment' and 'Great Commission'

Gathering of Ecclesial Communities in Asia

**24 - 27 August 2023
Bangkok, Thailand**



**Federation of Asian
Bishops Conferences**
Office of Evangelisation





Towards a New Commitment to the 'Great Commandment' and 'Great Commission'

Gathering of Ecclesial Movements in Asia *Concluding Statement*

-

“Just as in the first millennium the Cross was planted on the soil of Europe, and in the second on that of the Americas and Africa, we can pray that in the Third Christian Millennium ***a great harvest of faith will be reaped in this vast and vital continent.***”
(Ecclesia in Asia, 1)

In the spirit of synodality, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference (FABC) hosted a Gathering of Ecclesial Movements in Asia from the 25th to the 27th August 2023 in Bangkok, Thailand. The Gathering was comprised of 54 delegates representing 23 ecclesial movements and communities from across 14 countries, along with members of the FABC, including Bishop George Palliparambil SDB, Archbishop Yohanes Harun Yowono, Bishop Pablo Virgilio David, Assistant Secretary General, Fr William LaRousse as well as the Executive Secretary of the Office of Evangelisation, Manoj Sunny.

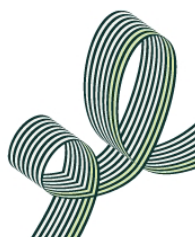
This Gathering sought to be an expression of synodality as communion, participation and mission, in the context of the ecclesial movements in Asia. Of significance to this Gathering was the preparations for the celebration of the Silver Jubilee (25th Year) of the Apostolic Exhortation for Asia '*Ecclesia in Asia*' and the 10th Year Anniversary of the Apostolic Exhortation on the Joy of the Gospel '*Evangelii Gaudium*.'

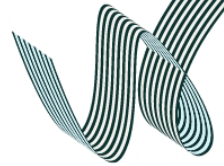
During this time, we discerned through dialogue a renewed commitment to the mission of evangelisation of Asia. The Church in Asia has recognised the significance of the 'Next Decade'; a time of preparation for the 2,000 year celebration of the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the birth of the Mother Church and the 'Great Commission' in 2033.

As a Gathering, we sensed the growing urgency for co-responsibility and collaboration as communities of missionary disciples. We also sought to distill a common vision and outline intentional strategies to realize the aspirations of evangelisation over the Next Decade.

A Mission for Asia: Evangelisation

As a gathering of ecclesial movements and communities, the theme of 'evangelisation', especially as considered within the contextualized and diverse reality of the Church in Asia, was a significant point of discussion. Our dialogue focused on the imperative of embracing our identity as 'missionary disciples' which is intricately tied to answering the call of baptism. Drawing on baptism as the primary source of mission informed our identity as a Church: the Church is not just an assembly of people who gather, but a common people who follow the call of God in their life.





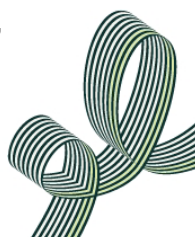
The renewal of the Church in Asia is not possible by our own efforts. No 'tool' or 'strategy' will be capable of the task; it is only possible through a dynamic movement of the Holy Spirit, a 'missionary impulse that transforms everything.' (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 27) It is the Spirit that this 'impulse' flows from. It is also the Spirit who equips the Church - individually and collectively - with charisms that empower them for mission and their particular role that can support its fulfillment. No one individual or community has been gifted all charisms in their entirety. Rather, we are called to share the charisms we have been given for the common mission that unites all the Church.

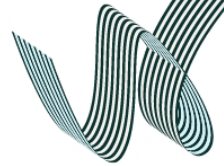
In this regard, synodal evangelisation and collaboration in mission, are an essential paradigm that is required of the Church in Asia if we are to 'make disciples of all nations' (Matt 28:19). The Gathering reflected the 'mosaic' that is Asia; representing a rich diversity in culture, history, language and social, political and economic climates. As home to over 60% of the world's population, Asia is truly the new 'mission' frontier of this millenia and the greatest priority for the Church in fulfilling the Great Commission.

The current reality of the Church in Asia is not without its challenges: 92% of Asia do not know Jesus. As reflected by Haggai International, this challenge is also a global reality, with approximately 152,600 people dying each day, and 46,000 of them not knowing the person of Jesus Christ. The changing nature of the challenges that the Catholic Church faces globally were also explored, with particular emphasis on the need to reach 'younger generations' who leaving the faith at an early age. The recent statistics on the 'nones' or non-believers from Canada supported this point, with 34.6% of the population identifying, with 42.5% in the 14 and under age demographic. The urgent mission focus of children and young people are a priority for our movements, communities and the broader Church in Asia. In responding to these challenges, the Gathering acknowledged that evangelisation as communion and action has often taken a 'back seat' in the Asian Church. Whilst this reality should be challenging, we were reminded that the Church is 'not a defeated army.' We were encouraged by the words of Emil Brunner in this regard: 'the Church exists for mission as a fire exists for burning. Where there is no mission, there is no church.' The fact that the mission before the Church is so great, should also give us great hope for the life of the Church of Asia into the future.

As representatives of the ecclesial movements of Asia, we acknowledge the enormity of the task before us, and simultaneously renew our commitment that we will put into action our missionary commitment. Ecclesial communities and movements are uniquely placed to invite children, youth and families into an encounter with Jesus and accompany them to become missionary disciples. In these particular areas, as well as the broad and distinct array of identities and charisms held by our communities and movements, it is recognised that they have had critical role in the emerging Church in Asia and will be instrumental to its continued growth in the Next Decade and beyond. As a Gathering, we refuse to have our dreams for the evangelisation of Asia and the missionary renewal of our Church be reduced to slogans or a forgotten dialogue, but draw on them to accelerate our commitment to fulfilling the Great Commission.

To begin to realize the evangelisation of the nations, the revitalisation of the Church and the transformation of society, particular tools and strategies are needed to animate our dioceses,





parishes, communities and movements. Tools such as *Alpha* and *The Jesus Film* can play a fundamental role in initiating this work of evangelisation; but these tools are only effective if our leaders - especially the lay leaders - receive adequate and appropriate formation.

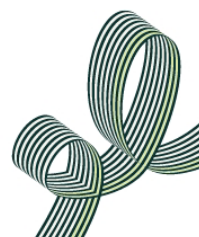
In the area of formation for mission, the Church in Asia needs to distill, define and disseminate our rich theological tradition of evangelisation. Exploring the dynamic process of evangelisation as articulated in *Ecclesia in Asia*, *Redemptoris Missio* and *the Directory for Catechesis*, centering on the essential elements of charity, witness, proclamation, conversion, catechesis, community and mission, allowed the Gathering to situate these tools for evangelisation, and gave language to identifying the particular contribution each movement or community can make within a unified strategy of evangelisation. This was further supported in exploring *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, *Evangelii Gaudium*, the *Bangkok Document* (Journeying Together as Peoples of Asia) and Final Document of the Asian Continental Assembly on Synodality. Immersing ourselves in these foundational documents on evangelisation as understood by the Church in Asia, led the Gathering to the clear articulation that evangelisation ‘proposes, not imposes.’

The proposition of the Gospel should have a particular emphasis on the external peripheries, expanding the Church’s understanding of what it means to undertake outreach. Of particular significance is the intentional mission focus on central Asian countries, where the proclamation of the Gospel faces particular and unique challenges. For the Gathering, this reaffirmed the notion that the Church exists not just for itself but for the mission it carries. In this, the Church can neither be too reliant on charitable works of mercy nor an over emphasis on catechetical initiatives. Fundamental to all evangelisation is the person of Jesus; as articulated in *Ecclesia in Asia* (23), ‘in all evangelizing work, however, it is the complete truth of Jesus Christ which must be proclaimed.’ This ‘first proclamation’ of the kerygma must include the witness of Jesus in our lives and in the identity of our communities; faith is not taught, but caught. The words of St Pope Paul VI helped the Gathering balance this tension of outreach, witness, proclamation and catechesis: the ‘modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.’ (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 67)

A Church for Asia: Synodality and Community

The Gathering affirmed that communion and participation in the mission is the most palpable sign that the Body of Christ is alive, today. Following evangelisation, synodality in the life of the Church was therefore the second major theme explored by the Gathering.

As emphasized by Pope Francis, a central challenge for the Church in Asia in becoming synodal is overcoming clericalism. Clericalism, or the ‘shadow’ cast on synodality, was seen as the opposite of the collaborative, co-responsible and participatory spirit that is desired by the Church. One of the main factors in this was the articulation that the ‘ministerial priesthood’ is founded upon the ‘common priesthood’. Entering into the Church as both community and mission is founded on the Sacrament of Baptism, and not Holy Orders, is essential to realizing this reality of synodality. The Gathering was encouraged by the words of St Augustine in affirming this: “for you, I am a bishop, with you, I am a Christian.”





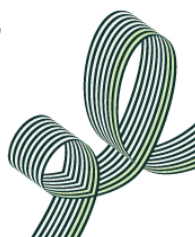
The emergence of ecclesial movements and communities in the Church in Asia is also a great remedy to this challenge. Communities are predominantly lay led, are founded on a charism and often share in an articulated commitment to evangelisation. The challenge for these communities is to create pathways and remain closely connected to the Parish. The Parish remains the fundamental reality of the Body of Christ, centered on the Celebration of the Sacraments and seeking to become more fully a 'community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey and a centre of constant missionary outreach.' (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 28) What is required is for the Church to focus on being 'bridges and bridge builders' both within itself (eg. between movements and parishes or clergy and laity) and beyond itself. To look beyond itself will require the Church to look up and look out, seeking to 'enlarge the space of our tent' (Isaiah 54:2), inviting all to belong in the process.

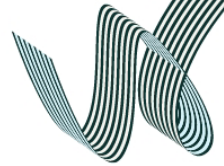
This will inevitably include intentionally reaching out to, and encountering, marginalized groups such as LGBT+, disabled, refugees and migrants, rural and remote communities, young people, elderly and women. This list is by no means exhaustive, but seeks to emphasize the parallels between the demands of a synodal Church and the very nature of Jesus' call to the first disciples. Peter, Andrew, James and John in the Gospel of Mark who were fishing on the Sea of Galilee on the Sabbath, rather than being in the Synagogue, were the ones Jesus called to 'come and follow', become the 'fishers of men' and who received the Great Commission. As representatives of the ecclesial movements of Asia, we commit to collaboration and co-responsibility, both amongst the movements and the broader Church, in our shared life and mission of evangelisation.

Synodality requires trust and relationship that will take time and effort by the whole Church. There will be challenges as well as successes as we embark on the Next Decade together. Unity for the sake of unity is often difficult; unity for the sake of a common mission is often simple. The common mission discerned by the Gathering is not so much a 'destination' but rather a common 'person': Jesus. Keeping our focus, as both communities and individuals, on the person of Jesus is the only way we will see the Great Commission fulfilled and is the only thing that we can contribute to the people of Asia. As articulated in *Ecclesia in Asia*: 'the heart of the Church in Asia will be restless until the whole of Asia finds its rest in the peace of Christ, the Risen Lord. The Church's faith in Jesus is a gift received and a gift to be shared; **it is the greatest gift which the Church can offer to Asia.**' (10)

The Gathering was distinctly aware of the threat to both the Church and Asia if this is not realized. In the words of Arnold Toynbee, civilizations often 'decline due to internal factors rather than external threats'; in other words, they are more likely to 'die from suicide than murder.' For the Church, the threat is one of becoming 'self-referential' or turning in on oneself. Rather, the ultimate goal of a synodal Church is coming out of oneself. The words attributed to Pope Francis, speaking to the Cardinals who elected him Pope, were relevant to the Gathering in these deliberations: to 'think of the times in which Jesus is knocking from inside so that we will let him come out.'

An aspect of this is maintaining a posture of generosity. All of the various gifts received by our ecclesial movements, and indeed the Church as a whole, have been given by God. We need to have a readiness to share all that we have for the common mission. As a Gathering,





we commit to being catalysts for collaboration rather than competition, extending this culture to the communities, movements, parishes, and dioceses that we belong to alongside other Christian Churches, networks and organizations that share in this common mission. Our dream is for the Body of Christ to become united in life and mission, working together and walking together on our pilgrim journey, and beginning to see the fulfillment of Jesus' prayer:

"May they be one, so that the world will believe that you sent me." (John 17:21)

A Dream for Asia: Towards 2033

"I dream of a 'missionary option', that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled **for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation.**"

- *Evangelii Gaudium*, 27

As a Gathering, our 'dream' for Asia over the Next Decade and beyond echoes these words of the Holy Father. We make a new commitment to the *Great Commandment* and the *Great Commission*. This dream is grounded in our faith in the person of Jesus; empowered by Jesus' faith and trust in us to be co-labourers in the mission; and, believing that, ultimately, it is Jesus who builds His Church, and will bring about the Kingdom here on earth as in heaven. (Matt 16:18)

To begin to realize this dream, the following priorities for the Next Decade (2033) are offered to the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference and the Church in Asia:

Communion

Relationship: Commit to exploring new partnerships, identify new opportunities for collaboration and create new environments for the next generation of leaders to journey together for future of the Church in Asia, including the creation of:

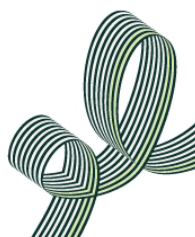
- A directory of ecclesial movements and communities in Asia; and,
- A library of tools and resources that can support evangelisation in communities, movements, parishes and dioceses across Asia.

Networking: Explore opportunities for networking to continue dialogue and collaboration as we discern common areas of mission, including:

- Encourage regular online and in-person parish, diocesan, national and Asian region gatherings of ecclesial movements and communities; and,
- The redevelopment of a Fraternity of Ecclesial Movements in Asia (FEMA).

Parish and Diocesan Engagement: Promote the integration of evangelization strategies into parish and diocesan pastoral plans.

Ecumenical: Engage in ecumenical and cross-denominational outreach initiatives, utilising common tools such as *Alpha*, *Jesus Film* and *Global 2033*.





Participation

Formation: Facilitate the process of hosting an Asian school of evangelisation, supported by the movements, and in collaboration with a Catholic University.

Schools: Partner with Catholic schools and educational institutions in collaborative evangelization efforts, intentionally reaching both Catholic and non-Catholic young people, teachers and families.

Families: Prioritize efforts concerning the evangelisation of families as well as the role of families within the life and mission of the Church.

Children and Youth: Prioritize efforts concerning the evangelisation of children and young people, including:

- Highlighting the role of ecclesial communities and movements in animating children, youth and young adults ministry;
- Outline a leadership and ministry pipeline to support local communities to accompany youth and young adults into mission opportunities;
- Clarify ministry roles that youth and young adults can fulfill, within our Catholic ecclesiology, to support the mission of evangelisation.

Mission

Global 2033: Commit to the vision and coalition of Global 2033, including:

- Supporting the various practical initiatives that are used to engage and promote the common vision (eg. G33 Courses for Evangelisation, Discipleship and Leadership, Regional Summits, Prayer-Care-Share, 'Easter to Pentecost' Evangelisation Focus, Priest Retreat) over this coming decade;
- Set a specific set of dates to launch local, national and Asia region contextualised efforts towards this common goal.

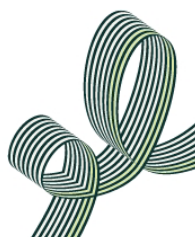
Focus: Reprioritise the focus of our communities and movements from maintenance to mission, moving beyond a mindset of 'self preservation' and promoting one of 'regeneration' of people into the person of Christ.

Evangelisation Resources: Share existing and collaborate on the development of new evangelisation resources to effectively equip movements, communities, parishes and dioceses for the mission of evangelisation in Asia.

Digital: Utilize social media and digital technologies, especially drawing on the particular contributions young people can make in this area, to communicate the truth of the Gospel using contemporary methods and mediums.

Prayer

Intercession: Recognise the essential nature of intentional intercessory prayer for the evangelisation of Asia, including:

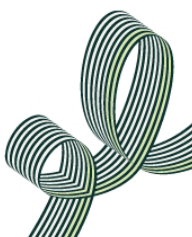




- Identifying existing prayer centers at Diocesan and national levels;
- Support the existing global intercessory prayer initiatives (Global 2033 and Intercessory Network for the Evangelisation of Asia);
- Encourage intentional prayer for individuals by name; and,
- Host a regular (bi-monthly) online prayer gathering for members of FEMA to intercede for the mission of evangelisation.

These proposed priorities seek to intensify our efforts towards the Jubilee Year (Rome, 2025), the World Youth Day (Seoul, 2027) and towards 2033.

We entrust all of these reflections and actions to the powerful guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the maternal intercession of our Holy Mother, the Queen of the Missions and Star of Evangelisation.





Church Documents

BD Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference, *'Bangkok Document', Journeying Together as Peoples of Asia* (2023).

DC Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization, *Directory for Catechesis* (2020).

EA Saint Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, (7 November 1999).

EN Saint Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi, Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelization in the Modern World*, (8 December 1975).

EG Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium, Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World*, (24 November 2013).

RM Saint Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio, Encyclical Letter on the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate*, (7 December 1990).

Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference, *Final Document of the Asian Continental Assembly on Synodality* (2023).

Websites

FABC Office of Evangelisation, Gathering of Ecclesial Movements in Asia Resources
Site: catholic.alphayth.org/fabc

Alpha Asia Pacific
Site: asiapacific.alpha.org

Global 2033
Site: global2033.org

The Jesus Film
Site: jesusfilm.org

