

F A B C 5 0 G E N E R A L C O N F E R E N C E



J O U R N E Y I N G T O G E T H E R A S P E O P L E S O F A S I A

“...and they went a different way.” (Mt 2:12)

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

Volume 1

OCTOBER 12-30, 2022
BANGKOK, THAILAND

Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC)



Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC)

FABC 50 General Conference
Journeying Together as Peoples of Asia
Bangkok, Thailand

Conference Proceedings
Volume 1

Editor
Pablito A. Baybado, Jr

Published by
Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC)

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FOREWORD

The Bangkok Document is the fruit of the first ever FABC General Conference that was held in Baan Phu Waan Pastoral Centre, Sampran, Bangkok from October 12-30, 2022. The Federation of Asian Bishop's Conferences (FABC) comprises 17 Episcopal Conferences, two Synods of Oriental Churches and three Associate Members. The theme of the General Conference was "Journeying together as People of Asia".

The Conference sought to reaffirm FABC's journey of the past fifty years, revitalize the Church in Asia and envision new pathways of service.

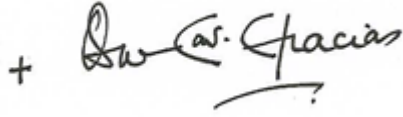
226 participants gathered at the Pastoral Centre for the Conference with 20 Cardinals, 120 Bishops, 37 priests, 8 Religious Sisters and 41 Lay Faithful participating. Its reflections and deliberations took place in the midst of the preparation for the Synod on Synodality. The General Conference concluded with discussion on the Bangkok Document and voted to approve its outline, entrusting a working group to prepare the final document.

After several preparatory meetings, the group met in the Archdiocese of Bombay from February 2-4, 2023 to finalize the text. After this meeting, some editing was done and we were able to publish this document on March 15, 2023.

The document reflects the heart and soul of the Asian Church and expresses her resolve to work unitedly and dedicatedly to establish the Kingdom of God. We present the Bangkok Document to all people of good will in Asia with an invitation to join us in our striving to build a better Asia and a better world. May God bless our efforts.

+ 

✠ **Charles Maung Cardinal Bo,
SDB**
Archbishop of Yangon
President of FABC

+ 

✠ **Cardinal Oswald Gracias**
Archbishop of Bombay
Convener of the General Conference

+ 

✠ **Archbishop Tarcisio Isao
Kikuchi, SVD**
Archbishop of Tokyo
Secretary General FABC



✠ **Fr. William LaRousse, MM**
Assistant Secretary General FABC

INTRODUCTION

Like the “Wise men [who] came to Jerusalem from the east asking, ‘Where is the infant king of the Jews?’” (Mt. 2:1), the FABC 50 General Conference is the journey of the Churches in Asia “from Manila to Bangkok,” borrowing the expression of Bishop Joseph Chusat Sirisuk, President of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Thailand, in search for the face of Jesus in Asia. It is the story of the Churches in Asia, as they grow together, walking side by side with the realities, challenges, and aspirations of the peoples of Asia.

From the seed of great joy and common mission “for the peoples of Asia” planted by Pope Paul VI in Manila, the FABC General Conference is the historical narrative of “Asian Christianity ... undergoing the process of shedding its alien baggage and becoming truly indigenous to the region,” according to His Eminence Charles Cardinal Maung Bo, FABC President, during the inauguration of the 50th anniversary of FABC. It was a time of coming together to stop, pray and discern as they looked back in the past 50 years. Like St. Augustine who reviewed thoroughly and reflectively his life in his “Confession,” they needed to listen and discern the promptings of the ‘Holy Spirit at work in Asia.’ “We are convinced that the future shape of our Churches of Asia will very much depend upon our readiness to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit and allow it to operate in our midst...” (OTC The Spirit at Work in Asia Today, 93)

In this first General Conference, inspired by the Gospel of Matthew 2:1-12, the Churches in Asia, through the bishops in communion with the Holy See, in the words of His Eminence Oswald Cardinal Gracias, the Convener of the conference, “start a monumental task of reaffirming, renewing, and revitalizing the Church in Asia. We will gather to commemorate, celebrate, and chart the direction that we, as the Church in Asia, will take on our journey together in the next decades. Open to the Spirit, we go by another way as He leads us.”

The FABC 50 General Conference, in a sense, is the fruit of this long journey of discernment and listening of the pathways the Holy Spirit is

leading the local churches in journeying with the Peoples of Asia. It provides a glimpse of the state local churches that have been built throughout the 50 years of realizing and en fleshing the Body of Christ in a given people, at a given place and time, through a humble and loving dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, the religions—with all the realities of the people in whose midst as it sunk its roots deeply and whose history and life it gladly makes its own” (FABC I, 10, 12).

“And they go different a way” (Mt. 2:12). The FABC 50 General Conference is also a moment of discovering the diverse pathways the local churches are committed to undertake in serving the peoples of Asia. In their Message to the Peoples of Asia, “In prayer and in a spirit of collaboration,” they vow to respond to the challenges in Asia by relying on the power of love, compassion, justice, and forgiveness. Furthermore, “they believe that peace and reconciliation is the only way forward.” In the Bangkok Document, the Churches in Asia “trace five pathways which we wish to travel post the FABC General Conference.”

Thus, the FABC 50 General Conference is the summary of the journey from Manila to Bangkok, for by learning from the past, and celebrating the present, the Churches in Asia are now empowered “to respond to God’s love, serving and loving our “neighbours,” the hungry and thirsty, the sick, foreigners and migrants, the Indigenous, oppressed and needy (cf. Mk. 12:29 ff. and Mt 25:31ff.), and journeying together in a synodal, inculturated church with intercultural relationships with our neighbors in religions, cultures, and societies for a better Asia” (Bangkok Document 165). It is the movement from triple dialogue to multilogue, in the way His Eminence Antonio Cardinal Tagle, the Papal Envoy, characterizes the contemporary being of the Churches in Asia.

For this reason, the FABC General Conference echoes, with more fervor and deeper commitment, the realization that the local Churches made during the First Plenary Assembly (1974): “preaching ...Jesus Christ and His Gospel to our peoples of Asia becomes a task which today assumes an urgency, a necessity and magnitude unmatched in the history of our Faith in this part of the world” (FABC I, 8).

Just like the star of the Magi, the publication of the FABC 50 General Conference proceedings in two volumes provides a guide to enter into the

experiences of conversations in the spirit and communal discernment of the bishops in Asia. It gives the readers a walkabout of the corners and roads navigated by the bishops as they look back in the past, analyze contemporary challenges, and discern new pastoral priorities in dialogue with the peoples of Asia. It hopes that the narration of the events through the Press Notes and the collection of the presentations will lead readers to a better understanding of the dynamics of communal discernment during the Conference. More than that, of course, this publication aims to inspire the readers, through prayer, reflection, and discernment, to discover the various pathways the Holy Spirit is leading the people of God to fulfill his Will in Asia.

Moreover, through this proceeding, the readers, theologians, and scholars can sift through the theologies of the FABC 50 General Conference to discover the treasures of our inculturated faith to answer questions such as the following: What is the face of Christ in Asia? Where is the Church in Asia? Where is the Church going? What are the unique attributes of the local churches and new pastoral priorities to journey with the peoples of Asia? This proceeding is an essential resource in understanding the nuances, vision and commitment of the Church in Asia in fulfilling her mission of preaching Christ in the local context.

The FABC 50 General Conference articulates the way towards becoming a synodal Church in Asia. The Conference that resulted in the Bangkok Document is rooted in the theology of synodality. “We realize that what makes us comfortable with SYNODALITY is that it has given a better articulation to what we have relentlessly pursued in the FABC” (Bangkok Document 150). It sets the direction for new fields of research on synodality. It presents salient points on theological and pastoral discussions that establish new opportunities for research collaboration and pastoral formation among the clergy, religious and the laity. Apart from giving us a sense of historical records on our progress for future reference, they serve as valuable resources for self-understanding and constructive critique and evaluation of the churches in Asia towards becoming synodal.

As Estella Padilla, FABC OTC Executive Secretary and core team member described it, the “FABC 50 was an enriching experience of synodality even before Pope Francis called for it. It was an appropriate preparation and a good grounding for the Asian churches for the Synodal Process. ... A

small core team was in charge of the planning: a synodal team too composed of priest, lay, religious men and women and two cardinals.” Hence, understanding the contextual and local rendering of the synodality as a new way of being church requires a thorough understanding of the spirituality and theology of the Bangkok Document and the General Conference as its context.

The Structure of the Proceedings

The two-volume books contain basically three elements: 1) the FABC 50 General Conferences, 2) the launching and inauguration of the FABC 50, and 3) the FABC 50 Guide Document. These three elements are arranged into five (5) parts.

The first part is the Message of the FABC 50 to the Peoples of Asia and the FABC 50 Bangkok Document, which is the final document of the General Conference. The Bangkok Document is named after the venue and host of the Conference, which is the Archdiocese of Bangkok. They are placed at the beginning of the two-volume books, indicating their utmost significance. The Bangkok Document, which is the heart of the two-volume proceedings, is considered as the Churches’ new way of being and becoming a synodal Church in the Asian context. It is a star that guides both the *modus vivendi* and *modus operandi* of the Church in Asia for the years to come.

The second part describes the conference’ background, nature, and objectives of the Conference. It includes the explanation of the Biblical foundation, the Prayer, the Song for Asia, and the rationale behind the logo. The third part presents the reflections and presentations during the launching and inauguration of the FABC 50 General Conference, which was held at the Shrine of Blessed Nicholas Bunkerd Kitbamrung, in August 22, 2022.

The fourth part is the General Conference proper, which took place in Baan Phu Wan, Pastoral Training Center, Thailand from October 12 to 30, 2022. In this section, the format starts with the Press Note for the day and the speeches and presentations follow. The Press Note is the narrative of the day’s events and process, which starts from morning prayer to closing ceremony in the evening. The arrangement of articles parallels the sequence of events as outlined in the Press Note.

There are four sections of the General Conference: 1). Visiting Asia, 2) Emerging Realities in Asia, 3) Discerning New Pathways, and 4) Final Message and the Schema of the Final Document. In Visiting Asia, the Episcopal Conferences present the realities, concerns, challenges and opportunities they faced in their own context and respective countries. Under the Emerging Realities, in dialogue with person of experts such as sociologists, environmental experts, economists, political scientists, theologians, psychologists, lawyers, activists, the Conference recognize the challenges confronting the Church in Asia. Then, through the process of communal discernment, they identified the pastoral priorities and new pathways of being Church in Asia. Finally, the last few days is devoted to the finalization of the Message to the Peoples of Asia and the schema of the Final Document.

An essential part of the General Conference is the listening and dialogue with the Peoples of Asia, which took place on Sundays. The first is the Talk Show with Asia, and the second is the Virtual Visits to the Parishes in Asia. These sections describe the nature of the programs and the panelists of the talk show, and the parishes from 14 countries in the case of the virtual parish visitations. Links are also provided for their corresponding video documentaries.

The Fifth part is the FABC 50 Guide Document, which was issued in November 2020 to all Episcopal Conferences and FABC Offices. This is the key document for the preparation of the conference. The purpose of this document is to “act as a catalyst for greater and more profound reflections for the benefit of the Church in Asia at the General Conference.” Consultations were carried out at various levels: (i) Four regional gatherings, (ii) FABC Offices, and (iii) An online survey to capture the aspirations of the general public.

The final part contains the appendices, which includes the following: 1) the dynamics of the morning prayers; 2). The FABC 50 Vademecum; and, 3) the list of participants.

It should be noted that the source document of most of the articles from the inauguration and the General Conference proper is the video documentaries available in www.fabc2020.org. Many of the articles are transcriptions of the presentations. A few of the speakers have submitted

their paper presentations. The articles herein, therefore, are submitted paper documents where they are available, while the rest are the edited transcriptions of the video presentations. Great care is being observed to ensure that the edited text is equivalent both in meaning and substance to the oral delivery. Thus, for whatever mistakes and errors in the incongruity of meaning between the oral presentation and the edited transcription, I take full responsibility. Moreover, there are presentations that are indicated in the Press Note but not included in the proceedings because they were not recorded due to the sensitivity of the topics and discussions. This is the reason why there are no country report articles in the Visiting Asia section.

Finally, I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to Fr. William LaRousse, MM, the FABC Assistant-Secretary General for his confidence and trust in me to work on the publication of the FABC 50 General Conference proceedings. I am also equally grateful to the following for their guidance and support: Rev. Fr. Enrico Ayo and Dr. Estela Padilla. I am also indebted to Asst. Prof. Val Brillo, Dr. Philip Fuentes, and my students in the subject Church in Asia class at the UST Graduate School for their invaluable assistance in reading and proofreading the manuscript. Last but not the least, I would like to thank the patience and understanding of the Office bearers of the FABC Office of Education and Faith Formation—Bishop Antonius Subianto Bunyamin, OSC (Indonesia); Archbishop Julian Leow Beng-kim (Malaysia); Bishop Joseph Ha Chi-shing (Hongkong); and, Bishop Peter Huyn Văn Hai (Vietnam)—as I spent most of my FABC time working on the proceedings.

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MESSAGE FROM THE FABC GENERAL CONFERENCE TO THE PEOPLES OF ASIA

Baan Phu Waan, Bangkok, 12-30 October 2022

We, the Pastors of the Catholic Church in Asia, share this message of joy, hope, and solidarity with you, Peoples of Asia. We are grateful for the blessings that God has showered on Asia through our Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) comprising 17 Episcopal Conferences and two Synods of Oriental Churches. "Journeying together as Peoples of Asia" was the theme of our conference in which we sought to reaffirm our journey of the past 50 years, revitalize the Church, and envision new pathways of service.

We are deeply thankful to the Royal Thai Government for the warm welcome and for honoring our general conference with the presence of the Minister of Culture during the opening ceremony. We express our deep appreciation to the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Thailand, especially the Archdiocese of Bangkok, for hosting the FABC 50 General Conference. We were happy to have with us representatives of the Holy See and other Continental Conferences. It was a fruitful time of praying, listening, discerning, and encouraging each other. It was also a moment of healing from the pain caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Through our discussions and deliberations at the conference, we touched the soul of Asia. At the same time, we were inspired by the hope, courage, and determination shown by the Churches in Asia to journey together and work with more dedication for a better Asia.

We were challenged by the different voices of our multifaceted continent that we hear crying out for help and justice:

- the sufferings of the poor, deprived, and marginalized longing for a dignified life,
- the anguish of refugees, migrants, displaced, and indigenous

peoples seeking genuine human dignity and safe places,

- the groaning of nature with wounds of exploitation, climate change, and global warming, pleading for being more adequately cared for,
- the dream of youth seeking for more significant roles in the Church and society,
- the voices of women asking for a more inclusive Church that respects their dignity and recognizes their rightful place,
- the desire of families looking for better stability and more support from all.

We are also deeply concerned about:

- the pain and suffering of some churches that need to receive relief through our empathy and solidarity;
- the rising voices of extremism that needs to be responded to wisely;
- the urgent need for a greater respect for life to be inculcated in society;
- the escalating violence and conflicts in our continent that call for dialogue and reconciliation;
- a society that is challenged by the digital revolution, which has impacted all both positively and negatively.

In prayer and in a spirit of collaboration, we desire to respond to these challenges by relying on the power of love, compassion, justice, and forgiveness. We believe that peace and reconciliation is the only way forward. We have envisaged new pathways for our ministry based on mutual listening and genuine discernment.

Inspired by the Gospel and by the recent teachings of Pope Francis:

- We commit ourselves to reach out to the peripheries. We are called to serve the most needy joyfully.
- We are called to a pastoral and ecological conversion to positively respond to “both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.”
- We wish to live out the spirit of complementarity and harmony by listening to others in genuine dialogue.
- We seek to promote a culture of peace and harmony in collaboration with our brothers and sisters of neighboring religions and traditions.
- We commit ourselves to bridge-building not just among religions and traditions but also by principled engagement with government,

NGOs, and civic organizations on issues of human rights, eradication of poverty, human trafficking, care of the earth, and other common concerns.

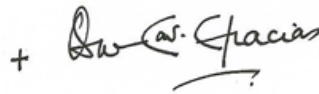
- We need to transform ourselves by fostering a culture of “reciprocal listening” where we listen to each other and all of us listen to the voice of God.
- We thus intend to improve the way we form ourselves in faith and accompany our families and communities, especially those in difficulty.

By journeying together along these pathways, we will serve the world with greater commitment. We assure our people of this continent that the Catholic Church in Asia will always work for a better Asia and the good of all our people. As we assure you of our prayers, we humbly ask you to remember us in your prayers. Together we journey at the service of the human family and all creation.

Given in Bangkok, Thailand, on 30 October 2022



✠ CHARLES CARDINAL BO S.D.B.
President of FABC



✠ OSWALD CARDINAL GRACIAS
Convener of FABC 50 General
Conference



✠ FRANCIS XAVIER CARDINAL KRIENGSACK KOVITHAVANIJ
Archbishop of Bangkok (Thailand)



✠ TARCISIO ISAO KIKUCHI S.V.D.
Secretary General of FABC



**THE FINAL DOCUMENT OF THE
FABC 50 GENERAL CONFERENCE**



FABC General Assembly

October 12-15, 2023

Baan Phu Waan Pastoral Center

Nakhonpathom, Thailand



al Conference
to 30, 2022
loral Training Center
om, Thailand

INTRODUCTION

1. Bearing witness to God's love for all human beings and for his creation is the mission of the disciples of Jesus Christ, journeying together as peoples of Asia. Indeed, in the covenant with Noah, God's love embraces all peoples and the whole of creation. Caring as a merciful father and a loving mother, God opens new pathways for our journeying in the present time with its multiple challenges and crises.

2. Walking in the footsteps of the Magi, the FABC 50 General Conference invites us to set out on a journey, charting the way together, following the "star" of God in our present history, interpreting the signs of the times. Mathew's account of the Magi's journey (cf. Mt 2:1-12) became the guide for FABC's First General Conference in Bangkok from October 12-30, 2022 convened on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the FABC. The evangelist narrates how the Magi, led by a star, embarked on an adventurous journey together. This inspired our Jubilee theme, "Journeying Together as Peoples of Asia, "...and they went a different way" (Mt 2:12). We saw the present time as a propitious one to discern and undertake new pathways to genuinely renew our mission and ministry in Asia of making the Gospel alive and life-giving for all, especially for those on the periphery, and for mother Earth, which groans with wounds of exploitation (cf. Laudato Si [LS], 49).

3. Asia is the continent of great religious traditions and of multicultural peoples who share in the common quest for Peace, Justice and Harmony. Drawing on the Gospel, the Catholic Church shares in this common quest. As a minority in Asia, the Church shares the joys and sufferings of our peoples. United with all social forces, organizations, civil society and all people of good will, we contribute our efforts to move from the present socio-economic-political life situation to a world in which the dignity and rights of all are promoted and respected. We want our people to be able to hope again and, through living together in solidarity and harmony, experience the never ending love of God.

4. And so, like the Magi, we as bishops of Asia and as representatives of the People of God, gathered together to read the signs of our times, to discern, to seek guidance and to discover new pathways. We remembered certain phases of the Asian Mission in which Matteo Ricci and others like him proclaimed the Gospel not in a manner tied to the cultures of their country

of origin, but in truly inculturated ways. Taking note of the great variety of cultures of the Asian peoples on the one hand, and the emerging realities, challenges and hopes of our peoples on the other, we embarked on a journey together, listening to each other's stories and learning from each other. We prayed and discerned together what the Spirit is telling the churches and peoples in Asia. We worshipped together and unpacked the gifts the Spirit has generously bestowed on us, to offer them in humble service for the good of the Church and all people. Finally, we moved to new pathways that enable us to live a fully human life. Reaffirmed, renewed and revitalized through our General Conference, we go forth on our synodal journeying with our communities, parishes, dioceses, and episcopal conferences on one hand, and with our peoples in Asia on the other. God, in his love, invites us to journey with him building societies and Christian communities which leave no one behind. As a Church in this continent, connected with the universal Church, we want to contribute to a better Asia, to a more peaceful, just and harmonious humanity and to the protection of nature.

5. The Gospel impels us, disciples of Jesus, to dare transcend borders - as the Magi did - to abandon unjust structures of life and embark on a journey together in a common quest for meaning and purpose, as we participate in God's project of building life in fullness (cf Jn 10:10), justice and peace. Keeping the journey of the Magi as our framework, we present this Final Document of our FABC 50 General Conference in five parts:

1. Journeying Together
2. Looking
3. Discerning
4. Offering Our Gifts
5. Undertaking New Pathways.

Part One: JOURNEYING TOGETHER

Responding to the call of synodality

6. Leaving familiar ground to heed God's call, as Israel's leaders once did, the Magi left their comfort zones and found themselves syn-hodos "on the way together," in their common quest for God who invited them to do what He Himself has done. The Chinese proverb says, "a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step". The first step that began our story of redemption was God taking the initiative to walk with human beings in the Garden of Eden (cf Gen 3:8). That "walk" culminated in the coming of God in our midst as one like us in all things but sin (cf Heb 4:15).

7. Portrayed in Matthew's Gospel as a representation of the Gentiles, the Magi cannot but remind us of our own journey as a Church in Asia. Varied historical circumstances have led us to Jesus Christ, Son of God, who, in His great love has revealed to us the face of God as Emmanuel, "God with us" (Mt 1:23). Not only does he invite us to journey with him; He is himself THE WAY that leads us back home to the Father's house (cf Jn 14:6)

8. Our aspiration for synodality comes with an act of faith in God who takes the initiative to walk with us and invites us to "walk humbly" with Him (cf Mic 6:8) He makes himself known to all honest searchers and pilgrims. He allows his star to become visible for all people of good will.

9. Sometimes, like the Hebrew slaves, we are tempted to give up the journey (cf Num 14:4). Or, like the Israelites in the face of hunger and thirst in the desert, we find ourselves longing for the fleshpots of Egypt (cf Ex 16:3). When we encounter dead ends or seemingly insurmountable barriers, we are discouraged from carrying on with the journey.

10. The Magi made a path for themselves as they journeyed, looking up to heaven for guidance. An atmosphere of prayer and meditation on the Word of God strengthens us to keep going as we engage in our Synodal journey. We are invited, as it were, to keep looking up to heaven to allow the "Star of Wonder, Star of Night...to guide us to the perfect light." Otherwise, even while journeying together we may lose the way.

11. Far too often the way of Christ has been portrayed only as a "Way of the

Cross” and made to seem like a morbid journey that glorifies suffering and death. Like the disciples, we can miss out on the meaning of the empty tomb and allow grief or confusion to prevent us from encountering the Risen Christ. We can find ourselves journeying together but, like the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, in the wrong direction (cf Lk 24:13-35).

12. It is precisely when we lose sight of the real goal - proclaiming Jesus - that we are tempted to give up. Some of Jesus’ disciples found the promise of Jesus about giving us his own body and blood, a “hard saying”. They parted ways from him. The question Jesus asked the twelve can be addressed to us also: “Do you also want to leave?” (Jn 6:66)

13. The history of the Church is fraught with many sad episodes of partings of ways, when instead of journeying together we decided to go our separate ways because of issues of doctrine, issues of pastoral care, issues of administration, etc., and each time we have been called back by the voice of Peter: “To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (Jn 6:67).

14. The Church in Asia too has sometimes strayed from the right path. There have been pioneers like Matteo Ricci in China and Robert de Nobili in India who blazed new trails, but by and large the Church followed the beaten track, unwilling to cut off its former moorings. There have been great freedom movements supported by the Church like the 1986 EDSA Revolution (People Power Revolution) in the Philippines and recent prophetic figures in Myanmar and in other places; but the prophetic voice of the Church has sometimes been stilled. She has, at times, also been too cautious in standing up for human rights.

15. Throughout this FABC 50 General Conference in Bangkok, we have endeavored to find new pathways as the Magi did. We have been led to do what Peter did at the very first Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15), when in reaction to Paul’s reaching out to the Gentiles, some wanted to restrict the mission to the Jewish converts. Assuming his leadership role, at the Council of Jerusalem, Peter stood between James and Paul and took the initiative to keep them together (cf Acts 15).

16. The new route proposed for the Church is the path of SYNODALITY. A synodal church has three essential elements: COMMUNION, PARTICIPATION, MISSION.¹

17. COMMUNION is the antithesis of our tendencies towards exclusivity. Every baptized member is equal in dignity. We may play different roles, but as baptized members, we all are “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, God’s own people” (1 Pt 2:9). There are no first and second class members in the Church. The Spirit further empowers us to enter into communion not only with our fellow Catholics but also with every Christian, every human being and every created being. We cannot be agents of communion except by the power of the Spirit of communion which we have received at baptism. Only in communion with the Spirit can we grow into communities of disciples and become builders of basic Christian and Human communities that act like leaven in a mass of dough.

18. PARTICIPATION is the most palpable sign that the body of Christ is alive and that each part is animated by the same Spirit. What can hinder participation in the Church is the “power” issue². When the roles of the clergy are translated into positions of power, there is a tendency to prevent the other parts of the body of Christ from playing their proper roles according to their charisms. The Church is thus reduced to a ‘clerical’ church. When the ordained ministry, whose principal role is to promote a variety of ministries and coordinate them for the building up of the Church, ends up monopolizing leadership, we need to be reminded of Jesus’ admonition to James and John: “it shall not be so with you” (Mt 20:26). Leadership has to be exercised always in the spirit of servanthood, participating in the leadership of him who came “not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for the many.” (Mk 10:45)

19. And finally, MISSION is the opposite of our tendencies towards what Pope Francis calls “self-referentiality”. We become self-referential when we forget that we do not exist for ourselves but rather for the world. This happens when our ministries are established primarily with the purpose of getting people to serve the Church alone, rather than serve society as part of a servant Church.

¹ A Vademecum: For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission.

20. Along the way, we are being challenged by the many ‘Herods’. Hence, we cannot be complacent; we need to avoid the common tendency to remain in ‘maintenance mode’, to stick only to the familiar pathway.

21. On the concluding day of our Conference, H.E. Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle, the Papal Legate placed before us an important challenge. Aware of the FABC’s vision of a Church that engages in evangelization through a triple dialogue (with religions, cultures and the poor), Cardinal Tagle pointed out that dialogue is often understood as just bilateral, meaning a dynamic between two sides. He posed the challenge to explore new ways of engaging in dialogue that are multilateral, what we might call a “multilogue” or the kind that requires precisely the spirit of synodality that has given this particular FABC 50 General Conference its freshest character. He spoke of the necessity for us to take more seriously the spirituality, lifestyle and living out of dialogue in our local churches, ad intra, among ourselves, and ad extra, in relation to the varied societies in Asia in which we operate.

22. Synodality should not just be among bishops or the ordained leaders of the Church. If synodality has to do with promoting communion, participation, and mission in the Church, then we, the Church in Asia, must make sure that we are able to discern the “sensus fidelium” through synodal consultations and opportunities for community discernment that would also involve, not just bishops but the rest of the faithful—laity, religious, and clergy—as well as other sectors of society that impact the life and mission of the Church. The Church in Asia must constantly remind herself of the words of Isaiah 54:2 which have been used as the title of the Synod document for the Continental Stage “to enlarge the space of our tent”.

Part Two: LOOKING AT ASIA’S EMERGING REALITIES

Recognizing the challenges confronting the Church in Asia

23. “When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of King Herod, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying: Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come

² In our General Assembly in Bandung in 1990, we resolved to pursue a new way of being Church by promoting the growth of BECs (Basic Ecclesial Communities) that would serve as our most concrete expressio

to do him homage” (Mt 2:1-2). Matthew characterizes the Gentile seekers as “Magi”, i.e., people of wisdom who make the effort and take time to “look up” to the sky and gaze at the stars. This indicates that they meditated and sought the guidance of heaven about their concerns on earth.

24. The Church in Asia can relate well with the quest that the Magi embarked on. The evangelist describes them in a manner akin to the Asian contemplative character. We can picture them journeying together in silence, asking questions whenever necessary and seeking both divine and human guidance.

25. Like the Magi, we Bishops, gathered at the FABC 50 General Conference, sought for human guidance in the person of experts - sociologists, environmental experts, economists, political scientists, theologians, psychologists, lawyers, activists, persons who can lead us to a better comprehension of the emerging realities in the continent. Above all, we sought divine guidance. We made sure we prayed in silence each time we looked into Asia’s multifaceted and diverse realities. Each morning session began with inculturated morning prayers and contextualized scriptural reflections. It was the sustained atmosphere of prayer that enabled us to view our emerging realities from the perspective of faith and spirituality.

26. The Magi were “wise”, not only because they looked up to heaven, but also because they looked around to seek counsel. We ourselves did a lot of looking up and looking around in this FABC 50 General Conference, as we prayed, reflected on the Scriptures, and engaged in spiritual conversations hoping that these could give us the appropriate optic in viewing our current situations in Asia, a perspective that is both human and divine, the perspective of the Incarnate God.

27. We likewise did a lot of looking back at the historical roots³ and development of our local Churches, especially during our ‘virtual visits’ to every country in Asia. Some of them, such as Korea, Japan, Vietnam, and Cambodia, had been literally watered by the blood of martyrs. Each ‘visit’ made us understand and appreciate the beginnings of the Christian faith in different countries of Asia, the early missionaries who prepared the ground for the first seeds of the Gospel.⁴ Each ‘visit’ opened our eyes to both the hopeful and painful realities that are emerging and impacting our respective local Churches. We also had the opportunity to listen to voices from different

parishes and sectors in various countries in Asia that are rarely heard.

28. We noted the Church is quietly flourishing in many Asian countries that used to be hostile to the Christian faith. We heard reports of governments that have welcomed the positive contributions of the local Churches to nation-building, to human development, to education, to the care for the environment, to the work against human trafficking,⁵ to social communication, etc. Our brother bishops from Korea edified us by opting to use the vocabulary of “neighbour religions” instead of “other religions.” The Indonesians inspired us with an enduring symbol of interreligious harmony in the “tunnel of friendship” that connects underground the Istqilal Mosque with St. Mary of the Assumption Cathedral in Jakarta. The fledgling Church of Mongolia, though functioning mainly as an NGO (non-government organization), has struck an amicable partnership with the Mongolian government. In several countries in Asia, the Church has entered into proactive approaches while partnering with government agencies and civil society in dealing with the Covid 19 pandemic.

29. On the other hand, we heard of adverse situations in several local Churches in Asia that are dealing with the erosion of religious freedom, religious extremism, laws which pose threats to the freedom of conscience and faith adherence, terrorist attacks motivated by religious extremism and the rise of populist and authoritarian governments which employ social media for disinformation. Despite their track record of systemic corruption and violation of human rights, they have managed to get people to vote for them. There appears to be, paradoxically, a new fascination for authoritarian rule and a tolerance for disrespect of civil liberties.

³ Our brothers bishops from the Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara Rites made us aware of the earlier development of a Christian tradition called “Syriac Orient” which had spread through the Asian continent in the early first millennium and after, mostly attributed to the mission of the Apostle St. Thomas, and how because of persecution and other factors they had dwindled by the end of the first millennium, only to be revived through the missions of the second millennium. We await with eagerness the result of a historical research on this topic.

⁴ Missionaries like St. Francis Xavier, Mateo Ricci, Robert De Nobili, John de Britto and others, who were full of fire to go out and evangelize. St Joseph Vaz is another example; he went from Goa to Sri Lanka to share the Gospel of Jesus. Being rejected and exiled did not discourage him. He still went to Sri Lanka and working at the harbour as a porter he continued his mission of sharing the Good News.

⁵ The Talitha Kumi program comes to mind.

30. The breadth and depth of Asia makes it truly difficult to understand the diversity of issues that impact this vast continent. So we focused on what struck us as the most impactful realities in Asian societies. From these we identified nine major priorities:

- A. Migrants, Refugees and Indigenous People, often displaced from their homelands
- B. Families, the bedrock of society
- C. The evolving role of Women in the fast-changing Asian societies
- D. Gender Issues confronting the Church and society
- E. Youth confronting a new world
- F. The impact of Digital Technology
- G. Promoting an equitable Economy in the face of Urbanization and Globalization
- H. The Climate Crisis which endangers our common home
- I. Interreligious Dialogue to bring about harmony and peace in the Asian continent

A. MIGRANTS, REFUGEES AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OFTEN DISPLACED FROM THEIR HOMELANDS:

31. Like the Holy Family that had to flee from Bethlehem and seek refuge in Egypt, many among Asia's poor are displaced either as local or foreign migrants. It was pointed out that by 2050 there will be more than 400 million migrants all over the world. While we acknowledge the right of people to migrate in search of a better life for their families, we are aware of the adverse effects of the consequent brain-drain. This continuous migration of professionals - like nurses, doctors, caregivers, architects and engineers - to other countries cannot but aggravate the situation of underdevelopment in their home countries.

32. Asia is the scene for a booming migration industry, which operates both legally and illegally at a very high cost of human values. Family life is disrupted; children are abandoned; the social fabric is gradually eroded. For some countries the migrants' remittances is a big contributor to their economy. This accounts for the policy of governments of some developing countries encouraging workers to go to other countries to the detriment of their own countries' development. While the migrants send home their hard-earned money and help their economies, hardly any money is invested

by the home governments for the benefit of the migrant workers themselves, some of whom even had to sell their land to be able to work abroad.

33. The horrific stories of abuse and exploitation that many experience only prove that slavery continues to exist even in the 21st century. We think especially of Indians, Filipinos, Pakistanis, Bangladeshi, and Sri Lankans living as contract workers in the Gulf States, or in the more industrialized countries of Asia. Often, they are treated like undesirable aliens, despite the fact that they contribute to the economies of their host cities and countries. Many of them, separated from their families, struggle with loneliness. In their struggle to cope with homesickness, some find themselves entangled in extramarital relationships resulting in complicated family situations.

34. We think of the many displaced by armed conflicts in Myanmar and elsewhere, of political refugees seeking asylum to avoid political persecution. Some of them, entering other countries as illegal aliens, find themselves hiding from immigration authorities for fear of getting deported. Being undocumented and having no legal status, many are exploited as cheap labor without any social benefits, and are unable to avail of public services, such as education and health care.

35. Many migrants are involved in low-skilled jobs. Most of them, having no fixed contracts, receive unjust wages and endure subhuman working conditions. The lack of governance and laws for the welfare of migrant workers, such as the freedom to form or join unions, are among the many problems that governments need to attend to. Women migrants usually suffer the worst forms of harassment and abuse and are usually the least protected and the lowest paid. It is encouraging to see international and national organizations protecting the rights of migrant workers, listening to their complaints and appealing for their cases.

B. FAMILIES, THE BEDROCK OF SOCIETY:

36. The family is an integral part of society. The family is the place where values and virtues are first taught, where love and sacrifice are first experienced, where fidelity and forgiveness are first learned. Most Asians consider harmonious family life as a blessing. Pope St John Paul II affirmed: As “the normal place where the young grow to personal and social maturity”

and “the bearer of the heritage of humanity itself”, “the family occupies a very important place in Asian cultures...” (Ecclesia in Asia [EA], 46).

37. However, families in Asia are currently facing many challenges that threaten their tranquility, stability and unity. Death due to human tragedies, violence, wars and natural disasters deprives some children of one or both parents. Migration for work in urban centers and abroad forces members of families to separate. Fortunately, the support of close kin (grandparents, uncles, aunts, elder siblings, cousins, etc.), usually enables children left behind to face difficulties and imbibe traditional values. Although Asians believe that children are happiest when raised by both a mother and a father, they support working mothers, house husbands and single parents. Wherever possible, parents or their surrogates provide for the education of their children. The Church’s schools, colleges and universities make a significant contribution to the private education system.

38. While mixed-Christian and interfaith marriages certainly pose some problems, they are also perceived as the first school of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. Concerned for the welfare and future of their families, the young and old participate in society and promote care for the earth, our common home.

39. In areas with greater access to social media, attitudes towards the family are being adversely affected by cultural globalization (EA,39). Moreover, government population control policies also greatly impact attitudes towards marriage, childbearing, and childrearing.

C. THE EVOLVING ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE FAST-CHANGING ASIAN SOCIETIES:

40. The FABC 50 General Conference Guide Document stated: “We still hear stories of discrimination, violence, and oppression against women in many areas of life throughout Asia. Their leadership capabilities have been undervalued, their contributions ignored, and some societies still treat women as sub-human. We have many reports of biases against women involving wage gaps, laws of ownership and inheritance, educational opportunities for girls, abortion of the female fetus, less access to healthcare, decision- making, and in many other areas. Alarming, gender-based violence continues to exist and gender issues are largely unacknowledged.”⁶

41. Asian women are often marginalized in the Church and in society because of the patriarchal mindset of some in the Church and because of the notions of purity and taboos in some Asian religions and certain South Asian cultures. Although many Church teachings, such as the Letter of Pope John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem* [MD], and Pope Francis' Post-Synodal Exhortation, *Christus Vivit* [CV], stress the dignity of women⁷ there is still a big gap between theory and reality. Although women are undoubtedly the majority in number when it comes to animating a Parish, they are not proportionately involved in decision-making in the Church. The internalization of patriarchal values and attitudes by women is also an important factor that impedes the dignity and mission of women in the Church. Their suffering is linked to sexism, classism, and racism.

42. However, things are changing. A recent Pew Research Center Survey⁸ has noted some improvements in terms of gender equality in different areas of life. For example, women in Asia have come a long way in terms of making themselves heard and recognized for their own intrinsic value. They have taken on responsibilities traditionally given to men and continue to rise above the challenges of a patriarchal society. Pope Francis reminds us: “Demands that the legitimate rights of women be respected, based on the firm conviction that men and women are equal in dignity, present the Church with profound and challenging questions on the social, political, economic and religious level which cannot be lightly evaded” (*Evangeli Gaudium* [EG], 104). Women dream of an alternative society where no hierarchical structures would oppress them.

D. GENDER ISSUES CONFRONTING THE CHURCH AND SOCIETY:

43. LGBTQI+ people are highly marginalized and face varied forms of stigma and discrimination based on their distinct sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions.⁹ For instance, while Georgia, Singapore

⁶ FABC 50 General Conference Guide Document, p. 8

⁷ See especially MD, 29 and CV, 42.

⁸ <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2019/04/22/how-people-around-the-world-view-gender-equality-in-their-countries>.

and Thailand show some kind of leniency towards gay relationships; Afghanistan, Brunei, Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen on the other hand affirm that homosexual activity is punishable with the death penalty.⁹ Similarly, after the Taliban takeover, in 2021, LGBTQI+ persons have found it even more difficult to live in peace.¹¹

44. The Economist, through a survey that it conducted in 2019, declared that while 45% of respondents in the Asia-Pacific believed that same-sex marriage is inevitable in the region, 31% of the respondents categorically found it unacceptable.¹² Gender issues are indeed contentious matters and so need to be dealt with great sensitivity, discernment and care.

E. YOUTH CONFRONTING A NEW WORLD:

45. Youth, defined by the United Nations as persons between the ages of 15 and 24, represent almost 18 per cent of the current global population. A vast majority of the 1.2 billion youth in the world today live in developing countries. In 2005, 61.8 per cent of the youth population of the world lived in the Asia Pacific region. Owing to the different demographic factors, the Asia-Pacific Region has recently witnessed a ‘youth bulge’ whereby 20 per cent or more of the national population is aged 15 to 24 years.

46. Due to a combination of several factors, youth in the Asia Pacific region today are better poised than ever before to participate in, and benefit from social, economic and political developments. Compared to previous generations, a higher proportion of young people in the region have completed primary schooling. They are better educated, with the gross enrolment rate at the tertiary level reaching 18 per cent and 15 per cent respectively for male and female youth. Across the region, young people have taken initiatives to participate in local, national and regional

⁹ Being LGBTQ in Asia and the Pacific, in <https://www.undp.org/asia-pacific/projects/being-lgbti-asia-and-pacific>

¹⁰ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/06/13/here-are-the-10-countries-where-homosexuality-may-be-punished-by-death-2/>. Accessed on 17 February, 2023.

¹¹ <https://www.hrw.org/report/2022/01/26/even-if-you-go-skies-well-find-you/lgbt-people-afghanistan-after-taliban-takeover>. Accessed on 17 February, 2023.

¹² <https://lgbtq-economics.org/research/lgbt-adults-2019/>. Accessed on 17 February, 2023.

development as important and equal participants, rather than as passive bystanders unable to shape their own future. “The youth of Asia are often at the vanguard of social and religious transformation in many countries, leading various social emancipation and advocacy movements, participating in renewal movements in the Church, and emerging as leaders in the Church’s pastoral programs and in Basic Ecclesial Communities” (FABC VIII 33). They “experience a deep thirst for spiritual values, as the rise of new religious movements clearly demonstrates”. (EA,6). In the young, “we can see a desire for God... an ideal of human fraternity... a genuine desire to develop their talents in order to offer something to our world... a special artistic sensitivity, or a yearning for harmony with nature... a great need to communicate... a deep desire to live life differently”, which are “real starting points, inner resources open to a word of incentive, wisdom and encouragement” (CV,84).

47. Although the present set of youth has numerous advantages and assets, it also faces a complex and rapidly evolving situation where new opportunities coexist with major challenges. Fierce competition is affecting the marketplace in the region. Youth often remain in a vulnerable situation and lack the requisite knowledge and skills to adapt to the changing economic and social environment. For instance, in Asia, youth made up 20.8 per cent of the labour force in 2004, but unemployed youth accounted for nearly half (49.1 per cent) of the region’s jobless people. Long-term unemployment leads to a wide range of social ills, such as delinquency and substance abuse, to which young people are susceptible and often feeds political unrest and violence. Drug abuse and other health risks are particularly high among those who are out-of-school.

48. In this ever-evolving scenario, youth ministry is not simply limited to improving what had been done in the past, but includes searching for new approaches, changed perspectives and evolving structures that will demonstrate the pastors’ sincerity and readiness to trust and value them. Furthermore, instead of being called the future of the Church, young people prefer to find themselves in the life and mission of the Church as they are now. No wonder they felt affirmed by Pope Francis who said to them, “Your youth is not an ‘in-between time’. You are the now of God, and he wants you to bear fruit” (CV,178).

F. THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY:

49. Since the dawn of this millennium, the world of digital communication and interaction has developed in a rapid upward curve so that it has become part and parcel of life. Digitalization has impacted almost all aspects of life and has improved efficiency and productivity in numerous ways.

50. However, along with the benefits, there are also challenges. For instance, digitalization has thrown up issues concerning personal security, depersonalization and hate crimes, fake news, social disconnect, bullying and addiction. Furthermore, in these new digital platforms, especially social media, those who own the technology set the rules. The owners make money by owning the data and having power over the consumers. Also driven by advertising, they have control over the narratives they allow to circulate. We also realize that digitalization is being used by governments and corporations to exert power and to influence culture. What is truly heart-rending is the digital divide that is emerging between those who have access to the Internet-based services (educational, financial, government, religious) and those who don't. The rapid progress in the area of artificial intelligence also presents new challenges to the human person. All these warrant our attention as we move into newer digital and virtual worlds.

51. Our attention was drawn, in particular, to the ill effects of digital technology on the holistic growth of young people. Young people nowadays tend to look at themselves and build their identity or draw their sense of security through social media. Citing recent studies, it was pointed out that, one of the serious consequences of the digital media on the youth and a cause for alarm is the “underdevelopment of empathy among young people”. Equally disconcerting is the realization that the digital media have caused a serious decline in young people’s capacity to engage in “serious reading,” which is essential for the development of logical, inferential, affective, analytical and contemplative capacities on young minds.

52. Catholic media practitioners called on Church leaders to acknowledge that they too are influencers and have a compelling message to proclaim. Their suggestions for effective digital evangelization include setting up the Church’s own secure social media platforms and building up social

communication teams in the local Churches. Reminding Church leaders that in the digital world, the story is the strategy, they made suggestions for a creative catechesis that utilizes the power of stories, images, metaphors and the like, to more effectively connect God's Word to peoples' lives. Eventually, young people, the so-called "digital natives", are expected to lead in this ministry.

G. AN EQUITABLE ECONOMY IN THE FACE OF URBANIZATION AND GLOBALIZATION

53. The whole world today has become one big global village and the process leading to this is called globalization which has led to the homogenization of culture. This phenomenon seriously impedes the multi-cultural way of life of the people of Asia and is termed 'Cultural Globalization'. However, there is also 'Economic Globalization', wherein the economies of the various nations of the world are tied together. We recall the words of Pope John Paul II, in his 31st World Day of Peace Message (1997): "The vast geopolitical changes which have taken place since 1989 have been accompanied by veritable revolutions in the social and economic fields. The globalization of the economy and of finance is now a reality, and we are realizing more and more clearly the effects of the rapid progress related to information technologies. We are on the threshold of a new era which is the bearer of great hopes and disturbing questions".

54. On the one hand, globalization has brought the world together, enabling people to rush to the aid of a country affected by earthquakes or natural calamities in any part of the world. On the other hand, it has divided the world. The gap between the rich and the poor has widened. Far from becoming an inclusive world which embraces all, in the name of development, millions of people have been excluded. Money-profit-market seems to be the determining economic thrust today. With greed for more wealth, the globalizing forces are appropriating the resources of the poor and unjustly exploiting their labour. All this is affected in the name of development, progress and growth!

55. What Dr. Manmohan Singh, the then Prime Minister of India, an economist, stated about India may truly be applied to the whole of Asia, viz.

that we “have learnt how to bring about growth, but we have yet to achieve comparable success in inclusiveness?!”¹³

56. This then is the challenge before the Church in Asia: how to direct the economy for the good of all, not just of a few, the “creamy layer”. The Church in Asia could make its own the words of Pope St John Paul II in his Address to the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, 27 April 2001 “The Church will continue to work with all people of good will to ensure that the winner in this process will be humanity as a whole, and not just a wealthy elite that controls science, technology, communication and the planet’s resources to the detriment of the vast majority of its people. The Church earnestly hopes that all the creative elements in society will cooperate to promote a globalization which will be at the service of the whole person and of all people”.¹⁴

H. THE CLIMATE CRISIS WHICH ENDANGERS OUR COMMON HOME:

57. If the Magi had lived in the 21st-century perhaps they would not have arrived in time to adore the newborn Jesus in Bethlehem! They would have had to deal, not just with Herod, but also with the extreme weather conditions, floods, typhoons, forest fires, rising sea levels, food shortage, viral mutations, and new diseases. All these would have gotten in the way of their quest for the newborn king.

58. Indeed, we recognize that a long-term challenge facing humankind in the 21st century is the human-made climate change and the associated ecological crisis. Countless people in Asia are already suffering due to weather extremes, drought, typhoons, deforestation and forest fires, and conflicts over water use. Water availability has direct consequences on the food supply. Given that Asia is home to many of the countries that are vulnerable to climate change, millions of people already suffer due to rising sea levels, air, soil and water pollution, the “throwaway mentality”, the loss of biodiversity, and waste management. All of these are crimes against

¹³ Planning Commission, Government of India, The Eleventh Five Year Plan Document, Vol 1, p. 4.

¹⁴https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2001/april/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20010427_pc-social-sciences.html.

nature and future generations.

59. St. Paul writes, “We know that all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now” (Rom 8:22). Through the help of the experts invited to this conference, the FABC 50 General Conference came to a realization that, instead of going through labor pains preparing for the birth of a renewed and better world, mother earth is now “groaning with wounds of exploitation”.

60. Pope Francis reminds us through his encyclical, *Laudato Si* that only when we can turn the sufferings of nature and of the victims of climate change into our own personal sufferings (cf LS,19), then and only then will we renounce our unsustainable capitalistic models of production and simultaneously take seriously necessary measures to reform our lifestyles.

61. Through the sufferings that we ourselves will have to face, we will recognize the little Child of Bethlehem in the faces of so many children and young people in Asia who are deprived of both their present and future dignity on account of climate change. The sufferings of Mary and Joseph are visible in the faces of so many parents who are unable to offer their children a decent home, adequate nutrition, proper health care or education. We see the sufferings of Mary and Joseph also in parents who are forced by circumstances to migrate because of the effects of climate change on their environments, or in parents who have to flee from the violence of wars and armed conflicts as well as consequences of struggles over water shortage, and the disposal of hazardous wastes.

62. Listening to the cry of the earth and the poor together with our neighbour-religions in our continent, along with all social groups of good will and those who exercise responsibility in the realm of politics and economy, our integral pastoral work can open new pathways on our common journey towards a better Asia and a perspective of the wellbeing of the humankind (cf LS,49).

63. Indeed, as the Church in Asia responds to Pope Francis’ call for ecological conversion, we are awakened to the great injustice that our present generation is inflicting upon the poor who are most vulnerable to the natural calamities triggered by human abuse of the environment. Ecological conversion also reminds us that when we destroy nature we simultaneously destroy ourselves. Only by realizing how intricately interconnected we are with every fellow creature and every living organism on the planet, which serves as our common home, can we begin to exercise our God given role as

stewards of creation.

I. INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE TO BRING ABOUT HARMONY AND PEACE IN THE ASIAN CONTINENT:

64. Asia is a land of many religions and cultures. Several world religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism and Shintoism have originated in Asia. In this multi- religious context of Asia, with each religion seeking space and autonomy, a spirit of competition can set in. Following the spirit of Christ and the Gospel, Christians should not seek to compete with the other religions. They should rather be concerned about reviving the Christian faith and expressing the Gospel values in their own lives so as to be living witnesses of Christ.

65. If Christianity has to coexist with other religions and worldviews in the modern world, which faces many changes and challenges in the context of globalization, consumerism, materialism, dehumanization, and exploitation of nature, the Church and individual Christians must demonstrate to the world that they have something to offer in terms of values, commitment, beauty, joy and happiness. Indeed, a comprehensive worldview, which can provide viable ethical and moral guidelines to a world paralyzed by value relativism is the need of the hour! Hence, the coming decades present a golden opportunity, as well as a great challenge to Christianity.

Part Three: DISCERNING

What the Spirit is saying to the Church in Asia

66. Matthew characterizes the seekers as “Magi”, as people of wisdom and inspiration who take time to LOOK UP to the sky and gaze at the stars. This signifies that they reflect and seek the guidance of heaven about their concerns on earth.

67. The evangelist tells us the Magi saw the star and, journeying together, found their way to Jerusalem, a short distance from their real destination, Bethlehem (cf Mt 2:1). Matthew tells us that their quest for “the newborn king of the Jews” attracted the attention of Herod, the then ruling king of the Jews. “When King Herod heard this, he was greatly troubled, and all Jerusalem with him” (Mt 2:3). King Herod enquires from the chief priests and scribes, in order to find out where this “Messiah”, this threat to his

power, “was to be born” (Mt 2:4). The chief priests and scribes search the Scriptures and, quoting Micah 5:1, point to “Bethlehem of Judah” as the prophesied birthplace of the “newborn King of the Jews” for whom these Gentiles were looking. Since it was the star that had guided these men this far, Herod “called them secretly and ascertained from them the time of the star’s appearance” (Mt 2:7). Then he sent them off to Bethlehem with the instruction: “Go and search diligently for the child. When you have found him, bring me word, that I too may go and worship him.” (Mt 2:8). After finding him, should they return to Jerusalem and entrust to Herod further information on the child’s whereabouts? This question required serious discernment.

68. The Church in Asia has had many similar encounters with political figures like Herod, and local religious leaders like the chief priests and scribes of Jerusalem. Our early missionaries also encountered ruling political and religious authorities who felt threatened by their presence – and today’s missionaries too face similar difficulties. Some others offer ‘partnership’ and ‘collaboration’. How to deal with these varied situations demands constant discernment.

69. The Second Vatican Council indicated the significance of discernment when it said that “the entire body of the faithful, anointed as they are by the Holy One, cannot err in matters of belief. They manifest this special property by means of the whole people’s supernatural discernment in matters of faith when from the bishops down to the last of the lay faithful, they show universal agreement in matters of faith and morals” (Lumen Gentium [LG], 12).

70. We are able to draw some insights regarding the process of communal discernment from the Vademecum for the Synod on Synodality, article 2.2. This process, the Vademecum explains, entails a listening to each other, to our faith tradition, and to the signs of the times so that we can discern what God is saying to all of us. This kind of discernment is an ongoing process and not only a one-time exercise. Ultimately it is “a way of life, grounded in Christ, following the lead of the Holy Spirit, living for the greater glory of God”. The NT Church followed this process so that the apostles could confidently say that the decision taken at the end of the entire process of discernment was a joint decision of the Holy Spirit and them (cf Acts 15:28).

71. In the book of Revelation, John the visionary, addressing the Churches of Asia (Rev 1:4), says: “Whoever has ears ought to hear what the Spirit says to the Churches (Rev 3:22). Keeping in mind these words, throughout the FABC General Conference, we asked ourselves, “What is the Spirit saying to the Churches in Asia in our present times?” In particular we asked ourselves, how do we respond to the nine challenges we have discerned together? We sensed that we are called to:

- A. accompany migrants, refugees, indigenous people
- B. give special attention to the family
- C. open new roles of leadership to women in the Asian Church
- D. address gender issues
- E. minister to the youth
- F. encourage the effective use of digital technology
- G. promote an economy based on inclusive growth in the context of urbanization and globalization
- H. care for our common home
- I. be bridge-builders and bridges, instruments of dialogue and reconciliation in Asia

A. ACCOMPANY MIGRANTS, REFUGEES, INDIGENOUS PEOPLE:

72. Many of the local and foreign migrants are baptized Catholics who bring their faith with them as part of their ‘spiritual survival kit’. They tend to band together, especially when they feel alone in their host countries. They create their own support groups by joining prayer meetings and Bible study groups, saying the rosary together, or by expressing their popular devotions together. Those who possibly were not active Catholics in their homelands find themselves drawn to their faith as their best way of coping psychologically and spiritually with the challenges and difficult situations they face in foreign lands. They find chaplaincies and ministries for migrants as sources of solace and places of refuge and solidarity.

73. We are deeply grateful to the local Churches that have opened their doors to migrants, refugees and displaced people. We are also edified by parishes that have gone out of their way to provide places of worship for them, defend their rights against those who exploit them and provide pastoral care to victims of human trafficking and sexual abuse. Understandably, the problems related to migration and human trafficking are of such magnitude that they would often require partnerships with civil society, as well as government and non-government agencies. Even more effective would be the proactive partnerships of local Churches in the common endeavor to respond to the needs of migrant Catholics for spiritual and pastoral care. We took note, in particular, of the proposal of the Philippine bishops to create a Personal Prelature to address such needs.

74. In many instances, in predominantly “Catholic” countries where the practice of the faith has radically diminished, Catholic migrants are bringing a new fire to parishes that have already grown cold. For instance, we think of Catholics from Asia who have migrated to other countries and how they are providentially turning into missionaries simply by practicing their faith with fervor, or participating in their traditions like Marian devotions, their Christmas novena dawn Masses,¹⁵ their Lenten and Easter practices and patronal feasts. The popular religiosity of Asia spreads far and wide, be it the procession of the Black Nazarene or the devotion to the Infant Jesus, or the Novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Singapore, or the Pilgrimage to Our Lady of Vailankani or to the Basilica of Our Lady at Sardhana in India or to Our Lady of La Vain in Vietnam and the Shrines of Mariamabad in Pakistan or to Our Lady of Madhu in Sri Lanka. Catholic migrants from Asia bring with them their unique devotions like a hidden wealth that continues to spread far and wide to many countries across the world.

75. The Holy Father encouraged the Catholic Migrant community in Rome last year when he said in his homily, “You received the joy of the Gospel... and this joy is evident in your people... in your eyes, on your faces, in your songs and in your prayers. In the joy with which you bring your faith to

¹⁵ Popularly known in Filipino as “Simbang Gabi” in preparation for Christmas

¹⁶ Homily of Pope Francis on the occasion of the Filipinos Catholics’ commemoration of the 500th Year of the Arrival of Christianity in the Philippines.

other lands.”¹⁶ He said, “wherever they go to work, they sow the faith,” and he regards their “discreet and hardworking presence” as “a testimony of faith...through humble, hidden, courageous and persevering presence.”

76. He could have expressed similar sentiments about Asian Catholics migrants who bring with them the joy of the Gospel and are transformed into missionary disciples as they live their faith and with great heroism witness Christ! We resolved, therefore, to do what we can in the FABC to contribute to the formation and empowerment of Asian Catholic migrants.

77. A special category of people needing our care and support comprises indigenous people who are being marginalized and displaced in the name of ‘development’. In recent decades, we have seen greater sensitivity and awareness for the plight of the indigenous peoples. The UN General Assembly in 2007 adopted the ‘Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples’ and recognized that Asia comprises a majority of the world’s self-identified indigenous groups. Generally they are the earliest settlers of a region and not only represent immense cultural riches but also offer the rest of the world wisdom and practices for better human living in a globalized world which is experiencing ecological and societal disasters. In many parts of the world, indigenous knowledge and agricultural practices for adaptation to climate change are also increasingly being given recognition. The socio-cultural, political, economic and ecological challenges they face would consequently call for an increased accompaniment and support. In situations of exploitation, the Church, given her prophetic tradition, should be the voice for the indigenous peoples and a bridge-builder in socio-cultural conflicts. As she seeks to accompany and support more vigorously the indigenous peoples, the Church must be an ally and advocate for their fundamental rights and dignity. In like manner she should increasingly regard the different indigenous cultures in Asia as an opportunity to express the Christian faith in a creative way for a culturally sensitive evangelization.¹⁷

B. GIVE SPECIAL ATTENTION TO THE FAMILY:

78. The family is the basic cell of society and one of the key factors for an

¹⁷ FABC 50 General Conference Guide Document, p. 10.

authentic and stable culture. Furthermore, as Pope St John Paul II stated: “the family occupies a very important place in Asian cultures...(hence) family values like filial respect, love and care for the aged and the sick, love of children and harmony are held in high esteem in all Asian cultures and religious traditions” (EA, 46).

79. Indeed the ‘Church of the home’ has a special vocation to witness and proclaim the Kingdom of God. Parents as the original and primary educators of their children model the practice of faith in a spirit of co-responsibility. As the first catechists of their children, they transmit the Gospel to them and from their children they themselves receive the same Gospel as lived by them! Such a family radiates the Gospel, while becoming an evangelizer of many other families and of the neighbourhood (FC,123).

80. The FABC 50 General Conference drew our attention to certain important aspects of family life and ministry:

- i) Faith formation of children and youth requires ministry to parents who are the most important mentors in the life of their children. Furthermore, the key moments in the faith journey of the children are the reception of the sacraments.
- ii) Family movements within the parish can teach and support parents in their role as teachers of the faith. So also, the Parish Family Cell can network with the Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs), the Women’s Cell and other parish associations to provide assistance to families in crises.
- iii) The digital world is making the family a soft target. Hence, the Church needs to take this into account as it seeks to strengthen faith within the family.
- iv) Interfaith married couples would need special pastoral care so as to be guided and integrated, together with their children into the life of the Church.
- v) The teaching of the Church with regard to responsible parenthood needs to be specially promoted.
- vi) Cross-generational mentoring of relationships need to be encouraged
- vii) Families need to be assisted to develop skills to build and deepen relationships. This can be done through pre-marriage as

well as post-marriage programs.

viii) There would be need of special support to and care of vulnerable members such as single men and women, sexual minorities, senior citizens, the aged and infirm, the bereaved, sick and differently abled, individuals and families in crises.

81. We therefore seek to promote families where all live together in mutual respect and harmony, and where parents make quality time for themselves and their children so as to assist their growth and development as human beings and Christians. We strive to create Asian societies in which elders are respected and a culture of life is upheld. We hope to build in Asia societies where migrants are integrated and refugees are reunited with their families. We seek to establish a `civilization of love'¹⁸, wherein families help other families, elders mentor younger couples, and safe communities – both real and virtual begin to form themselves – where children and youth can gradually grow as mature citizens and eventually missionary disciples.

C. OPEN NEW ROLES OF LEADERSHIP TO WOMEN IN THE ASIAN CHURCH:

82. At a meeting of the International Union of Superiors General (UISG) The Cardinal Prefect of a Dicastery was asked: “Why is it difficult to experience gender equality in the Church and society?”¹⁹ He stated: “The problem of walking together, as man and woman, is something that needs to be delved into and explored more and in a deeper fashion. We need to return to the fundamental biblical insights and categorically ask ourselves: What does it mean to be in the image and likeness of God? It means men and women together, for they do not image God by themselves, but only when they are together. Indeed, in God, unity and diversity have never been a problem. For us, this has been a big problem throughout our history. We need to retrieve this aspect of our lives”.

83. Our task then is to recover a sense of the person. The essence of being

¹⁸ Paul VI, Homily for the Closing of the Holy Year (December 25, 1975): AAS 68 (1976), 145.

¹⁹ Joshua J. McElwee interviews Cardinal João Braz de Aviz in National Catholic Reporter (August 12, 2013) in <https://www.ncronline.org › news › vatican-religious-pr>. Accessed on February 19, 2023.

a person involves individualization. I am different from the other, but I cannot fully be a person without the other. If to be born, there is need for relationship; if to grow, there is need for relationship; how can this not be true in the spiritual life? There is a need for us hence to reconstruct our relationships.

84. At the FABC 50 General Conference we affirmed the following:

- i) Care is an important part of Catholic theology, Church history, and the Church's mission of spreading the Gospel, where, in the spirit of the common good, we are called to care for others, especially vulnerable groups such as women, as we strive to give each what is due to them in justice. Care and justice are very important for women to move forward in the Church, and are values that the Church needs to continue to foster.
- ii) Based on the notions of social friendship and political charity (cf. social encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* [FT], 88, 169), pastoral care should be offered by Church organizations to low-income women workers, foreign domestic workers, ethnic minorities, abused women and other vulnerable women.
- iii) Based on Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), women as objects and subjects of liberation should be affirmed; they are subjects of history and agents of change.
- iv) The Church should employ different ways to affirm solidarity with women, empowering them, supporting women self-help groups and advocating social transformation. Indeed the equal dignity of women and men flows from the affirmation that we are made in the image and likeness of God. Furthermore, this must be translated into shared and equal participation of women and men in all aspects of Church life, including leadership functions.²⁰

85. The Church of Asia needs to listen to women's experiences and women need to feel that they have been heard and have made a contribution to the life of the Church. When lived- praxis becomes the axis for theologizing, the lived experiences of women will not be excluded. The struggle of the women to resist oppressive structures opens new avenues for reconstructing the

²⁰ Cf. *Predicate Evangelium*, Preamble, No. 10.

existing theologies in Asia.

D. ADDRESS GENDER ISSUES:

86. Pope Francis in a recent interview affirmed that God loves all his children just as they are, and criticized as unjust, laws that criminalize homosexuality, while calling on Catholic bishops to welcome LGBTQI+ people into the Church.²¹

87. Pope Francis' comments were hailed by gay rights advocates as a milestone and were perceived as being consistent with his overall approach to LGBTQ+ people and his belief that the Catholic Church should welcome everyone without discrimination. He quoted the Catholic Catechism no 2358 which says: "The number of men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible. This inclination, which is objectively disordered, constitutes for most of them a trial. They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. They are called to fulfill God's will in their lives and, as Christians are to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord's Cross the difficulties they may encounter from their condition."

88. According to The Human Dignity Trust, about 67 countries or jurisdictions worldwide criminalize consensual same-sex sexual activity, 11 of which can or do impose the death penalty. Experts say even where the laws are not enforced, they contribute to harassment, stigmatization and violence against LGBTQI+ people.

89. People of different sexual orientations have sometimes complained of discrimination at the Table of the Lord. The Eucharist, the source and summit of the Christian faith (cf. CCC 1324), is the sacrament of God's unconditional love in Jesus Christ, offered to all, to both the righteous and unrighteous, to saints and sinners. It is God's grace offered to all, through the new and eternal covenant which is actualized by the body and blood of Christ. The Eucharist is a body broken for broken people like us, given to us as food, so that we can be changed and be transformed into Christ,

²¹ Cf. <https://www.npr.org> > 2023/01/25 > pope-francis-says-bei...Accessed on 19 February, 2023.

into members of his body, the Church. Indeed, the Lord alone can heal our brokenness and restore our wholeness.

E. MINISTER TO THE YOUTH:

90. Youth need guidance and support as they navigate through the most challenging part of their development and seek to grow in their journey with Christ. Teaching young people in the Church to grow in their relationship with the Lord prepares them to serve Christ in all they do. When we minister to the youth, we are not only preparing them to become future leaders, but also empowering them to contribute to build up the Church. Animating youth for Christ has always been a concern of the Church. Youth need a Church which welcomes them to participate, is patient and forgiving when they fail, guides them in their life choices and helps them grow into mature, responsible, Christian adults. We recall the inspirational words of Pope Francis: “The Church will have to initiate everyone—priests, religious and laity—into this ‘art of accompaniment’ which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other” (cf. Ex 3:5) (EG, 169). Hence the Church seeks to accompany the youth at all times and in all circumstances.²²

91. The Church needs to periodically review the programs, activities and functioning of its Youth ministry at every level – community, parish, deanery and diocese – to ensure that youth requirements are met and integrated with the family, community and Church.

92. FABC 50 General Conference identified some key areas of youth ministry:

i) Faith formation: The faith needs to be made relevant and meaningful. If the faith experience and understanding is not authentic, youth run the risk of being vulnerable to the materialistic values of the world, as well as the teachings of sects and other groups.

ii) Career guidance: Career guidance needs to be embedded in the context of discerning one’s calling and purpose in life.

²² cf. Catholic Bishops Conference of India (CBCI) 29th General Assembly 2010.

iii) Counselling: Youth live in a world that is distinctly different from the one their parents grew up in. Both they and their parents need counselling to bridge this gap between two different worlds. Youth also need professional guidance to assist them as they wade through the turbulent waters of their passage to adulthood.

iv) Outreach and involvement: Youth need to take responsibility to be part of creating the world and society they would like to live in. They also need to get involved in civic and political issues, beginning by addressing the issues in their neighbourhood and society.

93. Christ-like leaders are needed to serve young members of the congregation and help them to reach their full potential. Investing in youth is necessary for developing the body of Christ. Ultimately, helping youth to grow spiritually in their formative years will equip them to make an impact for Christ both now and in their future.

94. It was in the context of care for the Youth that FABC 50 General Conference reflected on the need to safeguard minors and vulnerable adults. The Guide Document for FABC 50 General Conference states: “The Church is also challenged by the scandal of sexual abuse of minors especially when the ‘culture of silence’ is prevalent in these parts of the world. The abuse of power (misuse of authority) poses to the Church challenges that she has to contend with.”

95. The values of respect for children and reverence for the elders, are like trademarks in an Asian household. We are aware that the Church must be involved in efforts to effect long term change through formation, systemic and structural changes, and advocacy in defence of the vulnerable. Many of these initiatives have to be carried out by collaborating and networking with non-governmental and civil society organizations for the good of all. These partnerships only accentuate the fact that the Church does not exist for herself but is at the service of all the peoples of Asia as she continues to announce the Kingdom of God and transform our realities in the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. LG,5).

F. ENCOURAGE THE EFFECTIVE USE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY:

96. Scientists have been speaking about a “fourth industrial revolution”.²³ At present there are 2.2 billion online users in Asia, with 95% using mobile devices. Although the virtual is never meant to replace actual physical encounters, we need a forward-looking missional response to this reality as the rapid developments in information technology and the digital revolution continue to impact and change our lives. There is consequently a dire need for this generation of “digital migrants” to enter into the digital world so as to effectively use digital technology for the Church’s mission.

97. The pandemic heightened the power and usefulness of digital technology. It allowed the parishes to reach out to people despite the restrictions and lockdowns, enabling them to provide spiritual services and faith formation online.

98. However, in these new digital platforms, especially the social media, those who own the technology set the rules. They make money by both owning the data and having power over it. Driven by advertising, they have control over the narratives that they allow to circulate. Catholic media practitioners have called on Church leaders to acknowledge that they too are influencers and so have a compelling message to proclaim.

99. We acknowledge the need for effective digital evangelization, which would include setting up the Church’s own secure social media platforms and building up social communication teams in the local Churches. Furthermore recognizing in the digital world that the story is the strategy, we recommend creative catechesis that utilizes the power of stories, images and metaphors, which more effectively connect God’s Word to peoples’ lives. Inevitably, it is the young people, the so-called “digital natives”, who are expected to lead in this ministry.

G. PROMOTE AN ECONOMY BASED ON INCLUSIVE GROWTH IN THE CONTEXT OF URBANIZATION AND GLOBALIZATION:

²³ Klaus Schwab, “The Fourth Industrial Revolution: what it means, how to respond”, World Economic Forum, Accessed on 29 June 2017.

100. Globalization is dictating the world economy today. The Guide Document for FABC 50 General Conference states: “... when driven by the neoliberal economic system or self-serving political power struggles, globalization can also lead to the concentration of economic and political power in a few hands and transnational companies. This then causes neglect for multilateralism in solving worldwide problems at the expense of the weaker countries, small companies, the indigenous peoples, the poor, the vulnerable, and the environment. With the goal of maximizing profit and exerting power by transnational companies which are often connected with the governments, they take advantage of the relative absence of rules and controls that should guide global liberal markets ... The greed for profit and unlimited growth also increases inequality in Asia and leads to asymmetric development processes”.

101. The present economic order is not favouring the poor, rather, it is death-dealing to millions of people. We keep in mind the inspiring words of Pope Francis: “Just as the commandment ‘Thou shalt not kill’ sets a clear limit in order to safeguard the value of human life, today we also have to say ‘thou shalt not’ to an economy of exclusion and inequality. Such an economy kills ... Today everything comes under the laws of competition and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed upon the powerless. As a consequence, masses of people find themselves excluded and marginalized: without work, without possibilities, without any means of escape.” (EG, 53).

102. In his spontaneous message to the Directors of Global Solidarity Fund on 25th May 2022, Pope Francis said: “The economy must be converted, (and) it must be converted now. We need to move from the liberal economy to an economy shared by the people, to a communitarian economy ... We cannot live with an economic pattern that comes from the liberals and the Enlightenment. Nor can we live with an economic pattern that comes from communism...”

103. Since urbanization and globalization appear to be irreversible trends, it is imperative that the Church leaders are adequately informed about this emerging trend in Asia and be prepared pastorally to face the situation. Since cities are places of social, political, and economic influence, the growing urban Christian population in Asia needs to be formed and equipped with a deep faith and social and cultural skills to be a witnessing community of salt and light to minister effectively to the overall urban population.

Interestingly, the culmination of the New Testament is symbolically a city – the New Jerusalem which forms part of the peaceable home that fulfills God’s promised justice for the poor, salvation for the humble, and the renewal of creation (cf. Rev 21-22).

H. CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME:

104. As disciples of Jesus Christ, God incarnate, we need to enter into an intensive dialogue with creation. We are stewards of creation, not its masters. We owe it to the generations ahead of us that we keep the integrity of our common home as well as guarantee the future and dignity of future generations. Intergenerational solidarity is not an option, but rather a question of justice and surviving with dignity. The environment is on loan to each generation, and we are responsible for the way we leave it for those who follow.

105. We need to learn from nature, as well as from the wisdom of our indigenous people who do not regard nature as something outside of themselves but rather as a mother who nurtures them. It is from them that we all have to learn how to deal with creation in a sustainable way, because they perceive nature as an integrally interconnected system, of which we are only a part. Unfortunately today the Asian countries record the highest increase of emissions. Hence, the governments in Asia on one hand, and on the other hand, the industrialized countries, who over time have been the primary emitters of greenhouse gasses as well as the profiteers of unsustainable production models need to urgently fulfill their part of the decisions relating to the Paris Agreement of 2015.

106. The 2015 Paris Agreement indeed was a landmark in the global response to climate change. To tackle climate change and its negative impacts, world leaders at the UN Climate Conference (COP 21) in Paris reached a breakthrough on 12 December 2015 in this historic Paris Agreement. The Agreement sets long-term goals to guide all nations: i) Holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2 degree Celsius above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 degree Celsius above the pre-industrial level, recognizing that this would significantly reduce the risk and impact of climate change; ii) Increasing the ability to adapt to the adverse impact of climate change and foster climate resilience and low greenhouse gas emissions development, in a manner that

does not threaten food production; and iii) Making finance flows consistent with pathway towards low greenhouse gas emissions and climate-resilient development. The Agreement is a legally binding international treaty. It entered into force on 4 November 2016. As of today, 194 Parties (193 States plus the European Union) have joined the Paris Agreement.²⁴

107. We also learned that the costs of inaction are far greater than the costs of action, and if we go on like the past seven years after Paris, we will come out not even at 2.5 degree Celsius with disastrous consequences, especially for the poverty stricken people in Asia and the world over. Due to the high oil and gas prices exorbitant sums have been earned through the selling of fossil fuels. It is now crucial that we do not commit the lapses of the past, but that this money earned is utilized to create renewable energy, ensure energy efficiency and develop more cost- efficient transformative technologies.

108. Responding to the Holy Father's call for ecological conversion and climate action through his Encyclical *Laudato Si*, the Magna Carta of the Church relating to climate change, the FABC 50 General Conference made a strong plea that we put an end to our ecologically irresponsible and unsustainable habits and wasteful ways of life, and raise environmental awareness through the proactive promotion of ecologically-sound solid-liquid and gaseous-waste management, repudiate models of agriculture that depend on hazardous chemical fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides, and eschew industries that depend on coal and other fossil-fuel-generated energy. We vowed as well to consciously promote the generation of clean and sustainable energy throughout Asia, starting with our own institutions in our particular Churches. We will also work with our indigenous peoples throughout Asia, as well as with all forces of civil society and representatives of governments, to rehabilitate our forests, our watersheds, and our coral reefs, to conserve wildlife, sustain indigenous biodiversity, and restore the ecosystem and biome.

109. The move of some Conferences of bishops and individual dioceses to divest their institutions from investments in 'dirty energy', such as coal and fossil-fueled power, is one concrete move the Asian Church and society must emulate. We will build awareness in our region and strive to ensure that the

²⁴ <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/paris-agreement>. Accessed on 15 February, 2023.

Churches in the industrialized countries take the lead. Besides encouraging our Parishes and Religious Congregations to do so, the Laudato Si Movement and all Ecclesial bodies need to draw up action plans for their local situation, as well as plans on the level of the episcopal conferences and the FABC itself. In the light of `Laudato Si', we also resolved to redouble our efforts towards advocacy, together with the other Continental Federations of Bishops' Conferences, and for awareness building and action backed efforts so as to alleviate the agony of our people. We will furthermore open ourselves to ecumenical and interreligious initiatives related to climate concerns and action, as well as partnerships with civil society groups. We will strive to also cooperate with Government and Non-governmental agencies to implement the Laudato Si goals of the Church, the targets of the 2015 Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN.

I. BRIDGE-BUILDERS AND BRIDGES, INSTRUMENTS OF DIALOGUE AND RECONCILIATION IN ASIA:

110. Becoming “bridges and bridge-builders” is the image that best describes the mission of the Church of Asia and the Good News that we bring to our peoples and the rest of the world. It encapsulates the mission and purpose of Jesus, the one we proclaim as Christ and God-incarnate, who was born in Asia and raised as an Asian, and brought to birth a great spiritual tradition in this Continent. The Biblical narrative (cf. Gen 28:10-19) about Jacob’s dream of a stairway between heaven and earth sums up the story of salvation. It is the narrative about the God of Israel who takes the initiative to counteract the effects of sin, the human tendency to play god and to arrogantly cut off our connection to our Creator, our very source of life. It is sin that has brought about our alienation from God, from one another, from creation, and from our own selves.

111. We have since constantly “wrestled with God” like our ancestor Jacob, and have attempted to overcome sin assisted by God’s mercy. Despite our sinfulness, we are nevertheless called to serve as a “bridge over troubled waters”, as a stairway, through which “angels could ascend and descend” so that God could once again walk with humankind. In due time, Jacob’s dream would see its fulfillment in the very person of Jesus, the Son of God who came to serve precisely as the bridge himself (cf Jn 1:51). As St. Paul says, “For in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile all things for him, making peace by the blood of his cross [through

him], whether those on earth or those in heaven” (Col 1:19-20).

112. We proclaim Christ himself as the bridge, the one in whom we have found “the way, the truth, and the life” (Jn 14: 6). Only in his name can the Church in Asia respond to the call of the Spirit to become a bridge-builder. Since the time the FABC was first convened, we have consistently proposed dialogue as one of the fundamental pastoral priorities of the Asian Church. Dialogue is the best expression of our call to be bridge-builders. We are called to expand our understanding of dialogue beyond the triple contexts of religions, cultures and the poor, to include also dialogue with youth and with women, dialogue with governments and civil society groups, with creation, with technocrats, entrepreneurs and scientists, the hungry, the homeless, the illiterate, the migrants and refugees, the indigenous people, victims of human trafficking, people with disabilities, undocumented people and rebels, as well as people struggling with addictions and other mental health issues.

113. It is within the context of dialogue that we highlighted the role of the Asian Church in peace-building and in the ministry of facilitating reconciliation. We have realized that in the promotion of peace, dialogue with the victims of violence is as essential as dialogue with the perpetrators of violence. Otherwise, there is no way we can arrest the vicious cycle of violence, where the abused become abusers and the victims become victimizers themselves.

114. In many parts of Asia, the Church navigates her way through many situations of conflicts and is called consequently to be an agent of reconciliation. We have much to learn from the wisdom of the four basic elements of the Church’s sacrament of reconciliation: confession, contrition, penance and absolution. As these elements are effective in addressing our need to be personally reconciled with God, they are just as effective in addressing our personal, familial, communal and societal conflicts. How is reconciliation possible at all, if we do not even have the humility to admit our shortcomings and failures? If we do not find it in our hearts to express remorse for the harm and the hurt that we may have caused? If we do not resolve to make amends and to carry out concrete acts of reparation? How can we work for reconciliation if we do get people to see forgiveness as strength rather than as weakness?

115. To respond appropriately and effectively to the nine challenges that we

have identified, formation becomes a crucial factor. Indeed, the challenges that we face and an appropriate response that needs to be made, would require the concerted response of all - Bishops, Priests, Religious and the Laity - to ensure that we strive to build a collaborative Church. Hence formation programmes of all, particularly of the laity, becomes a priority. Indeed, we cannot respond adequately to the challenges we face, unless we have the committed and coordinated involvement of all the baptized. It follows then that Bishops, Priests and Religious need to be trained to empower the laity to live their baptismal commitment, both in the Church and Society. In this manner will we have a `renewed Church`. And in so doing, we will have a better Asia for all her peoples. This is the calling the Church in Asia senses as she eventually works for a better world.

116. The Spirit invites the Church in Asia to restore the ministerial priesthood's grounding on the common priesthood of the faithful. This could not have been expressed better than by St. Augustine who once said, "For you I am a bishop, with you I am a Christian." There is no way we can meaningfully exercise our roles as ordained ministers for the community of the faithful if we cannot be fellow Christians with them, co-equals in dignity as fellow members of the body of Christ. The Second Vatican Council stated this fact very clearly. "They cannot be ministers of Christ unless they are witnesses and dispensers of a life other than earthly life. But they cannot be of service to men if they remain strangers to the life and conditions of men (cf. 1 Cor 10:33). Their ministry itself, by a special title, forbids that they be conformed to this world; (Cf. Jn 3:8) yet at the same time it requires that they live in this world among men." (Presbyterorum Ordinis [PO],3).

117. At the FABC 50 General Conference, we reiterated the resolve made several times in our past FABC Plenary Assemblies to initiate the necessary reform of both our initial and ongoing formation programs for the ordained ministries in a manner that promotes a more participatory Church and empowers the laity for roles of leadership. To be able to do this, we have to attend to the ongoing formation of our seminarians, priests, religious and bishops. We need to come up with programs and structures of formation that are contextualized in our specific cultures and worldviews in the different countries of Asia. The ordained must learn to share roles of leadership with the laity and consecrated persons through the variety of ministries and services that we are all called to assume within the Body of Christ, according to the example of Jesus who at the Last Supper reminded the disciples, "I

am among you as one who serves.” (Lk 22:27).

118. The participation of lay people, including women, in their human, spiritual, pastoral, and intellectual formation, the close personal mentoring by good role models, the guided immersion of the candidates for the ordained ministries in the life-situations of the poor, their exposure to the basic ecclesial and human communities and their involvement in interreligious, ecumenical and cultural dialogue will create the necessary atmosphere of formation that will raise “shepherds with the smell of the sheep”. We have also pointed out, specifically, the need to include the FABC’s teachings and traditions in their academic curriculum.

Part Four: OFFERING OUR GIFTS

Asian Culture and Spirituality

119. “On entering the house they saw the child with Mary his mother. They prostrated themselves and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.” (Mt 2:11)

120. In Matthew’s portrait of the Magi who allow themselves to be guided by a star to a lowly home in Bethlehem, we see an image that is typically Asian, visitors stopping by and reverently removing the sandals off their feet as we have been taught to do when entering our own homes. This is the Asian way of reminding ourselves that ‘family’ is about creating a sacred space together. And so we shake off the dust that clings to our feet and make acts of ablution that prepare us for the encounter with the Holy One in the inner recesses of our home. It is within the confines of a home that God makes a dwelling place and becomes present among us. We acknowledge that presence, most of all, in the fragile infant that needs all the care and affection of home and family.²⁵

121. We find meaning in worshipping God in a little child who kenotically

²⁵ St Luke’s infancy narrative, often combined with elements derived from St. Matthew’s, has brought about our traditional portrayals of the Bethlehem scene. Instead of a regular house we find ourselves in a manger in a stable that becomes the navel of the world, a meeting point between heaven and earth, God and humankind, where celestial beings and human beings meet, where sheep and shepherds dwell, where paupers and magi prostrate themselves to worship the Divine Infant.

strips himself and embraces our humanity in order to raise its dignity into a true image of divinity. As Pope Francis observes: “Filled with yearning for the infinite, they scan the heavens, find themselves marvelling at the brilliance of a star, and experience the quest for the transcendent that inspires the progress of civilizations and the tireless seeking of the human heart.”²⁶ He is God who becomes human so that humanity can become divine. He has offered himself as a sacred gift (sacerdos) in order to enable us recognize our own lives as gifts and offer them to God, the source of all gifts for the salvation of the world.

122. Whether in the Church or in the world in which the Church in Asia lives, we deal with a diversity of views, religions and cultures, colors and flavors that coexist, in harmony and in tension as well!

123. Like the Magi, we Asians value reverent silence and seek solitude for contemplation in our temples, ashrams and sacred places. We use the same gesture of folding our hands and bowing our heads, not only in prayer and worship, but to show recognition, respect and offer peace, and while blessing the other, accepting an honour, expressing gratitude, initiating dialogue and friendship, begging forgiveness and bidding farewell. Instead of asking for a verbal blessing, some of us simply take an elder’s hand and press it to our forehead.

124. It is significant to note that Jesus’ kingship is revealed in the absolute poverty of the manger. Recognizing the salvific force of those living in poverty, and putting them at the center of the Church, the poor call us to ponder the mysterious wisdom of God, often revealed to us by their very lives.²⁷

125. As Pope Francis observes in Fratelli Tutti [FT], “we need to develop the awareness that nowadays we are either all saved together or no one is saved. Poverty, decadence and suffering in one part of the earth are a silent

²⁶ Homily of Pope Francis at St Peter’s Basilica on Friday, 6 January 2023, on the Solemnity of Epiphany.

²⁷ G. Gregory Gay, C.M., Superior General’s Letter to Members of the Vincentian Family announcing the Vincentian Year of New Evangelization, 18 July 2014.

breeding ground for problems that will end up affecting the entire planet.”²⁸
We believe that “each of us can learn something from others. No one is useless and no one is expendable. This also means finding ways to include those on the peripheries of life. For they have another way of looking at things; they see aspects of reality that are invisible to the centers of power where weighty decisions are made.”²⁹

126. In our time, we may not read the ‘signs of the times’ in the manner of ancient astrologers i.e., by the position of the stars, yet we continue to read the ‘signs’ in nature, in the faces of people we encounter, and in the events that happen in our communities and the world around. Our Asian cultures keep us sensitive to the presence of the Divine, of God who takes the initiative to communicate with us, always inviting us to respond with faith and love and leading us towards fullness of life.

127. As Dominus Iesus [DI] observes, “Bearing in mind this article of faith [the incarnation of Jesus], theology today, in its reflection on the existence of other religious experiences and on their meaning in God’s salvific plan, is invited to explore if and in what way the historical figures and positive elements of these religions may fall within the divine plan of salvation.”³⁰

128. Hence, for us Asians, looking is more than locating things with our eyes. It is a disposition of attentiveness that proceeds from a humble admission of our ignorance, a profound desire to know more, and the disposition of awe and amazement about the world. We, Asians, do not see life as a choice between opposites, between black or white, light or darkness. We would rather consciously keep dealing with the tension in a creative dynamic that hopefully will bear fruit within us, amongst us, and around us.

129. The Church in Asia has much to learn from the strong cultural inclination to nonviolence of our ancestors. We have developed self-defence into an art, where the goal is never to harm, hurt or kill the offender but to preempt his moves, avoid his blows, and block his attacks until he perhaps falls under his own weight. The art of self-defence goes by many names in Asia but

²⁸Fratelli Tutti [FT], 137.

²⁹Ibid, 215.

³⁰Dominus Iesus [DI], 14.

the principle is the same. When done collectively by a people that rises to oppose injustice in a consistently nonviolent way, it is given new names, such as Satyagraha by the Indians, one of the shining legacies of Mahatma Gandhi which led to the end of foreign rule in India, or “People Power”, by the Filipinos, which brought an end to dictatorship in the Philippines.

130. The choice to see in every human being a fellow sufferer opens us to the Asian path to peace and reconciliation, even as we learn to navigate our way through the many conflicts in our societies. We fight for justice in a nonviolent way, and always in a manner that is mindful of the spirit of healing that victims of injustice and violence need, in order to nip in the bud, the vicious cycle of violence. We believe in the option to forgive as strength, and not as weakness. Thus, the power of the cross of Christ as a sacrament of God’s unconditional love resonates deeply within the Asian soul. As Paul rightly states, in the ultimate analysis the greatest virtue is neither faith nor hope, but agape, unconditional love (cf 1 Cor 13:13). This is indeed good news that the Asian Church proclaims. It is the lotus that blooms quietly even in the murkiest waters.

131. Dialogue has therefore consistently remained at the top of the FABC’s pastoral priorities from the very beginning. Among its many forms, we have focused in particular on what we call the triple dialogue—with our neighbour religious traditions, with our neighbour cultures and with the poor.³⁴ In the light of synodality, Pope Francis has inspired us to widen the scope of dialogue beyond interpersonal communication, and to extend it to the synodal notion of accompaniment and conviviality. It never proceeds from a presumption of ill will because it is founded on the basic Christian principle that all human beings, having been created in God’s image and likeness (Gen 1:26-27), are by nature good, even if that image has been damaged and obscured by sin.

132. When some of our local churches in Asia speak of the need of presenting Jesus with an “Asian face”, it is because they belong to parts of Asia that received the Christian faith in a European garb, through the evangelization

³⁴ Thanks to the testimony of our Korean bishops, we have resolved to start doing as they do in their dialogues— namely, to no longer speak of faiths and cultures outside Christianity as “other” other religions and cultures, but as neighbour-religions and cultures.

efforts of European missionaries. This is even more understandable in countries where the spread of Christianity is connected to their colonial past. It is ironic that some Asians tend to forget that Christianity first took root on Asian soil, and that the Son of God first took flesh in a culture and setting that was Asian. At the very heart of the later Greco-Roman articulations of the faith in the Scriptures, is a culture that is strongly Semitic and Asian.

133. Also often forgotten is the fact that the first mission areas of early Christianity were in cities that belonged to what used to be known as “Asia Minor”, such as those mentioned by Luke’s Acts of the Apostles, i.e., the Pauline missionary journeys in places like Syria, Antioch, Phrygia, Galatia, Ephesus, Iconium, Derbe, Lystra and Pisidia, Troas and Miletus. (Acts 16). Even the book of Revelations begins with the visionary’s messages to the “seven Churches of Asia.” (Rev 1:3)

134. It is now also well attested historically that the Christian faith had in fact reached many Asian countries in its originally Asian form in the first millennium. But many circumstances, including persecution, had prevented the faith from taking root in Asia in the first millennium, except in some countries like India, as is evidenced by the oriental rites of the Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara Churches that trace their roots from the earliest missionary activities that reached India through the apostle St Thomas.

135. In most other parts of Asia, wherever Christian evangelization work was mediated by missionaries from Europe, such as in the former colonies of Spain, Portugal, France, and Great Britain, or from North or South America, such as those that had reached the Philippines through Acapulco, some western expressions of Christianity remain evident in religious art, architecture, and liturgical expressions. In such instances, there is understandably an effort to give an Asian expression to Christianity. Communion with Rome need not mean the “Romanization” of the Church in Asia.

136. Despite the Second Vatican Council’s manifest support for the inculturation of the liturgy in the local cultures and languages of Asia, as is well articulated in Sacrosanctum Concilium, much is yet to be done with regard to the intercultural dialogue that should continue to give shape to both the expression and the practice of the Christian faith in various countries of Asia.

137. The shared aspirations of Asia, Africa and Latin America for more contextualized theologies, as well as for culture-sensitive praxis in the realms of pastoral action, liturgical expressions, popular religious devotions and indigenous spirituality are evident in all the documents coming from our continental federations of episcopal conferences. These aspirations are validated by the *sensus fidelium* that the ongoing Synod on Synodality has encouraged to take into account.

Part Five: OPENING NEW PATHWAYS

Returning by Another Route

138. “And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their country by another way.” (Mt 2:12)

139. Matthew narrates when the Magi came to Jerusalem, seeking information, they asked: “Where is the newborn King of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to worship him.” (Mt 2:2). They followed divine guidance - the star - and at the same time, human guidance: the help of others to find the One they were looking for. Having found him, they prostrated themselves before the Infant King, offering him their treasures. Then, they went back to their own country by another route (cf. Mt 2:9).

140. We, the Bishops of Asia did something similar when we came together for the FABC 50 General Conference. As we explained in Chapter Two, we sought divine guidance in prayer and contemplation and human guidance in the person of ‘experts’ in different fields. Together, we looked at different realities through a ‘virtual visit’ to each Asian country. We looked at the realities of Asia, and discerned what the Spirit is saying to us. We offered Jesus the treasures we discovered. Hence, we are now ready to return to our dioceses by “another route”, along new pathways that have been opened out before us by FABC 50. We could trace five pathways along which we wish to travel post the FABC 50 General Conference.

A. FROM FOREIGN EXPRESSIONS TO AN INCULTURATED PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL

141. Christ, the Son of God assumed a humanity that was Asian. The first missions were to the countries of ‘Asia Minor’. But the later Christianization

of many Asian countries around the middle of the second millennium was tied to the European geopolitics, with the Spanish and Portuguese empires dividing the world among themselves. In many Asian countries, Christianity therefore came with an European garb. Often, the missionaries who were sent by their own religious orders rode on the royal patronage of the foreign powers.

142. There were, of course, missionaries who chose to take a different pathway. They followed a different way to prevent their mission from being co-opted by the ruling colonial authorities. Among the most notable examples of such missionaries of the 16th-17th centuries were the Italian Jesuit missionaries Alessandro Valignano and Matteo Ricci who brought Christianity to Japan and China (respectively),³² as well as Roberto de Nobili who followed the footsteps of Ricci in the Southern Indian setting.³³ One might say they lived ahead of their times and were ahead of the FABC's insistence on dialogue with Asian cultures and religions by almost four centuries!

143. The Italian Jesuits, Alessandro Valignano and Matteo Ricci, were unique in that they did not just insist on learning the local languages in order to communicate the faith. They also took the local cultures and faiths seriously. They came not just to teach but also to learn by immersing themselves in the worldviews of their host countries. They allowed the Gospel to take root on the soil of Asian culture. They realized "that the conquest model of evangelization would be absolutely fruitless in penetrating the ancient civilizations of Japan and China."³⁴ The same could have been said of Robert De Nobili and his collaborators in India who sought to root the Gospel in the culture of their host countries. They "rejected the idea of Christendom, viz. the assumption that there was an essential identity between Christianity and European society."³⁵

³² Since these Italian Jesuits started off mainly from the Portuguese territory of Goa in India as their point of departure for Macau in China, it is possible that their contact with Indian Christians of the Oriental Rites had given them an idea about a different approach to evangelization. The Indian Christians of the Syro-Malabar Rite, for instance, are often noted for their St. Thomas Christian heritage that is uniquely inculturated with traditional Hindu customs, and has been described by scholars as "Hindu in culture, Christian in religion, and Oriental in worship." See Felix Wilfred, *The Oxford Handbook of Christianity in Asia*, Oxford University Press.

³³ Another one was a Portuguese Jesuit who became a saint and martyr, St. John De Britto. He was apparently mentored by De Nobili and worked in the second half of the 17th century.

³⁴ R. Ellsberg, *All Saints*, Claretian Publications 2008, p.37-38.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

144. This missionary approach of adapting to local customs and respecting the culture of the countries to be evangelized did actually enjoy the support of Rome at the start.³⁶ Unfortunately, when other religious orders started missionary work in China during the 17th century, they reacted strongly to the inculturation and adaptation models of evangelization adopted by Valignano and Ricci, igniting a heated controversy that eventually attracted the attention of Rome and led to the so-called “Chinese Rites Controversy”. As a consequence, Pope Clement XI, in 1704, issued the Decree *Cum Deus Optimus*, condemning these Chinese ancestor rites and prohibiting Chinese Christians from practicing them. One of the most serious consequences of this Decree was that it caused the formerly sympathetic Emperor to swing to the opposite extreme of imposing an imperial ban on Christianity.³⁷ The controversy over the Chinese Rites would last until the first half of the 20th century, when in 1939, Pius XII, through *Propaganda Fide*, finally came up with the new decree *Plane Compertum*.³⁸ It is very encouraging to note how the recent Popes have consistently upheld a more positive regard for the inculturated and dialogical missionary approaches of Valignano and Ricci³⁹. Pope Francis described Ricci as “a man of encounters, who went beyond being a foreigner and became a citizen of the world.”⁴⁰

145. At the FABC 50 General Conference, we felt the Church must go back

³⁶ For example, in an instruction given to the Missions Étrangères de Paris in 1659, the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith wrote: “Do not act with zeal, do not put forward any arguments to convince these peoples to change their rites, their customs or their usages, except if they are evidently contrary to the religion [i.e., Catholic Christianity] and morality. What would be more absurd than to bring France, Spain, or Italy or any other European country to the Chinese? Do not bring to them our countries, but instead bring to them the Faith, a Faith that does not reject or hurt the rites, nor the usages of any people, provided that these are not distasteful, but that instead keeps and protects them. Marcel Launay; Gérard Moussay, *Les Missions étrangères: Trois siècles et demi d’histoire et d’aventure en Asie*, Librairie Académique Perrin, 2008, 77-83.

³⁷ Dun Jen Li, *China in transition, 1517-1911*, Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1969, 22.

³⁸ This Decree practically vindicated the missiological approaches of Valignano and Ricci, for example over the ancestor rites. Cfr. George Minamiki, *The Chinese rites controversy: From its beginning to modern times*, Loyola University, 1985, 197.

³⁹ Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis paid rich tribute to Ricci. <https://christiansforsocialaction.org/resource/heroes-of-the-faith-matteo-ricci/>; https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/pont-messages/2009/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20090506_ricci.html. Accessed on???

⁴⁰ <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2022/12/17/matteo-ricci-sainthood-cause-244370>. Accessed on??

to inculturated evangelization. Inculturation springs from the theology of incarnation and the paschal mystery. In Christ, God saves humankind by embracing our humanity and taking on a human embodiment or enfleshment, through his INCARNATION. St. Paul calls it the KENOSIS of God in Philippians 2:7-8, “He EMPTIED HIMSELF, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.” The underlying truth is: THE WORD BECAME FLESH. “He pitched his tent among us.”

146. The mystery of the Incarnation continues with the Church. The Holy Spirit continues to take flesh in the communities of disciples who make up the Church, the BODY OF CHRIST, in the local churches or communities of disciples around the world. FAITH never comes in a vacuum. Evangelization always happens in the context of INTERCULTURALITY.

147. While we do understand that INCULTURATION is indeed an essential aspect of the dialogue between faith and culture, at the end of the day, dialogue is only possible among people who open themselves to an INTERCULTURAL ENCOUNTER that can bring about new forms of inculturation. An intercultural encounter creates a kind of dynamic that becomes mutually beneficial for both dialogue partners. And this opens us to what we might call TRANSCULTURATION, namely, the discovery of shared values that allows us to transcend cultures, and even lead to the growth and purification of cultures.

B. FROM BASIC ECCLESIAL COMMUNITIES (BECs) TO BASIC HUMAN COMMUNITIES (BHCs)

148. At the FABC 50 General Conference in Bangkok, in the light of the aspiration for a more synodal Church that grows constantly in the threefold aspects of communion, participation and mission, we have resolved to reorient our BECs towards becoming catalysts of renewal in society. Indeed, Synodality goes beyond dialogue; it is not just about fostering communication. More essential than communication is accompaniment, journeying together, conviviality. Our Basic Ecclesial Communities will not be truly incarnating synodality as a lifestyle if our communities only stick to themselves and their own ‘churchy’ concerns. If they are to be true to their mission, i.e., to be like yeast in a mass of dough, then we must build the kind

of Christian communities that will lead to Basic Human Communities.

149. We must also be more ready to let go of ministries that no longer serve their purpose and be disposed instead to identify the charisms generously bestowed on us by the Holy Spirit and create new ministries, not just the kind that would get the faithful to serve the Church, but more importantly, those that empower them, as members to serve all society. Our laity should use the best resources of our faith to help especially in managing conflicts at all levels, to engage proactively in the politics of the common good, especially in the work for peace and reconciliation based on justice and mutual respect for human dignity.

C. FROM DIALOGUE TO SYNODALITY

150. Over the past five decades, the FABC has consistently pursued the path of a threefold DIALOGUE—with CULTURES, with RELIGIONS and with the POOR. The way of DIALOGUE is now finding its fuller expression in SYNODALITY. Synodality gives a fresh expression to Vatican II's spirit of CONCILIARITY. We realize that what makes us comfortable with SYNODALITY is that it has given a better articulation to what we have relentlessly pursued in the FABC. Synodality is not possible without dialogue, even if synodality is more than dialogue. The listening and discerning that go with dialogue are basically the same elements that go with synodality. The objective is none other than to transcend the OTHERNESS of the dialogue partner so that s/he becomes a NEIGHBOUR and partner in communion. The purpose of dialogue is more eloquently spelt out by SYNODALITY which encompasses the aspiration for COMMUNION, PARTICIPATION and MISSION.

151. Throughout the FABC 50 General Conference, we endeavored to find new pathways as the Magi did. We were led to do what Peter did at the very first Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15), when some apostles, in reaction to Paul's mission to the Gentiles, wanted to restrict the mission to the Jewish converts. Assuming his leadership role, at the Council of Jerusalem, Peter stood between James and Paul and made the move to keep them together (cf. Acts 15).

152. What has lit the way for us as we together discerned the emerging realities in Asia, was the new fire that Pope Francis has ignited in the Church

through his reflections, especially those contained in such papal documents as *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel), *Laudato Si* (On Care for Our Common Home), *Amoris Laetitia* (The Joy of Love), *Fratelli Tutti* (On Fraternity and Social Friendship), as well as the recently published apostolic constitution, *Praedicate Evangelium* (On the Roman Curia and Its Service to the Church in the World). The FABC 50 General Conference afforded us time to seriously review these teachings. And we realized that these monumental teachings of the See of Peter have reaffirmed the Second Vatican Council and challenged the universal Church to “return to her sources” (ressourcement), while at the same time responding to the “signs of the times” (aggiornamento).

153. Since one of the most concrete fruits of Vatican II was the Synod of Bishops, we sense that Pope Francis has invited the Church to take ‘synodality’ seriously, expanding it in both directions—ad intra and ad extra. Ad Intra, within the Church, among our fellow baptized Catholics: the consecrated persons, the ordained, and the laity, especially women and young people. Ad Extra with the Church, outwardly directed to fellow Christians, fellow believers, fellow human beings, especially the poor, and all fellow creatures in our common home.

D. FROM PROCLAMATION TO STORY TELLING

154. It was the coming of God’s reign that Jesus proclaimed as Good News in first century Palestine. He invited people to discover the dignity and nobility of our humanity in our common aspiration for the realization of God’s reign in our midst. And so Jesus called attention to his message by using whatever medium was available then. While most of the Rabbis in his time stuck to the familiar medium of the Synagogue podium, Jesus proclaimed his message where people were: on a boat by the lakeshore, at table fellowships, on the road, on a hillside, under a tree; just anywhere! And most of the time, through simple, casual conversations.

155. His method is still the most effective one in this day and age: STORYTELLING. The world over people love good stories. There is always that ‘child’ within us that is drawn to listen when someone tells a story and begins with the usual, “Once upon a time...” or “In a far-away village by the sea...” or “One day there was father with two sons...” We recall that the theme of the Asian Mission Congress in Chiang Mai, in 2006 when we reflected

on the face of Jesus in Asia, was “telling the Story of Jesus...”. We also determined a methodology of nurturing our Basic Ecclesial Communities by promoting “storytelling” as the most characteristic way of living the life of an Asian Church, one that enhances true-to-life conversations that strengthen communion and build community.

E. FROM THE BEATEN TRACK TO NEW PASTORAL PRIORITIES

156. At FABC 50 General Conference, we Bishops made concrete decisions to move from the old beaten track to new priorities. We can spell out some of these:

157. We will work towards renewing our ministries in all our local churches in Asia towards mission by nurturing our communities in the dynamics of communion and participation. By doing so, we hope to reorient our faithful from self-referentiality to truly living out our calling to be the “salt of the earth” and the “light of the world”, with no other motive than to share the joy of Christ’s Good News to a world that is longing to be renewed and recreated according to God’s design. We hope to be able to reorient our ministries from merely serving the Church to serving the world, as part of the mission of a servant Church.

158. We commit ourselves to transforming our parishes from maintenance to mission, by fostering Basic Ecclesial Communities that build Basic Human Communities. We will ensure that all our local churches are safe spaces for children and vulnerable adults, and that they are proactive in addressing and preventing any kind of abuse. We will ensure that they are also welcoming towards the poor, especially the migrants, itinerants and displaced peoples, and maintain an inclusive, gender-sensitive, and participatory atmosphere at all times.

159. We will consistently heed the call to pastoral and ecological conversion in the face of the present climate emergency in a manner that is truly sensitive to “both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.” We will go out of our way to partner with agencies that are committed to reducing our carbon footprints by repudiating the use of dirty energy and promoting the generation of clean and renewable energy. In the spirit of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue, we will unite ourselves with fellow Christians, fellow believers, and all fellow human beings in protecting the earth, our common

home. We will consciously call on all our institutions to resolutely divest from investments in industries that are destructive of our environment.

160. We will serve as bridges and bridge-builders, and actively work for reconciliation in the midst of conflicts. We will consciously promote the well-being of all and consistently take part in building societies that are particularly mindful of the welfare of the most disadvantaged sectors in society, especially children and elderly people, people with disabilities, people with substance-use addictions, people struggling with mental health issues, people deprived of liberty, victims of human trafficking and extrajudicial killing, the indigenous peoples, survivors of wars and natural calamities. We resolve to live out the spirit of complementarity and harmony by listening to others in genuine dialogue.

161. In collaboration with our brothers and sisters of Christian traditions and neighbour religions, we will help promote a culture of peace and harmony, the economics of inclusive growth and development, holistic approaches to education and character formation, and the advancement of science and technology geared towards total human development. We commit ourselves to a proper and judicious use of digital technology that is particularly mindful of the welfare of young people. We will unite ourselves with governmental agencies, NGO's, and civic organizations on issues of human rights, poverty mitigation, human trafficking, care for the environment, and the right use of the social media.

162. We will go beyond interpersonal dialogue into multilogues that promote critical thinking and communal disciplines of discernment. We will uphold the freedom of all communities of faith to contribute to nation-building through the formation of the moral character of citizens. We will resist the ideology of secularism that excludes faith, religion and spirituality from the public discourse. We will work with all people of goodwill towards fostering a better and a more humane world, towards building a civilization of justice, peace and love. Our mission is to contribute to a better Asia, to work for a better world.

CONCLUSION

163. To be all things...for the Asian people

164. In his letter to the Corinthians St Paul describes his understanding of being a disciple and missionary of Jesus Christ: “To the weak I became weak, to win over the weak. I have become all things to all... All this, I do for the sake of the gospel, so that I too may have a share in it.” (1 Cor. 9:22-23). It is in the light of these words that we humbly present this Final Document of FABC 50 General Conference which was convened in Ban Phu Waan, Bangkok, from October 12-30, 2022. We have laid this out only “for the sake of the gospel”, which is God’s Good News of love, peace and justice for our peoples in Asia and the whole of humanity.

165. The Church in Asia can only bring the liberating, empowering and revitalizing Good News of Jesus Christ if she learns to witness this love and to lay down her gifts as the Magi did before God, who became a child, one of us, in Jesus Christ. In his teaching and through his life, death and resurrection he reveals to us the love and mercy of God, the creator of all people and nature. He teaches us to respond to God’s love, serving and loving our “neighbours”, the hungry and thirsty, the sick, foreigners and migrants, the indigenous, oppressed and needy (cf Mk 12:29 ff and Mt 25:31ff), and journeying together in a synodal, inculturated church with intercultural relationships with our neighbours in religions, cultures and societies for a better Asia.

166. We entrust the Church in Asia and the Asian peoples to the intercession and protection of Mary, our Blessed Mother.

Blessed Lady, Mother of Jesus

Draw us near your Son’s embrace.

All that we have we offer to him,

Just as all that he is he has offered to us as gift.

May the seeds of his Gospel continue to take root on Asian soil.

May he continue to take flesh in our Asian cultures.

May we learn to empty ourselves as he did,

That the world may see in us his Asian face

And that in us, amongst us and through us

his light may radiate to the rest of Asia!

AMEN.

167. We find it fitting to close this Document, with the beautiful lyrics of the song, entitled “The Song of Asia”, composed for our FABC 50 General Conference. Inspired by Matthew’s narrative of the Magi’s journey to Bethlehem, it is a prayer written in poetry and cast in Asian music, that is youthful, hopeful and uplifting:

THE SONG OF ASIA

Bless our God who walks with us
On our shores we see love coming, casting seeds on all our land
To our night comes suddenly shining, a great sign to set us free
And at dawn we see your sun, all our shadows now have a meaning
We now see a sister, a brother, no more strangers in our land

God the Father, mercy is your name, o Lord Jesus redeem our pain
Holy Spirit fill us with your fire of great love,
Bless our God who walks with us
Bless our God who walks with us

And the poor will proclaim your praises,
our young your mission will embrace
And creation’s groaning will now be heard
Holy peace to all will be served
Holy peace to all will be served

You have woven us together, different shades now shining as one
We are gifts to one another, salt and light to everyone
And at dusk we see your star, pointing to a new direction
We now serve every sister and brother, we are one family in our land

God the Father, mercy is your name, O Lord Jesus redeem our pain
Holy Spirit fill us with your fire of great love,
Bless our God who walks with us
Bless our God who walks with us
And the poor will proclaim your praises,

our young your mission will embrace
And creation's groaning will now be heard
Holy peace to all will be served
Holy peace to all will be served

To the margins we will go,
and behold the face of the Lord

And the poor will proclaim your praises,
our young your mission will embrace
And creation's groaning now will be heard
Holy peace to all will be served
Holy peace to all will be served

God the Father, mercy is your name, O Lord Jesus redeem our pain
Holy Spirit fill us with your fire of great love,
Bless our God who walks with us
Bless our God who walks with us



ABOUT THE CONFERENCE

In 1970, during Pope Paul VI's visit to Manila (November 28 – 30), the Asian bishops gathered for the first time. From that meeting, a desire to strengthen their collegiality and a need to define and articulate what it means to be a 'Church in Asia' in the spirit of Vatican II emerged. This gave birth to the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference (FABC).

Fifty years have passed since the beginnings of the Federation of the Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC). On the occasion of this anniversary, the FABC gather the Churches in Asia in a General Conference to commemorate, celebrate and chart the directions for the coming years. It is only appropriate that we celebrate this journey, despite the challenges, by gazing into the past, the present and the future. In order to assist us in this process, the underlying premise of the FABC 50 – General Conference (FABC 50) would be to reflect on some key questions: (i) How can the Church in Asia continue to become the good news in the light of the emerging realities? (ii) How could the FABC more effectively serve and support the Bishops and their Conferences in Asia? (iii) How can a renewed appreciation of the blessings and richness of Asia contribute to the Church? (iv) How can the Church in this part of the world contribute to a better Asia? (v) How can the Church in Asia contribute to the Universal Church?

Pope Francis, during his visit to Thailand, encouraged the FABC to undertake this General Conference for the renewal and revitalization of the Church in Asia:

“I realize that you are making plans for the 2020 General Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences, which will mark the fiftieth anniversary of its foundation. This is a fitting occasion to revisit those ‘shrines’ where the missionary roots that left their mark on these lands are preserved, to be guided by the Holy Spirit in the footsteps of our first love, and to welcome with courage, with parrhesia, a future that you yourselves must help develop and create. In this way, both the Church and society in Asia will benefit from a renewed and shared evangelical outreach. In love with Christ and capable of bringing others to share in that same love.... The memory of the first missionaries who preceded us with courage, joy and extraordinary stamina can help us take stock of our present situation and mission from a much broader, much more transformative perspective. In the first place, that memory frees us from the belief that times past were always more favorable or better for the proclamation of the Gospel. It also helps us to avoid taking refuge in fruitless discussions and ways of thinking that end up making us turn in on ourselves, paralyzing any kind of action. ‘Let us learn from the saints who have gone before us, who confronted the difficulties of their own day’ (Evangeli Gaudium, EG 263). Let us cast aside everything that has ‘stuck’ to us along the way and that makes it harder for us to press forward. We know that some ecclesial structures and mentalities can hamper efforts at evangelization. Yet even good structures are only helpful when there is a life constantly driving, sustaining and assessing them. Ultimately, without new life and an evangelical spirit, without ‘the Church’s fidelity to her own calling’, any new structure will soon prove ineffective (cf. *ibid.* 26) and detract from our important ministry of fervent prayer and intercession. Sometimes this can help to give us perspective when dealing with enthusiastic though unwise methodologies that appear to be successful but offer little by way of life.” (Pope Francis, Address of His Holiness at Meeting with the Bishops of Thailand and FABC, Bangkok, 22 November 2019).

With this in mind while being faithful to the Church’s missionary call, we embark on this journey as the Church in Asia together with all the peoples of Asia as we seek to reinvigorate the evangelical spirit through new pathways for the glory of God.

Objectives and Methodology

Guided by Matthew 2:1-12, the overall objective of FABC 50 is to reaffirm, renew and revitalize the whole Church in Asia, with the following general objectives:

- To affirm and celebrate the journey of the past 50 years (Wise men came to Jerusalem from the east asking, ‘Where is the infant king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose and have come to do him homage’ – Mt 2:1-2)
- To become aware of the current and emerging realities and challenges confronting Asia and the Church (When King Herod heard this he was perturbed, and so was the whole of Jerusalem – Mt 2:3)
- To search for the face of Jesus in Asia (... And falling to their knees they did him homage – Mt 2:11)
- To trace a vision of the Church in Asia [Asian Church] at the service of the peoples in Asia and in communion with the Church throughout the world (... they opened their coffers and presented him with gifts – Mt 2:11)
- To envision new pathways of service and journeying together as peoples of Asia (... they returned to their own country by a different way – Mt 2:12)

BIBLICAL FRAMEWORK

Matthew 2:1-12

As the FABC celebrates 50 years of its existence, it desires to follow Jesus more faithfully in our times. The Gospel passage (Mt 2:12) forms an integral part of the infancy narrative and grounds this desire for renewal.

“Wise men came to Jerusalem from the east asking, ‘Where is the infant king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose and have come to do him homage.’” (MT 2: 1-2)

The General Conference begins with honouring the journey and the “stars” that have guided our path for the past 50 years.

“When King Herod heard this he was perturbed and so was the whole of Jerusalem.” (MT 2:3)

This verse invites the Asian church to reflect on, what “troubles” us concerning the emerging realities in Asia.

“... And falling to their knees they did him homage.” (MT 2:11).

Amid the emerging realities, we need to keep our focus on the person of Jesus, who then leads us to steer the Church through the different challenges confronting the Asian peoples.

PRAYER

Blessed are You Father who in Your great love,
sent Your Only Begotten Son
to reconcile us to You and to one another
by his Passion, Death and Resurrection
and the power of the Holy Spirit.

We thank and praise You for the birth of FABC over fifty years ago.
By divine providence and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit,
Bishops from Asia met and formed the FABC.
May the FABC continue to be steadfast in its mission of love and service
for Your beloved people in this vast continent of Asia.

Help us to surmount the challenges
that threaten the stability of our families, the dreams of our youth,
the integrity of our environment, and the harmony among peoples,
cultures and religions
Through the intercession and motherly protection of Mary,
Mother of the Church
and Star of the New Evangelization,
may this occasion of the 50th anniversary celebration of FABC
be a propitious time to discern and undertake new pathways
for genuine renewal in our mission of making the Gospel alive
and life-giving:
for the poor, deprived and marginalized,
for the displaced and the migrants,
and for mother earth who groans with wounds of exploitation.

We make this prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son,
who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever. Amen.

THE SONG OF ASIA

Theme Song of FABC 50 General Conference
composed by Fr. Carlo Marcelo

Lyrics

Bless our God who walks with us
On our shores we see Love coming
Casting seeds on all our land.
To our night comes suddenly shining
A great sign to set us free.
And at dawn we see Your sun.
All our shadows now have meaning.
We now see a sister, a brother.
No more strangers in our land.
(No more strangers in our land)

Chorus 1

God the Father, mercy is Your Name.
Our Lord Jesus, redeem our pain.
Holy Spirit, fill us with the Fire of Great Love.
Bless our God who walks with us.
(Bless our God who walks with us)

Chorus 2

And the poor will proclaim Your praises.
Our young Your mission will embrace.
And Creation's groaning now will be heard.
Holy Peace to all will be served.
(Holy Peace to all will be served)

You have woven us together,
Different shades now shining as one.
We are gifts to one another.

Salt and light to everyone.
And at dusk we see Your star
Pointing to a new direction.
We now serve every sister and brother.
We are one family in our land.
(We are one family in our land)

Chorus 1

To the margins we will go
And behold the face of the Lord!

Chorus 2

And the poor will proclaim Your praises.
Our young Your mission will embrace.
And Creation's groaning now will be heard.
Holy Peace to all will be served.
(Holy Peace to all will be served)

Chorus 1

God the Father, mercy is Your Name.
Our Lord Jesus, redeem our pain.
Holy Spirit, fill us with the Fire of Great Love.
Bless our God who walks with us.[3]

Rationale Behind the Logo

In 1970, on the occasion of Pope Paul VI's visit to Manila, the Asian bishops came together for the first time. From that meeting flowed the desire to strengthen the bonds of friendship among them and provided an opportunity to define and articulate what it means to be 'Church in Asia' in the spirit of Vatican II. This, then, gave birth to the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference - FABC.

The year 2020 will mark the 50th anniversary of that significant moment and 2022 marks the 50th year that The Federation of the Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) was officially constituted.

The Logo of the 50th anniversary of FABC General Conference strives to bring to chart the direction forward for the coming years as we journey together as People of Asia.

The Logo designed attempts to:

- To affirm and celebrate the journey of FABC over the past 50 years seen in the number 50 in red.
- It attempts to create an awareness of the emerging realities and challenges confronting Asia and the Church, as seen in the wave signal in the 5 of the fifty.
- The Cross of the FABC portrays renewed commitment in our search for the face of Jesus in Asia, and the new pathways of service with the peoples of Asia, as the Magi went by a different way is depicted the anti-clock movement





**INAUGURATION OF
THE FABC 50
GENERAL CONFERENCE**



Inauguration of the 50th Anniversary of the
Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences
Shrine of Blessed Nicholas Bunkerd Kitbamrung, Thailand

PRESS NOTE

August 22, 2022

The Inauguration of the 50th Anniversary of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), was held at the Shrine of Blessed Nicholas Bunkerd Kitbamrung, Thailand. This marks five decades since the Bishops of Asia came together for the first time in 1970 to establish the FABC. The inauguration commenced with the bells of the shire peeling, inviting all to pray for the Church in Asia. The choir led the delegates in prayer, singing *Veni Creator Spiritus*, calling on the Holy Spirit to guide and direct the Church of Asia. A solemn procession was led by Charles Cardinal Bo (President of FABC & Archbishop of Yangon), Oswald Cardinal Gracias (Convener of FABC 50 & Archbishop of Bombay) and Francis Xavier Cardinal Kriengsak (Local Convener of FABC 50 & Archbishop of Bangkok).

Charles Cardinal Bo in his inaugural address, expressed how the past fifty years has been a journey of grace and gratefulness. “This long journey has given the Asian Church a vibrant identity, constantly challenging us to be a missionary church, it continues.” Cardinal Bo also highlighted the key contributions of the Church in Asia to the Universal Church as it sought to be the face of Christ to the people of Asia. “With creativity, FABC fortified

the Asian threefold dialogue with cultures, religions, and the poor of Asia. FABC envisaged a coordinating structure with empowering commissions. Grace has led us so far.”

What is the Lord’s Call to the Asian Church?

“With Christianity playing an important role in Asian nations, education, health, and human development, countries are becoming economically and politically more confident. The Church is vibrant in Asia with increasing vocations. This is a great opportunity and challenge. With prayer, planning, and commitment, this century can become the Asian Christian Century, proclaiming the Good News and fostering peace with justice in the world”.

The theme chosen for the General Conference is FABC 50: Journeying together as peoples of Asia – “...and they went a different way.” (Mt. 2:12). The basis for the theme comes from the infancy narratives in the Gospel according to St Matthew 2:1-12.

“**The Church is vibrant in Asia with increasing vocations. This is a great opportunity and challenge.**”

The Gospel passage was read by four persons representing the four regions of the FABC. Sr. Rekha Chennattu RA shared a reflection on the passage.

“The story of the Magi invites the Asian Church to see, recognize, and respond to God’s interventions. In this context, we may ask ourselves: when and where do we experience interventions of God? God speaks to us through the various events of our daily life. So, what is God’s message in and through the global experience of the coronavirus pandemic? What is God’s instruction as the Church is called to make a synodal journey? What is God’s dream when FABC celebrates its golden jubilee? The pandemic, more than ever before, reminds us of our interconnectedness and interdependence as members of the human family. By convoking the Synod on Synodality, Pope Francis invites us to be a listening Church, to radically shift our mindset so that we become more attentive, more inclusive, and journey together. The Jubilee year of FABC offers a golden opportunity for us to enter into a process of renewal.”

“Lastly, how do we understand v. 12b – “And they went by another

way”? In the light of the above analysis, it is reasonable to say that the Asian Church is challenged to explore new pathways for its journey forward.”

“The story of the Magi invites us to consider the pandemic, the synod, and the jubilee as God’s interventions and challenges us to take new ways – to journey on different paths, to allow the Church to unfold in new and even more authentic and holier ways. Perhaps it is a call to embrace a new way of being the Asian Church”

“God calls the Church to continual renewal. Are we called to become more contemplative and interdependent, more synodal and inclusive? A more ascetic and prophetic Church? God invites us to become fully and



truly an Asian Church by listening to Asian realities and embracing Asian spiritualities. We are called to journey together as peoples of Asia into the unknown, at the service of God’s mission of announcing the gospel of Jesus Christ, guided by the Holy Spirit.”

Oswald Cardinal Gracias, in his address, focused on the future direction of the FABC. “Our responses to the challenges today must be well-discerned, grounded in Scripture, tradition, magisterial teaching, and pastoral practice that promotes unity and sustainability in order to transform our realities in the power of the Holy Spirit (Lumen Gentium, 5).

The song of Asia, composed by Fr Carlos Marcelo, was then played. This was followed by the Holy Father, Pope Francis' message, which the Apostolic Nuncio to Thailand, Archbishop Paul Tschang In-Nam, read.



His Holiness Pope Francis wrote: “It is my hope that the FABC 50 General Conference will renew the Churches in Asia in fraternal communion and in missionary zeal for the spread of the Gospel among the richly diverse peoples, cultures, and social realities of the vast Asian continent.”

Cardinal Francis Xavier Kriengsak Kovithanij invited all to the Litany of the Saints for Asia.

Bishop Allywn D’silva (Auxiliary Bishop, Archdiocese of Bombay) led the congregation in the FABC 50 General Conference prayer. Cardinal Bo, Cardinal Gracias, and Cardinal Kriengsak invited the whole of Asia to join in prayer by striking the “gong” - a tradition that announces good news for everyone to recognize.

We look forward to the journey ahead as the Church in Asia reflects on how it can be the Face of Jesus in these times.

Pope Francis' Message for FABC 50



To My Venerable Brother
 Cardinal Charles Maung Bo
 Archbishop of Yangon

President of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences

As the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences marks the fiftieth anniversary of its establishment and inaugurates a season of spiritual preparation for the celebration of its first General Conference in October next, I send warm greetings and prayerful good wishes to you, your brother Bishops, and all taking part in this significant ecclesial event. It is my hope that the FABC 50 General Conference will renew the Churches in Asia in fraternal communion and in missionary zeal for the spread of the Gospel among the richly diverse peoples, cultures and social realities of the vast Asian continent.

The theme chosen for the General Conference - Journeying Together as Peoples of Asia... "and they went a different way" - is most fitting within the broader context of the synodal path of listening, dialogue and discernment undertaken by the universal Church in these years of preparation for the next Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. I pray that the deliberations of the General Conference will enable your local Churches

to develop, within the polyhedric unity of the People of God (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 237), creatively “different ways” to proclaim the joy of the Gospel, to form new generations of missionary disciples, and to labour for the extension of Christ’s kingdom of universal holiness, justice and peace.

With these sentiments, I invoke upon the forthcoming assembly a rich outpouring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Commending you, your Brother Bishops and all those entrusted to your pastoral care to the prayers of Mary, Mother of the Church, I cordially send my blessing as a pledge of wisdom, grace and peace in the Lord .

“I pray that the deliberations of the General Conference will enable your local Churches to develop, within the polyhedric unity of the People of God (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 237), creatively “different ways” to proclaim the joy of the Gospel, to form new generations of missionary disciples, and to labour for the extension of Christ’s kingdom of universal holiness, justice and peace.”

From the Vatican, 5 June 2022.

Read by Apostolic Nuncio to Thailand, Archbishop Paul Tschang In-Nam.





A Journey of Grace and Gratefulness

H.E. Charles Cardinal Maung Bo

Archbishop of Yangon

President, Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Greetings in the Name of the Lord.

Today, history beckons us. After half a century of an Asian Journey of Grace and Gratefulness, the Asian Church gathers with great joy today to inaugurate the 50th Year celebrations of FABC. The Conference will be held from 12th to 30th of October.

I wish all of you the great feast of Mary our mother and Queen. It is apt that my words of upholding grace and gratefulness come with the Magnificat of Mary, with whom the Asian church can sing, “The Lord has done marvels for me.”

The Asian Church celebrates this juncture of grace and gratefulness. All praises to God the Almighty, who has guided this church through all these years. Asia is the cradle of many religions. In his great journey to the Asian Church Saint Pope John Paul II extolled the vital role of Asia in the Salvation History. In his Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* the Pope said:

“The Church in Asia sings the praises of the “God of salvation” (Ps 68:20) for choosing to initiate his saving plan on Asian soil, through men and women of that continent. It was in fact in Asia that God revealed and fulfilled his saving purpose from the beginning. He guided the patriarchs (cf. Gen 12) and called Moses to lead his people to freedom (cf. Ex 3:10). He spoke to his chosen people through many prophets, judges, kings, and valiant women of faith. In “the fullness of time” (Gal 4:4), he sent his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ the Savior, who took flesh as an Asian! Exulting in the goodness of the continent’s peoples, cultures, and religious vitality, and conscious at the same time of the unique gift of faith which she has received for the good of all, the Church in Asia cannot cease to proclaim: “Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, for his love endures forever” (Ps 118:1) (EA 1).

Yes. All Glory to God, who chose this continent for that sanctified Salvation History. The Sainly Pope left a mandate to the Asian Church to continue vibrantly living up to that reality. Inspired by the Sainly Pope’s wisdom, the Federation of Asian Bishops Conference coordinated the missionary endeavors of the Asian Church. It has been a long and challenging journey. This long journey has given the Asian Church a vibrant identity, constantly challenging us to be a missionary church. It continues.

Now, the Asian Church and the FABC stand at the crossroads of a very challenging epoch. Much has been achieved. We are grateful to all those who shepherded that process and to the theologians and others who provided the FABC with its intellectual identity. Asia is a virtual mosaic of cultures; the church reflected that diversity. The incorporation of the cultural and the religious is what theologians refer to as inculturation.

Asian Christianity is undergoing the process of shedding its alien baggage and becoming truly indigenous to the region. Today, the Church and the world stand at the crossroads of history. We gather amidst suffocating clouds of conflict and displacements, the collapse of the economy, frightening climate change, the pandemic, and the starvation of millions. Secularism is on the ascendency in the traditional Christian world. Authoritarian

“ This long journey has given the Asian Church a vibrant identity, constantly challenging us to be a missionary church.”

leadership is becoming a norm in many countries. Democracy faces stiff challenges. Fundamentalism and religious violence threaten global peace. We are called upon to examine ourselves what could be the role of Asian Churches in these challenging moments.

How can Asian churches become prophets of peace in an increasingly anxious world?

The third millennium brings great challenges. Pope Francis has always encouraged us to consider every challenge an opportunity. As we inaugurate the 50-year celebrations, we are reminded that the Biblical perspective of Jubilee mandates a comprehensive change and a robust renewal. The Church under the present Pope has proactively initiated changes.

“With creativity, FABC fortified the Asian threefold dialogue with cultures, religions and the poor of Asia. FABC envisaged a coordinating structure, with empowering commissions. Grace has led us so far.”

We are challenged to be a Synodal Church, with Evangelization gaining the prime place in Vatican structures and mission. On the justice front, the Pope has called for our dedication to the environmental and economic justice struggle.

The Pope has called for a life built on the right relationships. His three documents have given the Asian church and the world a road map to right relationships: *Evangelii Gaudium* guides us in our relationship with God, *Laudato Si'* charts a course in our relationship with God's creation, and *Fratelli Tutti* enlightens us on our relationship with one another.

The FABC conference has reflected on these and other needs, challenges, and themes, which will be discussed. As we get into these deliberations, we are becoming aware of the call of the Gospel to become active missionaries. The mission of the Asian Church is already charted out in the Book of Revelation. Asia was the soil on which the great mission of Evangelization started.

What is the Lord's Call to the Asian Church?

With Christianity playing an important role in Asian nations' education, health, and human development, countries are becoming

economically and politically more confident. The church is vibrant in Asia and Africa with increasing vocations. This is a great opportunity and challenge. With prayer, planning, and commitment, this century can become the Asian Christian Century, proclaiming the Good News and fostering peace and justice in the world. The FABC conference will address many of these concerns.



The October FABC 50 General Conference will collate all the deliberations and chart a new course of journey for Asia and the World. The theme chosen for the conference is:

FABC 50: Journeying together as peoples of Asia –
“...and they went a different way.” (Mt. 2:12)

It might seem slightly contradictory. The Early church journeyed together in Christ’s mission, but its diverse gifts helped it reach various cultures and nations. Asia is the biggest continent, with 60 percent of the population comprising 48 countries, and it needs both unity and diversity.

I wish the people of Asia a great blessing as we undertake this journey. Let the Lord, who promised the prophets of faithful accompaniment, walk with him. With His Providence, the Asian church will see great wonders. God bless all our efforts.



FABC 50: Envisioning the Future of the Church in Asia

H.E. Oswald Cardinal Gracias

Archbishop of Bombay

Convener, FABC50 General Conference

Your Eminences, my dear brother Bishops, my dear Fathers and Sisters, and my dearest people of Asia. Very warm greetings to you on this auspicious day, the feast of the Queenship of Mary.

Cardinal Bo, a short while ago, took us through the birth of the FABC and its milestones. May I now look to the future? Half a century has passed. We at the FABC, together with all of you – the people of Asia – are embarking on a new journey with the FABC 50 General Conference.

Inspired by the Scripture reading just proclaimed at FABC 50, we will start a monumental task of reaffirming, renewing, and revitalizing the Church in Asia. We will gather to commemorate, celebrate, and chart the direction that we, as the Church in Asia, will take on our journey together in the next decades. Open to the Spirit, we go by another way as He leads us.

To begin with, FABC will affirm and celebrate our journey thus far. The FABC was founded in response to the particular needs and challenges of the Asian Church fifty years ago. We wanted a Church of the poor, of the young, and of dialogue—a Church for the poor, for the young, and for dialogue. This goal remains relevant even today.

But there have been so many big changes, so many new challenges. Hopefully, we have just exited the COVID-19 pandemic; we have new socio-political and economic tensions, a deepening migrant and climate crisis, and so on. The first few days of FABC 50 will be spent getting to know about the situation in different countries and deliberating on the emerging realities. These challenges and realities may well disturb us, but they will not surprise us. We live with them!

Then, we turn once again to God and search for the face of Jesus in Asia. We will seek out the Jesus who is among each of us despite our diversity. Strengthened by our encounter with Jesus, FABC 50 will try to trace a new vision for the Church in Asia. As a Church, we do not exist for

“Our responses to the challenges today must be well-discerned, grounded in Scripture, tradition, magisterial teaching, and pastoral practice that promotes unity and sustainability in order to transform our realities in the power of the Holy Spirit (Lumen Gentium, 5).”

ourselves but are at the service of all the peoples of Asia as we continue to build up the Kingdom of God.

Our responses to the challenges today must be well-discerned, grounded in Scripture, tradition, magisterial teaching, and pastoral practice that promotes unity and sustainability in order to transform our realities in the power of the Holy Spirit (Lumen Gentium, 5).

We have, therefore, dedicated the next few days of FABC 50 to workshops and plenary sessions on Church documents and characteristics of the Church in Asia so that we become and remain a prophetic, relevant and responsive Church. We discern the role of the Church for a better Asia.

With this, we come to the theme of FABC 50: journeying together as peoples of Asia through the Synodal path, we seek out new pathways of service and more appropriate and effective structures. At FABC 50, we will do this in Synodality – in communion with the people of Asia, with the participation of 250 bishops, priests, religious and lay persons, and with the mission of a renewed and shared evangelical outreach. Thanks to your participation at several consultations in preparation for the General

Conference these past couple of years, we already have some initial salient points for consideration, such as the expansion of the triple dialogue of the FABC, better support for the Bishops, and indeed all Church leaders to be - as Pope Francis stated - “Apostles of listening,” partnerships, better communication and organizational structure, and so on. We will discuss this during the last week of the conference.

My dear people, it is our desire that through FABC 50, we will revitalize ourselves in service to the people of Asia, both at the General Conference and beyond. We will seek a renewed FABC for a more vibrant Church in service to the people of Asia. FABC 50 will be a steppingstone to



help us as the Church in Asia rethink our commitment to mission, worship, and pastoral strategies.

As we move towards a new phase and prepare a future full of hope and joy amid chaos and uncertainty, we give thanks to our Triune God for guiding our steps, and we pray for the Holy Spirit’s continued unerring guidance. My dear people, I humbly ask you to keep praying for us and for the success of FABC 50. Do recite the special prayer at all Sunday Masses till the 30th of October 2022. And do also celebrate with us by joyfully joining us in singing the Song of Asia. May Mary, the Queen of Heaven, intercede for Asia and protect Asia.

God bless each and every one of us!



**THE FABC 50 GENERAL
CONFERENCE**

An Introduction to the FABC General Conference

PRESS NOTE

12th October 2022

Thailand will host the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference (FABC) General Conference, which is gathering to celebrate its 50th Anniversary. From 12 to 30 October 2022, the Baan Phu Waan Pastoral Centre in Nakhon Pathom's Sam Phran will host 200 delegates, including Cardinals, Bishops, and lay representatives from 29 member countries across Asia.

The conference's inauguration was held at the Shrine of Blessed Nicholas Bunkerd Kitbamrung in Bangkok on 22nd August, the Feast of the Queenship of Mary, seeking her intercession for the FABC. A campaign of prayer was initiated in all parishes in Asia to pray for the success of the General Conference.

This General Conference marks five decades since the Bishops of Asia came together for the first time in 1970 to establish the FABC, founded in response to the needs and challenges of the Asian Church fifty years ago. The opening ceremony on 12th October will be presided over by H.E. Charles Cardinal Bo, President of the FABC. From October 12th up to the 30th, the members of this Assembly will undertake, with great responsibility, the monumental goals of the FABC 50 of reaffirming, renewing, and revitalizing the Church in Asia.

The first few days of the FABC General Conference will be spent understanding and deliberating on the emerging realities in different countries as the FABC 'visits Asia.' Each of the 29 member countries has been invited to present an exposition on the present situation in their countries, including political, social, economic, religious, and any other challenges for the Catholic Church.

From the 17th to the 22nd of October, the General Conference will reflect on these realities in dialogue with recent Papal documents. The FABC Guide Document and subsequent consultations have already highlighted some of them - the pandemic, globalization, socio-economic and political

challenges - and the issues of gender, Indigenous people, youth yearnings, and the Church's transformation. The FABC will connect these realities with reflections on the documents of Pope Francis, especially *Evangelii Gaudium*, *Fratelli Tutti*, *Laudato si'*, *Amoris Laetitia*, and *Predicate Evangelium*, and will focus on the lessons the Church in Asia needs to learn in order to respond to them.

Several sections will be done virtually as the FABC explores how to revitalize the life of the Church. Meetings, workshops, and sessions will be interspersed with moments of silence and recollection and readings from Scripture, the importance of which was emphasized by His Holiness Pope Francis. These ensure that the FABC General Conference remains guided by the Holy Spirit, our Comforter, and Paraclete, who is ever present, moving through the world and sustaining all with His breath of life.

On Mission Sunday, October 23rd, the shepherds of Asia will make 'virtual visits' to parishes in different member countries to guarantee that deliberations do not remain theoretical and to uphold the duty of building up the Kingdom through loving service. Thus fortified, the FABC will spend the following week discerning and envisioning new pathways for the Church and working for a better Asia, with experts guiding the delegates through new methodologies.

The FABC 50 General Conference is of utmost importance. Its members will commit to becoming and remaining a prophetic, relevant, and responsive Asian Church at the service of the people of Asia. This can only be done by being in communion with all the peoples of Asia, with active participation and adherence to the mission of renewed and shared evangelical outreach. FABC 50 will come to a close on Oct 30th with a new vision mapping the Church's path in Asia through a Message and final Document.

The General Conference will be concluded by H.E. Luis Cardinal Tagle, who has been appointed as delegate by the Holy Father.

The FABC is grateful for the prayers from across Asia. Through the intercession of the Holy Spirit and continued support, the members hope for a successful journey, and the wisdom and strength to carry out their mission.

Opening Eucharist and Ceremonies

PRESS NOTE

12th October 2022

On the 12th of October 2022, at Baan Phu Waan Pastoral Centre, Bangkok, the FABC 50 General Conference opened with a Eucharistic Celebration, presided over by H.E. Charles Cardinal Bo, President of the FABC.

In his homily, H.E. Cardinal Bo gave prominence to the Jubilee year of the FABC as a celebration of the Asian Church. Through the scripture of the Mass and the theme of the FABC General Conference, ‘journeying together as peoples of Asia - and they went a different way’, he emphasized that this was a Pentecostal moment, a star to follow, and a challenge - to journey forward, in step with Jesus. With immense gratitude for all that the Asian Church and the FABC have accomplished, H.E. Cardinal Bo reminded the congregation of the tasks set before the FABC: to be a missionary and proclaiming Church, to engage with the cultures of Asia, to be of one spirit and mind, and challenged them to create a century of Christ and witness in Asia.

The opening ceremonies continued at St John Paul II Hall, where Thailand’s Minister of Culture extended guests a warm welcome, His Excellency Itthiphol Khunpluem, who, highlighting Thailand’s warm atmosphere and values, expressed his pleasure to be hosting the representatives from the Churches in Asia.

H.E. Francis Xavier Cardinal Kriengsak Kovithavanij, Archbishop of Bangkok and Host of the FABC 50 General Conference welcomed all the attendees, emphasizing the importance of being in communion with one another and the message of witnessing God through love for each other. Bishop Joseph Chusak Sirisut, President of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Thailand, reflected on the theme, putting a spotlight on the importance of walking side by side, and the unique opportunity to renew and revitalize the Church in Asia.

H.E. Charles Cardinal Bo expressed his joy at being a guest of Thailand and marked the history being written as the long-awaited General Conference came to fruition. Echoing the call of St. Pope John Paul II, Cardinal Bo reiterated the goals of the FABC, exhorting, 'History beckons; the Spirit moves, onward, Asian Church!'

H.E. Oswald Cardinal Gracias, Archbishop of Bombay and Convenor of the FABC expressed his warm welcome, marking the momentous occasion of the FABC's first General Conference. Reflecting on FABC's history and outlining its upcoming days, Cardinal Gracias invoked the guidance of the Holy Spirit for the conference and wished everyone a successful journey forward.

The opening program was enriched by children from across 11 schools in Thailand. Through virtual story-telling, music, song, and dance, they enacted the history of the Catholic faith in Thailand, showcased the diversity of Asia's many cultures, and topped off the evening with a rousing performance that truly reflected the beauty and diversity of Asia's peoples, working in unison.

His Excellency Itthiphol Khunpluem was gifted a commemorative coin, and the evening closed with a round of photographs and fellowship, followed by dinner.



Welcome Remarks

His Excellency Itthiphol Khunpluem
Minister, Ministry of Culture
Royal Thai Government

Your Eminences, Card. Charles Maung Bo, Card. Oswald Gracias, Card. Francis Xavier Kriengsak Kovithavanij, Card. Michael Michai Kitbunchu, Bishop Joseph Chusak Sirisut, Cardinals, Archbishops, bishops and our honorable guests from the different countries, Sawasdee khráp.

On behalf of the Royal Thai Government, we very pleased and honored to be here at the opening ceremony of the FABC 50 General Conference. As we know Thailand is one of the countries in Asia that live together peacefully and in harmony with all people wherever religion and culture they come from. We live in a harmonious diversity.

Very warm greetings to all Cardinals, Archbishops, Bishops and religious leaders from all the catholic churches in Asian countries. Moreover, we have guests from every continent, from South America, North America, Europe, Africa.

I am happy to welcome you and congratulate you for the FABC General Conference whose members gather here in Thailand. For the Gener-

al Conference, which is your golden jubilee or 50th anniversary, I am very proud to have the opportunity to meet Cardinals, archbishops, bishops, and the representatives from Pope Francis.

This Conference will be held from 12th to the end of October 2022. In Thailand, we have just crossed over the Covid-19 pandemic situations, and that is why, people all over the world are now back to their normal lives. They can now come together, travel and meet in person with one another. For this reason, we can now have the General Conference as a gathering together in person to meet and share experiences among one another here in Thailand. That is why, on behalf of the Royal Thai Government, we are pleased to represent our government and our people of Thailand to this Conference.

The Royal Thai Government promotes all religions in Thailand. We have to realize that people need moral and ethical development, and all religions play essential role in developing human being. National development does not only include the external material or economic aspect. But it is more important to cultivate the spiritual moral and ethical development for the people. Thailand is very much aware of the need to develop these aspects that is why the people is the center in developing the country.

We also emphasize about the moral and ethical human development in our national strategy. Therefore, it is a very impressive opportunity that the Asian Catholic leaders come for their General Conference in Thailand with the goal of searching for the common direction to providing service in Asian countries, particularly in the moral and ethical development for the Thai people.

The Thai government is honored and happy to collaborate with you for the common benefit for all nations. And we hope that all the objectives within this General Conference will be success. May God's grace be with you all the religious delegates for the success of your Conference. Thank you.



Welcome Remarks

H.E. Cardinal Francis Xavier Kriengsak Kovithavanij
Archbishop of Bangkok, Thailand
Co-President, FABC 50 General Assembly

Eminent Cardinals, Excellencies Archbishop, Bishops, brothers and sisters in Christ, especially his Excellency Mr. Etipon Itthiphol Khunpluem Minister, Ministry of Culture, first of all, I wish to welcome all of you to Thailand, our land of smile.

On behalf of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Thailand, I felt honored that members of the 50th FABC General Conference had chosen Thailand Bhan Puu Waan Pastoral Training Center of the Archdiocese of Bangkok as the venue of this conference.

The Catholic Church in Thailand and the Archdiocese of Bangkok have great pleasure to host and collaborate with all of you for this conference. As regards to the theme of this conference, "Journeying together as peoples of Asia" is really in time with the synod and the synodality which Pope Francis encourages the people of God all over the world to proceed in this way. This is very timing for positive action globally as we need as one world

to have common plan of action to reflect the policy of the Catholic Church.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, that I have said on the occasion of this FABC 50 General Conference inauguration day, the 22nd last August, which took place in the Shrines of Blessed Nicholas Bunker Kitbamrung in Bangkok, I would like to underline that we Christians believe in God who is love; One God in Three Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The soul of all communion, and this communion we are going to have a real experience together this day in the meeting hall in our small groups of discussions, during our prayers, and the concelebrations of the holy Eucharist, even also during the time for our coffee break.

I hope that from this day onward, together we can have the experience of this God who is love manifested in Jesus Christ, the risen Lord who is still present among us. Wherever two or three are gathered in unity, in reciprocal love, there God who is love is among them. It is a spiritual presence of the Lord that is so intense that is manifest itself and people can feel it.

Dear brothers in the episcopate, welcome to Thailand, welcome to Bangkok. Finally, I wish you all have a successful conference and have a pleasant stay in Baan Phu Waan.

May God bless you all.



Welcome Remarks

Bishop Joseph Chusak Sirisut

Bishop of Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand

President, Catholic Bishop Conference of Thailand

Sawasdee khráp. Your Excellency Mr. Etipon Itthiphol Khunpluem, Minister, Ministry of Culture of the Royal Thai Government, Your Eminences Card. Charles Maung Bo, Card. Oswald Gracias, Card. Francis Xavier Kriengsak Kovithavanij, Card. Michael Michai Kitbunchu, Cardinals, Archbishops, bishops and all.

Today, Cardinals, Bishops, priests, religious and colleagues of FABC gather here to record a memorable event when 180 bishops met in Manila Philippines in 1970, which is taken as the birth of the FABC. From Manila to Thailand, 50 years has passed, the Churches in Asia walk and grow side by side in the midst of the rapidly changing society.

The Catholic Bishops Conference of Thailand is joyful and happy to welcome all cardinals, bishops, and participants to this General Conference of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. I am also very proud to be part of this important event.

This General Conference will be an important opportunity for the Churches in Asia to renew the Church in Asia to herself, with inspiration from the Gospel of St. Matthew that we walk together as the people of Asia, and they went a different way. It is the most amazing journey of the wise men who travel in the wilderness with suffering and pain, at last they have met the Holy Infant bringing them with great joy and they departed to their own country in another way.

Being conscious of its spiritual dimension, everyone who came to meet Jesus for salvation from him, we discover the new way, and we never return to walk the same way again.

Finally, the church in Asia has discovered the new way of service and taking the journey together as the Peoples of Asia proclaiming the good news of Jesus that brings Salvation to all of us.

May the Holy spirit be with us all in this General Conference so that it will be a great fruitful success in the future according to the will of God.

Sawasdee khráp.



History Beckons: The Spirit Moves Welcome to the Jubilee of Hope to Asian Church

Inaugural Welcome Address of

His Excellency Charles Cardinal Bo

Archbishop of Yangon

President, Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences

With great joy and jubilation on behalf of the FABC I warmly welcome all my brother bishops, priests, sisters and people of God. May the blessings of the living, loving and liberating God Jesus be with us all.

We waited for this moment of grace! This Pentecostal moment! Happy Jubilee.

This is a glorious moment for the Asian Church, the FABC crossing the Golden jubilee. As the third millennium marches along, history beckons and the Spirit moves: together we say: Onward Asian Church! This is the moment for Asia. The Joy of Jubilee may call us to make this century a call to synodality, call to be good news to Asia and the world.

These are moments of Grace and Gratitude. First of all, gratitude to our graceful host Cardinal FRANCIS XAVIER KRIENGSACK KOVITHAVANIJ

and the Thai Church. Let showers of blessings be upon all those who spent days and nights planning and preparing for this event. We feel so blessed to be here.

As the spiritual panorama unfolds in front of us, we are treated to a glittering presence of diverse and colorful people. We thank the Lord for the vibrant diversity of the great continent of Asia, the cradle of great religions, home of great cultures. Welcome to every culture, every language, every country. Let us join together to make this moment, Asia's moment in the Church's history. All plans and hopes find their convergence today.

Every diocese has been preparing for this jubilee in a synodal way for the last few years. I warmly thank all the bishops, religious and priests and the people of God for this participation in communion.

At this jubilee I wish to echo the call of Saint John Paul II whose spirit hovers over our gathering. Participating in the Asian Synod, 1999, the prophetic Pope proclaimed:

The Jubilee is an occasion for proclaiming that “The Savior of the world was born in Asia” (Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, released by Pope John Paul II on November 6, 1996). Yes. We accept that challenge today. Christ, born in Asia, needs to be proclaimed the vast multitude in this biggest continent.

As we gratefully gather to thank the Lord, we are guided by the same Saint John Paul II in our Jubilee celebrations: “To remember the past with gratitude, to live the present with enthusiasm and to look forward to the future with confidence.”

We have much to be thankful for: the Asian theological reflections, the three-fold dialogue with cultures, religions and poor, our attention to women and youth concerns, our collaboration during great challenges, our support to persecuted brothers and sisters, our contribution to health and education in many Asian countries and our ongoing collaboration across the cultures, all that made FABC a robust organization. We are grateful for the people of God in Asia, their

“Let us join together to make this moment, Asia's moment in the Church's history. All plans and hopes find their convergence today.”

steadfastness amidst threats, their generosity amidst challenges, their enthusiasm despite their tiny size in many Asian Countries. They are the light, seed and the yeast of the Asian Church.

When the Pope Saint John Paul calls for living the present with hope, we are reminded of the words of Pope Francis in Myanmar in an inter religious meeting: “For when we speak with one voice in affirming the timeless value of justice, peace and the fundamental dignity of each human person, we offer a word of hope.” As the dream of Christ returning to Asia, the Asian Church is called upon to exhibit an evangelical enthusiasm for justice and peace.

The future calls for a pilgrimage of confidence. History beckons; the Spirit moves us; let us proclaim the missionary call to the Asian Church, let us make this a century of Jesus’ Good News to the whole of Asia. Let us not forget this is the first continent where the Christ message was proclaimed. This is the continent where great men like Apostle Thomas, Francis Xavier and countless men and women generously offered their service in the integral evangelization ministry. Let their example spur

Let this gathering be God’s outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Multiple languages, multiple cultures: let us hear the same language of God’s call in the coming days. Let the Holy Spirit be the animator of our words and actions.

“The future calls for a pilgrimage of confidence. History beckons; the Spirit moves us; let us proclaim the missionary call to the Asian Church, let us make this a century of Jesus’ Good News to the whole of Asia.”

Our task is reflected in the theme of the Jubilee FABC 50: Journeying together as peoples of Asia “... and they went a different way.” (Mt 2:12) which aims to reflect on the “re-emerging and emerging realities and challenges of the Church in Asia.”

Like those wise men from the East, we have come here to encounter Jesus, to be inspired by the mystery of incarnation. Like those men, let the star of hope guide in different ways, but the same destination: the dream of Jesus in establishing a humanity liberated from

**“...let the star of
star of hope guide
in different ways,
but the same
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from the grip of
evil and man-made
disasters.”**

the grip of evil and man-made disasters. Let Mary, the star of Evangelization, the mother of Magnificat, bless every moment of our presence and deliberations. May her intercession make us sing with her at the end of these celebrations: The Lord Has Done Marvels for us.

Before I conclude, on behalf of the whole of the FABC and all present here, let me thank you dear wonderful and generous people of Thailand, the land of smiles, for your magnanimity. A warm welcome to every one of you.

Let the celebrations begin, let the outpouring of the Spirit open our eyes, let our hearts be blessed with the Grace of the Trinitarian missionary zeal.

Thank you.





The Inspiration and Context of the FABC50 Inaugural Welcome Address of

H.E. Oswald Cardinal Gracias

Archbishop of Bombay

Convener, FABC 50 General Conference

Your Eminence Cardinal Charles Bo, President of the Federation of the Asian Bishops Conferences, Your Eminence Cardinal Francis Xavier Kriengsak, Archbishop of Bangkok, our gracious host. His Excellency, the Honorable Minister of Culture, My dear brother Cardinals, my dear brother Archbishops, Bishops, respected officials from the Government of Thailand, members of this assembly: distinguished guests, delegates, and representatives from Asia and beyond, Reverend Fathers and Sisters, ancillary staff and everyone joining us here, both in person and virtually. Warm greetings and a hearty welcome to each one of you. I wish to especially greet those who are joining us online. A special welcome to you. Thank you for joining us.

Today marks a momentous step in the journey of the Federation of

Asian Bishops' Conferences. We come together in the spirit of Synodality to conduct our first-ever General Conference. We have had several Plenary Assemblies - 11 of them. We met every few years. Every participant carries cherished memories of those enriching meetings, most recently at Colombo. Before that, in Vietnam, and earlier in Manila, in South Korea, and in the year 2000, in this very place, Baan Phu Waan, in Samphran Bangkok. So, we are coming after 22 years for a big meeting like this.

The day has arrived for us General Conference after over three years of preparation, slowed down naturally because of the Pandemic, but never really stopped. And after years of consultation, even before that, today, history is being made as we celebrate and begin the First Ever General Conference of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. Pope Francis has sent us a very encouraging message, a message with direction and assurance. We are all aware that two and a half weeks is a long time to be away from our dioceses. Hence, we had earlier designed it for four (4) weeks being patterned after the South American model. But there were many complaints, so we reduced it to three weeks. There were still many complaints, so we reduced it further to two and a half weeks. Complaints still but we decided to ignore the complaints. So, we will be here for two and a half weeks.

Our host Card. Kriengsak and his team has made very special efforts to make us comfortable over here. We are the first beneficiaries of the renovated facilities at Baan Phu Waan. Thank you, your Eminence, and thank you Fr. Suphot the Director of the Center. All of us who came a day earlier have, within a day, realized that our stay over here, is magnificent because the arrangements are excellent. We are grateful to the Cardinal and to the Thai Bishops' Conference. Thank you, Thai Bishops' Conference. And for all of us, it is a special joy to see among the participants of the assembly, and we hope he will come with us often, the presence of Cardinal Michael Michai Kitbunchu, an ardent supporter always of the FABC. Thank you, your Eminence.

We are here for two and a half weeks, and I think we are expecting a feast. I think it will be a feast intellectually and spiritually. There is an air of expectancy and anticipation among all of us. Today the Pope has sent a message also encouraging us, we have a video conference scheduled. And on the last day we will have a video message again from the Secretary General

of the United Nations.

Thailand is a land of tourism. For the next three days, we will be spending in religious tourism. Every country will give us a description, challenges and opportunities, its beauty and the areas where things can go wrong from 29 countries that belong to the FABC. It promises to be really a virtual feast with an excellent media team borrowed from one of the Archdioceses of India, with their help, we will visit all these countries. Next week will be a week of applied theology. A further discussion on the emerging realities in our countries and experts with the help of church documents, will explain to us, reflect with us, what the Church advises us to do in these circumstances.

And the last week will be special, they went by a different way and will use a different way to search this new way. The first two days, we will speak and study and discuss among ourselves about the path we have got to follow. The theme “in a different way” refers to the Magi, inspired by the spirit, they went a different way after they met the Christ child. We hope too to meet the Christ child and find this new way for ourselves. At same time we will also discuss the restructuring of the FABC. This will be a big challenge, we want the FABC that is vibrant, energetic, effective, and beautiful adapted to the needs of 2022 and even beyond, a decade and beyond more.

Therefore, we hope to conclude a message to the Peoples of Asia, a final document, which we will refer even after the Conference like the synod. We just celebrated the Eucharist, giving praise and thanks, and petitioning the

“We acknowledge the grief the pain. the loss, the suffering. and the isolation that we all went through but from which we hopefully emerged spiritually stronger.”

Lord. After this \ inaugural ceremony, we have a festive dinner to follow the Paschal meal. Tomorrow, we begin real business. Have a happy, enjoyable and fruitful stay in Baan Phu Waan. Fruitful for us, fruitful for the peoples of Asia.

Thank you very much. God bless.

Video Message from **His Holiness, Pope Francis** for the FABC 50 General Conference



Dear brothers,

Members of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference, you began the meeting of Bishops in 1970, and when my predecessor Saint Paul VI visited Asia, he found a continent of great masses, made up largely of young people, and Asia was acknowledged as the home of diverse cultures and religions.

The Bishops noted that the masses were awakening from fatalism to a life worthy of man; the young people were also awakening, they were idealistic, aware, concerned, impatient and restless; culturally diverse societies were awakening to become a true community of peoples.

This meant that the Church in Asia was being called to be more authentically the Church of the poor, the Church of the young, and a Church in dialogue with fellow Asians of other denominations.

“...the Church in Asia was being called to be more authentically the Church of the poor, the Church of the young, and a Church in dialogue with fellow Asians of other denominations.”

You will now come together, and I wish to accompany you in some way in the work of fraternity and exchange of ideas that you will carry out. It is important for the Regional Conferences to meet with some consistency, as in doing so the Church is formed, is strengthened along the way, and the fundamental question is: What is the Spirit saying to the Churches in Asia? And that is what you must answer.

Go forward, let the laity assume their baptism, their function as laypersons, and let the singularity of each one be respected, because the universal Church is not the uniform Church, no: she is universal, with respect for the particularity of every Church.

God bless you. I pray for you, and you, pray for me. Thank you.

“Go forward, let the laity assume their baptism, their function as laypersons, and let the singularity of each one be respected...””





Vote of Thanks

Archbishop Isao Kikuchi, SVD

Secretary General, FABC

Your Eminences, Your Graces, Your Excellencies, Honorable guests, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ. It is my privilege to have been asked to give the vote of thanks on this occasion of the opening ceremony of the FABC 50 General Conference.

First and foremost, we are most grateful to the Holy Father, Pope Francis, who personally showed his interest in our conference by sending his message, and also his envoy in the person of His Eminence, Louis Antonio Cardinal Tagle.

Because of the present challenging health situation caused by the pandemic of Covid-19, there would be no need to mention that the planning and organizing of the General Conference was not an easy task for the organizing committee members. For this reason, we sincerely express our gratitude to His Eminence Cardinal Oswald Gracias, Cardinal Charles Bo, the Adjunct Secretary Bishop Allwyn D'Silva, and the entire members of the organizing committee who met at least once a week on Mondays on-line for the past two plus years to put the idea of celebrating the 50th anniversary

into reality. Also, all the Executive Secretaries of the various FABC offices for their contribution.

Adding to the anniversary commemoration, in 2021, the Synod came in so that the Synodal Path also had to be included in the consideration for the direction of the preparation, even though, FABC had already included the Synodal way as our *modus operandi* from the beginning.

At the same time, we are also deeply grateful to our welcoming local host, His Eminence, Cardinal Francis Xavier Kriengsak Kovithavanij, the Archbishop of Bangkok, and the Bishops' Conference of Thailand, and the entire Catholic Church of Thailand for hosting this event and for giving all necessary support to realize the conference. We have already experienced the smiling hospitality upon our arrival, and, very grateful for the airport logistics which is not easy to arrange for so many.

We are also grateful to the Government of Thailand for welcoming us to this beautiful country and assisting our arrival needs, and, to the Minister of Culture who has graced us with his presence and kind words this evening.

We should not forget all the partners within and out of Asia who have been supporting this conference spiritually and materially. Without your generous support, we are not able to gather today. I hope we will be able to meet the expectation of our donors through our 20 days of sharing, reflection, deepening and planning for the future of FABC.

On my own behalf and on your behalf, I must give a big applause to Fr. William LaRousse, Assistant Secretary General of FABC, together with the FABC Central Secretariat Staff for their dedicated service for all of us. Thank you, Father Bill and your staff.

In conclusion, I would like to express my deep gratitude to all of you who traveled all the way from every part of Asia to join this memorable and historical General Conference. Your contributions for the next 20 days are keys for the future of FABC. Happy stay and enjoy your fraternity and, of course, enjoy Thailand.







**ORIENTATION AND
VISITING ASIA**

PRESS NOTE

13TH OCTOBER 2022

The first day of the FABC General Conference, 13th October 2022, began with H.E. Orlando Cardinal Quevedo's celebration of the Eucharist. At St Michael's Hall, H.E. Charles Cardinal Bo led the congregation in the Adsumus, with the Morning Prayer prepared by the Philippines, which was conducted by the Daughters of St Paul.



An introduction to Baan Phu Waan Pastoral Centre, the home of the General Conference, was provided by Fr. Suphot Rueksujarit, Rector of Baan Phu Waan, who gave an insight into the vibrant history and mission of the Centre. Fr. Nigel Barret, from the FABC Press Office, provided a technical orientation to the representatives.

H.E. Oswald Cardinal Gracias, providing context for the creation and purpose of the FABC, outlined the proceedings and structure for the upcoming days of the Conference. He asked the gathered representatives to join in a short remembrance for those lost to the Covid 19 pandemic and closed with a small prayer, with wishes for a fruitful Conference.

H.E. Cardinal Gracias also introduced the members and invited input on the FABC commissions: the Commissions involved in the planning and organizing the General Conference, the Commission for the Final Message, and the Commission for the Final Document. H.E. Cardinal Bo added words of encouragement and invoked the intercession of the Holy Spirit to guide the conference representatives.

The first segment of the conference, ‘Visiting Asia,’ began with reports on the emerging realities from the countries of Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Brunei, and Nepal, and the three Rites from the country of India (Syro-Malabar, Syro-Malankara, and Latin Rites).

The representatives of each country highlighted the various concerns and challenges faced by the Church and community, speaking passionately about their histories and the work of the Church. Showing support and concern and seeking understanding from each other, the representatives will work together to find a path forward, fulfilling the purpose of the conference.

Aloysius John of Caritas Internationalis gave the gathered audience an overview of Caritas’ purpose throughout Asia, the challenges set before the organization in carrying out its mission in a post-pandemic world, and what role Caritas and its network could play as part of the Church.

The first day concluded with representatives breaking into groups for the workshop discussions and reflections based on all they had learned from the reports. H.E. Cardinal Bo led the gathered audience in the evening prayer, bringing the day to a close.



Background, Nature, and Objectives of the FABC 50 General Conference

H.E. Oswald Cardinal Gracias

Archbishop of Bombay

Convener, FABC 50 General Conference

Most of us are surely aware that this General Conference has been years in the making. May I briefly go through that lengthy process mainly to recognize how the Synodality and Fraternity that was put into the preparatory phase has enabled us to be here today with joy, hope, enthusiasm, and expectation. Thus, we can also document the history of the Conference.

All Participants at recent global ecclesial events will have noticed how Bishops in South America have invariably been referring to Puebla, Medellin, and now Aparecida in their reflections. Today, rare is a Church document emerging from South America that does not refer to Aparecida. These names refer to the all-important decennial Conferences organized by CELAM, the Federation of Latin American Episcopal Conferences - the Latin American equivalent of the FABC. Pope Francis, then Cardinal Bergoglio of Buenos Aires, was the main architect of the Aparecida final document. How much that document has influenced the Pope is seen in the

many references to *Aparecida in Evangelii Gaudium*. Speaking at one of our meetings, the Holy Father stated that *Evangelii Gaudium*, among the first documents issued by him, outlines the pastoral priorities he wishes to set for the Church of today. The question, therefore, arises: isn't it time for the FABC to have something similar in Asia? What helped South America can surely help Asia. Would such a Conference not help our Churches in Asia to renew and revitalize our pastoral thrust so that the Church could become what the Lord calls her to be? A vibrant Church working for a better Asia.

After discussing this with the past presidents of CELAM, especially the much remembered and recently departed of the Lord, Cardinal Claudio Hummes, we collected suggestions for organizing such a conference. Since it was an International Conference, it was necessary to get the Holy See's approval. I shared this proposal with Pope Francis who enthusiastically gave wholehearted support and encouragement and invited us to go ahead with the planned General Conference for Asia. The idea was formally presented at our Central Committee Meeting and was unanimously approved. Details had to be worked out, so we began discussing the material requirements, refining the concept, and planning the logistics.

I shared this idea with Cardinal Tagle, then still in Manila, and then we shared the idea with members of the FABC Office of Theological Concerns. Ideas crystallized, and it was pointed out that we were going to meet on the 50th anniversary of the First Asian Meeting of Bishops on the occasion of St. Pope Paul VI's visit to Manila. We had found a special occasion that called for a celebration, which was named FABC 50.

Then things moved swiftly. Bishop Allwyn D'silva was appointed Secretary for this General Conference, and our Office for Theological Concerns members constituted the first Core Committee with which we began brainstorming. I want to single out Misereor and its President, Msgr. Pirmin Spiegel and its past president, Msgr. Josef Sayer, who, together with Dr. Ulrich Fusser several times especially, came down to Rome to discuss the idea with me and take it forward. Their role in assuring support and sharing their personal experiences in Latin America with CELAM was crucial initially. So, too, we need the assistance of our late Fr. Raymond O'Toole, then FABC Secretary General, who meticulously prepared the material we needed for our discussions and regularly gave good practical advice.

Bishop Allwyn quickly organized Regional Meetings. Their conclusions were condensed in a Consultation Paper so that our General Conference could be conveniently held in 2020 to mark the FABC's Golden Jubilee.

The COVID-19 pandemic hit us badly, and many lives were lost. We also lost several of our confreres - brother bishops. We acknowledge the grief and the pain, the loss, the suffering, and the isolation that we all went through but from which we hopefully emerged spiritually stronger. We adapted in response to the new circumstances. Though we were compelled to postpone FABC 50 more than once, our planning continued online. From 2020 until last week, the core group, now evolved into an expanded Organizing Committee, has met digitally two to three times each month, usually on Mondays. Fr. William LaRousse, the Assistant Secretary General of the FABC, kept detailed notes both before and after the meeting, and thus, our documentation is complete.

Our FABC 50 Guide Document was released in November 2020, and your responses to it will be synthesized in an FABC Paper published thereafter. These papers have helped us come to FABC 50 better prepared to fulfill the theme “going by a different way,” just as the Magi did, guided by the Holy Spirit, after their meeting with the Christ Child.

We inaugurated FABC 50 on the Feast of the Queenship of Mary, confident in her intercession for the FABC. We started a campaign of prayer, praying for the success of the General Conference, especially at Sunday Masses.

The process intensifies from today, October 12th, until the 30th of the month. In particular, the Bishop Members of this Assembly will undertake, with great responsibility, the monumental purpose of FABC 50—reaffirming, renewing, and revitalizing the Church in Asia, a Church living and working for a better Asia.

Our first three days will be spent in “visiting Asia.” All the twenty-nine countries belonging to the FABC have been invited to present an exposition of the present situation in their countries: political, social, economic, religious, and any other special challenges for the Catholic Church. While these are not being live-streamed as they are aimed at the

Conference participants, we look forward to our online interactions during the Talk Show on Sundays. Details will be available on the FABC 50 website. Sunday, October 16, will be the link between our “visiting Asia” and the next week when we will have a six-day in-depth study of the special challenges in Asia. On Sunday, we will interact with several people in the field and those directly affected by new realities in Asia.

From October 17th to 22nd, we will reflect on and deepen our understanding of the emerging realities impacting the Churches in Asia, and we will do so in dialogue with recent papal documents. The Guide Document and subsequent consultations have already highlighted these realities - the pandemic, globalization, digitalization, urbanization, climate change, the migrant crises, political governance, a transformation of cultures and religions in our society, changing family values - and the issues of gender; indigenous people, yearnings of the youth, how our human dignity is being impacted and how the Church is also being transformed. In the coming weeks, we will connect these realities with reflections on the latest documents of Pope Francis, especially *Evangelii Gaudium*, *Fratelli Tutti*, *Laudato Si'*, *Amoris Laetitia*, and *Predicate Evangelium*. We will not just have talks on these realities but focus on the lessons we need to learn for us, as a Church in Asia, to respond to them. In this digital age, several sections will have virtual voting as we explore how to revitalize the life of the Church. This revitalization must necessarily come about through new pathways - new pathways for the pastoral care of families, for worship, formation, and the digital ministry, for dialogue, peacebuilding, and reconciliation, for giving urgency to the voice of youth, for the role of women in the Church, for proclaiming the Gospel through interreligious dialogue, for leading and governing the Church in a synodal way.

To effectively do so, we will intersperse our meetings, workshops, and sessions with moments of silence and recollection, as well as readings from Scripture. Pope Francis has taught us the importance of silence. After every few interventions at the World Synod of Bishops, which many thought strange at the beginning, the four-minute silence has now become an invaluable asset, a necessity for us to assimilate and personalize what had just been shared. This ensures that we remain guided by the Holy Spirit, our Comforter and Paraclete, who is ever present with us, moving through the world and sustaining us with His breath of life. On Mission Sunday, October 23rd, the shepherds of Asia will be making virtual visits to parishes

in different Asian countries to galvanize ourselves with the “smell of the sheep” to guarantee that our deliberations do not remain just theoretical and deviate from our duty of building up the Kingdom through loving service.

Thus fortified, we will go on to spend the first few days of the following week discerning and envisioning new pathways for the Church working for a better Asia. An expert will guide us using a new methodology. I cannot stress how vital our role at this General Conference is. We are undertaking to become and remain a prophetic, relevant, and responsive Asian Church at the service of the people of Asia. We cannot do this without being in communion with all of you people of Asia, without the active participation of members of this assembly, and without adhering to our mission of renewed and shared evangelical outreach. I know everyone will be praying throughout this time for the success of the FABC 50 General Conference. Thank you, and please continue to do so even more fervently during this phase.

We need the guidance of the Holy Spirit to proceed with courage and perseverance, with wisdom and vision, identifying the priorities of the Church in Asia and restructuring the FABC as needed. May we have the courage to let go when things need to be changed, the wisdom to discover new paths to fulfill our mission, and the strength to walk along these new paths.

By the end of that week, October 30, FABC 50 will come to a close, articulating a new vision of the Church’s way in Asia through a Message and Final Document. Plans for a restructured FABC will also have been finalized, or at least a direction for the set. Cardinal Luis Tagle has been appointed by the Holy Father as his delegate, and he will formally conclude our Conference.

But let me emphasize that this is not where we disembark and disperse. Our journey continues. Next year, we will further commit ourselves to reflect on the new pathways and directions that will emerge at this General Conference, both during the annual FABC Central Committee Meeting and at the Asian Continental Synod, which will take place in March 2023. Our final FABC 50 statement will be worked upon in the coming months, and we will commit ourselves to putting into operation the new pathways, thus revitalizing the Church in Asia in the years ahead and into the next decade.

My dear friends, may I request you to recite the FABC prayer in all Sunday Masses until the end of the Conference? Let us celebrate together during this grace-filled time by often singing the Song of Asia. May the heart of the Asian Church throb with the music of the Song of Asia.

May the Lord direct our hearts, minds, and selves and permit us to be co-creators of a future of peace, joy, and hope. May Mary, the Mother of the Church, and her blessed spouse, Saint Joseph the Worker, intercede for us. May God grant us a revitalized Asian Church that will emerge after this General Conference. May the Triune God bless each and every one of us as we actualize FABC 50! Onwards, we march together in Synodality in the General Conference FABC 50, which, we are confident, will make a difference to Asia. I wish you a happy and fruitful stay in Baan Phu Waan! Thank you.

An introduction to Baan Phu Waan Pastoral Centre, the home of the General Conference, was provided by Fr Suphot Rueksujarit, Rector of Baan Phu Waan, who gave an insight into the vibrant history and mission of the Centre. Fr Nigel Barret, from the FABC Press Office, provided a technical orientation to the representatives.

H.E. Oswald Cardinal Gracias, providing context for the creation and purpose of the FABC, outlined the proceedings and structure for the upcoming days of the Conference. He asked the gathered representatives to join in a short remembrance for those lost to the Covid 19 pandemic, and closed with a small prayer, with wishes for a fruitful Conference.

H.E. Cardinal Gracias also introduced the members, and invited input on, the commissions of the FABC; the Commissions involved in the planning and organisation of the General Conference, and the Commission for the Final Message and Commission for the Final Document. H.E. Cardinal Bo added words of encouragement and invoked the intercession of the Holy Spirit to guide the representatives of the Conference.

The first segment of the conference, 'Visiting Asia', began with reports on the emerging realities from the countries of Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Brunei, Nepal and the three Rites from the country of India (Syro-Malabar, Syro-Malankara and Latin Rites).

The representatives of each country highlighted the various concerns and challenges faced by the Church and community, speaking with passion about their histories and the work of the Church. Showing support, concern, and seeking understanding from each other, the representatives will work together to find a path forward, fulfilling the purpose of the conference.

Aloysius John, of Caritas Internationalis, gave the gathered audience an overview of Caritas' purpose throughout Asia, and the challenges set before the organisation; carrying out their mission in a post-pandemic world, and what role Caritas and its network could play as part of the Church.

The session for the first day concluded with representatives breaking into groups for the workshop discussions and reflections, based on all they had learned from the reports. H.E. Cardinal Bo led the gathered audience in the evening prayer, bringing the day to a close.



Visiting Asia - Day 2

PRESS NOTE

14TH OCTOBER 2022

The second day of the FABC General Conference, 14th October 2022, began with a celebration of the Eucharist by His Beatitude Baselios Cardinal Cleemis.

At St Michael's Hall, H.E. Oswald Cardinal Gracias led the representatives in the Adsumus and the prayers for the day. He read out a message from His Holiness Pope Francis and welcomed all to the second day of the Conference.

Each day, the morning prayer was culturally unique and made from various countries. Today's morning prayer conducted by the Daughters of St Paul from the Pauline Province in India.

The Conference continued with the segment 'Visiting Asia,' which featured reports on emerging realities from Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Timor Leste, South Korea, Malaysia, and Singapore. The representatives of each country gave their listeners the opportunity to find commonalities and explore differences between their countries, working together to journey onward.

Archbishop Gintaras Linas Grusas, representing the CCEE, gave the representatives a comparative overview of the Church in Europe, its hopes, and the tasks it will need to undertake for the journey forward, taking inspiration from the topics discussed at the FABC General Conference.

The second session concluded with representatives reforming their groups for the workshop discussions and reflections, at the end of which they collated data for collection. H.E. Cardinal Gracias led the gathered audience in the evening prayer, bringing the day to a close.







Visiting Asia - Day 3

PRESS NOTE

15TH OCTOBER 2022

The third day of the FABC General Conference, 15th October 2022, began with a celebration of the Eucharist by H.E. Joseph Cardinal Coutts. Noting the importance of listening to each other as minorities, Cardinal Coutts reminded each one to give thanks, have hope, and follow the call to holiness from the heart.

At St Michael's Hall, H.E. Francis Xavier Cardinal Kriengsak Kovithavanij, Archbishop of Bangkok and President for the day's sessions, led the representatives in the Adsumus. Reflecting on Cardinal Coutts' homily, Cardinal Kriengsak emphasized the importance of evangelizing



through word and deed and bringing the Gospel into daily life. Reassuring his listeners that Jesus was among them, he welcomed all to the third day. The morning prayer, hosted by the country of Pakistan, was conducted by the Daughters of St Paul, who led the representatives in song and reflection through video.

The Conference continued with the segment ‘Visiting Asia,’ with reports on the emerging realities from Japan, Taiwan, Vietnam, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Myanmar, and Hong Kong. The representatives of each country added context to the history, successes, and challenges their people faced, seeking understanding and providing listening ears.

The delegates reformed their groups for the workshop discussions, at the end of which they collated data for collection.



Most Reverend Oscar Azarcón Solís, representative of the USCCB, shared a message from its President, commending the efforts of the FABC and his wishes for a fruitful Conference. Reverend Solís provided an overview

of the Church in the US, noted the shared aspirations, and, reassuring the representatives of the USCCB’s communion with the FABC, wished the gathered representatives a success in their endeavors.

Catholic Safeguarding Institute’s Doctor Gabriel Dy-Liacco, President, and Monsignor Ramon Masculino, Jr, Ecclesial Relations Director, and Safeguarding Spirituality Specialist, shone a light on the Institute’s work and mission and its importance in the current scenario, urging the representatives to take definite action in their home countries.

Fr. Clarence Devadass presented a synthesis of the group responses to the country reports, collating them into four major categories: joys, concerns, the Church’s response, and what changes the FABC can bring about.

The third and final day of the segment ‘Visiting Asia’ concluded with H.E. Cardinal Kriengsak leading the evening prayer.





Holy Eucharist and Talk Show with Asia

PRESS NOTE
16TH OCTOBER 2022

The first Sunday of the General Conference, 16th October 2022, began with morning prayers and a celebration of the Eucharist at St Michael's Hall, Baan Phu Waan.

The Eucharist was celebrated by H.E. William Cardinal Goh, Archbishop of Singapore. In his homily, Cardinal Goh took inspiration from the readings, which provided principles and a way forward. He reminded his listeners that it was their responsibility to stand firm as shepherds of the Church, to fulfill their roles as discerners, guided wholly by the Holy Spirit. Calling his audience to be witnesses, to be true to their conscience, and to act when the time is right, Cardinal Goh stressed the importance of prayer and the clergy and laity journeying onward together.

The gathered representatives and delegates attended a live virtual 'Talk Show' with 16 panelists from 13 countries of Asia, who came from myriad walks of life and were invited to shine a light on the many realities they represented, including laity, religious men, and women, inter-faith marriage, family, single parenting, politics, aging, the differently abled, women, indigenous people, victims of climate change, the aftermath of terror attacks, and business relations.

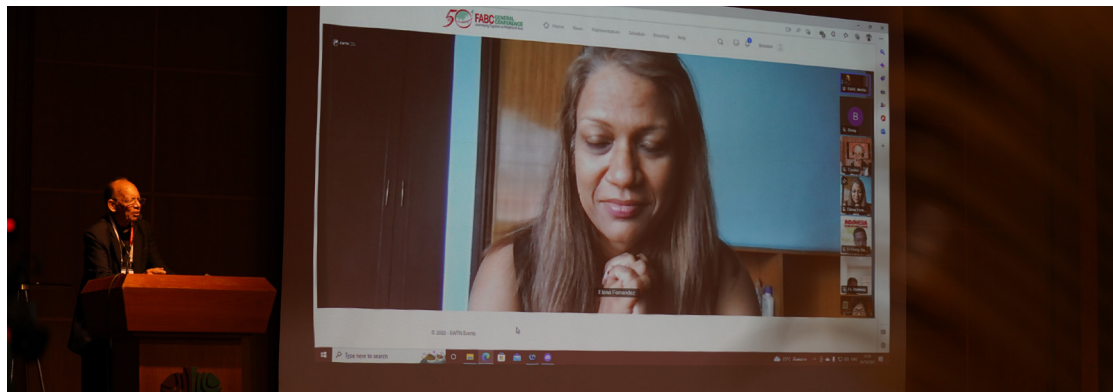
In his introduction to the talk show, Bishop Allwyn D'silva asked his audience to consider, 'Who can I be a neighbor to?' He requested that they listen with an open ear. The panelists left their audience with valuable insights and potent messages of hope. In his message thanking the panelists, H.E. Oswald Cardinal Gracias said, 'Our hearts beat with you.'

Talk Show with Asia

An essential part of the FABC 50 General Conference is the virtual dialogue and conversation of the bishops with various individuals coming from different sectors in Asia. The aim of the interaction is for the bishops to listen to their struggles, hopes and aspirations for the Church in Asia, and respond to their questions, “to become aware of the current and emerging realities and challenges confronting Asia and the Church” in order to better see “the face of Jesus in Asia” and “envision new pathways of service and journeying together as peoples of Asia.”

Moderators of the Virtual Talk Show are Ms. Wendy M. Louis (Singapore) and Pablito A. Baybado, Jr (Philippines).

Video link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jdZoxmXYwNo>





Concluding Message of His Eminence Oswald Cardinal Gracias

Thank you very much each of you, and those who joined us from their homes. We are grateful to you. We wish we have more time for interaction with you, and we are fascinated with your sharing. I want to thank each one personally on behalf of all our bishops and cardinals, and all those who are participating in this Conference.

Maurice, Fr. Warnakulasuriya, Sr. Mieko, Andrew, Richard, Elena, Rodrick and Monica, John, Fr. Stanislaus, Chanthavisouk, Congressman Jude, Sanjeeb, John, Johnnie, Naeng, Fr. Domini and Cookie, thank you so much. I have kept Cookie Lewis last because I want to tell you; all of us love you, we love you very much. Cookie you are wonderful, and you have really touched the hearts of each one of us.

We are grateful to you for having allowed us to come into your homes, to your convents, to your presbyteries. We have been visiting Asia—making a tour in Asia—through the Conferences Reports for the last three days. But I think our Talk Show in is the icing on the cake. This was the best part of it because we already got an idea of what you are. Thank you, thank you once again for the trouble that you took to come to us.

I want to say to each one of you that your aspirations, your heartfelt feelings are what we feel. Our hearts beat with you. We understand our youth. We have heard the same plea during the Synod on the Youth: “Be our friend, listen to us.” I want to say to Elena, many questions were raised to you, you inspired us by what you have said. I want to tell you that, do not for a moment think that you are outside of the Church. I do not know why you felt that way. I was whispering to Bishop Alwyn who sitting next to me, “Why is she saying this? Because you are us, you are the church. You are at the heart of the church, and you are right inside. We thank you for what you are doing. We are grateful you. You are really an evangelist, an apostle, and we want to encourage you to carry on. There are difficulties and misunderstanding always that will happen.

To all the others, Congressman Jude, thank you for giving that incentive to us that politics is also important, and that the church and the state should work together. We should really get more of our people to get into politics. I want to say to Andrew, your whole encouragement of having a new vision and getting businessmen also into the work of evangelization. I am not replying to each one individually because of lack of time. To all of you, I want to say thank you.

All of us Bishops have now understand and feel that the Conference Reports are very much complemented and filled up by what you all have said. The two have gone together. I want to ask all of you, and all those who are with you who have been watching to continue praying for us because we are going to carry on our tasks for two more weeks. In the next two weeks, we will continue to look at Asia and go to specific situations, reflect on, and hope that, at the end, we will come back rejuvenated.

Thank you and great gratitude to all of you. All that we can give you is our own prayers and blessings, and I am asking all the Bishops to stand up and, give a blessing, together with me, to all the participants of this program.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the Church in Asia. Thank you for the Church in all our 29 countries of Asia. We ask you to send your Spirit continuously on them. We thank you for the most precious gift that each of us in our churches have: The presence of Jesus, Our Lord, Our Master, Our King of our hearts, and Our Friend, Our Companion, Our Strength, who gives us courage every moment. Inspire the church in Asia to go ahead as you want us to build the kingdom of God as you want us to. Make all our lay people our partners in this big project of rebuilding the kingdom of God.

Bless them, all those who took part in this video conference and bless their families, their dear ones, anybody who may be sick, may be old, needing help, strengthen them. Once again, we pray to you to revitalize the Church in Asia. And all these we pray through Christ Our Lord. Amen

Now to all the participants, the Bishops are giving a joint blessing

for you, all your dear ones, and all the countries in Asia.

The Lord be with you. May the blessing of almighty God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit come down on you and remain with you forever. Amen.

Thank you very much. Before we end, I want to thank our excellent moderators, Miss Wendy and Prof. Bong. Thank you also to our media team. You did a fantastic job. Thank you once again. Finally, Cookie, thank you very much. God bless you Cookie, we love you.

The Panelists for the Talk Show in Asia are the following:

1. Youth (Taiwan): Mr. Maurice Kung, I am a third-year student in History and currently studying at Taiwan National ChengChi University (NCCU). I serve as the President of the NCCU Catholic Students' Association.

2. Religious Men (Sri Lanka): Rev. Fr. Warnakulasuriya Weerakonda Arachchige Dilan Anura Fores Fernando, SSS is a Provincial Superior of the Blessed Sacrament Congregation for two consecutive mandates in the Province of Christ the Bread of Life Sri Lanka from April 2014 to September 2022

3. Religious Women (Japan): Sr. Mieko Uno, Sr. RSCJ is a Provincial of Japan Province, Religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus from 2019 to present.

4. Business person (South Korea): Andrew Kyungsug Lee is Founder and CEO of the following companies: Kvision Inc., Nport Inc., and 3R Inc., Conductor of Parish youth choirs & Executive Secretary of Poi Parish Pastoral Council.

5. Indigenous People (Myanmar): Mr. Richard Win Tun Kyi served as KMSS national director for 10 year, Senior BOD member and Localization & Advocacy focal of KMSS. Currently serving in CBCM as Executive Coordinator of Nation Building Strategic Plan of (CBCM)

6. Single Parent (Singapore): Elena Fernandez is a Facilitator

for Surviving Divorce, a programme by Rose Sweet, Archdiocese Commission for the Family, March 2018-present).

7. Mixed/Interfaith Marriages (India): Mr. Rodrick Stephen Natal and Monica Suresh. Monica is a Hindu and Rodrick is a Catholic, married in February 20, 2022.

8. Laity (Vietnam): John Peter Ta Dinh Vui is married to Martina Pham Phi Phuong. Peter is a Country Servant of Missionary Families of Christ in Viet Nam (joined on 1993, Couples For Christ at that time). He is also working for the Catechumenate and Marriage Preparation in Saigon Archdiocese, and a Member of the National Episcopal Pastoral Commissions for Family., and for Laity.

9. Victims of Climate Change (Indonesia): Fr. Stanislaus Ferry Sutrisno Widjaja is a Laudato Si' Animator Training by Fr Pedro Walpole SJ in Bukidnon (2018), a Founder of Eco Learning Camp Bandung in 2014, and a Full time ministry in interfaith ecological awareness training since 2014.

10. Family (Laos): Ms Chanthavisouk Nirasay is an Administrative Officer in Haakkeo School (Private school), and a Personal Assistant to the UNDP Resident Representative, Vientiane

11. Politician (Philippines): Congressman Jude Avorque Acidre is a member of the House of Representative of the Republic of the Philippines and co-founded in 2015 the Tingog Party List. His key advocacies include education and alternative learning, proactive youth development, civic participation, good governance, inclusive economic growth, and wider social service delivery.

12. Social Worker (Bangladesh): Sanjeeb Drong is General Secretary of the national platform of indigenous peoples, Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples Forum. An Expert Member of the Parliamentary Caucus on Indigenous Peoples and Minorities. A Thematic Committee Member of National Human Rights Commission, Bangladesh on Ethnic and Religious Minorities and Business and Human Rights

13. Differently Abled (Pakistan): Cookie Lewis is 33 years old who has lived with the sisters in her entire life.

14. Migrant/Refugee (Thailand): Mr. John Jirawat Chenpasuk John is a Thai native speaker, is originally from the computer field, studied in Sydney, Australia. He started his humanitarian work with the Catholic Office for Emergency Relief and Refugees (COERR) since 2000. After the restructuring of Caritas Thailand in 2009, he has been working as a Program Coordinator of Caritas Thailand at its National Secretariat to present. John has been working in coordination with COERR and the National Catholic Commission on Migration (NCCM) in response to migrant and refugee issues in Thailand.

15. Women (Malaysia): Jannie Lasimbang is a state legislative assembly member of the Kapayan constituency from the Democratic Action Party (DAP). She is a member of the United Nations Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; a Commissioner with the Malaysian Human Rights Commission; Secretary General of the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact and also the Secretary General of the Indigenous Peoples Network of Malaysia.

16. Human Trafficking Victim (Cambodia): Naeng Krohorn is 31 years old living in Kampong Cham Province, Cambodia.

17. Ageing (Hong Kong): Fr. Domini Lui, Director of Bioethics Research Center.







**EMERGING REALITIES AND
THE CHURCH IN ASIA**

**DAY 1
OCTOBER 17, 2022**

PRESS NOTE

17TH OCTOBER 2022

Monday of the second week of the FABC General Conference, 17th October 2022, began with a celebration of the Eucharist by H.E. Patrick Cardinal D’Rozario, CSC.

At St Michael’s Hall, H.E. Charles Cardinal Bo, President of the day’s sessions, led the representatives in the prayer for the FABC, and the morning prayer was hosted virtually by the country of Bangladesh. An orientation was conducted by H.E. Oswald Cardinal Gracias, who explained how the sessions of the week would follow the themes of Papal documents and would reflect the emerging realities of Asia.

Members of the Office of Theological Concerns of the FABC, Bishop Gerald Matthias, a moral theologian, and Fr. Nguyen Hai Tinh SJ, teacher of dogmatic theology at the Catholic Institute of Vietnam, presented ‘A post-pandemic Church and the Body of Christ.’ Speaking about the setbacks the pandemic caused and, more importantly, the opportunities it provided, Bishop Matthias elucidated how the body of Christ - the Church - has suffered, but healing could emerge. Fr Tinh explained how the pandemic revealed that the Church is vulnerable to pain, suffering, and change but is a Church of Paschal mystery and Synodality, moving towards healing and togetherness. Bishop Matthias also presented new pastoral pathways revealed by the pandemic - programs of dialogue, formation, digital evangelization, ecological conservation, and reviving the liturgy to be personal to each person.

Next, Atty. Antonio La Viña, lawyer, educator, and environmental policy expert, and Ms. Ridhima Pandey, an environmental activist from India, spoke on ‘The Climate Crisis and its Impact in Asia.’ Updating his audience about the current status of the climate crisis, Atty. La Viña stressed the utmost importance of turning back the worst effects of the climate crisis while still possible. Calling the representatives to play a role of stewardship and leadership, he put forward a set of action points for the Church, ranging from global to local plans, suggesting *Laudato Si’* and *Fratelli Tutti* as frameworks to build on.

Outlining the story of ecological devastation in her home state, Ms. Ridhima Pandey described her efforts in campaigning for all the children impacted by the climate crisis. Underlining the need for widespread change, how today's children were out on the streets taking action because the older generation had not, she exhorted, 'every single degree (of global warming) matters... we need your help.' Ms. Pandey also introduced the film 'The Letter,' a message from Pope Francis to the world addressing youth action and the climate crisis, which was screened for the representatives later in the evening.

Bishop Allwyn D'Silva, former head of the Climate Change Desk of FABC, followed, presenting on the topic 'Laudato Si': A Call for Responsible Stewardship.' Requesting everyone to join in the canticle of creation, Bishop D'Silva led his listeners on a reflection of the encyclical. Emphasizing how the earth is a common home to all and that the readings of Genesis impart that we are stewards of the earth, meant to safeguard it, Bishop D'Silva repeated Ms. Pandey's statement, asking, 'What kind of world are we leaving for the next generation?' He also demonstrated how *Laudato Si'* was deeply connected with the Church's social teachings, concluding by asking the representatives to dream of an Asia that involved Christian communities, upholds the rights of the poor, and preserves local culture and natural beauty.

H.E. Lazzaro Cardinal You Heung-Sik, the Prefect of the Dicastery for the Clergy, put forward his "Reflections on Priestly Formation in an Epochal Change." Asking 'Which Church, what kind of Priest, what kind of formation?' is needed, Cardinal You expressed that everything goes back to one book – the Bible, one law – mutual love, and one Master – God. In a time of change, Cardinal You added that the Church needs to become Synodal – a home and school of communion, and that what the priests needed are those who are true disciples, called to service, who works as a family, and that formation needs to happen at both home and seminary. He concluded by emphasizing the importance of the Word of God as part of everyday life. Representatives followed the sessions by forming new workshop groups to discuss and reflect on how the presented values and teachings could be incorporated as a way forward. H.E. Cardinal Bo led the evening prayer, which included a Hindi Bhajan.



**“... A body you prepared for me” (Hebrews 10:5)
 The Church of Bodiliness, Paschal Mystery and Synodality –
 A Theological Portrait of the Post-pandemic Church in Asia**

Fr. Nguyen Hai Tinh, S.J.

Teacher of Dogmatic Theology, Catholic Institute of Vietnam

Member, FABC-Office of Theological Concerns

Part I of our discussion has presented the positive and negative impacts that the pandemic exerted on the Church in Asia. Let’s now take another look at the Church and ourselves again, this time in the perspective of faith. We wonder how we should describe theologically the post-pandemic Church in Asia, i.e., what do the impacts of the pandemic mean for the Church in Asia viewed in Her relationship to God, Christ and the Holy Spirit as well as to the peoples of Asia as God’s people.

In doing this, describing the post-pandemic Church, we do not take on the standpoint of outsiders but as members belonging to the Church ourselves. Neither do we view the Church as separated from the rest of the peoples of Asia, but as companion to humanity on the same road of history. In other words, we will describe the Church from the perspective of the ones who co-suffer with all the peoples Asia, of the ones who despite their sinfulness, put their faith in the wisdom and goodness of God, the God of history.

With that disposition of mind and heart and following the model of Christ taking up a “body” for His Incarnation (cf. Hebrews 10:5), we discover a portrait of the Church in Asia that not only sheds light on who and where we are but also invites us to repent and to thrive for its authentic expression and realization. Indeed, the letter to the Hebrews describes Christ, upon his Incarnation, being aware of his “body” as prepared by God and as a manner of existence by which He fulfills God’s will. By taking on a “body”, i.e., human existence, Christ becomes one of us and companion of all humanity in this world and in history. Putting Jesus Christ’s “body” in contrast to sacrifices and offerings of the law, the letter also emphasizes the salvific value of his obedient sacrifice of that “body” (cf. Hbr 10:4-10).¹ Therefore, according to the letter, Christ is to fulfill God’s will and to save us by way of Incarnation, and more concretely, by having a “body” that could be offered as a sacrifice of obedience, i.e., that is vulnerable to pain, suffering and death, the summit point of which is on the Cross. Based on the meaning of that “body” of Christ, as a mode of existence that is vulnerable to suffering, as a preparation for the Paschal mystery and as a means for God to accompany humanity in history, we wish to present a portrait of the post-pandemic Church in three big strokes: Bodiliness, Passing-over, and Synodality.

1. Bodiliness – A Church of Incarnation

Like Christ having a “body”, the Church, as the Mystical Body of Christ existing in this world, has her own bodiliness that is vulnerable to historical changes, to pain, suffering, death and even sinfulness. This bodiliness is vividly manifested during the pandemic of covid19. Just as the pandemic reminds humanity as a whole of their vulnerability, it also manifests the Church’s aspect of earthly bodiliness. The bodiliness of the Church can have different meanings: institutional, personal or moral. In institutional sense, bodiliness may refer to the tangible, visible elements of the Church (cf. LG 8) that were heavily affected by the pandemic. In personal sense, it can also refer to the persons who are poor² and who suffered the

¹ Cf. Albert Vanhoye, *L’ Epistola agli Ebrei – “Un Sacerdote Diverso”*, trans. Carlo Valentino (Bologna: Centro Editoriale Dehoniano, EDB, 2010), 25-27, 220-221; Raymond Brown, Joseph Fitzmyer and Roland Murphy, eds., *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990), 938.

² The poor here includes all those who died alone during the pandemic, those who lost their family members without being able to see them at death during the pandemic, especially orphan children, those who lost their jobs due to the pandemic, those migrants workers who

most during and after the pandemic; we may usually think of the poor as a multitude without personal faces. The pandemic reminds us of thinking of them as persons with real faces and names like Lazarus (cf. Lk 16,20) and not as statistical numbers. Finally, in moral sense, the bodiliness of the Church also consists in Her embracing members who are sinners like us who contributed to the devastating character of the pandemic. Indeed, the pandemic is not only a natural disaster that causes suffering; it is also caused by our excessive exploitation of nature and exacerbated by human greed, fear, indifference, egoistic individualism and opportunism; in other words, it could be said to be the pandemic of our own sinfulness.

Therefore, it could be said that the picture of the Church in Asia after the pandemic is marked strikingly with suffering³, both as caused by sin and as occasion for grace. The pandemic has left a big wound in the body, mind and spirit of Asian peoples; the wound that is not always taken notice of. Suffering together with all peoples of Asia, the Church lives Her bodiliness and is aware of it, at least in three following manners:

Firstly, the Church in Asia is aware that being an earthly entity, She is exposed to historical turbulences which include pain, suffering, disorientation, dispersion and death for Her members; that Her visible elements are prone to be affected by historical changes and need to be adapted to those changes so as for the Church to be truly Herself and to be able to serve the peoples who are in need of the Church now in new different ways. Given that Asian peoples are typically keen on communal expressions of life, the pandemic has been striking a hard blow to the Church in Asia when her external activities were locked down.

Secondly, the Church is aware that in Her bosom or related to Her, the poor of God are those most affected by the pandemic; that they, the poor

could not go home or had to leave their jobs to escape cruel lockdowns, those who had no food, no medical care during the lockdowns, those whose financial status is heavily affected by the pandemic, etc.

³ Asia suffers with almost 200 million people discovered infected and around 1.5 millions deaths (cf. <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>, accessed on Sept 23, 2022) together with all the negative effects such as family brokenness, orphans, job reduction, unemployment, etc. Regarding Church life, such mishaps during the pandemic as churches are closed, liturgy celebrations and pastoral activities are disrupted, communities are dispersed, etc. have left great impacts on the Church, though in different manners and with various degrees depending on places and cultures (cf. FABC-OTC, *The Body of Christ in the Pandemic: Theological Reflection from Asian Perspectives*, Part 1, B).

and the suffering are the concrete true body of Christ (cf. Mt 25) and best represent the bodiliness of the Church. They, the poor and the suffering belong to the core of the Church's identity and existence. Given that Asia contains most of the poor of the world, the pandemic is an occasion for the Church in Asia to feel the pain of the poor as Her own pain and to be more vividly aware of Her being actually the Church of the poor.

Finally, the Church is aware that the sinfulness of Her members contributes to exacerbate the pandemic. The pandemic not only invokes in us the experience of victims, but also reveals our own protagonistic sinfulness, collective and personal. Given Asia countries are most infamous for opportunistic corruption and exploitation of the poor, even and especially during the pandemic, the members of the Church in Asia do well to remind ourselves of being sinners who are in need of forgiveness, repentance and conversion. As ministers of the Church ourselves, we ask ourselves how many times we have not only frustrated the faithful but also hurt them deeply and kept them away from the Mother Church. There has been always a virus in our minds and hearts, in our social conventions and structures which covid-19 is just a catalyst for it to rage on.⁴ Therefore, the Church in Asia after the pandemic, relying on the infinite forgiving mercy of God received by Her members, is not only a Church of repentance and conversion, but also a Church who takes preventive measures to try to make sure that another pandemic of mind and heart will not happen.

In summary, the post-pandemic Church in Asia lives the mystery of Incarnation by being aware of and acknowledging Her bodiliness that is vulnerable to historical changes and to suffering. Living Her bodiliness, being affected by history, suffering together with all humanity, by doing all that, the Church lives Her true identity as the Church not only of God but also of the world and for the world.

2. Passover from suffering to healing – A Church of the Paschal mystery

Just as Christ's Incarnation is not the end in itself but is intimately related to and looks forward to the Paschal mystery as its summit expression and fulfillment⁵, the vulnerability and suffering of the Church in Asia only

⁴ Cf. FABC-OTC, *The Body of Christ in the Pandemic*, Part 2, A, II, 1; C, II.

⁵ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter*, trans. Aidan Nichols, O.P. (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993), 11-48.

finds its true meaning and value in the mystery of the Cross of Christ and His Resurrection (cf. CCC 618). To make sense out of the pandemic, the Church does not experience it simply as one catastrophe among others in history, but lives through it under the light of the Paschal mystery.

Given a “body”, Christ was being able to become the true Suffering Servant of the Lord who bears the sins and the sickness of humanity and transforms them into new life. Likewise, the vulnerable bodiliness of the Church gives Her the true opportunity to live the Paschal mystery of Her Head. The experience of the pandemic, as it was, could have got all the characteristics of the experience of the Cross and Resurrection of Christ. In fact, the Paschal mystery has been lived heroically during the pandemic by the poor, the Church and Her members⁶; this mystery also needs to be the irreversible mark that characterizes the post pandemic Church.

Indeed, not unlike the suffering servant who bears the others’ sins, many, even sinners like us who contributed to the negative impacts of the pandemic, have experienced the pandemic as something falling on to us out of the blue. Not unlike the suffering servant, many, especially the poor, have suffered silently without raising voice to blame any allegedly suspected perpetrators. The same situation is still happening today after the pandemic, especially when we think of the war in Ukraine: people in the whole world and not only in Ukraine are silently dying and suffering because of the nonsense war, that is said to derive from one man’s or a few men’s egoistic decisions.

This experience of unjust and nonsense suffering would be meaningless and in vain if we don’t live it under the banner of the Cross of Christ. It is here that we find the significance of the Church for the people of the world: She is here on earth to co-suffer with the world but also to shed light of meaningfulness to the dark picture of the suffering world. The Church is and should be the Church of the Paschal mystery. Only Christ, who suffers silently and unjustly but out of love for the Father and for others, can bring us that light of meaningfulness, of hope and new life. Gazing upon Christ on the Cross, the post-pandemic Church is not only

⁶ Cf. FABC-OTC, The Body of Christ in the Pandemic, Part 2, A, II, 2.

aware of suffering and sinfulness, but also freely assumes Her wounded bodiliness with obedience and love. This gazing – an interior attitude of faith, the object of which is the Cross of Christ – is the decisive and the first step toward healing and salvation (cf. John 3:14-15; Numbers 21:8-9), before any analysis or action plan, be it scientific, social or pastoral. This emphasis on the Paschal mystery is not irrelevant at all especially when we take into account that in many countries in Asia, the faithful are very devotional to celebrations of the Holy Week and very keen on the spirituality of the Cross.⁷ Moreover, many if not majority of Asians have been living the Paschal mystery in their history of being brutally persecuted or suppressed, in the past and at present. The Paschal spirit is already in their blood and bone.

Furthermore, as shown in the first part of this paper, the pandemic, in many senses, has been a moment of grace and not only of sin or suffering; it has offered us opportunities and not only challenges; it has broken us but also strengthened us physically, socially, morally and in faith. The reality of the Resurrection has been manifested during and after the pandemic. The Risen Christ and His Spirit have been very much at work in the heroic acts of self-sacrifice and care for others, in the creativity, solidarity and transformation in many aspects of personal and social life.⁸ The post-pandemic Church has come out of the pandemic under the banner of the Risen Lord and still needs to keep His Spirit of Resurrection alive and at work in Her life. Practically, this could mean renewal of liturgy, pastoral activities, Church organization and other visible elements so that the Church could constantly respond to the changing needs of the people; living the spirit of the Resurrection could also mean more emphasis on care for the poor, bringing them not only Good News but also good concrete supports of a meaningful life; finally living the spirit of the Resurrection could mean the eradication of sins among Her members, by way of metanoia and meta-action against the spirit and lifestyles that caused and exacerbated the pandemic.

⁷ For example, in the Philippines and in Vietnam, notwithstanding the extreme and superstitious practices, devotions during the Holy Week are the backbone of the liturgical year for most people for centuries. People become spiritually and ecclesially alive and active during the Holy Week with their traditional devotions that have deeply taken roots in their cultures for centuries.

⁸ This is described in more details in the paper FABC-OTC, *The Body of Christ in the Pandemic*.

The Risen Christ, when appearing to the disciples, though still carrying the wound of the Cross, always brings peace, unity, forgiveness, and healing, etc. (cf. John 20:24-29), i.e., salvation in various forms corresponding respectively to the various needs of various people. Likewise, the post-pandemic Church, herself still carrying the consequences of the pandemic, would do well to bring about the holistic healing that comes from God and that would respond to the variety of needs of the people in a “new normal” world today. Holistic healing could only come from God alone who heals all our sickness, including death as the worst, by way of the Cross and Resurrection of Christ. This healing is life to the full (cf. John 10:10), i.e., it is not only spiritual, but also moral, social, physical, etc. and includes the whole cosmos.

In summary, throughout the pandemic, the Church lived the mystery of the Cross of Christ, the true Suffering Servant; overcoming the pandemic, both in normal and spiritual senses, the Church is healed and enlivened with the Spirit of the Risen. The post-pandemic Church in Asia could continue to live the paschal mystery by looking with faith to the Cross of Christ, assuming sufferings with His spirit of obedience and love for God and for humanity. The Church could also let the Spirit of Resurrection enlivens Her by continuing efforts to renew Herself institutionally and heal Her members as well as other people holistically.

3. Synodality – A Church of the Pentecost

The experience of the pandemic tells us how much we all are related, being on the same boat of space and history. The experience during the pandemic of physical relatedness and interdependence is just an indication of a much deeper and larger interdependence that we have to one another. The pandemic also tells us that no one is saved until all are saved. Learning the lesson of the pandemic, humanity has shown many gestures of solidarity on personal, community, national and international levels.⁹ The post-pandemic Church could do well to join and accompany many people of the world in this effort of solidarity, and synodality is an opportune way to do this.

⁹ Those gestures range from taking care of the sick in the family or commune to international donation of vaccine, from spontaneous acts of free medicin, oxigen and food distributions to orphanages set up for covid orphans, etc.

With his “body,” Christ becomes present among us, but his presence does not stop short at the physical level but “evolves” to spiritual level, in His Resurrection and in the coming down of the Spirit. We have seen this form of presence in the Pentecost which is also our experience today of Christ’s presence. We would like to stress three characteristics of the Pentecost that could be applied to synodality as well: presence, other oriented, and urgency.

Firstly, presence: Upon receiving the Holy Spirit of the Risen Christ at Pentecost, the apostles ceased to confine themselves apart from the world; realizing that the world is their home, they plunged into it to meet with people and were able to speak in ways that people of different cultures and places could understand (cf. Acts 2:1-11). Synodality not only means planning and doing things together, but first of all means profound listening to and enjoying one another’s accompaniment; it therefore should characterize not only the Church’s way of proceeding in administration or mission but also the being of the Church Herself. In short, synodality is not only about doing but also about being as well. The experience of the pandemic has taught and prepared us for synodality as being and doing together with all humanity, the post-pandemic Church in Asia would do well to keep up that spirit.

Secondly, other-oriented: It could be said that the disciples received the Holy Spirit not only in the upper room where they saw the Spirit coming down as tongues of fire, but also when they went out to meet and talk with people. Likewise, Synodality means orient ourselves to others, being ourselves by being with others. Speaking about “the others”, we wish to mention, among many others, three objects of synodality that could be emphasized in Asia. First, synodality begins at the grass root of family; the Church should be synodal even from its domestic level. Family itself has gone through the pandemic with its own losses and revival,¹⁰ one sign of which is the ability to form together a home, a true community of persons of dialogue, a true domestic church and not simply a boarding house of individuals. Post-pandemic Church’s pastoral care for family is vital for a true synodal Church. Associated with family care is pastoral care for the youth whose future is a “new normal” world that is in no way normal as

¹⁰ Cf. FABC-OTC, *The Body of Christ in the Pandemic*, Part 2, A, II & III.

before, much affected and changed by the pandemic. Asia as a continent with the largest number of youth and Asian people's keen on family life, this level of synodality should be one of the main focuses of the post-pandemic Church in Asia.

Second, synodality can be performed with other people of different religions, with goodwill nonbelievers and humanity as a whole. With his “body”, Christ has shared our human conditions and history; in many senses, he relies on us and our history to fulfill his existence and his mission. With his “body”, he generally thinks and does things the way we think and do; he learned to obey the Father, i.e., to be himself as the obedient Son of God, by suffering in his “body” which is our way of existence (cf. Hebrews 5:8). Likewise, the Church in Asia could become truly Herself if She learns how to obey God in the ups and downs of human history, together with all humanity. Like Christ, the Church relies on humanity to fulfill Her being and mission. Given that the majority of Asians are non-catholics, this form of synodality is also urgent and essential for the post-pandemic Church in Asia.

Finally, synodality could also be applied to our relationship with the cosmos and nature. Though having impacts on all other aspects of human life, the pandemic is seen firstly as an attack on our body, which is a part of “the totality which constitutes the unity of the material universe”¹¹, i.e., the body is the manner through which we live our belonging to and relation to the cosmos and nature. The pandemic is the manifestation of the conflict between ourselves and nature, it teaches us the pungent lesson that destroying nature means destroying ourselves. Being present to nature, enjoy its presence, listening to its “groaning” and “pains” (cf. Romans 8:22) and walking with it in its changes and evolution, etc. are just a few of many gestures that we could do to realize synodality with nature. It is time for us not to view our custodianship of nature as one-way relationship of making use of, or even worst, manipulation of nature, but as dancing with nature to the rhythm that the Trinity themselves are leading.¹² Given Asians' peculiar relationship with nature, both as deeply and constantly immersed in it

¹¹ Karl Rahner, “Death” in *Encyclopedia of Theology – The Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, ed. K. Rahner (New York: Burns & Oates, 1975), 330.

¹² Cf. FABC-OTC, *The Body of Christ in the Pandemic*, Part 3, C.

and as heavily destroying it, this synodality as “dancing” with nature is particularly urgent for the post-pandemic Church in Asia.

The third characteristic of synodality is urgency. We see in the mind and heart of the disciples during the Pentecost event a sense of urgency. Upon receiving the Spirit, they immediately began to speak in tongues as the Spirit enabled them (cf. Acts 2:4); their successive missionary activities also give a sense of urgency. Likewise in our performance of synodality, which is in no way a complacent way of being together, there needs to be also a sense of urgency. Urgency could entail, among other things, deep conviction, strong determination to spread Gospel truth and values, as well as heroic and self-denying sacrifice. Asia as the land of abundant martyrs, in the past and at present, is a great witness for this urgency, which together with gentleness and harmony, is part of the nature of Asian peoples. The Gospel has come to Asia by the urgency of foreign and local missionaries, now Asian Catholics should also feel the urge to keep the Gospel and its liberating force alive for their own country-people and others.

In summary, the bodiliness of the Church could be an opportune way for us to perform synodality, which is to walk together, or better, to dance with one another to the Trinitarian rhythm. Synodality as the fruit of the Holy Spirit must be constituent to the being of the Church Herself. The post-pandemic Church in Asia may need to accompany family and the youth in a more special way; the Church may also need to extend synodality to all people of different cultures and religions and to nature as well. Finally, the post-pandemic Church may need to find Herself in a situation of urgency to keep the Gospel alive among Her members and all peoples of Asia.

In conclusion, we begin with the symbol of the “body” that Christ received from the Father upon his incarnation, and we discover a portrait of a post-pandemic Church in Asia who is closely associated with the mysteries of Christ and of the Holy Spirit. The bodiliness of the Church need not always be an obstacle or Her weakness, but Her distinctive strength. Vulnerability is a necessary means for the Church to live the mystery of Incarnation, the Paschal mystery and to walk with humanity on the road towards God, the source and goal of all things.





A Post-Pandemic Church and the Body of Christ: Few Pastoral Pathways

Bishop Gerald John Mathias

Bishop of Lucknow, India

Member, FABC-Office of Theological Concerns

Following Father Tin's introductory presentation and theological reflection, I would like to present a few pastoral pathways. Many of these suggestions may already be familiar to you, but what we need is a new enthusiasm and zeal to implement them. A crisis moment can serve as an opportune time to create something new, different, and more life-giving. We need to find new pastoral pathways emerging from the immense pandemic crisis we have all faced. Here are some suggestions, and more can emerge through collective reflection.

Firstly, a post-pandemic Church should strengthen the Church in the home. Families have borne the brunt of this crisis, emphasizing the importance of building faith and love within the family. Moreover, our understanding of the family has expanded to include a wider circle, including neighbors and strangers. Thus, we should focus on strengthening basic ecclesial and basic human communities, as they offer the best context for communion, participation, and mission.

Secondly, pastoral accompaniment, dialogue, and family counseling are crucial for wounded and broken families who have suffered due to the pandemic. Pastors and those involved in family apostolate need to provide support and counseling, addressing the needs of youth, children, orphans, and single parents. Through dialogue and listening, we can create a sense of belonging, helping wounded families experience God's unconditional love and mercy.

Thirdly, ongoing formation and renewed catechesis are more urgent in the post-pandemic Church. Ethical, moral, spiritual, pastoral, and social dimensions should be included in the ongoing formation, equipping families with the grace and presence of God to face future challenges.

Fourthly, promoting a pro-life program is essential. Respect for life from conception to natural death should be cultivated and promoted, emphasizing that children are gifts from God. Efforts to remove anti-life mentalities and foster a culture of love and life must be intensified globally. The fifth pathway involves strengthening the Church in cyberspace. The internet world has entered our lives in an encompassing way, and I believe it will only continue to grow. Despite not being systematically evaluated, online liturgies, church activities, meetings, seminars, and even social action will persist, including hybrid formats. The online Church will become part of the local Church and even the wider global Church.

With this development, we may have a better understanding of and connection with the world of the young. Many young people have been missing from our Church life, and after the pandemic, many of them have become disconnected and disengaged. To attract youth, we must be more involved online and in the digital world. The use of platforms like YouTube and other digital media for pastoral care should be explored further. Whether there are future lockdowns or restrictions, or even under normal circumstances, these tools should be utilized to provide pastoral and spiritual support, ensuring that the faithful remain connected to the Church and to God.

We should trust our young people to lead in digital evangelization. The digital media offers ample opportunities for evangelism. A post-pandemic Church will also strengthen its presence in the world at large. The pandemic has made us acutely aware of our deep global connectedness as

one humanity, one global family. Our mission is to serve the entire world, not just our own countries. We are connected to the entire world, and as we realize the zoonotic origin of the virus and the impact of our relationship with nature, we understand the need to live together in a more integral way. Being a Church means being integrally connected to the world and its people, especially the poorest and marginalized. We are connected to the cosmos, the environment, ecology, and the wisdom of different disciplines. We are connected to the deepest joys, sorrows, and pains of humanity. There is a need for ecological conversion as the ecological crisis calls us to profound interior convergences.

Pope Francis appeals to us to be guided by the seven aims of love, which include responding to the cry of the earth, the cry of the poor, adopting an ecological economy, living a simple way of life, promoting ecological education and spirituality, and engaging in community outreach. While major decisions regarding climate change and environmental issues are taken by scientists and world leaders, there are practical things we can do on a daily basis. These include avoiding the use of plastic and paper, reducing water consumption, separating refuse, cooking only what can be consumed, showing care for living beings, using public transport or carpooling, planting trees, and being mindful of energy consumption.

The pandemic has reminded us to be Good Samaritans, reaching out to the needy, sick, and hungry. As the body of Christ, the Church must imitate the Good Samaritan and show compassion in the face of pain and suffering. We should strive to be Good Samaritans, avoiding indifference or neglect. Our mission should go beyond mere proclamation and preaching; it should be marked by prophetic living and witnessing. Our actions on behalf of justice should be integral to proclaiming the Gospel. Building bridges and fostering communal harmony, social justice, and peace are crucial in today's polarized and divided society.

A post-pandemic Church should also strengthen the parish. Liturgies need to be renewed and deeply connected to the struggles of people, especially the poorest. The sacraments should foster a sense of involvement and connection, allowing people to relate what they celebrate on Sundays to their daily lives. Ministries should be strengthened and integrated, including youth ministry, care for the elderly, addressing environmental issues, supporting vulnerable children, and providing family counseling.

Grassroots leadership should be empowered, and collaboration with NGOs and government units should be sought. Consultation with different disciplines and pastoral planning are essential.

Synodal leadership should emerge from grassroots levels, empowering the laity, women, and youth. Clericalism should be shunned, and work should be delegated to religious and laity, empowering them to contribute. Synodality should be a way of life, with a focus on listening, discerning together, and making decisions collectively at every level of the Church. Bishop Gerald Matthias's insights provide a pathway for pastoral work and call for a transformation in the Church's approach.

In conclusion, let us pray for ourselves, our people, and the entire human family affected by the pandemic. The suffering calls us to reflect and seek God's guidance in our actions. Bishop Gerald Matthias has shared invaluable theological, moral, and spiritual insights, providing us with a strong foundation for our journey ahead. Our prayers are with him and with all who have suffered during these challenging times.





The Climate Crisis: Risks and Responses

Atty. Antonio La Viña

Filipino Lawyer, Educator and Environmental Policy Expert

I am currently in the Philippines, specifically in Mindanao, where I have been attending meetings related to climate justice. I apologize for the foreign background noise. My topic is the climate crisis and the extent of its impact on Asia. What must the church in Asia do to heal the universe? I believe the right question is, what must the church in Asia do to help everyone in the world heal the universe? The church cannot do this alone; it requires collective action from all churches, religions, and people around the world.

Let me begin by providing an update on the science of climate change. The final report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is yet to be released, but several working group assessments and reports have already been published. One key finding is that human influences have unequivocally changed the world in a harmful way. It is crucial to limit global warming to 1.5 or 2 degrees Celsius by reducing emissions. Otherwise, we will face severe impacts, including more frequent extreme weather events and tipping points that could lead to irreversible consequences.

In Asia, the impact of climate change is particularly significant.

Coastal cities in Asia have a larger population than all other continents combined, making more people vulnerable to climate change. Agriculture, fisheries, and biodiversity will be severely affected, compromising livelihoods and increasing social conflicts. Island states, such as those in Oceania and Southeast Asia, will be greatly affected by sea-level rise and typhoons, and there is a real risk of their extinction.

South Asia, including Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan, has already experienced extreme heatwaves and increased humidity, which have affected workability. By 2050, these countries are projected to face extreme precipitation events and rising temperatures. Northeast Asia, including Japan and China, will also face typhoons, extreme precipitation, and droughts. Even Australia and New Zealand are not immune, experiencing droughts, floods, and forest fires.

The severity of these impacts calls for urgent action. We must strive for a low-carbon economy, prioritize nature-based solutions, and ensure the protection of human rights. Every country needs to mitigate climate change and transition to sustainable development. It is crucial to avoid maladaptation, where vulnerable communities are displaced without better alternatives.

The Church has an essential role to play in promoting resilience, stewardship, education, and leadership. International cooperation is necessary, but individual actions at the local level, in homes, communities, and institutions, also matter. We need to reexamine our practices, such as energy consumption and resource management, and invest in educating our people about climate change.

In conclusion, we cannot solve the climate crisis alone. It requires collective efforts from all nations and communities. The church in Asia can contribute significantly to healing the world and restoring harmony with nature. Thank you.



Environmental Activism Uttarakhand

Ms. Ridhima Pandey

Indian Youth Environmental Activist

Your Excellencies, Reverend Fathers, Sisters, and guests, my name is Ridhima Pandey. I am 14 years old, and I am from India. I am from Uttarakhand, a part of the Himalayan region known for its natural beauty. The holy River Ganga also flows there, but this treasure is now being polluted because of human activities like deforestation and disposal of wastes in the Ganges, among others. I believe many of you present here might already know about that.

My state has been impacted by cloudbursts, landslides, and flash floods, which is why I became an activist. I was five years old when the Kedarnath flash flood occurred in my hometown of Uttarakhand. I watched the destruction on television and saw kids crying because they lost their parents and homes. Witnessing such devastation affected me deeply, and I started having nightmares about floods and losing everything.

After being impacted by these flash floods for a while, I decided that I wanted to do something because I did not want to die. I asked my parents what I could do to stop the flash floods. That is when I learned about climate change and global warming. I realized that due to human emissions, the

climate of the entire Earth is changing, and India, like Asia, is one of the most impacted places by climate change. But what makes me even more anxious is that the ones most impacted by this crisis are not the ones responsible for it.

The kids of my generation are the ones most affected today and in the near future. The current policies are not on track to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius or even 2 degrees Celsius. According to the IPCC report, the current trajectory would lead to 2.7 degrees Celsius or even more warming by the end of the century. Every fraction of a degree matters to all of us.

In 2017, I filed a petition against the government of India for their inaction in fulfilling their promises made during the Paris Agreement. Unfortunately, the petition was dismissed by the National Green Tribunal in 2019. I also filed a petition at the United Nations under the Child Rights Committee in 2019 to protect the rights of children worldwide, but it did not move forward due to technical issues. Millions of kids around the world are suffering due to climate change, and I do not want my generation to endure such conditions.

Climate change disproportionately affects the poorest and weakest communities. It is projected to increase extreme poverty and widen the economic gap between the richest and poorest countries. We must shift our focus from gain maximization for a few to risk minimization for all. We need your help to address this crisis.

Now, if I were not an activist, I would question why kids become climate activists in the first place. It is because the older generation failed to do their job. I was forced to be an activist because the older generation forgot to respect the planet. I had to miss out on my childhood and school because I was scared that if I did not take action, my future would be destroyed.

I had the opportunity to work on the film “The Letter,” produced by the Dattasi Movement and Defense Production. I also had a private audience with Pope Francis at the Vatican, representing the voice of the youth, along with the voices of the poor, Indigenous people, and wildlife. Seeing him hear us as activists made me feel heard, which is what we need.

While we were filming the letter, I also learned about the encyclical

Laudato Si', and I learned that in the encyclical, His Holiness has mentioned that we all have to come together to protect our common home, to protect this planet. In the Letter, you will see four different voices coming together and having a dialogue with Pope Francis to change the way we treat Mother Earth today.

We hope that this film will help you bring the message of Laudato Si' to different communities in your country so that they will be able to join Pope Francis in his fight to protect Mother Earth for the coming generations. Now, at the very end, the Laudato Si' movement and I would like to invite you all for the special screening of the Letter from Pope Francis to you today at 7:30 PM. Now let us watch the film trailer that we will see this evening.

Thank you, thank you so much.





Laudato Si' - A Call for Responsible Stewardship

Most Rev. Allwyn D'Silva

Auxiliary Bishop, Archdiocese of Bombay

Chairperson, FABC-Office of Human Development

My dear sisters and brothers, this is not a talk so that you can relax. I repeat this is not a talk on *Laudato Si'* because all of us are very familiar with this topic and the letter. But today, for another thirty minutes, we will try to reflect on the encyclical to make it a bit personal.

1. Prayer – Contemplation

And so, I would invite you to, of course, we cannot go out but imagine that you are out in the garden amidst the trees, the flies, the butterflies, the insects, and just imagine that we are all living in a common home. We are all living in a common home, and Saint Francis of Assisi wants us to be brothers and sisters to all the trees, to all the animals, and to all the insects. So, we pray once more in the great cathedral of creation and revel in the “grandiose cosmic choir” made up of countless creatures all singing the praises of God.”¹ Let us join Saint Francis of Assisi in singing: “Praise be to you, my Lord, for all your creatures.”²

¹ Message of the Holy Father Francis for the Celebration of the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, 21.07.2022

² Apart from the first section of the *Canticle of the Creatures* by Saint Francis of Assisi, as performed in the Umbrian dialect of Italian by Choir of the Diocese of Rome (link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iAAoayeSoPw>) was screened for contemplation.

To Saint Francis, “each and every creature was a sister united to him by bonds of affection. That is why he felt called to care for all that exists” (LS 11). So, my dear friends, the animal, the flower, the sun, and the moon are all our brothers and sisters. We all live in a common home, and I would like you to experience being a member of this common home. It is not only our family; it is not only our religious community; it is not only our parish; it is not only even our country – it is the whole of creation that is our common home. “To sense each creature singing the hymn of its existence is to live joyfully in God’s love and hope” (LS 85). This contemplation of creation allows us to discover in each thing a teaching that God wishes to hand on to us since “for the believer to contemplate creation is to hear a message, to listen to a paradoxical and silent voice” (LS 85).” The whole of creation is our cathedral.³

2. Creation – Sin – Mandate

Creation can only be understood as a gift from the outstretched hand of the Father of all and as a reality illuminated by the love that calls us together into universal communion (LS, 76). Even the fleeting life of the least of beings is the object of his love, and in its few seconds of existence, God enfolds it with his affection (LS 77). All creatures are moving forward with us and through us towards a common point of arrival, which is God... Human beings, endowed with intelligence and love and drawn by the fullness of Christ, are called to lead all creatures back to their Creator (LS 83). All these lines are taken from *Laudato Si*.

“**It’s not only our family, it’s not only our religious community, it’s not only our parish, it’s not even only our country - it is the whole of creation that is our common home.**”

But we all know that there is sin in the world. And this sin is a rupture in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, our neighbor, and earth (cf. LS, 66). The same wretchedness which leads us to mistreat an animal will not be long in showing itself in our relationships with other people (LS 92). I remember an incident where a human being kicked a dog that came his way, and later on, I heard that there was domestic violence in his house; because of the same treatment that he gave to the animal, he gave it to his wife also. So, sin is manifested in all its destructive power in wars, the various forms of violence and abuse, the abandonment of the most vulnerable, and attacks on nature (LS 66).

³ The song *My Cathedral* as performed by Jim Reeves (link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ks-oIONqrZO>) was screened for contemplation.

This, in turn, distorted our mandate to “have dominion” over the earth (cf. *Gen* 1:28), to “till it and keep it” (*Gen* 2:15) (LS 66). People have often accused us that we have taken the line from Genesis very seriously – to have dominion over the earth. Of course, Scripture scholars will give us another meaning of dominion, but we also read in Genesis 2:15 that we have to “till it and keep it” and be a steward, mother, and a friend to creation.

3. What We Need

Pope Francis asked us this question, and I’m repeating it: What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?⁴ Do we feel responsible for the next generation? As Cardinal Oswald Gracias usually mentions, it goes against God’s commandments—the commandment not to kill and not to steal—and we are stealing from the next generation. When we read *Laudato Si*, we ask ourselves certain fundamental questions: What is the purpose of our life in this world? Why are we here? What is the goal of our work and all our efforts? And what need does the earth have for us?⁵

Pope Francis tells us that “everything is interconnected” (LS 70). We are not living in isolation; we are living in “one complex crisis which is both social and environmental” (LS 139). We have “common and differentiated responsibilities” (LS 170), and need “personal and communal ecological conversion” (cf. LS 216-219). We need to have an “integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and protecting nature” (LS 139). We have to “restore through the long path of renewal” (LS, 202).

4. Catholic Social Teaching – Reflection⁶

Laudato Si’ is very much connected with the Church’s social teachings. It is not something that is apart from the social teachings of the Church. Now, what are the signs of the times? We have been listening for the last three days to the signs of the times in different countries. We need to have a “dialogue with all people about our common home” (LS 3). It cannot be just a Christian dialogue, a Christian responsibility. There is no Christian water, Muslim hill, or Hindu animal – we are all connected in our common home. There is an “urgent challenge” (LS13) because of the “rapidification of changes” (LS 18). There is a “serious disrepair” (LS 61), and “cracks in the planet we inhabit” (LS 163).

⁴ LS 160

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ This entire section draws from “Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. 2017. The Contribution of *Laudato Si’* to Catholic Social Doctrine”

As you know, Pope Francis' letter is grounded in Scripture, on the goodness of creation (cf. *Gen* 1:31 in LS 65). Also, we see in the Gospels an earthly Jesus' tangible and loving relationship with the world (cf. *Lk* 12:6, *Mt* 6:26 in LS 96). At the end of time, there is deliverance and reconciliation of all things, not only of human beings (cf. *Col.* 1:19-20, *1 Cor.* 15:28 in LS 100).

It is not only Pope Francis who has spoken about the care of creation; he is in continuity with the Magisterium. It goes back to our Catholic tradition and the other Popes such as, Paul VI, John Paul II, Benedict XVI, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Saint Francis of Assisi and many others

who have spoken. And what do they invite us to: "Changes in lifestyles, models of production and consumption."⁷ There has to be a change – "and the established structures of power."⁸ We have to seriously think about the structures of power because if we are in such a structure, we will naturally dominate or have dominion over creation. Committing a crime against the natural world is a sin against ourselves and a sin against God.⁹ Who turned the wonderful world of the seas into underwater cemeteries bereft of color and life?

“Committing a crime against the natural world is a sin against ourselves and a sin against God. Who turned the wonder world of the seas into underwater cemeteries bereft of colour and life?”

So, first, of course, we all know this: one of the important social teachings of the Church is human dignity. So, "the destruction of the human environment is extremely serious." I think we have to be aware of and take cognizance of this fact, "not only because God has entrusted the world to us men and women" (i.e., stewardship), "but because human life is itself a gift which must be defended from various forms of debasement" (LS 5). In the last few days, even in the morning, I think, we all talked about being pro-life and respecting life. So, care for creation is linked to the inalienable human dignity the fundamental human rights such as the universal right to clean water¹¹ (i.e., common good), the rights of workers¹² (i.e., participation), and

⁷ LS 5 quoting Saint John Paul II in *Centesimus Annus*

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ LS 8 quoting Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew

¹⁰ LS 41 quoting the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, one of the 21 citations from several national and regional bishops' conferences across five continents in the encyclical.

¹¹ cf. LS 30

¹² cf. LS 128

the right of the poor to own land¹³ (i.e., preferential option for the poor). We can ask ourselves: Where is our human dignity when breathing in toxic air impairs lung function?¹⁴ What happens to our human dignity? Where is our human dignity and right to life when we do not know whether we are consuming food or chemicals?¹⁵ Where is our human dignity when we are all quenching our thirst with water laden with micropollutants with serious health implications?¹⁶

Another aspect of the Church's social teachings is the common good and solidarity. The Earth is a shared inheritance whose fruits are meant to benefit everyone (LS 93), and both politics and economics should be at the service of the common good,¹⁷

“Is there any common good on a polluted planet - our rivers are spewing foam, oceans churn up oil and garbage, our soil is eroding, extreme weather and temperature changes abound, and new diseases are emerging as we further unravel and decimate ecological balances?”

(i.e., subsidiarity). And the common good extends to future generations,¹⁸ (that is, intergenerational solidarity). Interdependence obliges us to think of one world with a common plan (LS 164). The principle of the common good immediately becomes, logically and inevitably, a summons to solidarity and a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters (LS 158). Is there any common good on a polluted planet – our rivers are spewing foam, oceans churn up oil and garbage, our soil is eroding, extreme weather and temperature changes abound, and new diseases are emerging as

we further unravel and decimate ecological balances?¹⁹ We have put a price on the Lord's oxygen, water, food, and land, yet we cannot be assured of the goodness, adequacy, and quality of the natural resources we commoditize.²⁰

Another aspect is the preferential option for the poor in the Church's

¹³ cf. LS 94

¹⁴ Rebello, Shawna Nemesia. 2020, October 3. Catholic Social Teaching: Positioning Sustainability. *The Examiner*. 6-7

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ cf. LS 189

¹⁸ LS 159

¹⁹ Rebello, Shawna Nemesia. 2022, June 4. Renewing the Face of the Earth: Situating the Ecological Role of a Christian. *The Examiner*. 14-15

²⁰ Ibid.

social teachings. “O God of the poor, help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth, so precious in your eyes... Touch the hearts of those who look only for gain at the expense of the poor and the earth” (LS 246) – these are found in the encyclical *Laudato Si’*. It is essential to show special care for indigenous communities. When they remain on their land, they

Now, how can we ensure ecological justice through participatory actions and bottom-up, collective decision-making that safeguard the rights of the poor, the vulnerable, the indigenous and the marginalized?”

themselves care for it best. Pressure is being put on them to abandon their homelands to make room for agricultural or mining projects which are undertaken without regard for the degradation of nature and culture (LS, 146). I have just come from the South of India, where a multinational is taking the land of the fisherfolk, and I am happy that the Church is taking a very active part in defending the rights of the indigenous people.

So, where are our solidarity and subsidiarity when we persist in undermining our interconnectedness? What option can we offer to those in need when we cannot assure them a livable world? How can we even presume that everything will be fine as we do not stand with the Indigenous custodians of the earth and let their voices go unheard? These are questions I think we must ask ourselves seriously. Now, how can we ensure ecological justice through participatory actions and bottom-up, collective decision-making that safeguard the rights of the poor, the vulnerable, the indigenous, and the marginalized? What dignity of labor (i.e., participation) can we hope to achieve as we hurdle into mechanization, digitalization, and automation on a planet that we are systematically killing? What good will an economy narrowly focus on growth and GDP do, then?

The God who created the universe out of nothing can also intervene in this world and overcome every form of evil (LS 74).²²

5. Dreams – Way Forward

The theme of this conference is to go a different way. So let us dream, but do not go to sleep! We dream of an Asia that upholds the rights of the

²¹ All questions in this paragraph are directly quoted from “Rebello, Shawna Nemesia, 2020 & 2022”

²² An instrumental rendition of the hymn *The World Stands in Need of Liberation My Lord* was played with this text on screen for reflection.

poor, the original peoples, and the least of our brothers and sisters, where their voices can be heard and their dignity advanced; we can preserve its distinctive cultural riches, where the beauty of our humanity shines forth in so many varied ways; can jealously preserve its overwhelming natural beauty and the superabundant life teeming in its mountains, rivers and forests; we dream of Christian communities capable of generous commitment, incarnate in Asia, and giving the Church new faces with Asian features.²³ Let us hold on to these dreams, concretely choose to care for creation, and have life in abundance.²⁴

I think climate change is the most important topic because if the world ends, what will happen to the families and the migrants? There will not be any migrants or families. So, let's take this very seriously.



²³ Adapted from *Querida Amazonia* 7, Pope Francis' 2020 apostolic exhortation

²⁴ A rendition of *Laudato Si'* – The Song (link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k9NESaygyU>) released by the Archdiocesan Office for Environment, Mumbai in collaboration with the FABC Office of Human Development and Climate Change Desk and the Commission for Ecology of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India was screened to conclude.



Reflections on Priestly Formation in an Epochal Change

Cardinal Lazzaro You Heung-sik

Archbishop Emeritus of Daejeon

Prefect of the Dicastery for the Clergy

Good afternoon, everybody. Pope Francis wrote a letter six days ago, on the 11th of October. He said to me, “If I leave Rome, you go to Bangkok. You give my best regards to everybody, to all and each of you. Also, my blessing.” And I brought the best regards from the Pope, or his blessing, to you. I prepared this conference in Italian; my friend will be translating it into English. My English is very poor, and the Secretariat prepared this speech this morning. And I have already given the USB file to Father William.

What kind of priest and what kind of formation – one book, one law, one master. When I think about priest formation, what immediately comes to my mind is my personal journey toward the Priestly Ministry, in which everything goes back to what is essential: one book, one law, one Master. A single book of the Gospel to be put into practice faithfully, or to the letter, in everyday life. There is only one law, the Commandment of mutual love. The teacher is interested first in these apostles, one master who makes himself present where we live together as children of one father and as a family of brothers and sisters. These three best ways have left a deep imprint in my

life forever, and they serve as the light and the guide for me even today.

In fact, our formation is never a process that ends; on the contrary, we need a daily conversion so that our way of living, speaking, and acting is more and more rooted in the Gospel. There is always something new every day that we learn from the master who wants to be part of our life and present among us. These three pathways or directions, which, in reality, are very essential and related, have a fundamental role in the early church. The martyrs had the strength to bear witness to the Gospel, even to the point of death, because they allowed themselves to be radically guided by the word of God. This is the case even in my own motherland, Korea.

Mutual love was the community's basic rule: "See how they love one another and how they are ready to die for each other." The living presence of the risen Jesus supported and guided the Church even in the most difficult circumstances. It cannot be advised today. At every age, we need to go back to these beginnings and embark on a new journey from these roots, from this soul, to say from our genetic code that we cannot exchange for any other guideline.

At the same time, the spirit of the Lord leads the people of God through history and guides them more fully to the whole truth. It leads them towards greater maturity and makes them respond to the signs of all times. It is therefore necessary to ask ourselves what kind of priestly formation could be suitably adequate today, in our time that Pope Francis characterizes as a change of age or epoch. This is a question that I have constantly asked myself since the Pope appointed me as the Prefect of the Dicastery for the Clergy. I do not simply raise this question with myself in my office but also with my collaborators. So, you can constantly listen to Pope Francis, the Bishops, and the other people who come to visit us at the Dicastery.

Let us try to understand, based on reality, what kind of life priests have in various parts of the world. You have certainly changed, challenged by the serious problem of abuse, which reports in my country were truly painful for the serious suffering it inflicts on the victims and for the damages it does to the credibility of the Church. You cannot gloss over this, but observe, above all, that many priests are discouraged, overworked, and struggling in difficult personal situations. They often live in profound experiences of loneliness and risk becoming realistic. They do not feel valued and cared for,

and this wears them down inwardly.

Of course, there are also many positive examples, but the question remains. So, what can we do to help priests become joyful and happy? It is my work to have joyful and happy priests and seminarians. It is urgent that we keep asking ourselves what kind of priestly formation is needed, not only about initial formation but also, and in a special way, regarding ongoing formation. Every priest must feel welcomed and listened to, accompanied, and supported along his life path. You have identified this as a priority for the coming years. However, we cannot address this question directly without raising fundamental questions even more forcefully: which Church and, therefore, what kind of a priest for this Church? And consequently, what kind of formation? On this triple question, I would like to offer you a few reflections, which will certainly require a greater study.

Which Church? Cardinal Rozario mentioned the ecclesiology during the Holy Mass this morning, according to the Second Vatican Council. But I think it is important to leave this ecclesiology, the mystery of communion and mission. Allow me to start my reflection on the Church from a great bishop of my land, Cardinal Stephen Kim Sou-hwan, who was Archbishop of Seoul for 30 years. He was a true father of the Church in Korea, and with his wisdom and testimony, he contributed a lot to the growth of Catholics in my country. When in 1989, the International Eucharistic Congress was held in Korea, Cardinal Kim explained to all believers, “We need to become like a big Eucharistic bread in society.”

This image captures the whole ecclesial communion of the Second Vatican Council, which is three dimensions: mystery, communion, and mission. Mystery, the Church is tasked of making God present, indeed, making him seen. Thus, her life must be permeated with God, deeply rooted in him, constantly nourished by the sacrament, and formed by her Word, living the Gospel. It is the universal call to holiness that Vatican II calls us to, and which Pope Francis has reminded us of in his Apostolic Exhortation on holiness in everyday life. This requires not only an intense life of prayer but also

“ **It is the universal call to holiness that Vatican II calls us to, and which Pope Francis has reminded us of in his Apostolic Exhortation on holiness in everyday life.** ”

continuous re-evangelization of the whole day of being so that people can see Jesus in us.

Communion: in our relationships, we are called to be an icon of the Triune God, to show His communion, to live on Earth as it is in Heaven. This is the being of the Church that the Second Vatican Council presents to us in *Lumen Gentium*. A people made one by the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, rooted in God and shaped by His Word. We are called to live out this mystery every day, that what is many and diverse can become one body and one soul and that this unity does not cancel differences but brings them into harmony.

Mission: where people live, where they walk, where they suffer, struggle, and hope. We are called to bring the Trinitarian life into all areas of human coexistence. In the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis expressed this task as follows: “Today, when the networks and means of human communication have made unprecedented advances, we sense the challenge of finding and sharing a ‘mystique’ of living together, of mingling and encounter, of embracing and supporting one another, of stepping into this fray, in which we come to know ourselves as the word’s bread.”

It is not a question of sacralizing people’s daily life but of Christianizing it, of imbuing it with the Gospel, which requires not only an intense life of prayer but also continuous re-evangelization of the whole day of being. So that people can see Jesus in us.







**EMERGING REALITIES AND
THE CHURCH IN ASIA**

**DAY 2
OCTOBER 18, 2022**

PRESS NOTE

18TH OCTOBER 2022

On 18th October 2022, the second segment on ‘Emerging Realities’ of the FABC General Conference began with a celebration of the Eucharist by H.E. Jose Fuerte Cardinal Advincula Jr.

At St. Michael’s Hall, H.E. Oswald Cardinal Gracias, President for the day’s sessions, led the representatives in the *Adsumus* prayer. Hosted virtually by the country of Sri Lanka, the morning prayer was conducted by Sr. Nilanthi Ranasinghe FMM.

The first session for the day, ‘Youth: A Voice for the Church,’ began with group discussions on the concerns for and role of the youth in the Church. The first speaker, Fr. Akira Takayama, Chaplain to the youth ministry in the Diocese of Takamatsu, stressed the importance of priests’ need to listen to the youth and be re-evangelized. He shared common points from the youth and priest councils in Japan - the importance of cooperating with the youth, the position of the Church as different from home, work, and school, the importance of the youth being considered as more than just a taskforce, and the hope that elders and Church leaders will provide spiritual guidance and be kind to the growth of the youth.

H.E. Cardinal Gracias invited two of the youth representatives present to speak: Mr. Anthony Judy and Ms. Ashita Jimmy. Their messages implored listeners to listen, explaining that five years after the Youth Synod, it was time to take stock and consider whether the Church had progressed. They stressed the need to show the youth trust and genuine interest and converse and journey along with them.

Mr. Gregory Pravin, a Youth pastoral worker in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, spoke about how the pandemic had left people living in a digital, individualistic world, self-sufficient, without a hunger for the Lord. Challenging his audience to change the narrative from ‘the young people are absent’ to ‘I am absent from the young people’ and to be more than shepherds, to become seekers, Mr. Pravin emphasized the need to create new structures and develop tools and methods that would guide the youth back to the fullness of the Church experience.

The next speakers, members of the Ecclesia of Women in Asia, were Dr. Stephanie Puen, a theology professor at Ateneo de Manila University, Dr. Mary Yuen, a theology professor at the Holy Spirit Seminary of Theology and Philosophy in Hongkong, and Sr. Rasika Pieris, a human rights activist from the Colombo Province of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Speaking about ‘New Pathways for the Role of Women for the Church in Asia,’ they began by providing context and background to the many issues Asian women face, including discrimination, misogyny, dual roles, disparity of income, and domestic violence.

Dr. Stephanie Puen introduced the concept of caring justice, highlighting how care was deeply undervalued for many women. She stressed that care should be the responsibility of all, that it should be responsive, and that it should go along with solidarity, communication, trust, and respect, asking her listeners to create a culture of care.

Sharing her personal experiences, Dr. Mary Yuen underlined the socio-economic problems faced by Asian women, especially after the pandemic. She put forward pastoral responses that the Church could undertake, including pastoral care, support centers, family crisis centers, and assurances of rights and dignity. While there were many active women faithful, Dr. Yuen called for the Church to notice where hierarchies were gender-biased to enhance participation and introduce theology for women.

Sr. Pieris, noting that ‘men of quality are not threatened by women’s call for equality,’ put forward several points that would lead to women of Asia becoming agents of social transformation. Advocating for alternative social structures that dispel gender hierarchy, a theology that reflects the struggles of women and minorities, and a more inclusive image of God, Sr. Pieris highlighted the need for women to be full-fledged decision-making citizens and discipleship of equals in the Church.

Ms. Christine Nathan, President of the International Catholic Migrant Commission (ICMC), explained how migration is a big business touching over a million lives, and spoke about the many socio-economic struggles, attached problems of human trafficking, unsafe jobs, slave labor, and discrimination migrants face. Ms. Nathan also provided avenues through which the Church could help: by campaigning for better contracts, human rights, safer working conditions, more clarity about jobs and countries,

creating decent work opportunities, and making migration a choice and not a necessity.

Sr. Abby Avelino MM, regional coordinator of Talitha Kum Asia, described the breadth and expansive work that Talitha Kum, an international network against human trafficking composed of religious women congregations, does. Sr. Avelino demonstrated how working at grassroots levels, Talitha Kum collaborates to take action, raising awareness, standing with the socially vulnerable, with programs that work both towards the prevention of trafficking and care for victims, seeking to heal and empower survivors.

A virtual message was played from H.E. Vincent Cardinal Nichols, President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, speaking on human trafficking as a losing battle, despite the many efforts of the people working against it, and exhorting the gathered representatives to dedicate as much time and effort towards stopping human trafficking as they could.

Fr. Fabio Baggio, CS, from the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, explained the dicastery's scope and purpose and its involvement in social missions and offered assistance when needed throughout the Conference.

Archbishop Tarcisio Isao Kikuchi SVD, former President of Caritas Asia, led a reflection on '*Fratelli Tutti: A Call to Human Fraternity.*' Explaining the context of the pandemic under which the Holy Father published *Fratelli Tutti*, Archbishop Kikuchi reflected on the encyclical's aspects, stressing the importance of interdependence, harmony in diversity, and solidarity. Demonstrating how all Christians are called to bear witness, he asked his audience to consider how they could spread hope in the current world.

The evening concluded with the body prayer, inspired by St. Julian of Norwich, and H.E. Cardinal Gracias led the congregation in the vespers.



The Challenges to Pastoral Care for the Youth in Japan

Fr. Akira Takayama

Chaplain, Youth Ministry, Diocese of Takamatsu, Japan

Hello everyone. It is so great to see you all. I am Akira Takayama, a Japanese priest from the Diocese of Takamatsu. I really appreciate this precious opportunity. I will be happy to hear your comments and experiences. The outline of my presentation includes the following: 1) topic of this presentation; 2) perspective as a pastor; 3) background: Catholic Church in Japan and the Pastoral Care for the youth; 4) Body: Reflection on the voice of the youth and priests; and 5) conclusion.

Today, I was given this topic “Youth: A Voice for the Church, the situation of the youth in the Church in Asia and why it must be a concern for the future.” But this topic is too broad to talk about, so I am going to focus on the case in Japan. The goal of this presentation is to report on the situation of the pastoral care for the youth in Japan, thinking together about the future of the Catholic Church in the region of Asia. So, this is my main point: priests should have to put our minds to listening to the voices of the youth. Priests should be re-evangelized. Priests should have to do all these things for the future of the Catholic Church. Priests are supposed to talk about the Gospel, almost every day. But we should keep on appreciating the essential message of the Gospel. This is a kind of re-evangelization.

This is my perspective as a pastor. The passage on the text of the Gospel, Luke 24:13-35, Jesus had kept on walking the path to Emmaus together with two disciples until they noticed Jesus' presence. Jesus attitudes are totally inspirational to us. According to Henry Nouwen, on the text of the book of his work "Creative Ministry," priests are challenged to be servants of life who can listen to the voices of nature, people, and God." Nouwen's message is quite important too to carry out this task for priests to be re-evangelized.

Here is the background information about the Japanese society and the Catholic Church in Japan. First, geography and demographics. There are five main islands, with a total estimated area of 380,000 square kilometers. Japan's territory is vertically long and is almost as long as Vietnam. The population is 124,750,000 people. And the number of populations in their twenties (20's) is 12,490,000. The number of Catholics in Japan is 431,100. It is around 0.3% of the total population of Japan. Catholics in Japan is a minority, and the Catholic Church in Japan consists of 16 dioceses, but actually many foreigners are not officially counted. Recently, a lot of young people from Asian countries come to Japan as technical interns and many of them are Catholics. Like the youth from Vietnam, Myanmar, etc, they are enhancing the Catholic Church in Japan.

Next, I am going to talk about pastoral care for the Catholic Youth in Japan.

The Bishops' Conference in Japan does not have an official committee for the ministry of youth. This is one of the characteristics of the Catholic Church in Japan. So, there are voluntary associations of catholic youth which is acknowledged by the bishops in promoting communication between the youth of various dioceses. This association mainly consists of catholic youth supported by some bishops and priests. And usually, each diocese has its own activities.

One Catholic Youth Gathering which is a network meeting has been held in various places all over Japan was supported by this voluntary association. This is popular among the youth in Japan, because at this event, many catholic youths various parts of Japan can get to know each other and share their faith. A network meeting was held in Takamatsu Diocese in 2016. Over 130 young people from various places in Japan gathered on that day.

The other day in order to prepare for this presentation, some priests of various dioceses gathered on zoom and discuss the pastoral care for the youth. And we reached a finding for some specific realities and challenges. First, the differences between the youth who were baptized in their infancies and the youth who were baptized at the age of adults. The youth who were baptized as infants tend to think of the catholic church as a place to hang out with friends. On the contrary, the youth who were baptized at the age of adults, tend to prefer praying and learning than hanging out there. Almost all the priests in Japan are considering this and always trying very hard to unite the youth. Second, due to the lack of number of priests, all the priests have to be in charge of parishes, pastoral care for the youth, and some other responsibilities at the same time. So the priests are working so hard to find time for the youth because the youth are our future. Plus, just like other countries, the Catholic Church in Japan has to deal with the influence of covid19. The number of attendances at every mass has declined and some youths have left the catholic church. but still some activities on the internet have started. Priests and lay people are working together in order to overcome the difficulties under this pandemic.

Now, I am going to report the voices of the youth and priests' reflections on the Gathering of the Workshop for the priests in the ecclesiastical province of Osaka in 2019. This is the main part of this presentation. This Gathering was entitled "Listening to The Voice of the Youth." Ten catholic youths were invited to talk about the Catholic Church before the priests. All of them spoke honestly, and the priests reflected on it and shared ideas. I am going to show you some examples.

“The youth who were baptized as infants tend to think of the catholic church as a place to hang out with friends. On the contrary, the youth who were baptized at the age of adults, tend to prefer praying and learning than hanging out there.”

“We do not want the priests to be worried too much about the generation gap.” “We do not want the priest to quarrel and degrade with each other in front of us young people.” I did not think the priests always acted like this, but we should still be thoughtful. It is quite natural that we notice a generation gap, but the youth do not want the priest to be worried about the gap. “We did not want the other parishioners just to consider us to be industrious and ideal workers for the church activities.” I guess

this might be one of the characteristics of Japan. As I already mentioned, Catholics are a minority in Japan. If some young people come to the church, older people are so happy to see them. Besides, older people tend to ask the youth to help with church activities, and then the youth are told to do some tasks every Sunday, and they feel exhausted. So, the youth think: we help the older people at the parish who will track our growth with kindness. I think the parish community should not try to set the youth group under too much control. Needless to say, we should not spoil them by giving in to their demands. We should think a great deal about their voluntary activities. Actually, they said, “we are communicating on the Internet even between different dioceses, and they said we want to hear sermons that can offer spiritual insights.” This is really important. Priests should become not only their friends but also their life guides.

And they said, “we need the third place, which is different from the home, school and working place.” The third place is a kind of pedagogical or sociological return. Generally speaking, human life is somehow based on a person’s place. Home is a first place, and school or working place is second. The church is the third place, which can encourage them to rebuild different relations. One young person in the gathering strongly insisted on the need to make the church the third place. He had the experience of temporarily

leaving school because of personal problems, and he supports kids in the same situation as him.

“We should not be worried too much about generational gaps. Young people just hope that priests will become spiritual companions and wisdom, and the church itself will become the third place.”

After listening to these voices, the priests reflected on them and had time to share ideas. We should not be worried too much about generational gaps. Young people just hope that priests will become spiritual companions and wisdom, and the

church itself will become the third place. We should just support young people with voluntary activities. Sometimes, we feel like making comments or advising them, but we should sometimes wait for their own decision-making and encourage them, without judging the results.

Just like the youth, we should cooperate with each other beyond the bounds of the diocese. We should try our best to make the church the third place for the youth. Yes, we should care about the older generations of

the church, but we also have to work with the young people, and we should notice our errors. We should reflect on the fact that the church in Japan has been directing the youth to the traditional way of the church. We should care about the traditions and adjust them to the present situation. At the same time, we should accompany and answer the questions of the youth with patience to help them to deserve their own lives.

The international youth want to overcome language barriers. In my diocese, international youth gatherings have been held. In order to achieve these goals, we should be re-evangelized. This is our main response to their voices.

In conclusion, I am going to show some words: listen, offering a place, cooperation, and re-evangelization. As priests, we should have to go to accompany the youth and put our minds to their voices. As priests, we should be there to encourage them to think and act voluntarily by offering the Catholic Church as a third place. We must be re-evangelized and cooperate with each other to practice these goals. As priests, we must sincerely reflect on the reality and challenges shown before us. Otherwise, the Catholic Church in Japan will be decline. However, we should not think about the future too negatively or optimistically.

We should all restart from appreciating Jesus' message and Jesus' sacraments together. Thank you for your attention. God bless you all.





Reflection 5 years after the Youth Synod

Mr. Anthony Judy and Ms. Ashita Jimmy

Youth Representatives from India

Anthony Judy:

Your Eminence, Your Excellency, dear fathers and sisters, my dear friends, thank you for giving us this opportunity. We are discussing about the youth and youth ministries in Asia, representing India. We are the national leaders of the youth movement and student movement.

In youth ministry, sometimes there is a lack of support at the diocesan and parish levels. In 2018, the Holy See hosted the youth Synod, and now, in the fifth year after that synod, it is time to re-check whether the youth are listened to or heard in the church. Sometimes, we feel that the hierarchies do not give time to listen to the youth.

Most of the time, especially during COVID-19 in India, the youth are always with the church for funerals and other things to support the church. However, when we consider the Asian aspects, many youths are with the church in some places, while many are not, and many are away from the church.

We have also discussed this in our group. Now, we have seen the presentation from Japan, and after COVID, youth are further away from the

church. It is time to listen again, and it is a continuous process. It is not for a specific time or purpose. It is a continuous process of listening to the youth.

If we do not listen to the youth, we cannot say they are the future and the present of the Church. If we start today, it will help the church grow and bring the youth together with us. Focusing on the youth is crucial. I am happy that during this meeting's initial stages, we had at least 13 minutes to discuss the concerns and the role of youth in the church.

I hope all have discussed the matter and given more importance to youth ministry in Asia. Thank you.

Ms. Ashita Jimmy:

Your Excellencies, Your Grace, fathers, sisters, and all the guests, thank you for giving us this opportunity. First, thank you so much for having us here. We feel blessed to be among you as youth representatives.

I represent the students from India, and I want to emphasize that if we think about it, we can actually make a difference in the church through the youth. Pope Francis also says that youth are the present and the future, but it is crucial to focus on the present and think about the future later. By focusing on the youth right now and providing them with opportunities, they can show what they can do for the Church.

Trusting our youth and engaging in more frequent and meaningful conversations with us can mean a lot. It shows that we are being heard. We feel that, currently, many people do not know what we do or what is happening. We just want the youth to be heard. We also want to change the present scenario of the Church. We want more youths to be active like we are. We are making great efforts towards that goal.

Furthermore, we want other countries to have youth movements like we do in our country. It would be meaningful if, on an Asian level, bishops could meet with youth just like they do. I know the Asian Youth Day happens virtually, but it would be even more impactful if we could meet face to face. This way, we could understand the scenarios of youth in other countries and the difficulties they are facing. Thank you so much.

Thank you, thank you very much. We assure you, all the bishops, that we are giving importance to this matter. Thank you.



Towards an Authentic Youth Accompaniment

Mr. Gregory Pravin

Youth Pastoral Worker, Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur

Good morning to everyone gathered at FABC 50. I thank God for the gift of each person present here and am very grateful for the opportunity to accompany you on this journey, even if it is just for a few minutes. A little bit about myself: My name is Gregory. I was not born a Catholic, but my faith journey began in my youth when I was 16.

Since 2009, I have been employed by The Architects of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, to serve as a lay pastoral worker in the office for young people. I wear various hats on the job, but ultimately, my responsibility is to be present and provide pastoral accompaniment to young people. Given the task to share with you this morning, I want to focus on the current and emerging situations of young people in the Church in Asia and why it must be a concern for the future.

I would like to strongly point out that I am very much concerned about accompaniment – the lack of it with young people who are the now of God, who shape communities and societies of the future. Allow me to explain myself further. Suppose I, as a young person, am being bullied. In that case, now, your company, the accompaniment of those around me, will nurture

me and help me to grow into either someone who continues to be bullied—a victim—or maybe I could become a survivor. But even then, what kind of survivor would I be? A survivor who bullies others, or would I be someone who defends those being bullied? Or very sadly but not uncommon today, I might not even live to grow older.

Suicide, as we know it today, is a very real option for young people. My point is that whatever situation a young person may be going through will affect his tomorrow. How will get marriage and procreate in the future? Would our young people even want to get married and have children? What type of nurturing and parenting styles will emerge? Will we even have vocations to the priesthood, religious life, or even to lay people working in the Church? Would they even be bothered or attracted to the service of the Church and its mission?

What type of public office leaders would we have? Would our young people want to become teachers, doctors, police officers, and even politicians to lead the country? As I continue, I would like to narrow my points to the post-effects of limiting our encounters and engagement on virtual platforms, especially within our churches and especially among the urban and more privileged settings.

In the past couple of years, we have altered our habits, which have led to new behaviors and, as a result, formed new characteristics and personalities within us. These are very subtle alterations. For example, before attending Mass, it would mean a call to holiness. I wake up on Sunday, I get ready, I read the readings beforehand, and you know, I prepare my mind for receiving the Lord. I receive the sacraments. At the end, I hear the mandate, “Go, go and be a witness.”

But the effects of the pandemic—what happens to my Sunday mornings? I wake up, take out my phone, and say, “Alright, let’s watch Mass for which country today.” You know, maybe I understand what is going on. Was I assisting at Mass in the celebration? Was I attending? Was I present? I am not too sure. So, what happens now? I will just wait for next Sunday. It just becomes routine. It becomes a habit.

How we used to celebrate the variety of devotions and popular piety has shifted from a community experience to an individual experience. Now, why this sudden shift? During the challenging times of the lockdown, we turned to the aid of technology to keep us alive, hopefully long enough to

survive and overcome the crisis, which was COVID-19.

Unfortunately, it took just too long. Digital platforms, which we had begun to use as tools to cope with our isolation, eventually became digital environments in which we began to live. A migration from actual to virtual has profoundly impacted our self-understanding, understanding of others, and ability to communicate and form relationships with others.

Well, we, young people, we were studying, we were working, we were dating, we were gaming—we were doing almost everything on the screen. Church-wise and faith-wise, we were no longer making pilgrimages to the Lord. Instead, now we had begun to summon spiritual personalities and celebrities in the name of the Lord. The knowledge that when two or three are gathered in the Lord’s name, He is present has been overthrown by the new experience. When I Google in the Lord’s name, there He is present.

“Digital platforms, which we had begun to use as tools to cope with our isolation, eventually became digital environments in which we began to live.”

Now, we have minimal need for bonding, communion, and fraternity. We have learned to become self-sufficient. We no longer long for or yearn for the Lord because we have found a way to satisfy our hunger for the Lord.

Now, just imagine this – a world without hunger, a world without hunger for Jesus Christ. If I can tell myself that I am self-sufficient in my relationship with Jesus, what else would I say I can become self-sufficient? What else would I need? Who else would I need? Me, myself, and I are enough.

Now, do not get me wrong. I am not referring to a segment of people who are rejecting the Lord or saying, “Jesus is just too much for me; please don’t give me the Cross, Church, no, not my community.” But I am referring to people who have been satisfied and self-sufficient on their own in their intimacy with the Lord. They do not need any more sacraments to be nourished. They do not need any more of the community to grow. I do not even know if they need Jesus to be with Jesus. It is so self-reliant and self-sufficient.

For us pastors and formators who were actively serving in front of

the camera, we may have had a more encouraging and uplifting experience. Well, that is simply because technology is a tool for us. But for the rest who were in front of the screens most of the time, they were living in it. It was their life.

Let me further elaborate. Those of us who were facilitating and preparing for online masses were called to rise above our comfort zone, above the call that we were asked to do. It was a great risk and sacrifice; it was like a mission. Then, we would attend Mass, prepare what was needed, receive the sacrament, and return the following Sunday because we have been mandated to. But the rest of everyone, sitting relaxed at home, viewing the screen day in and day out, weekend after weekend, were not asked to rise above the challenge. They were asked to step back and out of their comfort zone.

The community had become a spiritual community, communion had become spiritual communion, and connection had become a spiritual connection. I believe you understand why I am going with this. All this eventually became a spirituality; it became how I lived out my faith by myself.

I am not playing the blame game here or pointing fingers at bad pastoral guidelines during the lockdowns. None of us knew what to do and what it would do to us. Nevertheless, I am trying to emphasize that, knowingly or unknowingly, there is a new virus among us. I have no name for it. This is because I do not want to give it that glory. But if we do not

“Today, it seems the world is making a ruckus that young people are not returning to church, not for the sacraments, not for mission.”

recognize this virus among us, among young people, we might mistakenly medicate the symptoms rather than the root cause.

Today, it seems the world is making a ruckus that young people are not returning to church, not for the sacraments, not for mission. Surely, they have found new sacraments and new missions since they are now self-sufficient. We are in no place to argue or defend. The fullness of the truth is in the Catholic Church. It would do no good. We must embody this truth and show it to them in the hope that their eyes will be opened, and they will see it. Whenever someone in the church says, “Young people are not here,” think about this instead: Where are the

young people? Are we able to truly manifest the Good Shepherd in our lives? To be radical and courageous enough to leave behind the 99 and to run after the one? Can we shift the narrative from “The young people are absent” to “I am absent among the young people”? Or do we continue to give excuses for ourselves?

It certainly would be much easier to play the role of the father in the parable of the prodigal son, just to wait around until the son returns. Have you ever wondered what would happen if the son did not return? Then what are you going to do? I have always reflected personally that the Good Shepherd’s greatest struggle was to stop himself. He had to stop being a shepherd and become something else. He had to become a tracker; he had to become a seeker. He had to get lost in order to find the lost. And then, having found the lost, he took it as his own burden, his weight to carry. A famous lyric from a famous song comes to mind: “He ain’t heavy, he’s my brother.” I will be singing that same song.

Dear Bishops, if we want young people to change, then we need to change as well. We have to stop thinking as if the way forward is to improve what we are already doing, refine existing systems, and work with existing structures. No need to reinvent the wheel. But then, is it correct to put new wine into old wineskins? If our tools and methods were efficient to begin with, then why are we having this discussion? I have no guarantees what will work, but it is undoubtedly clear what will not work.

That being said, do not go out looking for others to be the new wineskins. We all have the capacity to become new wineskins. If not, we would not be here today. If not the Good Shepherd, then maybe the Good Samaritan. He, too, had to stop being who he was and become a nurse to the injured person. The rest who passed by, I imagine, were too distracted with who they were and with their identity and did not allow themselves to reach out. But the Good Samaritan was able to break free from the narrative.

Who am I? For whom am I? Though the events may have inconvenienced the Samaritan, just maybe his actions may have blessed the injured person with the opportunity for conversion. Something to ponder. Is our goal to provide convenience or conversion? In my own experience attending similar gatherings like this, there is always a recommendation for our Bishops first to become friends with young people. “Friendship before stewardship,” I have heard before. Examples of Bishops wearing jeans

for the very first time in their life so that they could be relatable to young people, of Bishops dancing and drinking and playing sports, talking about sex, even. So on and so forth. I think that these are wonderful, these are great moments of encounter. But I also think now is the time to elevate this friendship.

Can our Bishops cultivate an environment where young people can challenge the bishop in dialogue, can argue with passion, can disagree? Can the bishops place themselves in a vulnerable position among young people? Are we able to foster a friendship that is not utilitarian? A friendship that, despite our differences, holds firm. Can our Bishops and young people be equal co-workers in the community, in the Church? As pastors of the community, whether we are clergy, religious, or laity, there is always the temptation to desire a return in some sort from the people we are accompanying and invested in. Could they take on leadership roles for us? Can they be a more visible sign in the Church? Well, yes and no. I believe we must trust in the workings of the Holy Spirit and the discernment of the young people themselves.

“Through my own personal encounters and shared encounters with my fellow lay pastoral workers, some young people deliberately choose to become nobody so that they are free to be available and present to others.”

Through my own personal encounters and shared encounters with my fellow lay pastoral workers, some young people deliberately choose to become nobody so that they are free to be available and present to others. They say to me that if I am nobody, then I just might be able to be that needed somebody for anybody. They see the roles and responsibilities in church and other areas as limiting themselves to the mission. With respect to the Church, this may be something we need to reflect on deeply if our roles and responsibilities in church are keeping us from becoming like the Good Samaritan to others.

In conclusion, I would like to say something a little bit scandalous. The Eucharist is not the source and summit of our faith, and it will never be unless we are on a journey to the summit. Even before the events of the pandemic, many young people have fallen off the path to the summit and found alternatives. The recent events of the pandemic and lockdown have

changed the landscape so much that, for some, it is unrecognizable, and they have found themselves other alternatives. We need to navigate new paths to the summit. Along the way, some parts would lead us to dead ends, but surely, we will find some new paths that will lead us right to the summit together. We have to reinstall human dignity with more love and responsibility. We have to re-emphasize the common good with a more meaningful relationship. To replace solitude with solidarity and to reaffirm confidence in our young people through subsidiarity. Dear Bishops and friends present today, just in case my point was not made clear, the situation our young people are facing today, in church, in their workplace, and in life, is having to figure out everything on their own, by themselves, and face alone the consequences of their actions. I think Mother Teresa said it best: “The most terrible poverty is loneliness and the feeling of being unloved.” I cannot prescribe any other solution other than genuine accompaniment.

Do not clutter the lives of our young people with gimmicks programs and interactions if it is not in the hope of building authentic relationships and genuine pastoral accompaniment. I am hopeful that through accompaniment, our young people will grow roots firmly in the faith, and tomorrow, they will become genuine companions to the new generation of young people. With that, thank you.





Caring for Women Using Caring Justice: Contribution of the Church Towards Gender Justice

Dr. Stephanie Puen

Professor, Ateneo de Manila University

It is important to talk about women's contexts, and I'll talk specifically about the Philippine context. Then I would like to talk about caring justice, an important concept a colleague, Dr, Rachel Sanchez, and I are working on, which we think is an important path forward for the Church and society.

Situationer

A just society would recognize women's work in the home and in the workplace as a valuable contribution to the common good and promote women's well-being and flourishing as individuals. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought long-standing injustices against working women to the fore and has exacerbated these, framed through the tension of balancing women's needs versus the survival of the business and economy.

Women are among the many vulnerable groups affected heavily by the pandemic. Statistically, most of those who lost work and were hard hit were women: "all over the world, women have been hit harder by the pandemic,

leading some to call the global recession as a “shecession” (Punongbayan, 2020). “Shecession” refers to “the disproportionate impact of a pandemic recession on working women” which leads to greater gender inequality (Alon et al., 2020). “...in the US, at least one study showed that the pandemic has lowered not just women’s labor supply but also their wages — worsening already yawning gender wage gaps” (Punongbayan, 2020). UN Women, drawing from the UN Secretary General’s policy brief on COVID-19 and Women, UN Women Spotlight on Gender, COVID-19, and the SDGs, UN thematic policy briefs focused on COVID-19, and data from the UN Women’s rapid gender assessment, estimates that 740 million women work in the informal economy, and that globally, they “lost an average of 60 percent of their income” (UN Women, Gender Equality in the Wake of COVID-19, 2020:6). Industries and sectors that are dominated by women, particularly those in care industries, are more vulnerable to the negative impacts of the pandemic, with women’s employment being 19% more at risk compared to men, and with 70% of health and social care workers being women (UN Women, Gender Equality in the Wake of COVID-19, 2020:6).

The COVID-19 pandemic is a recent phenomenon that continues to unfold. There are some literatures regarding how it has impacted women, especially working women, in different parts of the world. A study in the United Kingdom has shown that, with the work-from-home setup, heterosexual parents both have increased involvement in the household. However, the demands for childcare and schooling also increased, and many mothers compared to their husbands still worked more to care for the home and their children due to existing gender norms (Chung et al., 2021:5–11). Another study from the United States finds that the gender gap in domestic work remained. While fathers became more involved at home during the pandemic, mothers still were the ones who overcompensated to adjust to the increase in parental demands in the household, child-rearing and schooling (Dunatchik et al., 2021:10). Research on Bangladeshi women exhibit that women experience more vulnerability in the labor market and more unpaid workload during the pandemic. The study shows that feminized areas of

“The study shows that feminized areas of work such as agriculture and garments are most negatively affected. Women are among the first to lose their jobs, be further relegated to the home, and experience poverty.”

work such as agriculture and garments are most negatively affected. Women are among the first to lose their jobs, be further relegated to the home, and experience poverty. Women struggle with double work burden, in order to manage the demands of both paid and unpaid work much more during the pandemic (Sarker, 2020:1–5).

These existing studies similarly highlight the gendered impact of the pandemic on women’s work despite different societal contexts. A similar pattern of unequal gender division negatively affecting Philippine women’s work can be established based on international data and local essays or news articles. Related literature concerning women’s work during the pandemic account for the gender dimension involved but these hardly tackle the role of religion, and the Christian response needed for working women during this crisis.

Delving into the Philippine context, “64 percent of working Filipino women reported that COVID-19 had adversely affected them, although they were less worried than their peers about the impact on their careers. Only 27 percent of working women in the country think the disruption will prevent them from progressing in their careers.” (Dumlao-Abadilla, 2020). Because of this, “the COVID-19 pandemic threa-tens some of the progress made in achieving gender equality in the global workplace as working women are forced to take on expanded duties at home and at work at the expense of their mental and physical health” (Dumlao-Abadilla, 2020).

Exacerbated by the pandemic, women have had to work from home and work at home: the expectation to take care of the home as well as work their job has become more prominent and taxing as women began working from home due to the pandemic. This has thus contributed to women having to let go of work, due to “the extraordinary demands of childcare amid the pandemic. Parents who should otherwise be working are finding themselves having to stay at home and look after their kids — especially to oversee their kids’ online education. Mothers might bear the brunt of this task. Data show that women outnumber men in the ranks of those newly not in the labor force” (Punongbayan, 2020). The double burden of having to take care of domestic duties as well as their career because of patriarchal expectations has also worsened by the increase also in domestic violence, correlated with the increasing isolation of being stuck at home together with loss of income, basic needs, and social safety nets (Nikos-Rose, 2021). Thus, while the pandemic has had a negative effect on many different communities,

the emerging research and data “reveals the extra toll this unprecedented disruption has had on women, who are traditionally expected to shoulder most, if not all, household and childcare responsibilities even as they build their careers” (Dumlao-Abadilla, 2020).

The pandemic has also affected women working for the Catholic church, and the ritual of parish life and attending mass that anchors people (Reynolds, 2021). Thus, the parish has had to adapt its rituals for people to participate in, not only for the good of the people, but also for the parish, as the parish relies heavily on donations, which have decreased during the pandemic (White, 2021). The work of adapting to the “new normal” has fallen on the shoulders of the people running the parish daily activities, who are mostly women. “Frequently described as the backbone of parishes,” women have filled many administrative roles in parishes, and the forced changes brought about by the pandemic, has made the work of women more difficult, given limited resources (Weber, 2018; Simcoe, 2021).

The UN has also identified three major recommendations that ought to be included in a gender-aware response to COVID-19: first, there should be “investments in universal, gender responsive social protection systems to support women’s income security;” second, there should be “expanded access to affordable, quality childcare services to enable women to remain in or (re)enter the workforce;” and lastly, there should be a “reversal of longstanding inequalities, including unequal division of work at home, the gender pay gap, and pervasive undervaluation of work done by women” (UN Women, 2020:7).

However, part of the problem in responding to women’s needs and operationalizing these recommendations is that care is undervalued. Since it is primarily associated with women, it has led to an undervaluing of women’s labor and contributions to society, not just in the Philippines but elsewhere, as seen in the third UN recommendation. Care has also been marginalized in political and macroeconomic discourses which also serves as a way to analyze what is lacking in present society and imagine alternatives and solutions to the issues that women face.

Knowing this situation, it is important to ask—how do we care in ways that are responsive to the needs of women today and to show how important care is? Work that Dr. Rachel Sanchez and I are doing on talks about caring justice as an important consideration in responding to the situation of women. I

would like to highlight 3 aspects of caring justice in particular: 1) caring for or taking care of and responsibility; 2) care receiving and responsiveness; and 3) caring with and solidarity, based on Joan Tronto's work on an ethic of care and Catholic social thought, which I think is an important contribution that the Church can foster with and for women, not just here in the Philippines or South East Asia, but also in other communities.

Caring For (or taking care of) and Responsibility

“Caring for ” or “taking care of” the one cared about entails taking on responsibility for the unmet need and finding ways to address it. It also involves recognizing that one has the capacity to respond to the need (Tronto, 1993:106). A sense of responsibility comes from interconnected social relationships where a person recognizes that one has done or has failed to do something that has contributed to the needs of others, and so the person should care (Tronto, 1993:132). Concretely, caring for another from a sense of responsibility entails taking on the burden of meeting the other's unmet needs (Tronto, 1993:132).

The interconnectedness from which a sense of responsibility emerges is akin to Catholic social thought's notion of fraternity and is further enhanced by it. The culture of caring in Catholic social thought is situated within the context of universal fraternity (Kućko, 2020:702– 734). Hence, this culture is not just for one's kin or nation or in-group, but rather meant to include all, especially the vulnerable and wounded. This culture is also meant to succeed with everyone's contribution, with participation at the grassroots level and synergy and collaboration at the level of institutions and higher organizations (Francis, Fratelli Tutti, 2020: sec. 78).

In relation to this phase of caring, privileged irresponsibility is not only a form of ignorance but also a form of excusing oneself from taking responsibility for caring. For instance, Tronto gives the example of a breadwinner and head of a traditional household, usually a man, to excuse himself from the responsibility of caring for the home and doing domestic chores because he is already the provider for the family. (Tronto, 2013:58) This would explain why many working mothers find themselves overcompensating and taking on more household responsibilities despite some instances where working from home has become possible for both parents.

Care-receiving and Responsiveness

The second aspect of caring I want to emphasize is the acknowledgement that reception on the part of the object of care is important (Tronto, 1993:107, 134). This stage makes the moral quality of responsiveness important in the actualization of care. When a person gives care to a person, group or object, the person, group or object responds in various ways. Some ways can be explicit like words of gratitude. Some responses can be less explicit like a child becoming strong from healthy food or a plant growing from being watered. Responsiveness entails mutuality in that the person caring must observe these responses with a sensitivity to needs that have not been met or new needs that may arise, thus continuing the process of care (Tronto, 1993:136). Rather than seeking to understand the needs of others by putting oneself in their position, the kind of responsiveness Tronto describes involves considering the position of the other as expressed by the other. The care-giver engages the perspective of the care-receiver without assuming that people are the same and interchangeable (Tronto, 1993:136).

The various needs that have emerged in the situation of the pandemic have called for urgent responses from governments and businesses. Tronto's caring framework is a reminder to also observe the effect of one's decisions even though these are intended to help others, and then listen to feedback. Caring about women would therefore eventually entail listening to women's voices and what they have to say about the different arrangements or possibilities presented to them during the pandemic.

“Caring about women would therefore eventually entail listening to women's voices and what they have to say about the different arrangements or possibilities presented to them during the pandemic.”

Moreover, Tronto adds that there is a “...Need to keep a balance between the needs of the care-giver and care-receivers” (Tronto, 1993:136). This comment is especially relevant to mothers who are working during the pandemic. Many of them are care-givers of their children but they also have their own needs.

Caring With and Solidarity, Plurality, Communication, Trust and Respect

Tronto's initial listing of the phases of the process of care did not

include “caring with” but she later added this stage based on qualities which Selma Sevenhuijsen mentions are needed for caring in a democratic society. These qualities are: “plurality, communication, trust and respect;” these will enable people to see caring as a social activity and collective responsibility where everyone can be involved as receiving and giving care (Tronto, 2013:35).

Caring with one another is also expressed in *Laudato Si* which emphasizes solidarity and plurality by calling for participation and inclusion amidst diversity. Such a community includes each person’s active inclusion and participation (Francis, Fratelli Tutti, 2020: sec. 98). This culture of care thus also reminds society of the importance of “solidarity, which, “as a moral virtue and social attitude born of personal conversion, calls for commitment on the part of those responsible for education and formation... [this implies] ‘solidity’ born of the consciousness that we are responsible for the fragility of others as we strive to build a common future....when we speak of the need to care for our common home, our planet, we appeal to that spark of universal consciousness and mutual concern that may still be present in people’s hearts” (Francis, Fratelli Tutti, 2020:sec. 114-115, 117).

In Catholic social thought, the quality of communication is often expressed as dialogue. Dialogue and solidarity are not just private matters, but are also crucial in the functioning of social systems and structures (Francis, Fratelli Tutti, 2020: sec. 181).

Dialogue plays an important role in fostering a culture of care, especially in response to fear, uncertainty, and conflict. “The ability to sit down and listen to others, typical of interpersonal encounters, is paradigmatic of the welcoming attitude shown by those who transcend narcissism and accept others, caring for them and welcoming them into their lives” (Francis, Fratelli Tutti, 2020: sec. 48). Being able to encounter and handle conflict without withdrawing away or creating violence is crucial, especially in ensuring no one is forgotten or left behind (Francis, Fratelli Tutti, 2020: sec. 28). Dealing with fear, uncertainty, and conflict in a healthy manner is formed through an appreciation of one’s own identity in relation to others--in the family, in one’s local community, in social institutions, and even across borders (Francis, Fratelli Tutti, 2020: sec. 143).

The pandemic has brought both interconnectivity and social inequality to the fore. This notion of caring as “caring with” is therefore very

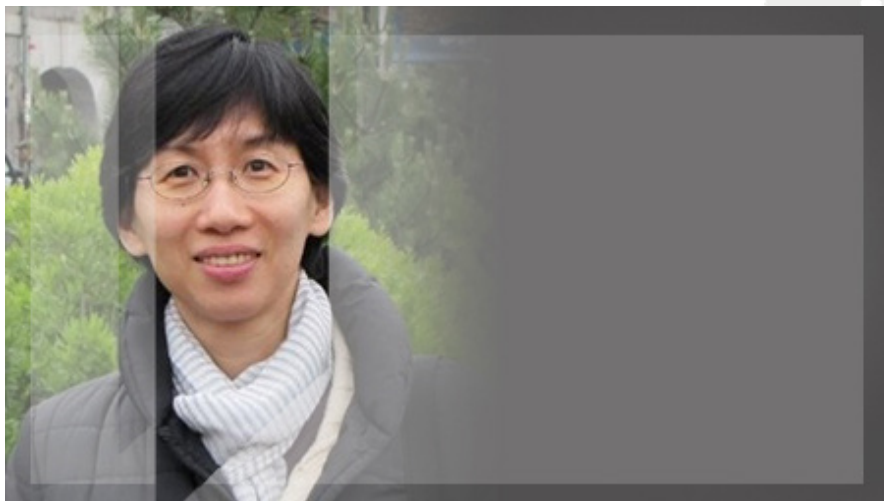
apt. In the Philippines, “caring with” is expressed through the community pantries that began with the initiative of one Filipina, Ana Patricia Non, who could no longer merely stand by while so many are suffering (Cabalza, 2021, Cabato, 2021, Suazo, 2021). However, there is a danger of merely romanticizing the community pantries or the Philippine spirit of bayanihan without seeing the need that catalyzes it. The qualities of “caring with” also challenges society, governments and broader institutions to recognize the need behind why these pantries become widespread and to cooperate with people and promote just social transformation.

Conclusion

Caring justice as a concept we think is important for women moving forward in the Church and is something that the Church can continue to foster. Care is an important part of Catholic theology, Church history, and mission of spreading the gospel, where we are called to care for others in the spirit of the common good, giving each what is due to them in justice, especially vulnerable groups such as women.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to our conversation today!





The Role of Women for the Church in Asia

Dr. Mary Yuen

Justice and Peace Commission, Hong Kong

Your Eminence and other participants of FABC, thank you for inviting me to share with you in this panel on the role of women in the church in Asia. I am honored to be here and would like to begin by sharing my personal experiences and the challenges faced by women in society and the Church. I will also provide examples of pastoral responses and the need for empowerment.

I would like to begin by sharing an experience from over twenty years ago when I was a young Church worker at the Justice and Peace Commission in Hong Kong. Along with representatives from various Asian countries, I had the chance to participate in a Villa for women in Pattaya. This experience involved visiting marginalized groups, such as sex workers, women laborers, and those in distress. Accompanying them and listening to their stories was a profound experience for me.

During the workshop, we had the opportunity to hear from committed women leaders at the grassroots level. We also engaged in discussions and theological reflections. This experience highlighted the transformative power of learning from grassroots women and integrating

their perspectives into our own understanding.

Upon my return to Hong Kong, we formed a small working group at the Justice and Peace Commission. Our focus was on producing Bible-sharing materials for parishes and an educational kit on gender issues for Catholic schools. Additionally, I attended feminist theology courses and studied theology in the evenings, further expanding my understanding of gender issues in society and the Church.

In my subsequent studies, I delved deeper into the topic and took courses that utilized the method of the pastoral cycle or praxis approach. I found this method to be invaluable in theological reflection and pastoral planning. It continues to guide my work to this day.



Through my experiences, it is evident that FABC has long been concerned with women's issues. The recent FABC 50 documents include a paragraph on women, reflecting the bishops' attention to the stories of women facing discrimination, violence, and oppression. Building on this foundation, I would like to share some research-based points that highlight the challenges faced by women, including domestic workers, migrant women, low-income cleaning workers, and abused women.

For example, let us consider female foreign domestic helpers in Hong Kong. During the pandemic, many of them have been forced to stay in home quarantine with their employers, leading to unexpected terminations, making it difficult for them to return home or disclose their whereabouts. They also face increased workloads due to heightened cleaning and sanitation needs. Some employers impose unreasonable hygiene requirements, and helpers are often denied permission to go out during their days off due to fears of infection and spreading it to their families.

Another group facing challenges is migrant women in China. Many of them migrate from rural areas to urban cities, seeking autonomy and liberation from various forms of authority and limited opportunities in their hometowns. However, they encounter new problems upon arrival, such as temporary, physically exhausting, and low-status jobs with limited security and welfare benefits. They are also at risk of facing sexual harassment and abuse.

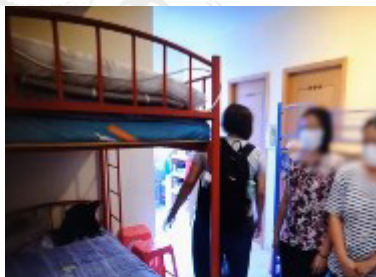
Furthermore, in Hong Kong, many women work as street cleaning workers, facing low incomes and heavy workloads, particularly exacerbated during the pandemic. They lack sufficient protection and are at a higher risk of infection. These women need to assert their voices and advocate for their needs.

Apart from these examples, we also see challenges working women face in East Asia, where they must balance work and family responsibilities. The pandemic has further intensified the pressures on single mothers, as their children have to study from home, leading to an increase in domestic violence incidents.

In the face of these vulnerabilities, it is important to explore how we can respond and empower these women. While acknowledging their difficulties, we must recognize their potential for transformation and agency. They can regain their capability for change and become agents of empowerment and solidarity.

There are also other challenges faced by women, especially in East Asia, where many women are working women who have to balance work and family responsibilities. Single mothers face additional difficulties, particularly during the pandemic when children have to study from home, leading to an increase in domestic violence incidents. NGOs have conducted surveys showing a significant rise in calls for help, and statistics indicate a surge in domestic violence cases during lockdowns. In the face of these vulnerabilities, it is essential to explore how we can respond to women's needs and affirm their capability for empowerment and solidarity actions. Based on the notion of social friendship and political charity found in Catholic social teachings, partial care should be provided to disadvantaged women. Women as objects and subjects of liberation, as affirmed in Mary's

Magnificat, should be recognized as agents of change and history. Solidarity should empower women's capabilities, upholding their dignity and moral agency while redefining differences and making connections. Supporting women's self-help groups, advocating for social transformation, and fostering the virtue of Charity within church communities are essential aspects of strengthening women's power.



Now, I would like to share a few examples of partial care for disadvantaged women. For instance, many migrant domestic helpers face numerous challenges, including the risk of losing their jobs and being unable to find shelter. In response, church workers and volunteers form teams to seek temporary shelter for these workers and provide them with basic necessities. Counseling services and rights advocacy are also extended to migrant workers, along with temporary shelter during job transitions or court cases.

In Hong Kong, there is a partial center for Filipinos and Indonesians that provides material support and care and extends solidarity through counseling services. Workshops and gatherings for Indonesian migrant workers offer opportunities for skills development, education, empowerment, and the affirmation of their subjectivity.

The Catholic Labor Commission and labor centers in Hong Kong organize monthly gatherings and self-help groups for low-income workers, fostering their confidence, expression of needs, and lobbying for policy changes. These groups share their stories through interviews with the media, workshops, and church gatherings.

Additionally, for families facing crises, the Church, through social welfare agencies, operates Family Crisis Support Centers, offering counseling services and support to prevent family crises and address domestic violence cases. During the pandemic, these centers have seen an increase in requests

for assistance and have been providing various services to prevent suicide and support those facing domestic violence.

Turning to women in the Church, we observe both positive and negative signs. Positive signs include the presence of more women theologians and ministers who gather to theologize and discuss pastoral concerns. Local Churches in Asia see an increasing number of women actively participating in church affairs, attending theological courses, and taking up roles in ministries and leadership positions.



However, negative signs persist in certain Asian countries influenced by traditional cultures, such as Confucianism, which does not affirm gender equality. Local Churches may adopt hierarchical and patriarchal practices, leading to the curtailment of women's roles. Cultural and patriarchal traditions restrict women from playing leading roles in the Church despite their active participation.

In conclusion, all human beings are created in the image of God, possessing inherent dignity and value. Women should share equal dignity and equality in the Church based on their baptismal call as followers of Christ. Church teachings promote equality, yet a significant gap remains between theory and reality, with women being underrepresented in decision-making processes. The notion of gender complementarity taught by the Church can sometimes exclude women from leadership positions.

Therefore, church leaders should actively listen to women's voices, include them in decision-making processes, and provide opportunities for their greater involvement in ministries and evangelization. Keywords for effective engagement with women include listening, accompanying, empathy, and solidarity.

Lastly, I would like to mention a few recommendations from the BILA on Women in FABC.

- to enhance the participation of women in all Church organizations and councils;
- at the diocesan level, a committee be formed to address injustice especially against women and children, and take immediate action;
- women, including the religious sisters, be justly compensated for their work;
- women's theology be introduced in seminaries and formation centers;
- women be given support and opportunities which will enable them to study theology





The Role of Women in the Church

Sr. Rasika Pieris

Human Rights Activist

Good morning to all those who are part of the efforts of making the Church in Asia as Church of Asia and I would like to extend my sincere gratitude for the invitation extended.

Context:

Socio-political and religio-cultural traditions of a particular region can have a strong and enduring impact on the lives of people, as it does in Asia, where women have made remarkable progress in recent years and the transformation possible.

Asian women, who comprise more than a quarter of the world's population are not a monolithic group of people, yet oppression of women is a major form of oppression in Asia. Suffering, though a common reality, is closely connected with sexism, classism, racism, militarism, and colonialism, that are interlinked. But women of Asia suffer more than men.

Listening to the experience of women: women as agents of social transformation

For Gustavo Gutiérrez, the poor has two key elements: (1) The poor are the victims of oppressive and unjust social structures; and (2) The poor

are the agents of change if they are equipped with skills and hope to create new horizons. Similarly, the poorest of 'the poor' – the women of Asia are not mere victims of an oppressive system but are the social agents with the authority to transform unjust social and religious structures, through resisting and becoming. Resisting to remain victims of traditions and rituals that prevent them being the agent of social transformation is a new norm that the women of Asia adopted in order to experience God/Liberation. They are the 'agency' of 'representation' being the persons that they are called to be. They struggle for an equal society where they shall live with freedom and dignity, instead of awaiting for the religious promise of freedom after death.

Theology from the perspective of women

Being the majority in the Church of Asia, women face marginalization through the power structures inclusive of the Church due to misogyny within the Christian tradition and notions of purity and taboos in Asian religious traditions. For a woman to reject, what the dominating structures dictate, is a taboo in the Asian context. For C.S. Song, "What we have in many countries in Asia is a culture of suffering within a culture of domination."

In the church, there is an extensive disagreement on women's status under various historical condition due to social and religious construction of gender. Problematising traditional gender roles is considered feminist, hence argued, feminism is a production of modern cultures which is contrary to biblical values. A woman's nonconformist approach to societal status quo could be painted as 'unwomanly' or deprived of 'woman' qualities because struggle for women's liberation has been criticized by the patriarchal system as 'both western and bourgeois' for neither is applicable nor desirable in the context of Asia. Essentialising theology from the perspective of women is also de-patriarchalisation of theologizing in Asia. Any theology from Asia that does not touch the multi-layered oppression of Asian women is limited in scope and cannot liberate any person in Asia, because unless all oppressed women are liberated no one can be liberated.

No one possess the truth, truth possess the truth, theology has to emerge from the historical reality of the people in a context. By claiming the power of naming, the Asian women transform male-stream theologies. Hopefully, this process of producing a new way of doing theology seeks to correct and complete the one-dimensional tunnel vision of society and of the organized religion of Asia. It generates a new way of thinking about

faith, starting from reality and experience. This demands that the church listens to the alternative stories women offer, in their struggle for liberation. Church also needs to find new ways of doing theology together with men, and women; priests, laity, and religious in different social contexts.

2. Doing theology as Asian women

For Aloysius Pieris a theology is not a rational explanation of our faith but something emerging within a context of people: a dynamic involvement of a faith community.

Hardly offering liberating alternatives to the situations of the oppressed, traditional theology does not recognize the struggle for freedom as a part of salvation since it is not correlated with the present experience. The absence of the social/structural dimension of sinfulness within the interpretation of sin in the institutional Christian understanding of salvation scarcely recognizes political liberation as an essential element for salvation. This understanding of soteriology paves the way to viewing human beings, especially women who are the most oppressed in Asian society as the passive recipients of the results of unjust systems. Alternative society building is a dream for many women where no hierarchical structures prevail, therefore forming alternative societal structures like the Christian women grassroots movement becomes essential.

In the church of Asia, there is a need to listen to women's experiences, and women need to feel that they have been heard and have made a contribution to the life of the Church. When lived-praxis becomes the axis for theologizing, the lived experiences of women cannot be excluded. The struggle of the women to resist oppressive structures opens new avenues for reconstructing the existing theologies in Asia. The experience of 'poorest of the poor' is an influential and essential source of deconstructing "the theologies that have long been sustained by a conception of men's power over women."

Rethinking of the image of God that gives life to women

The 'maleness' attributed to God/Christ is a stumbling block for an inclusive paradigm of the Church. In the reification of God as male, the God-symbol is monopolized, and man becomes the norm of full humanity. The action of making the symbol of the male God synonymous with power, undergirds the hierarchical male church in which men are definers of codes

and women are neurotic consumers.

In their struggle for liberation, many women found new names and places for God, who empowers them resist suffering that is contrary to the traditional teachings that emphasize the masculine attributes of God. If women are to see themselves as creatures made in the divine image, that is, primary identity as the image of God, the language used to speak of God must reflect more than male symbolism, because language is not politically neutral, but rather serves as a tool of either oppression or life-giving.

4. New consciousness in the women and the church

Reading from androcentric perspective, texts such as the Bible, the Prayer of the Church, and liturgical lectionaries in the Church, does not affirm the equal dignity of women. Another remarkable factor for stagnation in affirming the dignity and mission of women in the Church is the internalization of patriarchy by women. The system that affects all aspects of the life of women and undermines their personhood in subtle ways. Women admit to accepting “man,” “mankind,” “brethren,” “sons of God,” “he,” “his” and “him” as being inclusive of both genders – this portrays that women are subsumed by or no more than shadows of men. Raising awareness of the dignity and role of women in the Church challenges this status quo in ecclesiology and theology.

Awakening to the equal dignity of women and men include the acknowledgement of the God-given creation and baptismal dignity of the imago Dei/Christi. In consciousness-raising, both women and men must take cognizance of the fact that the equality of believers, translating into shared and equal participation of women and men in all aspects of church life, is according to God’s will.

From hermeneutics of suspicion, (re-membrance, proclamation and active actualization,) women may draw inspiration and support from reclaiming the history/her-story of their foremothers and fore-sisters in the Bible whose voices have been muted or even silenced. Since patriarchal structures in both Church and society have the potential for transformation, consciousness-raising in conversion requires exposure of the overt and subtle ways in which men and women are entangled in the sin of patriarchy. Both women and men dream for the new humanity in Christ, and this could be reached through dialogue with women.

5. Women as full decision-making citizens

Schüssler Fiorenza defines ‘ekklēsia of wo/men’ as a democratic congress of full decision-making citizens, while highlighting democratic equality, citizenship, and decision-making power as essential elements of the notion of ekklēsia. The vision of the ekklēsia of wo/men is to struggle for change and liberation of God’s life-giving and transforming power of the community, in the midst of the structural sin of the kyriarchal powers of exploitation and dehumanisation. Schüssler Fiorenza proposes an alternative magisterium of ekklēsia of wo/men as the locus or place of divine revelation besides the Bible or the tradition of the patriarchal Church. It would become a norm for Christian theology in which the preferential option for the poor becomes a preferential option for wo/men, especially poor wo/men. She speaks further about the same notion of ekklēsia of wo/men as a discipleship of equals, while reinterpreting the experience of the early Christian community who lived in solidarity ‘from below’. Within the discipleship of equals, all are learners and there are no masters; each one learns from the other, which is the new paradigm of the alternative magisterium, the ekklēsia of wo/men, and the norm for Christian theology.

6. Learning from the other

In the view of A. Pieris, “each religion is a unique language, an idiom, with which the human mind in a given context has expressed its yearning for and its experience of integral liberation.” Hence, in speaking about the liberation Christology of religious pluralism, he draws attention to two imperatives: (1) Fidelity to what is unique to Christian faith; and (2) Fairness towards every other religion’s distinctive otherness, because the ultimate goal of every religion is the liberation of ‘every human person and the whole human person’: a soteriological absolute.

Living in a religiously pluralistic continent, many Asian Feminist theologians have found their own heritage as a new style to present the rich and multi-layered theological voices through symbols, images, songs, dances, stories with the aim of full liberation for all. The multiplicity of religious heritage that exists and interacts within and among Asians provides resources for a paradigmatic shift in the struggle for liberation. The inter-religious and inter-ethnic gathering, dialogue, sharing, and worship extends the solidarity of both men and women for the common goal of working together for liberation.

7. Coming to the understanding that “Men of quality are not threatened by women’s call for equality,”

Realization of admitting that liberation of women is integral to the liberation of the whole of humanity is pivotal. The call for equality poses threat, for Henriette Katoppo, “it is caused by fear – fear of loss of status, fear of what will happen when patriarchal structures mutate, but, basically, fear of the Other.” Overcoming male domination is a challenge for women in Asia, while recognizing it as a sin, because patriarchy in the Asian context is not just a matter of male supremacy and male-centeredness, but also a socio-political and religio-cultural system of control and domination involving powerful over powerless. In the process of affirming the full humanity of women, the recognition of how a woman’s particular context shapes her experience of oppression is not sufficient, it demands alternative ways of resisting elements that support patriarchy: “The stereotyped Asian social landscape must change.”

Conclusion

The challenge that remains a concern for the church of Asia is to distance herself from the colonial roots and its representations and make a paradigm shift from Eurocentrism to Asiacentrism. Eurocentricism does not fully echo the Asiancentric ideals of interdependence and interrelatedness which are core values of Asiancentricity. Nevertheless, being Asiancentric does not relate to being contrary to Eurocentrism nor cultural separatism, rather using Asian praxis as hermeneutical lense.

Asian praxis demands moving from supressionism to ecumenism without which the making sense of the Church of Asia will be a futile exercise. Mimetic histories of leadership model that is vertical may not suit as the context demands an inclusive structure that is horizontal that ensures the participation of people from all walks of life.

For the Church of Asia to choose the ‘preferential option for the women’ is ensuring the preference God adopted by taking the side of the oppressed.



The Situation of Asia on Migration, Labor, and Human Trafficking

Ms. Christine Nathan

President, International Catholic Migration Commission

Good afternoon, Your Eminences, Excellencies, delegates, sisters, and brothers. I would like to express my gratitude for the introduction and take this opportunity to introduce myself in my new role. My name is Christine Nathan, and I am the newly elected president of ICMC, which stands for the International Catholic Migration Commission. On behalf of ICMC, I bring warm greetings to all of you.

First and foremost, I would like to thank FABC for organizing this conference and inviting ICMC to address the attendees. It is truly an honor and a pleasure to be part of this 50-year FABC General Conference, where we, as people of Asia, journey together. I am particularly delighted to be back in Bangkok, which was my home for 12 years while working with the United Nations International Labor Organization (ILO) as a regional specialist for workers' education. In this role, I covered 32 countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

For those who may be less familiar with the ILO, it is a tripartite organization where the government, employers, and trade unions work together as equal partners. Unlike other UN agencies primarily working

with governments, the ILO engages all three stakeholders. Throughout my career, both at the ILO and now with ICMC, I have had the privilege of working closely on migration, labor, and human trafficking issues at the local, national, regional, and international levels. I have also worked extensively with South Asian countries such as India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Afghanistan, and the Maldives, as well as ASEAN countries including Thailand, Myanmar, the Philippines, Malaysia, Laos, Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Singapore, and Vietnam. Additionally, I have worked with countries in the Pacific Islands. This diverse experience is significant because many countries in South Asia and ASEAN serve as both sending and receiving countries for migrants.

Furthermore, I have had the opportunity to address migrant issues in collaboration with international financial institutions such as the World Bank, IMF, and ADB. Additionally, I have been a member of the Labor and Migration Commission of the Archdiocese of Mumbai, India, for the past two years. It is a pleasure to see Cardinal Oswald and Bishop Alwin present here as part of this conference's planning and organizing team.

Given this background, I am honored to speak before you today on the topics of migration, labor, and human trafficking, with a particular focus on the situation in Asia.

As we all know, the Church, particularly Pope Francis, has taken a firm stance on migration, labor, human trafficking, and the plight of refugees. Pope Francis has collaborated closely with the International Labor Organization (ILO) as both organizations strongly believe in social justice.

In 2018, Pope Francis organized a global consultative meeting in Rome, bringing together trade unionists from around the world. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss their roles and responsibilities and the challenges they face in organizing workers into trade unions. Recognizing the need for balance, Pope Francis subsequently organized a consultative meeting with employers to address their roles and responsibilities and how they can become model employers in the contemporary business world.

UNIAPAC, a Christian-based organization of employers, advises the Vatican on business developments. I mention this because the Holy Father, at the international level, understands the significance of these

partnerships in addressing labor, migration, and trafficking issues and ultimately eliminating the problem of human trafficking.

While much has been said about the role of migrant workers and governments, we often overlook the role of employers. Pope Francis has taken the initiative to address this gap.

In this regard, the mission of the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) is to protect and serve uprooted people, including refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced people, victims of human trafficking, and migrants, regardless of their faith, ethnicity, or nationality. This is the vision and work of the ICMC, aimed at restoring dignity and inspiring change within the migrant community.

The ICMC was founded in 1951 and mandated by Pope Pius XII to unite and organize existing Catholic associations and committees and promote, reinforce, and coordinate projects and activities on behalf of migrants and refugees. Since its inception, the ICMC has faithfully strived to protect and serve uprooted people, including refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced people, victims of human trafficking, and migrants. The Pope takes a keen interest in the work of migrants and refugees.

“...the mission of the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) is to protect and serve uprooted people, including refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced people, victims of human trafficking, and migrants, regardless of their faith, ethnicity, or nationality.”

The ICMC conducts its activities in accordance with humanitarian principles and the highest professional standards, guided by Catholic values and teachings. It is firmly committed to upholding the rights and dignity of people who are forced to leave their homes due to conflict, persecution, violence, the impact of disasters or climate change, the loss of livelihoods, and an escape from abject poverty.

Currently, the ICMC is on the ground in Ukraine, providing assistance to citizens by offering food, shelter, and medicine and seeking safe pathways for their passage to secure areas. With this brief background

on the ICMC, let me now address some salient issues and concerns of migrant workers.

The World Bank estimates that by 2050, there will be over 400 million migrants. Human mobility is an inevitable aspect that we can no longer ignore when considering our economies, societies, and cultures. Migration is a significant issue in the Asia-Pacific region, impacting millions of people, particularly those living in rural areas and villages.

According to the Asian Development Bank, there are over 50 million international migrants in the Asia-Pacific region, including those working in the Gulf countries. For instance, Malaysia has approximately 3.2 million migrant workers, including 1.2 million undocumented workers. India has over 18 million people working and living overseas, with 8.1 million in the Gulf countries alone.

The International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates that over 10 million Bangladeshi workers are overseas, primarily employed as low-skilled laborers in the Gulf countries. Research has also highlighted the increasing number of women who migrate as heads of families, seeking better job opportunities for themselves and their families.

The feminization of migration has brought new challenges to migration governance. It is crucial to understand the vulnerabilities and consider the well-being of migrant women and girls throughout all phases of migration, including before they migrate, during their migration, and upon their return home. For instance, a study reveals that out of the 6 million Philippine workers, 54 percent are women.

Women workers in destination countries often face greater discrimination, harassment, and abuse, both physically and verbally. Migrant women, in particular, earn significantly less on average compared to nationals in destination countries. This is because migrants often take up jobs that are less attractive to nationals, and women are among the least protected and lowest paid.

Asia is witnessing a booming migration industry, operating both legally and illegally, providing cheap labor to some of the wealthiest and most dynamic economies at a high human cost. While migration contributes

to productive labor and serves as an economic lifeline for millions, the vulnerable conditions experienced by female migrant workers have become an increasing source of public concern, as evidence of abuses continues to emerge. Protection from sending countries is often limited.

Many countries hastily send their workers abroad, leading to disrupted family life, multiple sex partners when one spouse is away, children dropping out of school, and young children turning to drugs and alcohol. The social fabric is gradually being destroyed. Efforts by trade unions, civil society organizations, and non-governmental organizations to campaign for job creation and decent work often fall on deaf ears, as governments find it easier to send workers abroad rather than address employment issues domestically. Unemployment levels are high in several countries within the region due to the lack of employment policies.

Migration is considered the backbone of several countries in the region. For instance, countries like the Philippines, Bangladesh, and Nepal are known as remittance economies, where high foreign reserves and GDP growth are attributed to remittances from migrant workers. However, the exploitation and poor working conditions faced by these workers cannot be ignored. Last week, I attended a national conference on migrant workers in Delhi, where the Ministry of External Affairs mentioned that India received \$87 billion in remittances last year. India aspires to be known as the skill capital of the world, but it sends its workers abroad hastily.

Migration is also a lucrative business for sending countries. In the case of Bangladesh, migrant workers contribute around \$15 billion to the country's economy. However, the remittance business comprises only a small percentage, as most businesses keep their money in overseas tax havens. The country provides significant bank loans for starting businesses, but little investment is made in migrant workers, who often have to sell their land or jewelry or borrow from loan sharks. Nonetheless, their remittances form a major part of the GDP.

Another significant issue is human trafficking, particularly of women and girls. It is estimated that between 600,000 and 800,000 cases of trafficking occur every year in the Asia and Pacific region. This poses a major problem in the region following migration. Push factors such as poverty, lack of employment opportunities, high education costs, and related issues

drive people to migrate or seek jobs overseas. Low-skilled women find it easier to seek domestic or low-paid jobs.

The International Labor Organization (ILO) adopted a convention on domestic workers in 2010, and almost all countries agreed to its adoption. It was the first time a convention specifically for workers in the informal economy was adopted. I witnessed the adoption of this convention, and during the three-week discussion, the employer group walked out of the meeting several times, opposing the convention and being against any laws or rights for domestic workers, including national wages.

Labor migration in Asia and the Pacific region largely occurs under temporary migration programs, and most migrants engage in manual labor and low-skilled work.

Migrant workers often fill jobs that are unattractive to nationals, and certain occupations are highly segregated by gender. Unfortunately, many countries in the region witness cases of workers living and working under slave-like conditions, with no fixed contracts, their passports taken away by employers, uncertainty in wages and payment, and various forms of exploitation.

“Unfortunately, many countries in the region witness cases of workers living and working under slave-like conditions, with no fixed contracts, their passports taken away by employers, uncertainty in wages and payment, and various forms of exploitation.”

Debt is a common issue, particularly in South Asian countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal, where workers often die on the job due to accidents, safety issues, or occupational health complications. In many cases, there is little or no compensation for these incidents, and families face difficulties in repatriating the bodies of their deceased loved ones. Additionally, the trafficking of body parts for organ sale is a distressing reality, leaving families with only the shell of the deceased.

To improve the situation for migrant workers, several issues need to be addressed. These include the recruitment process, excessive fees charged by middlemen, contract clarity, knowledge about the destination country’s labor laws, and clarity on working conditions, wages, working hours,

accommodation, safety, and health. Many workers have limited knowledge about these conditions until their arrival in the destination country. Confiscation of passports and heavy borrowing to fund the migration process further trap workers in exploitative situations.

Furthermore, there is a lack of governance in both sending and receiving countries. Recruitment agencies charging fees, lack of opportunities for workers, and inadequate laws to protect migrant workers are prevailing issues. Except for Japan and Korea, most countries do not allow workers to organize themselves into unions and carry out collective bargaining. Ratifying core conventions of the ILO and the UN, such as freedom of association and collective bargaining, is crucial to ensure the rights and protections of migrant workers.

Positive developments have been achieved through trade union cooperation between origin and destination countries. Bilateral agreements for the protection of migrant workers have been signed between trade unions in Nepal and Sri Lanka with counterparts in Bahrain and Kuwait. Similar agreements have been made between trade unions in Korea, Malaysia, and other countries. Such arrangements assist low-skilled migrant workers in filing labor complaints, accessing redress procedures, preventing recruitment malpractices, and raising awareness of their legal rights.

The Church, along with like-minded NGOs and trade unions, can work towards pushing governments to adopt proper laws, ratify UN and ILO conventions on migration, and grant migrant workers the right to unionize and engage in collective bargaining. Attention should also be given to occupational safety and health, particularly for domestic workers, by encouraging the ratification of the Domestic Workers Convention. Collaboration between sending and receiving countries is crucial to ensure the protection of migrant workers throughout their journey.

We should work together to implement the UN-based Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which recognize the importance of decent work both locally and internationally. SDG 8, for example, aims to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, as well as full and decent work opportunities. It is crucial to protect labor rights and provide a safe and secure working environment for all workers, including migrant workers, especially women migrants and those in precarious employment.

“We should strive to formulate fair migration schemes and promote bilateral and multilateral agreements that regulate migration.”

SDG 10 aims to reduce inequalities within and among countries and facilitate orderly, safe, regular, and responsible migration and mobility of people. This involves implementing planned and well-managed migration policies. To achieve these goals, we need to campaign to make migration a choice rather than a necessity by creating decent work opportunities in our countries. Respecting human rights, including labor rights, of all migrants is essential, as is ensuring fair recruitment and equal treatment of migrant workers to prevent exploitation and provide a level playing field with nationals.

We should strive to formulate fair migration schemes and promote bilateral and multilateral agreements that regulate migration. Countering unacceptable situations by promoting fundamental principles and rights at work is crucial. Promoting dialogue involving ministers of labor and employers' organizations in policy-making regarding migration is also important. Additionally, we need to strengthen the rights-based approach to migration and focus on effective labor laws and mechanisms to address exploitation and seek redress.

Working together, we can apply pressure on our governments and employers to ensure that effective labor laws are in place and mechanisms are established to combat exploitation. Collaboration and advocacy efforts are vital to protect the rights and dignity of all migrant workers.

I would like to thank the FABC once again for giving me the opportunity to address this conference of journeying together as people of Asia. Thank you very much.



Talitha Kum: Addressing Human Trafficking

Sr. Abby Avelino MM

Regional Coordinator, Talitha Kum Asia

Good afternoon. Thank you for inviting us and giving us the opportunity to present our work to you. Today's topic is migration, labor, human trafficking, and the plight of Asia. I am presenting the Talitha Kum. Talitha Kum is an international network against trafficking. Talitha Kum is an international network of consecrated life against trafficking in persons. Talitha Kum is part of the UISG and coordinates the anti-trafficking efforts of religious sisters, facilitating networking, communication, and formation according to the strategic planning of the International Union of the United States. It is the social teaching of the Catholic Church. Our vision is the expression of the Gospel of Mark.

This expression defines the network's identity and mission by referring to the transformative power of hope, compassion, and mercy. The Talitha Kum members living in the United States are respected and show respect for members of different religious traditions and non-believers. The Talitha Kum is an umbrella network of sister-led networks with more than 6,000 members on five continents in 92 countries.

The members of Talitha Kum are an inter-congregation of sister-led

networks committed to fighting trafficking in person. Organized primarily at the national level, it involves religious women and all people of goodwill who share the vision of religious people regarding anti-trafficking.

It is grass-roots-oriented, in dialogue with the national conference or association of major sub-peers. Our mission, the Talitha Kum mission, is to end human trafficking and exploitation through a collaborative initiative focused on the main areas of action at the grass-roots level: prevention, care for victims, access to justice, networking, and advocacy.

“**Our mission, the Talitha Kum mission is to end human trafficking and exploitation through collaborative initiative focused on main areas of actions at the grass -root level which are prevention, care for victims, access to justice, networking and advocacy.**”

Promoting action that affects the systemic causes.

In our realities at grassroots levels, we observe an increase in cases of human trafficking and situations of vulnerabilities exploited by traffickers all over the world. And yet, with a decrease in governmental resources for assisting victims and survivors.

In our 2021 annual report, Talitha Kum networks noted a sharp increase in injustices suffered by migrant people who are even more vulnerable to trafficking to different forms of exploitation, including in the sex industry, in the workplace, in forced marriages, and others. What do we do?

We are strong in prevention and giving hope by raising awareness. These are some words of sisters from the Talitha Kum in the Philippines. Talitha Kum chooses to stand by those who are in the deep darkness of social vulnerability, oppression, and exploitation, providing spiritual sustenance for a new, dignified life.

We empower women and girls, their families, and their communities. We call for guaranteed equal labor rights for women. This is a scene from Talitha Kum Bangladesh’s awareness campaign on child and forced marriage. We care for victims. Talitha Kum Thailand has a very strong protection program for survivors, especially for children and women.

Our call to action is to promote effective legal migration pathways. Talitha Kum calls, in particular, global governance stakeholders for the mission. In doing so, Talitha Kum supports Pope Francis' invitation to welcome, protect, promote, and integrate migrants, refugees, and inter-ethnic people to prevent them from falling into the hands of human traffickers. Talitha Kum advocates for the rights and dignities of migrants, refugees, and undocumented migrants. Talitha Kum provides counseling and legal consultation for labor exploitation cases of migrant workers. One of the cases that we heard mostly from the refugees we encountered daily. This is one of them. "My life was threatened in my own country. I trusted the recruiter and planned to go to Japan but I was deceived. Now I feel miserable. No jobs. I cannot support my family."

This is the story of this refugee from Cameroon, a story we hear from the sisters every day in this field. Talitha Kum is strong in networking and collaboration with NGOs, NPOs, government agencies, Catholic organizations, and other faith-based groups.

Talitha Kum in the Philippines has strong networking with different organizations. Last year, we launched the Talitha Kum call to action. The U.S. Government endorses this action and aims at the U.S.G. Global governance stakeholders, including states, international organizations, non-state actors such as civil society groups, private sector organizations, and an academic institution. And all those who have a role to play in the tireless effort to eradicate human trafficking and exploitation. Call to action hopes to bring the grassroots voices to the global stage. I would like to show our video when we launch this.

An estimated 50,000 people are victims of trafficking each year, mostly women and children. In 2020, the Talitha Kum network reached over 185,000 people, but more is needed to end trafficking once and for all. Talitha Kum has launched a new call to action for governments, civil society, and you. We want access to justice for victims and survivors. We want to empower women and girls. We want to create safe and legal migration pathways. We want to build an economy of care and solidarity. Join Talitha Kum. Let us work together to end human trafficking and exploitation.

So, to go back to the Talitha Kum call to action in advocacy, in this

document, we promote an economy without exploitation, empowering women and girls, as well as their families and communities. We advocate for supporting safe and legal migration pathways, including cases of forced displacement. We call on governments to implement migration policies and voter controls that rent human trafficking and protect the safety, dignity, human rights, and fundamental freedoms of all migrants, regardless of their migrant status. The call-to-action objective is to care, heal, empower, and restore.

To care for victims of human trafficking and exploitation and people at risk. Throughout the world, the sister networks of Talitha Kum stand as a sign of hope and liberation for people who are afraid of or are recovering from human trafficking.

For Talitha Kum, it is a person and community-centered approach. We create a good relationship and build a safe and trusting relationship. To heal physical, psychosocial, and spiritual wounds. We are rescuing women, technical interns, and victims of exploitation by providing shelter for protection.

This is a witness in Japan. To empower the victims and survivors, as well as individuals at risk, by listening to their voices. In Thailand and Cambodia, they have

a program, a sustainability program, a sufficiency economy, and some activities and workshops for the children, victims of and survivors of trafficking. In Pakistan, Talitha Kum sisters visited Muslim's areas to work to rehabilitate them back into normal life. Talitha Kum's call to action is to restore human dignity by providing access to justice.

“For Talitha Kum, it’s a person and community-centered approach. We create a good relationship and build a safe and trusting relationship. To heal physical, psychosocial, and spiritual wounds.”

Last year, 2021, Talitha Kum Asia reached 35,824 beneficiaries. Its activities include prevention, networking, training, capacity building, access to justice, and care for victims and survivors.

We have 61 Catholic organizations, 56 NGOs, and 42 government and intergovernmental agencies. Talitha Kum Asia has membership in 205

religious congregations, and its active members are 3,521. We are in 20 countries in 18 established national networks.

As you can see, the representation of growing networks in Talitha Kum Asia, including the Middle East, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. What are the initiatives of Talitha Kum Asia?

We launched the Talitha Kum ambassador against trafficking last year, and we are in the second year this time. We are in the process of training almost 30 young people in Asia. Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have started the monthly webinar. So, we are in the 20th webinar session this month.

We have a fourth regional conference that happened not too long ago. We were in Thailand last August. We do have online formation as we continue to deepen our understanding of human trafficking and our sharing of best practices. We are strong in networking among the sending and receiving countries. From our networking, we share our best practices, especially the programs that we did by Talitha Kum Thailand and Indonesia. We had the first international conference and, subsequently, a monthly webinar. We are doing a series of webinars to ensure we can interplay collaboration and networking. So, these are our young ambassadors from last year. The Talitha Kum youth ambassadors against trafficking are growing in numbers. They are doing an excellent job in awareness campaigns online or onsite. The social media platform is strong with this campaign. So, we try to involve young people as protagonists in the prevention campaigns. I would like to quote Pope Francis: “Human trafficking is an open wound in the body of contemporary society, a scourge upon the body of Christ. A crime against humanity.”

“We know that only by working in collaboration and solidarity, weaving a web in love, we will be able to confront the structural issue that caused and perpetuated human trafficking.”

issue that caused and perpetuated human trafficking. As members of the global Catholic Church, we affirm the pastoral orientation on human trafficking that will be incorporated into each direction of pastoral work.

We know that only by working in collaboration and solidarity, weaving a web in love, we will be able to confront the structural

We are also developing a network to address human trafficking. We invite everyone to join us in prayer for the successful implementation of this important work to end human trafficking. Together, we will create a future filled with prophetic hope, forming a network of compassion and grace.

Again, the expression Talitha Kum is an invitation to all – to call out the system that sustains human trafficking through our voice, our actions, and our daily choices. We commit ourselves to denouncing the arrogance and violence of economic and financial power when it acts against the dignity of the person.

I would like to conclude this presentation with this proverb from Utopian: “When spider webs unite, they can tie up a lion.” Now, I invite you, participants in this conference, to work together through our collaboration and networking. I thank you. I hope our sisters joining this conference will give you some information about our work, especially regarding the call-to-action document.

So, I invite you to support our sisters at the grassroot levels, especially the bishop at our your diocese or the priests that we’re able to allow them to conduct awareness campaigns in your own parishes. So, thank you so much for listening and have a good day.





Message on Combatting Human Trafficking

H. E. Vincent Cardinal Nichols

President, Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales

Hello, it is a great privilege for me to address you all as you celebrate this anniversary Gathering of the Federation of Asian Bishops conferences. I thank Cardinal Bo for his invitation just to say a few words to you as you begin your gathering.

I want to salute you as brother Bishops and say how I have a little understanding of some of the many challenges that you face across the vast regions which your Bishops Conference has covered. And I just want to assure you of my prayers, of my sense of solidarity with you in your Episcopal Ministry. Ministry that we share, even though our circumstances might be different, our faith is solidly shared and common.

I have this opportunity simply because I am the president of the Santa Marta group. This is a group established by Pope Francis to galvanize and act as a catalyst for the church's work against human trafficking and modern-day slavery. And I really must salute His Eminence Cardinal Bo for the leadership that he gives in these matters, both when I was able to come and be with him in Myanmar a few years ago and on every occasion when we have had Santa Marta Zoom meetings across the world and in different

places in the world. He is a great champion of this work, and I want to thank him. I know he will want to explain and lead the time that you have joined this conference for this matter of our work against modern-day slavery and human trafficking.

Very simply, this is a battle that is being lost. The dramatic movement of people across the world is a terrible drama of migration, especially when motivated by fear, terror, persecution, and conflict. This

“This drama is playing into the hands of the traffickers, and it is almost as if we see an endless supply of potential victims for human traffickers.”

drama is playing into the hands of the traffickers, and it is almost as if we see an endless supply of potential victims for human traffickers. I am afraid our efforts, and the efforts of many people, are not making great progress.

Many stand up against the evil of human trafficking, which Pope Francis calls a wound in the body of humanity and, therefore, a wound in the body of Christ. There are many different dimensions to the fight against human trafficking, from trying to chase the profits and bring punishment for the perpetrators to helping the victims look at the root causes, which are poverty and the fragility of people’s lives in desperate parts of the world. Criminal routes are used, and all sorts of different efforts are made.

But, the Santa Marta group has quite a specific objective: to bring the resources of the Catholic Church to this battle, particularly in cooperation with the forces of law enforcement. This is not an obvious partnership, but it is an important part of the work of Santa Marta. Not simply to raise awareness but also to find ways of partnership with those who see this as a crime and are dedicated to intervening in that criminal activity and rescuing people.

That might be a focus for your discussions during this anniversary gathering. The other, of course, is what we can do for the victims of human trafficking. How can they be helped, supported, and moved from being victims to witnesses against this crime in a court of law? These are great challenges, but the resources of the Catholic Church, often in the religious women, those that have a presence closer to vulnerable people, can play a significant role.

Cardinal Bo always takes time to emphasize one of the most dreadful parts of the human trafficking drama, and that is the trafficking of human organs and body parts. He calls this modern cannibalism, and I know that helps to focus very sharply on the indignation that we can feel at the exploitation of people who are seen not as brothers and sisters, not as subjects of the inner dignity that God gives us, but as commodities to be trafficked and manipulated.

“Cardinal Bo always takes time to emphasize one of the most dreadful parts of the human trafficking drama, and that is the trafficking of human organs and body parts.”

I wish you well at this anniversary gathering. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your episcopal leadership, and I hope that you will have time to dedicate to this topic of human trafficking. The Santa Marta group, with a growing global reach, is here to help you if that is what you would wish. May God bless you and may God bless your efforts. Be sure of my prayers, and please keep me and the work of the Santa Marta group in your prayers, too. Thank you.





The nature and mission of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development

Fr. Fabio Baggio, CS

*Undersecretary of the Migrants and Refugees Section,
Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development*

Good afternoon to everyone. I am very thankful for the invitation to be here with you and the opportunity to share our work at the Dicastery. I would like to acknowledge two of my members in the dicastery, Alwin and Naoko. There are three of us here to be with you today.

What is the dicastery and what is it doing? We have been existing since 2017, but since last January of this year, we have started restructuring the dicastery according to the recommendations we received from the evaluation commission, which worked last summer 2021 and from the Holy Father directly. We got some anticipation of the *Praedicate Evangelium*, and we found ourselves responding to the two main task of each dicastery and curia: first, serving the Pope, and secondly, serving all the college of bishops, individual bishops, episcopal conferences, regional and continental grouping and the hierarchical structures of the Eastern churches. Our task is to serve, we are called to served not only the Holy Father but also all of you who are here, the individual bishops. This service

is to be understood as an instrument and service for the integral human development.

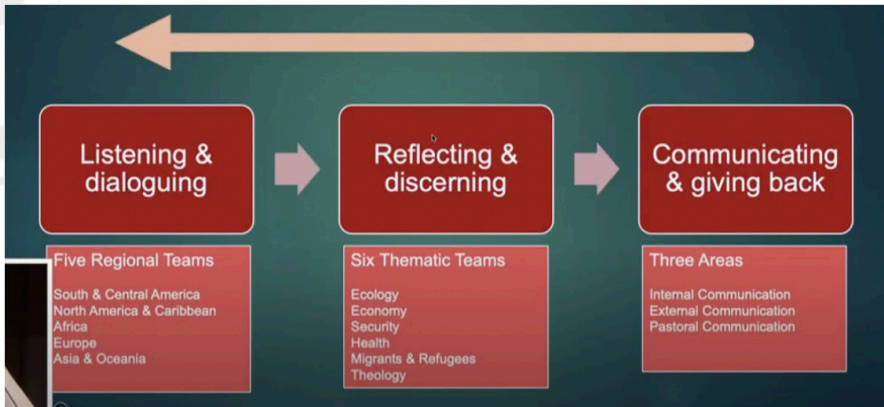
The Roman Curia is at the service of the Pope, who, as the successor of Peter, is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity both bishops and of the whole company of the faithful. By virtue of this bond, the work of the Roman Curia is also organically related to the College of Bishops and individual Bishops, as well as to Episcopal Conferences and their regional and continental groupings, and the hierarchical structures of the Eastern Churches. All these are of great pastoral benefit as expressions of the affective and effective communion existing among the bishops. The Roman Curia is not set between the Pope and the Bishops but is at the service of both according to the modalities proper to the nature of each. (*Praedicate Evangelium*, Preamble 8)

The mission of Dicastery. The Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development “is primarily an instrument at the service of the successor of Peter to assist him in his mission [...] and to be of assistance to Bishops, particular Churches, Episcopal Conferences and their regional and continental groups, the hierarchical structures of the Eastern Churches and other institutions and communities in the Church” (PE 1) aiming at promoting integral human development of all human beings.

It is difficult to define the work of integral human development, I used to crack a joke by saying that our task at the PIHD is everything that that the other dicasteries are not doing. So, everything that is not included in the responsibility of other dicasteries are our responsibility. You can rely on us on all of the issues that you think is not part of the other, which are mainly all the social issues based on the following areas.

“The Roman Curia is at the service of the Pope, who, as the successor of Peter, is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity both bishops and of the whole company of the faithful. By virtue of this bond, the work of the Roman Curia is also organically related to the College of Bishops and individual Bishops, as well as to Episcopal Conferences and their regional and continental groupings, and the hierarchical structures of the Eastern Churches.”

The new structure of DPIHD



The new structure of the Dicastery is tripartite: we have three different teams. The first team is the listening and dialoguing team, the second is the reflecting and discerning team, and the third is the Communicating and Giving Back team. And the idea is very simple, we are tasked to listen to the reality through the bishop conferences and all those who are responsible in the pastoral care in the different dioceses. Our work is to enter in dialogue with you whenever there is a need for something. We are here to listen to your challenges and the needs. We have a reflecting and discerning team that produces pastoral tools which are also helpful for the deepening of theological reflection. And then we try to go back to the different

“We have a reflecting and discerning team that produces pastoral tools which are also helpful for the deepening of theological reflection.”

dioceses and all local churches with the communication through social media, through the website publication, and with pastoral tools that can be produced according to the different needs.

The first group is divided into regional teams. There are five different teams according to different continents. The second group is divided into micro areas, namely ecology, economy, security, health, migrants, and refugees. There is also element of theology because Pope Francis requested us that every kind of reflection would start from social and human sciences and then proceed to theology.

And for the communication, which is the third group, we have internal

communication and external communication to all the bishops conference and with the rest of the world. And then the pastoral communication is tasks also in preparing tools for the work of the churches.

We are here to listen, which is our main task, to the challenges you are facing today. We are here to assist you. so please any time that you need assistance from us just ask us and according to our capacities, we will be at your service. This is a new way of being a dicastery at the service of the pope and at your service.

Thank you.





Fratelli Tutti: A Call to Human Fraternity

Archbishop Tarcisio Isao Kikuchi, SVD

Archbishop of Tokyo, Japan

General Secretary, FABC

President, Caritas Asia

I am highly honored to conclude the day by reflecting on *Fratelli Tutti*. I do not have songs like yesterday's of Bishop Alwin's sharing and reflection, but I have many quotations from the Holy Father's writings. Since the beginning of 2020, we have been wandering in darkness. Many people are searching for a way out of this pandemic. This pandemic incident will indeed be engraved in history. Pope Francis's encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, which was published amid this pandemic, should be understood in the context of the reality of such a world during the pandemic. Reflecting on the reality of the last two years or so, I would like to share my thoughts; although my knowledge is limited, and I am not really a theologian, I want to share my reflections on *Fratelli Tutti*. By the way, it will take some time, to reach *Fratelli Tutti*; I started somewhere else.

Pope Francis resumed the general audience on September 2, 2020, which had been suspended for some time during the early stage of the pandemic. He brought a small congregation into a courtyard of the palace. And he said, I quote: "The current pandemic has highlighted our

interdependence: We are all connected with each other for better or for worse. Therefore, to emerge from this crisis better than before, we have to do so together; together, not alone... We must do it together, all of us in solidarity.” The Holy Father continued by saying, “Diversity and solidarity united in harmony. This is the way.”

Solidarity has been one of the key concepts of the Holy Father since 2013, when he became the Pope. And the idea has been repeated wherever he has been. Explaining the concept of solidarity, the Holy Father wrote in *Evangelii Gaudium*, “The word “solidarity” is a little worn and at times poorly understood, but it refers to something more than a few sporadic acts of generosity. It presumes the creation of a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few” (EG 188).

Looking ahead to the post-pandemic world order and also in order to set the right path for the church in the future, Pope Francis repeatedly insisted that solidarity must be the central value. Despite the Holy Father’s repeated expressions of his hopes for the post-pandemic, the reality of our world is falling completely the opposite path. The Holy Father expressed his indignation during his *Urbi et Orbi* Message of Easter 2021 “The pandemic is still spreading, while the social and economic crisis remains severe, especially for the poor. Nonetheless, and this is scandalous, armed conflicts have not ended, and military arsenals are being strengthened. That is today’s scandal.”

As the entire world has been in a difficult situation, we, the church, have also faced difficulties for the past 2 or 3 years. As for the Church, in order to take measures against infections and to take responsible actions to protect each other’s lives, we are facing a period of challenges such as the complete closedown of church activities and temporary cancellation of public masses. I think the main reason why we see the situation as challenging is because of a lack of joy. Of course, for each Catholic, it means they have been spiritually depleted, such as not being able to attend Sunday Masses and the planning of events of all kinds being canceled, depriving them of the enjoyment of being with various people. But most importantly, we have been deprived of joy because we cannot come together as a community. We are isolated physically. Pope Francis begins the *Evangelii Gaudium* with this sentence, “The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus”

(EG 1). The Holy Father, who puts emphasis on the importance of going out and deepening our fellowship in sharing the joy of living the Gospel rather than living in our own comfort zones, forgetting to care for others, points out the following: “Finally an evangelizing community is filled with joy; it knows how to rejoice always. It celebrates every small victory, every step forward in the work of Evangelization” (EG 24).

Then, he emphasizes the importance of being in the community “Here and now, especially where we are a “little flock” (Lk 12:32), the Lord’s disciples are called to live as a community that is the salt of the earth and the light of the world (cf. Mt. 5:13-16). We are called to bear witness to a constantly new way of living together in fidelity to the Gospel. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of community!” (EG 92).

“God has formed the world as a dwelling place for man; therefore, in order to protect all life, the dignity of every human being, as well as the environment of the earth, our common home, must be cared for, and we must address the various issues of life through an integral viewpoint.”

Unfortunately, the path the church has taken to combat the pandemic has limited our opportunities to gather together to pray, study, and work. We are learning hard lessons right now, reminding us that limiting activities of faith communities also limits our faith’s joy. In November 2019, Pope Francis visited Japan with the theme, “Protect All Life.” Each of us has been given a life with dignity in the image of God and has guided along with all others our eternal hope. God has formed the world as a dwelling place for man; therefore, in order to protect all life, the dignity of every human being, as well as the environment of the earth, our common home, must be cared for, and we must address the various issues of life through an integral viewpoint.

Pope Francis left rich treasures during his brief visit to Japan. The Holy Father spoke about the value of life from various perspectives in Tokyo. During his homily in Tokyo, the Holy Father said as follows, and I quote, “Here in Japan, in a society with a highly developed economy, the young people I met this morning spoke to me about the many people who are socially isolated. They remain on the margins, unable to grasp the

meaning of life and their own existence. Increasingly, the home, school and community, which are meant to be places where we support and help one another, are being eroded by excessive competition in the pursuit of profit and efficiency.”

Isolation and loneliness, which are the opposite of diversity and solidarity, are threats to life in modern society. The present pandemic is adding more negative energy to this trend. In response to such a reality, the Holy Father repeatedly points out the importance of helping each other in solidarity and of paying attention to the cries of others. From day one of his pontificate, Pope Francis has been pointing out how people’s indifference in this modern society affects so many lives of vulnerable people. In 8th July 2013, when he visited the Italian Mediterranean Island of Lampedusa, and celebrated the mass with the refugees coming from Africa, the Holy Father said in his homily, “The culture of comfort, which makes us think only of ourselves, makes us insensitive to the cries of other people, makes us live in soap bubbles which, however lovely, are insubstantial; they offer a fleeting and empty illusion which results in indifference to others; indeed, it even leads to the globalization of indifference. In this globalized world, we have fallen into globalized indifference.”

It is the top priority of Pope Francis to make a society in which no one is excluded and forgotten. During the meeting with the victims of the Tohoku earthquake and Tsunami in November 2019, the Holy Father said, “No one “rebuilds” by himself or herself; nobody can start over alone. We have to find a friendly and fraternal hand, capable of helping to raise not just a city, but also our horizon and our hope.”

Hope is born only when we take an interest in the people who face crisis. When we strive to be with them and walk together. It is essential to have food, clothing, and shelter to survive. But, in addition to that, it is essential to have hope in life. Hope cannot be given from the outside. It can only be created through mutual fellowship or communion. Hope derives strength from the mutual support of solidarity and arises from the depths of the hearts of those who needed. There is more than just big anxiety about the life-threatening crisis caused by this pandemic. The concrete program is the reality of people who have lost their jobs and relationships, of those who are victims of discrimination and exclusion, and of those who are deeply isolated and suffer without any help. There are so many people whose lives

have been threatened in many ways and whose hope to live has faded. In addition, there is even confrontation due to violence in this world, which is exactly the opposite of solidarity. So where is hope?

Now, finally, I am reaching to *Fratelli Tutti*. In *Fratelli Tutti* the Holy Father clarifies the direction we should take while facing all these cruel realities of the modern world. In *Fratelli Tutti*, the Holy Father writes that “True, a worldwide tragedy like the Covid-19 pandemic momentarily revived the sense that we are a global community, all in the same boat, where one person’s problems are the problems of all. Once more we realized that no one is saved alone; we can only be saved together” (FT32).

But this sense of fraternity is short-lived in a world seduced by selfishness. The desire to exclude different people and ensure one’s own safety is apparent as a national ego, even in the midst of this pandemic. The Holy Father has already repeatedly called on us not to allow the disparity between the rich and the poor to become the disparity in the value of human lives. The Holy Father also pointed out that the taste of fraternity has been lost in a modern society dominated by virtual reality. Today, we can recognize that “we fed ourselves on dreams of splendor and grandeur and ended up consuming distraction, insularity, and solitude. We gorged ourselves on networking and lost the taste of fraternity. We looked for quick and safe results, only to find ourselves overwhelmed by impatience and anxiety. Prisoners of a virtual reality, we lost the taste and flavour of the truly real”(FT 33).

Then, the Holy Father continues to point out that we are now facing the challenge of rethinking our styles of life, our relationships, the organization of societies, and, above all, the meaning of our own existence. And that is also the challenge we are facing in Asia. For the past 10 years after the 2011 earthquake and tsunami, the Catholic Church in Japan has been trying to create *Hope for Life* in the disaster-hit area. I think it was a historical chance in the history of the church in Japan. We could manage to organize relief activities beyond the limits of each individual religious community. We have concretely demonstrated the importance of working together with people in disaster-hit areas through our continued presence in a number of volunteer centers. Also, flexible personnel assignments beyond the constraints of the contract with the local diocese made us able to close the gap between the local church and the people. There are many

decisions made by the Church in Japan that broke tradition and common practice within the past 10 years; the Church In Japan has the opportunity to change ourselves by creating *Hope for Life*. It is important to initiate building projects, distribution of goods, and other programs related to food, clothing, and shelter. But it is also important to create good and deep relationships with local people by walking the path of life together and by living and working together. I believe that through these activities in the disaster-hit areas, we have been sowing seeds to create hope for living.

“There are many decisions made by the Church in Japan that broke tradition and common practice within the past 10 years; the Church In Japan has the opportunity to change ourselves by creating Hope for Life.”

My time is almost coming at the 6pm, so let me conclude by quoting Pope Francis saying, “human beings are so made that they cannot live, develop and find fulfillment except “in the sincere gift of self to others”. Nor can they fully know themselves apart from an encounter with other persons” (FT 87). Then he continues, “Life exists where there is bonding, communion, fraternity; and life is stronger than death when it is built on true relationships and bonds of fidelity. On the contrary, there is no life when we claim to be self-sufficient and live as islands: in these attitudes, death prevails.” So in Genesis 2, the Lord God said, it is not good for man to be alone, I will make a helper for him, and he created two. In other words, since people cannot live alone, they are destined to live by helping each other. People are called to live a life with dignity in the fellowship, supporting and helping each other. So, we have the potential to be beacons of hope and solidarity in the realities of Asia. So the question for us right now is how can we be the beacons of hope in this reality of Asia?

Thank you.





EMERGING REALITIES AND
THE CHURCH IN ASIA

DAY 3
OCTOBER 19, 2022

Emerging Realities and the Church in Asia – Day 3

PRESS NOTE 19th October 2022

19th October 2022 of the FABC General Conference continued with the segment on Emerging Realities. The Holy Eucharist was celebrated by H.E. Anthony Cardinal Poola, Archbishop of Hyderabad. The president of the day, H.E. Francis Xavier Cardinal Kriengsak Kovithavanij, led the gathered representatives in the Adsumus. The morning prayer, hosted by the country of Taiwan, was led by the video prepared by Fr. Otfried Chan. The first session was entitled “Finding New Pathways for Formation, worship, and Digital Ministry in the Post-pandemic Era.”

The first speaker of the day, Prof. Pablito Baybado Jr., a Theology professor at the University of Santo Tomas, Manila, and Executive Secretary of the FABC Office on Education and Faith Formation, expressed the need for constructing a reality that includes faith-rich encounters. Using the ‘stop, pray, and go’ analogy of the motorcyclists who passed by his local Church on their way to work and anecdotes from his family life, Prof. Baybado stressed the importance of formation that values family integrity, and the need for formators who are gardeners, engineers, and builders, who are sensitive to the current realities and capable of accompanying the people.

Next, Mr. Alexander Lopez, Special Projects Manager of the Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN), explained how using technology has become the norm and questioned whether the Church was subject to censorship, manipulation, and big tech companies controlling the narrative. Advocating to build and operate secure platforms for the Church, Mr. Lopez addressed the gathered representatives, saying, “You are the influencers. You can provide real answers, not promises.”

Mr. Brinston Carvalho, a full-time member of the Media Ministry in the Archdiocese of Bombay, working at the AMCF Catholic Communication Centre, emphasized the effective use of Creative Catechesis in digital ministry - to help spread the mandate of the Gospel and the love of Christ. Stressing the importance of pastoral training in social communications and

digital media, along with the explicit need for the clergy to be part of the online social network, Mr. Carvalho mentioned, ‘the ‘sheep’ are on social media, the shepherds ought to be, too.’

Bishop Sebastian Francis, President of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei, voicing how there must be a paradigm shift in worship and formation to one that is creative, inclusive, and bridge-building, emphasized the need for clergy, religious and laity who are disciples, and the value of engaging in a dialogue of joy, mercy, and hope, with all.

The next session focused on “The challenges of the family today and how the Church in Asia can respond creatively to the pastoral care of families.”

Mr. & Mrs. Daniel and Shelley Ee, members of the Worldwide Marriage Encounter Leadership Team and the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life, speaking about the values of family life, its challenges, and the married couple as the heart of the family, proposed steps to improve the pastoral care of families; including enhancing formation and training, structural changes that allow couples to serve together, and activities that celebrate and enhance family life.

Mr. Michael Phichit and Mrs. Lucia Achara Sukeewat, National Presidents of the Christian Family Movement in Thailand, speaking about the many challenges families face, the social biases, the degradation of relationships between generations, and the myriad challenges of financial insecurity, stressed the importance of the Church recognizing the interconnect between these challenges, and added ‘as a Church and family, we have to admit that we need healing before we can improve.’

The focus of the next topic was “The opportunities that *Amoris Laetitia* offers the Church in Asia for effective ministry.”

The first speaker, Bishop John Baptist Lee Keh-mien of Hsinchu, President of the Chinese Regional Bishops’ Conference, led a reflection on the encyclical ‘*Amoris Laetitia: A Call to Love.*’ Underlining the real and ever-changing challenges to marriage, Bishop Lee emphasized the importance of pre-marital formation and the goals of *Amoris Laetitia*, adding context

through the encyclical.

Fr. Vimal Tirimanna, CSsR (Sri Lanka), professor at the Accademia Alfonsiana in Rome and member of the Theological Commission of the General Secretariat for the Synod 2021-2023, spoke about how family and marriage have been a great preoccupation of the Church and highlighted the aspects and differences of *Amoris Laetitia*. Emphasizing the importance of pastoral care for married couples, Fr. Tirimanna also illustrated diverse marriage and family cases as opportunities for witness and formation.

Each session ended with question-and-answer sessions with the speakers, group discussions, and reflections on the insight gained.

In the evening, the Bishop Friends of the Focolare Movement explained its origin and purpose and described its focus on family, unity, communion, and dialogue. The representatives were invited to an online meeting of the Bishop Friends, and a few members of the Movement introduced its many operations to the gathered audience.

The day closed with H.E. Cardinal Kriengsak leading the representatives in the angelus.





**STOP, PRAY, and GO:
The Landscape of Faith Formation**

Pablito A. Baybado, Jr

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and Faith Formation*

Faculty member, Institute of Religion-University of Santo Tomas

Good morning Your Eminences, Excellencies, sisters, brothers and friends.

I belong to the Mother of Mercy Quasi Parish in the town of Marilao, the Diocese of Malolos, Bulacan. The parish is situated along the way to Meycuayan, an industrial city. Every day, this road is teeming with hundreds of motorcycle riders on their way to work. It's a very busy road. That is why it is important that I go earlier for 15minutes than usual. Because traffic gets congested in front of the church. Not because of anything, but due primarily to all the motorcycles stopping to pray at the Our Lady of the Mother of Mercy. After few moments of prayer, then off they go. It is inspiring to witness these throng of riders doing the STOP, PRAY and GO. The same thing happens again when they come home in the afternoon. Fr. Edward Pecson, our parish priest, said that this practice is one of the best devotional practices that has formed and deepened the faith of his parishioners.

From the point of view of constructivism, the leading and most influential theory of education today, it can be said that the STOP, PRAY & GO dynamics is the very structure that facilitates the construction of a deeper meaning of the Christian faith. Constructivism is an important learning theory, which is based on the idea that people actively construct or make their own knowledge, and that reality is determined by the experience of the learner. In short, it is a theory that places so much value to human experience and encounter as a way of constructing meaning, forming good values, and deep moral conviction. In my view, the significance of constructivism is allowing the learner, the faithful for that matter, to discover meaning through the interaction within the given landscape.

“From the point of view of constructivism, the leading and most influential theory of education today, it can be said that the STOP, PRAY & GO dynamics is the very structure that facilitates the construction of a deeper meaning of the Christian faith.”

This resonates, what Pope Francis in a number of occasions, would call the culture of encounter. In his morning meditation at the Chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae, Pope Francis invites us to work for “the culture of encounter”, in a simple way, “as Jesus did”: not just by seeing;

not just hearing, but listening; not just passing people by, but stopping with them; not just saying “what a shame, poor people,” but allowing yourselves to be moved with compassion’ (Pope Francis, For a Culture of Encounter, Sept 13, 2016)

The Stop, Pray and Go dynamics is the experience at the corner of the Church in front of the Our Lady of the Mother of Mercy that indicates the relation of the Church, work and home that nurtures the life of the motorcycle driver. It is at this juncture that the home and the work are weave into a moment of prayer. What needs to be emphasized here, in my view, is the importance of constructing a landscape where the Church, in a sense our Christian faith, becomes the uniting factor of the many aspects of our daily endeavors. The landscape that connects the work, Home, and Road, which gravitates towards the Church during the Stop, Pray and Go, forms the person to a deeper love for his family by working harder and more diligently.

Seeds just don't grow well anywhere. They need a good soil and other elements to bloom into a hundred flowers and bear fruits. Faith formation, then, is the challenge of designing and redesigning existing structures and programs to facilitate the encounter, create an experience, for which the seed of faith gradually but steadily grows into maturity.

I have four kids, and due to the demand of work, they together with my wife would consider me as an absentee father. It is not that I wanted to be an absentee, but we live in an economic and social structure that force both parents to leave home before sunrise and return when kids are already sleeping soundly. In all honesty, the pandemic has been somehow a blessing because we are able to recover what we lost for the longest time: eating, praying, watching and playing together.

Thus, if there is any lesson that we can learn from the pandemic, it is precisely the value of the family, with parents having quality time with their children as the best approach to faith formation.

I think that our work on faith formation demands the Church to challenge these social, cultural, political, and economic structures that irritates and destroys relation within families. The Church should advocate, at various levels, for a new social structure that places the integral unity of the family as the highest value.

Moreover, it is also important for me that we rethink the family-parish relation as we return to our pre-pandemic mobility. We may want to open and redesign our parishes and institutional spaces for families to come for a STOP PRAY and GO experience in the form of picnics, sports, or other forms of cultural encounters, especially for the poor and the marginalized at any given day. Redesigning parish as a venue for family encounters is a must to counter the increasing mall-culture and secularism that continues to disrupt family relations.

“Redesigning parish as a venue for family encounters is a must to counter the increasing mall-culture and secularism that continues to disrupt family relations.”

Faith formation seen this way requires formators to be more like gardeners, designers, and engineers. There should be a shift in the attitude

of faith formation from knowledge-building towards building-relationship. In the words of Abp Julian Leow Beng Kim, Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur Malaysia, the most important aspect of faith formation is building relationship that will go for the next 10, 20, 30 years. It is inspiring to note, for example that the youth group that he has started 20 years ago remain his friends until today. Such friendship continues to nurture each one to grow in holiness, while it bears fruits in their respective works and ministries.

A formator who can be the parish priest, the bishop, the father, the mother, the teacher, the catechist, the manager, must be equipped with a strong sense of sensitivity to the situation and present realities, and with the given resources in a particular situation and context, creatively design the parish, the diocese, the home, the working environment into a landscape where everyone is both welcome, and that through its elements and their interconnectivity, provides the scaffoldings towards growth in the Christian faith.

Micco, my second child, has been the most adventurous among my kids. He went to three schools to finish his junior high school. His world was beyond imagination that practically made me and my wife regular visitors at the principal's office. At a certain point, I said it is enough. Emie, my wife, however, never gave up. She has persistently embraced Micco, and even literally, run after him in those days. Without her motherly care, an almost irrational and unbelievable care to an erring wild child, Micco could not have finished his degree and may not be the person he is today.

“Faith formation should have the character of a mother. Loving the child at all costs is what is most important.”

else can she bring Micco to change his ways, and all sorts of wanderings. And in all this, her prayers must have been her greatest companion more than me in those trying moments.

Faith formation should have the character of a mother. Loving the child at all costs is what is most important. But such love is every day translated into creatively thinking what else can she do, what more can she do, where

Bishop Antonius Subianto Bunjamin, OSC, Bishop Chair of OEFF, reminded me that accompaniment is an essential element in faith formation. Accompaniment is not the construction of a subject but a construction of a

social condition for subjects to shine and discover their God given talents. The art of accompaniment as a form of faith formation, is, therefore, the motherly attitude of allowing ourselves to become instruments of God, as a Church in various levels and degrees, patiently serving for the transformation of individuals and families as image and likeness of God to become light to others and at the service of a mutli-cultural and multi-religious societies.

In closing, STOP, Pray and Go emphasize the primacy of experience and discovery over rationality and formalism as the very landscape of designing our faith formation.

Thank you to Bishop Antonius Subianto Bunjamin, OSC and Archbishop Julian Leow Beng Kim for your guidance, and thanks to Fr. Rico Ayo for the inspiration in writing this reflection. Thank you for the joy and privilege of sharing with you, my thoughts.





Revitalizing the Life of the Church - Digital Ministry

Mr. Alexander Lopez

Regional Manager, Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN)

Good morning Reverend fathers, your Excellency, your eminences, and everyone participating in this morning session. Thank you for allowing me to be a part of FABC 50 celebration and, of course, congratulations to everyone.

I'm delighted to share some inputs on revitalizing the life of the church, especially on the aspect of digital ministry. As we all know, the church has been pushed to go digital, to use online platforms brought about by the pandemic. Schools, churches, offices had to adopt and be familiar with online technology.

With these digital services available during this time, we were able to continue operating and reaching out to our fellow brothers and sisters. Online streaming, online masses, online rosary, online adoration, and devotion became a big part of our lives nowadays. And with 2.2 billion online users in Asia alone and 91% on mobile devices, the church was able to continue reaching out to people despite the pandemic challenges.

And I think it would continue to use digital technology given we are also now facing an economic situation. We all know that streaming and posting content on platforms have become normal. We have what we call the big tech companies. Social media has become a normal thing that we use in our daily lives - Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, YouTube - and we have those influencers.

And we all know that these platforms, owned by these big tech companies, are, of course, driven by advertising. It is their business model. And, of course, since they own it, they also set the rules. In technical terms, it's called an algorithm. But, you know, in layman's terms, it's like a house. I own my house; I set my rules. And when I come into a country, they have certain laws. In the platforms, they have what they call algorithms - rules that users should follow.

Now, I cannot help but wonder, of course, sometimes I ask, being also in the development industry, since these big tech platforms own and operate their platforms and they set their rules and algorithms, do they share the same values as ours? Do they have the same values as the Catholic Church and the teachings of the Catholic Church? Are they pro-God, pro-life, pro-family, pro-marriage?

These are the questions that I always try to ask people who run these big tech platforms. Definitely, they can say, "This is right, this is wrong, this is my rules," because they control everything - algorithms, what they call artificial intelligence, machine learning that runs that they have placed in it because, understandably, they own it.

“But I cannot help but wonder also, if they don't have the same values as the Catholic Church, can they suspend your account? Can they censor your content?”

But I cannot help but wonder also, if they don't have the same values as the Catholic Church, can they suspend your account? Can they censor your content? Can they limit your reach? Can they manipulate the likes, the dislikes, the sad, the angry emojis?

I mean, can they cancel? Cancel culture is being used daily now.

And, of course, can they control the narrative to fit their agenda? Let's say I'm pro-life and I have a pro-life page on Facebook. Can they put my content on pro-choice pages, and so, therefore, I would receive dislikes, angry emojis? They can control the narrative.

And so, since they can manipulate, they can produce fake news, create trolls and bots, and use it to their advantage. I think this is the scary part as well of the big tech companies if they don't share the same values that we have in the Catholic Church.

So, what is the remedy? There is always a solution. We can build and operate our own platforms. For me personally and my team, we are tasked in EWTN Asia Pacific to build platforms from the ground up so that we can set the algorithms, so we can control at least what is happening in there. We have, let's say, Netflix. We now have EWTN Flix available also. We're using the virtual environment platform where we can freely express our Catholic views without being restricted or censored by anyone. And we can agree to disagree without canceling each other. I think it is important.

We believe that dialogue is important, right? I mean, the Catholic Church is rich in talents and resources, especially in building platforms, especially in content. Your Eminence, your Excellencies, reverent fathers, you are the

“Your Eminence, your Excellencies, reverent fathers, you are the influencers. You have followers. But really, more importantly, the Catholic Church provides answers, not promises.”

influencers. You have followers. But really, more importantly, the Catholic Church provides answers, not promises. You bring answers, not promises. The Catholic Church provides answers, not promises.

You know when a person is faced with personal issues like addiction, alcoholism, abortion, unwanted pregnancy, people are looking for real answers. I remember when I was 20 years ago, I had cancer, my wife was pregnant. I was looking for real answers. I actually promised God that if you keep me alive, I will serve the church. I found answers in the church, found answers in the Eucharist, in the adoration, in the rosary. The church provides real answers, and these answers should not be suppressed, censored, limited, canceled by a simple platform based on their algorithm. But of course, it is still important.

Now, aside from having our own platforms, we also need to produce compelling content or compelling stories because, in the digital age, the story is the strategy. The story is the strategy. Compelling stories can stretch the fast-decreasing attention span. I think it's only now three seconds. You know, because when you browse into Facebook or you can easily just go from one content to another content if it is not compelling to you.

And so, it is still important that we develop compelling stories so that we can cut through the noise surrounding today's digital environment. And with that, I think the next speaker would talk about content creation for the church.

Again, thank you so much, and I hope I was able to share some of my insights, some of my recommendations, and solutions for the digital ministry of the Catholic Church. Thank you again, and God bless.





Creative Catechesis: Renewing the Digital Evangelizing Ministry

Mr. Brinston Carvalho

AMCF Catholic Communication Center, Archdiocese of Bombay

Your Eminences, Excellencies, dear Bishops, religious priests, priests and esteemed guests, thank you for giving me the opportunity to address you.

In this short presentation of mine, I would like to lay emphasis on the use of Creative Catechesis, which includes content in digital ministry. The church has always taken a positive approach to digital media. The pastoral instruction on the means of social communication underlines that “The Church sees media as ‘gifts of God’ which, in accordance with His providential design, unite men in brotherhood, and so help them to cooperate with His plan for their salvation” (CP 1971).

Furthermore, the great St. Pope John Paul II declared, “It is not enough to use the media simply to spread the Christian message and the Church’s authentic teaching. It is also necessary to integrate the message into the ‘new culture’ created by modern communications” (St. John Paul II).

Therefore, doing that is even more important today since not only does media influence what people think and act upon, but also to a very great extent human experience itself is an experience of media. Pope Francis very boldly said, “The digital world can be an environment rich in humanity, a network not of wires but of people.” The church in Asia is no stranger to the power of the internet. The power of media and of course the power of technology.

During the Covid 19 pandemic, the church took digital adaptation to a whole new level. There was a widespread application of digital technology to the Eucharist, worship, pastoral care, discipleship, and missions. While the churches rushed to create digital provisions with little afforded time to training and of course deep reflection, most of us, most of the churches acted in accordance with their theological instincts. However, technology and the format of media used changes the rules of place of human interaction. How then can the Church in Asia today moving ahead of the pandemic, offer new ways of confronting people with the message of the gospel?

Communication in and by the church is essentially a community of the good news of Jesus Christ. And just like how Jesus connected with his people in his time, the church today needs to connect with her people in the means that they understand through storytelling, the use of the power of metaphors, and the explicit need to be relevant to the times. All these together form the core of creative catechesis.

I worked in the catholic communication center, the media wing of the archdiocese of Bombay and our motto is ‘communion through communication.’ Using this motto and creative catechesis, we spread the mandate and the love of Christ through word, worship and witness. Our main goal is to evangelize the lay faithful using creative catechesis. Creative catechesis can be done through various modes: static posts, infographics, short videos, and podcasts.

“The essential purpose of creative catechesis is to take something complex and break it down to something simple for us lay people to understand without losing any meaning or essence of what is conveyed.”

The essential purpose of creative catechesis is to take something complex and break it down to something simple for us lay people to understand without losing

any meaning or essence of what is conveyed. This is what I believe the Church in Asia needs to be working in the way forward. May I remind you that creative catechesis is not only a medium to communicate with the youth, but in fact people of all ages.

Allow me to share with you a few examples of how we in the archdiocese of Bombay use creative catechesis effectively. The ten commandments as you all know helps us with an examination of conscience. Perhaps a more relevant and creative and personal examination of conscience with Jesus may bring about a change of heart indeed. Saints are the pillars of our Church. Selected specific materials about the saints help the faithful to get to know more information and key information about the saints. Furthermore, we can also inspire the faithful with powerful quotes from these saints. An example of a short video is right here. This is something that we did for laity Sunday where we acknowledge of all those who contributions of those who serve in the church.

As phones are the first and the last things that we look at during the day, perhaps mobile wall papers are nice reminders of God's presence in our lives. Here is an example of using daily computer commands to encourage the people to follow the footsteps of Jesus. Control C, Control S something that all of us are aware about.

Creative catechesis can also help sow seeds of vocation. Here is a short promo video for the vocation promotion campaign done recently where priests from Archdiocese of Bombay on a road trip together, shares their experiences during their formation years and ongoing journey in priesthood.

“Creative Catechesis also allows you the freedom to tackle sensitive issues in the lighthearted ways.”

Creative Catechesis also allows you the freedom to tackle sensitive issues in the lighthearted ways. This is the campaign that we run during the season of advent. And finally, as a last example creative catechesis helps you stay relevant of the times. These are posts we have created with the latest trends in social media am sure most of you have on your phone.

If you did not understand the last few slides, then this brings me to a very important point, this is a challenge that needs your attention. The

clergy, priests, bishops and religious need to know and understand, at least at the fundamental level, the purpose and the beauty of social media. And more than that, the clergy needs to be aware of the latest digital trends and happening, perhaps even some form of training on the use of digital media. And more importantly, take serious actions to implement its use. The sheep are on the social media, the shepherds are ought to be. The shepherds need to keep up with the times. But I guarantee you that the clergy is not alone in this. There is help available in the form of the Catholic Media Professionals in your parishes, and the formation of communication cells in parishes and dioceses.

My experience of working in the digital ministry in the archdiocese of Bombay is a fulfilling one. It is not about the likes, the commands, the reach, the shares or the number of views but the sheer passion of sharing the values and teachings of the Church in a creative way. I would like to emphasize on the fact that creative catechesis is not a substitute to physical participation in the Sacraments. But only a method to further revitalize digital evangelization. The future is digital. There is no doubt about this. Honestly, I would have never imagined receiving a spiritual communion, what is next we have no idea.

Without doubt the task at hand is easier said than done. The quantum of work, the time effort and cost involved are huge. Additionally, there are plenty of challenges not only in developing creative catechesis but also in consuming them. Negative comments and feedback, sometimes political pressure, low internet bandwidth, lack of interest and the great challenge of tackling fake news. But I believe there is hope and when I look at the bishops and cardinals out here. Asia looks to you to lead the way forward, for the priests and the lay faithful.

I would like to conclude this presentation from a key quote from St. Pope Paul VI, “The Church ‘would feel guilty before the Lord’ if it failed to use the media for evangelization.” And therefore, I sincerely hope that the Church in Asia journey together with peoples and with this general conference recognizes the need to keep up with technology and social media and also strives to ensure its application in dioceses and parishes. Thank you.



Revitalizing the Life of the Church - Worship

Bishop Sebastian Francis

Bishop of Penang, Malaysia

President, Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia, Singapore & Brunei

Allow me to confine myself to some reflections and a paradigm for worship and formation based on all that has been expressed here in the last eight days. It is the same spirit, whether we are in *Lex Orandi* or *Lex Credendi* from worship to formation or in *Lex Vivendi* in life. It is the same spirit that is moving surely, clearly, and gently among us.

Everything that has been expressed, from our hopes to our disappointments to our failures to our aspirations and uncertainties, simply means that you have brought what your people are experiencing.

Let us now move on to worship and see if there is pressure now on us as we move to the second part of this conference – that we have to address the people of Asia and the people of our churches and give them a direction. As the Archbishop of Manila said, “Are we able to speak with authority, like how Peter spoke?” We, along with the Holy Spirit, have decided that this is the direction for the Church in Asia. Can we have that kind of confidence to regain our role as successors of the Apostles?

So, let us move to the first slide, which is about worship. It is in the context of an encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. I cannot help but feel that when I listened to this text, I actually experienced this more intensely during the pandemic when there was no more public worship. Jesus told her, “Yet a time is coming and has now come.” He said this two thousand years ago: “When the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and His worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.” The narrative on worship was not about the morality of the Samaritan woman, who had several men in her life. The narrative of worship was not about religion—which mountain to worship on, whether Mount Gerizim, Mount Zion, Jerusalem, or wherever.

The narrative on worship was not even about gender, with Jesus being male and the Samaritan woman female. It was not about race and ethnicity, he being a Jew and she being a Samaritan. But it was about worshipping God in spirit and truth.

Many of us made an interior journey during the pandemic. All we could cling to when there was no more external worship was an obligation to worship God in spirit and, in truth, carrying our people in our souls when we came before the altar to celebrate the Eucharist. Saint Faustina said, “A single day without the Eucharist is a dangerous day in the life of a bishop or priest.” And what about the people? Many of us were tempted not to celebrate the Eucharist because there was no audience, no congregation. However, it remains that we celebrate the Eucharist vicariously. Regardless of whether there is an audience or not, we carry every single person entrusted to our care into the Eucharistic table so that nobody is left out.

I wish to plead again that the Eucharist, coming from Asia, could focus not on being a reward for fidelity for practicing Catholics or baptized and practicing Catholics but as a nourishment for the wounded and the sick, both physically and spiritually, and nourishment for sinners. These are some thoughts about the Eucharist.

Almost everything that has been said here for the last eight days

points towards a message from the spirit to the Church in Asia. While we read the signs and face the magnitude of issues, crises, conflicts, and problems, we also need to ask what the spirit is saying to the Church in Asia. Three words stand out: the Church in Asia must be creative, inclusive, and bridge-building because the Father is creative, and the Son is inclusive. If the sacrifice on the cross were exclusive, it would mean nothing to us. He died to save creation and humanity.

Thus, everything that has been expressed here points towards being a creative, inclusive, and a bridge-building Church. A paradigm shift, or a paradigm for worship and formation, is needed. It must even be reflected in the language we speak in Asia, in our worship, and formation. It must be creative, inclusive, and bridge-building. As we were told in Bandung, it should be a new way of being the Church, not just putting new wine in old wineskins, or it will burst. It should be a new way of being the Church.

In Chiang Mai, during the Asian Mission Congress, we were told that Asians are storytellers. We like to share the story of Jesus, and Mongolia took it further by suggesting that we whisper the gospel to everyone in Asia. We are not here in Asia to boast or dominate.

So, I suggest a paradigm for formation. In the past, we have taken pride, and rightfully so, in being a Church of clergy, religious, and laity. But I suggest that we go back to our scriptural roots and recognize that we are a Church of Apostles. I am aware that I am primarily speaking to the successors of the Apostles gathered here. As successors of the Apostles, we must hold the primacy of love and truth. As Saint Edith Stein said, love and truth, one without the other, is destructive. We must hold the primacy of unity and continuity, not an emotional, sentimental unity, but a unity based on continuing the mission entrusted by the Father and the Son primarily to the Holy Spirit and through the Holy Spirit to all of us.

As a substitute for self-absorption, self-indulgence, or self-preservation, we must embrace the way of kenosis. We are primarily a Church of disciples, and the primary sacrament is not the priesthood or marriage, but discipleship. We need clergy who are disciples, consecrated men and women who are disciples, and laity who are disciples. The primary mission of disciples, especially our lay brothers and sisters, is in the world. While ministry within the Church is necessary, the primary mission of all

the baptized is to be witnesses in the world, in society, even on the way to work.

Finally, we must be a Church of the people of God, what Pope Francis calls “Fratelli tutti” (All Brothers and Sisters). I would like to conclude with two further considerations: that we move from membership to discipleship and that the unity we speak of is based on the continuity of the mission entrusted to the Apostles and disciples under the Lordship of the Holy Spirit.

But let us not forget that this mission is primarily entrusted by the Father and the Son to the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the Holy Spirit will succeed in the mission entrusted to Him by the Father and the Son. Pope Francis and all of us are called to cooperate with the Holy Spirit. At this point, as we are midway through our conference, I ask that we remain faithful to the Holy Spirit by remaining faithful to the process that has been chartered for us by Cardinal Charles Bo and his entire team. Let us be faithful to the process and, by being faithful to the process, we are faithful to the Holy Spirit. Maybe in Asia, we need to move from a narrow focus on Christology and the Christological debates of the first five centuries. Jesus Christ did not bring us to Himself and stop there. Beyond Himself, He led us into the mystery of the Trinity. Therefore, we must gently move from Christology to the fullness of God as a community of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Finally, I suggest a deeper realization of the triple dialogue: a dialogue with the poor, a dialogue with religions, and a dialogue with culture. Can I suggest, especially in Asia, that we excite our young people and everyone in a dialogue of joy, the joy of the Gospel, as Pope Francis calls it? We need a dialogue of mercy, the mercy of the Father and Jesus Christ. And we need a dialogue of hope generated by the Spirit. In 2025, it is going to be the Jubilee Year of Hope.

As we look to the future, we may encounter various crises. It could be a financial crisis, a man-made tragedy, a natural tragedy, a disregard for Laudato Si’ tragedy, or another lurking virus. Whatever it is, let us play our role and give Asia and the people of Asia, our churches in Asia, the leadership that they are looking for from us. Thank you, and God bless.



The Family: The Foundation for the Church in Asia

Mr & Mrs Daniel and Shelley Ee

Members, Worldwide Marriage Encounter Leadership Team

Member, Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life

Good afternoon, Cardinals, bishops, priests, religious brothers and sisters in Christ. Thank you for inviting us to speak on the family, the foundation of the church, the challenges of the family today, and how can the church in Asia respond creatively for the pastoral care of families.

We should make it clear that we are speaking in our own capacity as a married couple and not formally on behalf of the Dicastery for Laity, Family, and Life. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the family is the original cell of social life. It is the natural society in which husband and wife are called to give themselves in love and in the gift of life. The family is the community in which from childhood one can learn moral values, begin to honor God, and make good use of freedom. Family life is an initiation into life in society.

Each of us belongs to a family where parents, siblings, grandparents, and extended family are present. In our family, we are either in relationship or

out of relationship with each other. And we believe that for couples to guide and mature their children, they first need to be growing in their own spousal and spiritual life. In the family, we learn to share, to be compassionate, generous, to love the other even when he or she is not lovable. This call to love is just like how we are abundantly loved by God even when we do not deserve His love, when we stray, when we forget Him, when we sin.

Parents are the principal and first educators of their children. In this sense, the fundamental tasks of marriage and family are to be at the service of life, and the home is the first school of Christian Life and a school for human enrichment. Here in the family, one learns endurance, the joy of work, fraternal love, generosity, even repeated forgiveness, and above all, Divine Worship in prayer and the offering of one's life.

When the family, comprising parents, children, and grandparents, is functioning well, all will be in relationship. Love flows through this relationship, and the family will invariably share themselves with others, serving others in need. I know of this man who was fostered to a Muslim family soon after he was born. His mom had nine other children before him, and she was too ill after giving birth to him to care for him. He was baptized but not raised a Catholic.

At 30 plus years old, he met a Catholic lady who was 13 years his junior, and they got married. Before marriage, she wanted proof that he was not a Muslim, so she asked him to eat a plate of rice noodles with eggs and pork lard. His wife was baptized at 15 years with her mother and grandmother, and they received home catechism given by missionary priests. The man and the lady were married in a nice chapel, and he agreed to go to church with her weekly.

Now they had their fair share of ups and downs. They faced poverty; he was unemployed for some years and took up drinking in the early years of marriage.

Later, he got into debts gambling, but his wife's faith in God and Mother Mary's intervention gave her strength to persevere the hardships, and together they raised five children on his small income, which meant later that she had to go and work as a house help. Slowly, he became more prayerful, and towards the last years of his life when he was too old to go to

church, he prayed the rosary with her daily, and a neighbor brought Holy Communion to him. He died at the age of 88 years old after 55 years of marriage. Yes, that is the man. He is my father, and the lady is my mom. And the story of faith and love, of giving to each other, has benefited all of us, their children and grandchildren.

So, like Daniel has said, when a family functions well, love will flow through the ups and downs of life. On the other hand, when families are dysfunctional, relationships get fractured, and it becomes very difficult for such families to reach out to others to serve. So, it is vital to help families form good relationship. At the heart of the family is the married couple. We will suggest later about ways that, as a church, we can help to form, enhance, and strengthen the marital relationship. Those whose relationships are troubled will also need to be helped.

So, what are the challenges of the family today? We know that Asia is not a homogeneous continent. There is a diversity of cultures, religions, languages, and cuisines. But a big positive attribute is that Asian societies are centered on the family, where generally the interests of the family, community, and society are placed above the interest of each individual, and

“Asian societies are centered on the family, where generally the interests of the family, community, and society are placed above the interest of each individual, and that is a strength that must be preserved and strengthened.”

that is a strength that must be preserved and strengthened. So, we are some leaders in our community, and they cited some observations and challenges of families in their countries today.

They spoke about financial security, poverty, wars and conflicts, natural disasters, decline in family values, migration where families live apart long distances, addictions, loneliness, work-life balance, mental health issues, and academic stress. Even more worrying is the creeping in of individualism, especially through mass media and social media, the “what’s in it for me” attitude. Over time, this attitude, aggravated by the other challenges, will break up families and lead to the loss of precious life-giving relationships.

So, how can the church in Asia respond creatively for the pastoral care of families? We would suggest three categories of actions. One is

formation and training. Enhance the formation of clergy, religious, and lay volunteers in answering the pastoral needs of the people. Provide training programs for them to acquire the skills of listening, to have empathy, skills of dialogue, so as to be better able to serve families. Priests, religious, and lay volunteers are formed in their family homes. They need to have good spiritual and psychological well-being, and some may have come from dysfunctional homes and need healing during their seminary, religious formation, and lay volunteer training.

For pre-marriage formation, have well-developed programs that will help the young couples to understand themselves and each other and prepare themselves for the realities of family life. Form them to place God at the center and use experienced and well-functioning married couples to present programs to them. We already have programs like Catholic Engaged Encounter, Marriage Preparation Course, Couple Mentorship Journey, and the key is to ensure that the programs are effective and relevant to society. Recently, the Dicastery for Laity, Family, and Life has just issued guidelines to the local churches for the introduction of a catechumenate for married life.

Strengthen marriages through experiential programs to enhance intimacy, learning to communicate effectively, learning to forgive, and practice acceptance. These programs must be Christ-centered to be effective. We ourselves benefited immensely from attending the Marriage Encounter weekend in our early years of marriage and have been serving as presenters since 1990.

The church will also need to support and journey with couples in troubled marriages. There are programs that are designed specifically to address such needs. There are already pre-marriage and post-marriage programs available in various countries in Asia. We suggest that there should be a sharing of resources among the countries, and FABC could act as a platform to share resources and programs. Have a database of the programs offered, what their focus areas are, which countries they are presented in, and who are the promoters and leaders such as couples, priests, and religious. Provide their contact details and the languages that they are used. Such a platform and database can help to speed up the work of strengthening marriages and families across Asia.

We could use technology to strengthen relationships, creating chat groups, email groups to ensure constant, sustained, and meaningful connections and communications among small groups of married couples who might have journeyed in the same program together. Encourage and train more laborers for the vineyard, lay and clergy, in the pastoral care of the vulnerable, especially the poor and marginalized. Helping them not only in their physical needs but also to help enhance spousal and family relationships. The church can work with like-minded NGOs to develop sustainable livelihood programs for the poor. When their basic physical needs are met, it will be easier for them to think of strengthening their spousal, family, and spiritual life. Focus on sustaining family connections for the spouses who live apart in different countries because of employment reasons. Activities, retreats, formations can be organized in churches that will help these spouses to sustain their spousal and family relationships.

Deepen spiritual life through retreats for individuals, for couples, for families, for seniors. This needs to continue and be made relevant to the needs of the people. For example, in Singapore, many Catholics and non-Catholics have attended the Conversion Experience Retreat, a group-based retreat conducted by Archbishop Cardinal William Goh. At the same time, many people have gone to the Seven Fountains in Chiang Mai, Thailand, for silent retreats. Two different modes of retreat with the same spiritual aim of connecting with God. The key is to feed the people spiritually through ways that will speak to them at a particular stage of their lives.

The next body of actions is structural changes. They are couples, and not as two separate individuals. Currently, most Church organizations do not provide for this, and what they have is they are expected to serve as two separate people, and in some situations, they are given that there's a men's wing and a women's wing, so they serve separately. When we say that couples should serve as a couple, the two of them will have only one vote so that they will be on the same level as individuals serving on their own. This will be a very powerful signal to the parish of what we mean when we say marriage is a sacrament. They are no longer two but become one. They will love and serve each other and other people as how God loves. What a powerful testimony of God's love in action. Couples become walking, talking sacraments.

There are movements that already have this in practice, like Catholic Engaged Encounter and Retrouvaille. In fact, these movements have gone a step further by having married couples and priests serve together as a unit in leadership. The priest is not a spiritual director only but a partner in the three-person relationship and leadership, called aptly the ecclesial team. The priest living the sacrament of holy orders and the couple for the sacrament of holy matrimony become complementary and core responsible for the movement. The three become partners and close friends over time, sharing meals, dialoguing with one another regularly. We ourselves continue to dialogue with the Filipino priest in Dumaguete whom we had served and worked with as an ecclesial team from 2011 to 2019.

In March 2014, Pope Francis emphasized that marriage and holy orders constitute two great paths by which Christians can make their life a gift of love after the example of Saint Paul and his friends Aquila and Priscilla and thus cooperate in the building up of the church. A retired bishop in the U.S., Bishop William Skylstad, who was once the former president of the USCCB and served in the North American ecclesial team of Marriage Encounter, used to say that this way of the two sacraments working together is exactly how the church should be functioning. It encourages the laity to serve with passion and automatically encourages as much female participation as men.

It breaks down clericalism, which Pope Francis has spoken out against throughout his papacy. Make Masses family-friendly, especially for children and teens. Have uplifting hymns and homilies. Create rooms to accommodate babies, but don't call it a cry room, as it gives a negative connotation. Involve the youth in parish activities. Train and involve young electors, teenagers, and young adults in leadership roles. Keep the ministry of altar service alive and strong among young children and teens.

Renew family traditions, cultures, and values. Prepare for Sunday, Easter, and Christmas with family projects. Reclaim the dinner table without smartphones for engaged conversations.

Renew family traditions, cultures, and values. Prepare for Sunday, Easter, and Christmas with family projects. Reclaim the dinner table without smartphones for engaged conversations. Seek forgiveness in front of children

as a teaching moment. Provide interesting activities to strengthen family traditions, such as movie nights, parents and children afternoon bonding sessions, and celebrating milestone wedding anniversaries in Sunday Masses. Pair seniors with young people to tap into wisdom and knowledge sharing. Be innovative in evangelizing, starting small but dreaming big.

Accompany and inspire small cells through concrete acts of love. Encourage parents to be educators of the young on matters like marriage and vocation. Conduct remote preparation for young children by sharing wedding photographs and conversations about the beauty of marriage. Dioceses and parishes have the opportunity to conduct programs and provide activities to renew and strengthen couple and family life. Be creative and answer the needs of the people.

In conclusion, the presentation hopes to deepen and widen the discussion and consideration by dioceses in Asia regarding marriage and family life. With increasing challenges, marriage and family life are existential issues for both the church and society. Devoting efforts to pastoral care in these areas will lead to a fully alive and vibrant church. The presentation ends with the Pope's mandate to all families at the World Meeting of Families to be the seat of a more fraternal world, welcoming faces of the church, and always praying. Thank you for your kind attention.





The Family and the Church in Asia

Mr. Michael Phichit and Mrs Lucia

Achara Sukeewat

National Presidents, Christian Family

Movement in Thailand

I am Michael, and this is the best part of me, Lucia, my wife. We are part of CFM - President and Vice President of CFM Asia Continental in Thailand.

When it comes to family challenges, decision-making is a crucial aspect. For the simple and ordinary decisions, my wife takes care of them, while I handle the more significant and vital ones, like matters related to currency exchange rates or global issues.

Over the past 20 years, we have encountered numerous challenges while working for families. One concerning issue we've noticed is the increasing exposure of young people to harmful content online, such as the disturbing trend of girls selling their virginity. We wonder why such behaviors arise and believe it is essential to educate and guide the youth.

In our region, there are two types of families - those in rural areas with access to land and those who move to cities for work. However, urban families, especially those who are from lower-income backgrounds, face numerous struggles. They often lack access to quality education, leading to limited job

opportunities and financial hardships.

The gap between parents and children grows wider, as economic constraints force parents to work long hours, leaving kids with grandparents. The lack of quality education and guidance leaves children vulnerable to the negative influences of the media, leading some into substance abuse, violence, and other destructive behaviors.

As a Catholic family movement, we strive to address these challenges. We encourage parents to work from home when possible and support supplemental occupations, like raising cattle or growing crops, to foster stronger family bonds. Love and genuine care from parents are irreplaceable, and it is crucial to nurture healthier family environments.

We acknowledge that no family is perfect, and the family structure in Asia needs healing and development. Financial difficulties often hinder families from fully embracing their faith, as they struggle to make ends meet. As CFM, we are honored to share our experiences and call for prayers and support to strengthen families in Asia.

Let us remember the families in Asia in our prayers, asking for God's grace and blessings. Thank you for listening.





Amoris Laetitia - A Call to Love

Bishop John Baptist Lee Keh-mien

Bishop of Hsinchu, Taiwan

President, Chinese Regional Bishops' Conference

Dear eminences, your excellencies, reverend fathers, sisters, and brothers, good afternoon. Before I begin, I would like to express my gratitude to Mrs. Claire for preparing this paper and for sharing a story about myself in this FABC gathering. It was my first time sharing in FABC, and after that, a bishop approached me, saying, “John, what you said, I cannot understand, but I read it, it’s okay.” That’s why I will display the text on the screen so that you can read along. Let me begin.

Amoris Laetitia, the exhortation on the joy of love and the beauty of family life, was promulgated in 2016. Since then, Pope Francis has been favoring and promoting a new pastoral approach to the family situation through various occasions, particularly during the Year of Amoris Laetitia and the recent 10th World Meeting of Families in Rome, which I personally attended. I want to take this opportunity to share with you the experience and insights on how this new pastoral approach to family may be firmly established and sustained.

It is particularly important to address the contemporary family situation in Taiwan and many Asian countries. We are witnessing a declining population with low fertility rates and moral values under formation, facing challenges, including the values upheld by Christian marriage. Additionally, there are challenges such as separation and great suffering among families brought upon by the recent pandemic.

Despite these weaknesses, the family can become a light in the darkness of the world. The ultimate goals of *Amoris Laetitia*, as the teacher and defender of the liberty of the family and life, are rightly stated as five goals of celebrating the Year of *Amoris Laetitia*. Based on my pastoral experience, I will reference and evaluate them in three categories as follows: First, we need to increase the exposure of *Amoris Laetitia* to bring more people to read and be touched by its teachings. Only families that discover and experience both the joy of having a gift and of being a gift for the Church and society can become a light in the darkness of the world. This light is especially needed in Asia today.

Second, pastors need to work with families, and families must be joined together and cultivate a strong sense of co-responsibility among the different vocations in the Church.

Third, the Church needs to provide resources to enable families to become active agents of the family apostolate, making efforts at evangelization and catechesis inside the family. This effort needs to include married couples, children, young people, the elderly, and all situations of family fecundity.

Amidst the contemporary challenges faced by families, especially those experiencing marital breakdowns and other chaotic and challenging situations in an ever-changing society, the discovery of the laity, family, and life has crafted a way of working with families.

To join and work with families inspired by *Amoris Laetitia*, it is essential not to be random. I will share pastoral insights observed from implementations in Taiwan. What I want to highlight is how we may build

“Only families that discover and experience both the joy of having a gift and of being a gift for the Church and society can become a light in the darkness of the world.”

and sustain the companion community that Pope Francis wants to see in our Church. This community includes all stages of the sacramental journey: the time of preparation for marriage, its celebration, and the years that follow, especially during moments of crisis and discouragement for spouses.

To achieve this, we may wonder who belongs to the companion community. Inspired by the theme of the 10th World Meeting of Families, the domestic Church and city can and must be brought into the presence of the companion community. To uphold the community of communities, we, the bishops, together with parish priests and many couples, should actively participate in the marriage program.

It is important for parish priests to have a retreat and appoint themselves, especially in comforting the contemporary challenges and providing care for the youth, marriage, and the family. The help of marriage couples participating in such programs will effectively show real family accompaniment.

The need for a good premarital handbook is of paramount importance, akin to a vaccine that significantly reduces the risk of marriage breakdown. The program should enable engaged couples to cope with modern challenges, develop good communication skills, manage finances, prepare for children, have a common spiritual life, etc. Frequent programs involving diverse groups of couples are necessary to serve this purpose.

Furthermore, we must not overlook the positive feedback loop created here. Those who attend primary programs are appropriate candidates to become future components or benefactors.

Listening is a cultural element of accompaniment, especially in our busy times and during the current pandemic. Listening should be creative, as demonstrated in the Archdiocese of Taiwan, which utilizes volunteer operators in the Family Hotline to counsel those in need through phone calls or other social networking platforms.

Listening is a cultural element of accompaniment, especially in our busy times and during the current pandemic. ”

Accompanying families is not only a pastoral urgency but also a

profound spiritual experience. Pope Francis reminds us that the Church's task is like a field hospital, reaching out to everyone without frontiers to help each person find their proper way of participating in the ecclesial community, experiencing unconditional love and mercy.

Complementing our loved ones with the eyes of God and seeing Christ in them is a journey we must all take. Families must constantly strive for something greater and never lose heart due to their limitations, seeking the fullness of love and communion with God that lies before us.

The challenge of Christian marriage is real and ever-changing. Satan, sin, and adversity continually invite us to respond. Parish pastors and families need to join and grow together. Premarital programs should be taken with utmost seriousness, laying a strong foundation. The way forward for laity, family, and life is a response to Pope Francis' desire for a new path in the preparation for the sacrament of marriage, as published in the handbook titled "Coming, I tell us for marriage life." It encompasses all stages of the sacramental journey, from preparation to celebration and the years that follow.

This journey will be a welcoming path when there is permanent accompaniment, recognizing that the journey of marriage and family is ongoing, not confined to the wedding day but continually renewed with a Christian identity. This applies to priests and religious, and they too require accompaniment.

As we move forward, we must respond to Pope Francis' call for a new path in preparing for marriage. Let us work along the path of families and be true companions to them. Thank you, everybody.





Amoris Laetitia - A Call to Love

Fr. Vimal Tirimana CSsR

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*Member, Theological Commission of the Secretariat for
the Synod 2021-2023*

Good afternoon, dear bishops and other participants. We heard just now a succinct presentation of Amoris Laetitia. I have been asked by the organizers to give a presentation on some opportunities which the document Amoris Laetitia presents to the pastors in the Church, with the theme Amoris Laetitia: A Call to Love.

How the opportunities unfold in this document? Of course, the document consists of 325 articles. I don't know how I am going to manage in 20 minutes, but we should, because the more important part is the reflection. And I have tried to order this very short presentation in two main parts, rather three, but the main two parts are: what are the differences that Amoris Laetitia unfolds, especially in its method, and then how these differences present opportunities. In the second part, I will address specific controversial issues like homosexual unions, divorce, and remarriage, etc. I

do not need to prolong the introduction because it can be too cumbersome, and it should not be longer than the talk.

For nearly seven decades, issues related to both family and marriage have been a great preoccupation of the Church. It is enough to remember people like Romano Guardini in the 1940s and 50s expressing concern. Then the Second Vatican Council made space for one of the things that concerns the modern-day issues, which is marriage and family. Then Saint John Paul II and now Pope Francis are speaking about them. Soon after his election in 2013, Pope Francis, as Bishop Lee said, launched this unprecedented synodal process. We are into synodality at the moment, but I think the process of synodality began with the process of *Amoris Laetitia*, a two-year process. If we want, we can discuss this later during the open forum. And as the peritus for the FABC Bishops, some of you remember how some of the nitty-gritties took place at both the synods. I too remember.

The climax of that process was, in fact, the document itself. Now I want to say something which concerns bishops and priests, namely, when Pope started that unprecedented process, there were concerns expressed in the secular media. Sometimes, more than the church's official media, secular media tries to say what the church should say or what the church is saying in their own way. So, there were concerns expressed that this is a ploy, this is a trick by Pope Francis to change the Church's teaching on divorce and remarriage, especially the reception of the sacraments, or it is a ploy to recognize the so-called homosexual unions. But none of them happened if you open *Amoris Laetitia*. Nowhere is it mentioned.

In fact, indissolubility of marriage is confirmed and reconfirmed. The Catholic understanding of marriage as a heterosexual marriage is reconfirmed, and explicitly Pope Francis denies that the church can never recognize the so-called homosexual marriages. So, some of the fears were unfounded and unnecessary. Nevertheless, they were there, and that spoiled the outcome of *Amoris Laetitia* because people were wearing, as I am wearing these glasses, they were wearing the glasses of prejudice and reading. In fact, permit me, with all due respect to our Bishops here, at least a couple of bishops from Asia have told me openly during the past years, "Vimal, what is happening? What is happening to our Holy Father? He has

changed.” I said, “Have you read the document?” “No, I don’t read such documents.” Now, this has happened to me. So, I think we must be practical at a conference like this. So, I hope I will present some of the important points.

Amoris Laetitia is different, very different from earlier teachings in the sense that it directly confronts the marital and family problems. As we say in English, it takes the bull by the horns, not of imaginary people, but of real people living out there in the world. We are coming from families, all of us, including the Holy Father. We have our families, we know our families, and our nephews, nieces, and others. What things they go through? It is to address them that Amoris Laetitia is written, rather than from an ideal point of view. In doing so, it offers the balm of mercy. Pope St. John XXIII spoke about the balm of Mercy to shattered families and broken marriages. I want to quote here Cardinal Blase Cupich of Chicago in one of his talks saying, “There has been no change in the doctrine in Amoris Laetitia,” and I reconfirm it here. If you want, we can discuss during the question and answer what is new and revolutionary. Is the way the Church what it is as a Church now? This is the line that I want to underline. If there is a difference, the difference is ecclesiology.

What is the Church now? What do we understand by Church? That is the issue. The way the Church acts, the way the Church ministers to the people now, the Church is indeed a field hospital, says Cardinal Cupich. Here I notice so many opportunities. In sharp contrast to earlier teachings, Amoris Laetitia has stopped lamenting. Many of our earlier teachings, rightly so, were confined to condemning what was going on in the world, and what was going on in the Church. Rightly so, they limited themselves to lamenting. You read most of the earlier official teachings, they are all so upset, and Pope Francis is also very upset, as we see in the second chapter of the Amoris Laetitia. But he does not limit himself to condemning and lamenting, but he goes beyond. Neither is he satisfied merely by repeating Church’s doctrine. Dear friends, I put that Latin phrase repeating ad nauseam, just repeating doctrine. Pope Francis says in number 36, “By repeating our Church doctrine, it means nothing.” Of course, from the teaching point of view, it is a way of conscientization, a way of forming consciences, no doubt. But it will not solve the problems. We must do something.

The question asked by *Amoris Laetitia* is, “What can the Church do in the face of the complicated, complex questions regarding family and marriage today?” It reminds about the role of the Church. As a Redemptorist, I want to quote Saint Alphonsus Maria de Liguori, the official patron of Catholic moral theology. According to him, the Church’s role is to form the consciences of the people. Pope Francis simply repeats that. He has made a methodological change, I think. We have to take this, although we do not have time, be patient, as they say in Italian, “Let’s dwell on it little bit.” It is because very often, for example as a priest now for 35 years, how many times in my preaching, in my ministering during our Redemptorist missions, that I have tried to replace the conscience of the people? I am trying to tell them what they should be. That is not our role. Of course, forming, telling them is part of it, but it does not stop there. It is the conscience of the person who should ultimately act, according to the Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*,¹⁶.

Then Pope John Paul II in *Veritatis Splendor* repeats all this. Pope Francis says, in his introduction to *Amoris Laetitia*, that the pastors of the Church would be interested in Chapter 6. I do not know the reason why; it may be the Latin American way. The present Pope’s documents are very, very long, even for someone who teaches theology. So, he says, read chapter by chapter. In the introduction, he says, “Chapter 6 interests pastors, while Chapter 8 challenges everybody,” says the Pope. More than half of Chapter 6 is dedicated to the crucial, but indispensable, role of a pastor to accompany couples. Now, this we need to hear well. This is an opportunity. Rather than sitting in our armchair and telling, “This is the doctrine,” we need to accompany them. This is a purely Franciscan characteristic, Franciscan in the sense of Pope Francis’ characteristics. Before marriage, during marriage, and after marriage, I think Father Clarence may remember, he was also the executive secretary of the OTC just after me. We issued two documents already on marriage, not to even more, but in that, we always spoke about this point. It cannot be limited only to marriage preparation meetings. It must be before, during, and after.

Someone was interviewing me the other day, asking, “Did the FABC contribute anything to the Universal Church?” Here is one point where we have been taking the lead and saying much before Cardinal Bergoglio was elected Pope. Here is another important point to be kept in mind. It is not easy, says the Pope, to give fixed pastoral recipes that fit every situation. He quotes Thomas Aquinas and Pope Paul VI as he calls for contextual pastoral solutions that suit diverse contexts. Dear Bishops and others, this is important. As a parish priest, as a pastor, I would love to have a book of recipes. “Ah, here’s a marriage case. What does the law say? It will fit in here. Oh, there’s another case. This will be the recipe.” We cannot do that. This is simple moral theology. We have to take into account circumstances, context, and intentions. That is the Church’s cherished fundamental moral theology. So, this is an important point we need to consider. The rule of thumb given by *Amoris Laetitia* is to accompany, discern, and integrate. Of course, this basic rule has to be tempered. Bishop Lee said about it already. He used the word “compassion.” Pope Francis uses it regularly. It has to be tempered by mercy.

And another point is that it has to be a personal and pastoral discernment. We cannot, as pastors, responsible pastors, we should not say, “Ah, you go and decide what you want. This couple can go and decide what they want. That remarried person, no, personal decision, yes, conscience, yes, but personal and pastoral. The pastor has to accompany the persons. That is why it is put that way. However, in each and every particular pastoral context, serious and conscientious discernment is called for, rather than applying rules arbitrarily. So, it is a matter of forming consciences of people. It is a matter of accompanying persons by their pastors. Now, here, please note, most of the participants here are bishops. I dare say, as someone who loves the Church, do our priests know what the Church teaches? Sometimes, with all due respect to you, do the bishops know the latest teaching? Of course, bishops are so occupied. But how can we dare say we know? So, seminarians need to be trained properly with regard to what the Church teaches, not what this theologian or that theologian teaches. It should be what the official Church teaches.

I have found, in my experience as a teacher for the past 28 years now, in Sri Lanka, Rome, and elsewhere, that there are many ordained priests who know nothing about the Church's doctrine. They go by a pre-Vatican II book or something. So, we need to stress well-trained and knowledgeable priests. Otherwise, how can you accompany people? Thus, the document insists that laws cannot be simply applied, and Pope Francis is known for his very rhetorical way of talking. He says, "Laws cannot be used as stones to throw at people." But we need to begin with the persons involved. So, the question is, as Jesus used to say, what is more important, the laws or the persons? Laws are necessary. If anyone says that Church's laws are not important, I think he is not a Catholic. But laws are only a means to an end, the persons.

Pastoral care, especially with regard to complex cases, demands skills and others. Such care cannot be given by merely sitting at their desk. By the way, *Amoris Laetitia* was originally written in Italian. So, we need to consider the Church as a field hospital, and we need to feel the smell of the Sheep. And couples or families cannot be pigeonholed, the Pope's words, not my words, as regular and irregular. Let us take a certain pastoral case. I take my canon law code and say, "Ah, this is regular, this is not regular." They are necessary. I do that very often when people come for counseling to me, both in Sri Lanka and elsewhere. However, that is not enough. We need to accompany them and see how, in this situation, that person will fit in. A person will be affected by the values that cover the laws.

Here is another important point. Pope Francis repeats this even with regard to synodality. When we were at Frascati, some of the responses we saw was: how much room do we pastors, preachers, and bishops give to the grace of God to act? We are enclosed very often with our own legal frameworks. Is there any space for God's grace to act? Let me quote my favorite phrases from John 3:8, where Jesus tells Nicodemus, "The Spirit blows where he wills." None of us, no priest, no bishop, not even the Pope, can control the Holy Spirit. That we should know. Some may not like me saying this, but we have to say the truth. That is why I was called for. So, let the Spirit be the Spirit, the Holy Spirit. That is an opportunity. Pope Francis wants pastors to avoid the cold bureaucratic morality that is performed sitting at their official desk.

What the Pope is referring to now is what FABC expressed a few years ago. We said a mixed marriage is an opportunity. We talk about triple dialogue in Asia. A mixed marriage is an opportunity. For example, interreligious mix marriages in Thailand or in Sri Lanka. Let's look at the positive side, just as we look at the negative side. How many of us do that? And the Pope invites us to use them as opportunities. In FABC papers, we already discussed in those numbers the special pastoral care needed for those in civil marriages or those who are simply living together. Here, Pope Francis uses what Pope John Paul II taught us so beautifully, the law of gradualness. We cannot expect suddenly a married couple to just fit into what the Church teaches. And I want to draw, with your permission, dear pastors here, both priests and bishops, how patient are we with ourselves? How patient are we with priesthood when they don't fit into the idea? We allow them gradualness. Why not apply the same to married people, to family people? That's the issue. Pope John Paul II taught it long ago. Also, the care needed for those who are separated, divorced, or unjustly abandoned.

But I want to address too the issue for homosexual persons. I know that there are so many bishops who were present at the two synods. You remember how people, bishops, and others were worried about this issue because they thought Pope Francis is going to allow hereafter homosexual marriages. So, the constant teaching of the Church *Persona Humana* (1975) is the distinction made, for the first time, between homosexual persons and homosexual activities. Homosexual persons are accepted by the Church. In 1975, The Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith said, homosexual acts are condemned as intrinsically evil. And the Pope repeats it and says this is an official teaching of the Church. So, there is no way of accepting homosexual unions as marriages. Marriage is limited only to heterosexual marriages. Recently, about three years ago, a certain family suddenly discovered that their son was a homosexual. The family, a very pious one, was shattered. Are we going to condemn them? Pope Francis says, "Please try to understand the feeling sentiments of a family like that." How many of us do that?

We have discussed the thorny issues of the pastoral care for the divorce and the remarried. Pope Francis does not provide any new doctrine but simply develops the pastoral implication of the doctrine. Pope John Paul II was the first to say that all the divorced and remarried are not in the state of sin at the same degree; some are unjustly abandoned, while others are having their own difficulties. So, there are different degrees of culpability. We cannot condemn all of them on the same level of intensity. Pope Benedict XVI developed the same thing in *Sacramentum Caritatis* (2007), and said we cannot condemn all the remarried people as living in sin at the same level, some are innocent and unjustly abandoned.

In traditional moral theology, in such cases, can we consider discerning whether they are worthy of receiving the sacraments? This is the issue. Based on traditional fundamental moral theological principles as given in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, it teaches us that, in those cases where personal discernment reveals no serious state of sin, such couples could even approach the sacraments, including the Eucharist (footnotes 336 and 351). It is not a blanket statement allowing everybody to receive the Eucharist. That is utter irresponsibility and that is not the issue.

The last point, the document does not negate the immorality of those who deviate from the ideal of the church. Let us say a couple has got divorced and remarried, that is not the ideal for the church. Is it justifiable? Not at all, it is a state of imperfection. But what can we do with regard to those people in that state of imperfection? In the spirit of Jesus of Nazareth, and of Chapter 8 of John's Gospel, where it relates about the woman caught in the very act of adultery, we must be on the lookout for pastoral opportunities to do what we can. Here I want to repeat what the good Pope John XXIII used to say: the church is not only a very sure teacher, her doctrine is very sure, but also a tender mother. We should not forget the motherhood of the Church. Last but not the least, *Amoris Laetitia* is good news for persons in families and marriages that are in crisis, because it provides so many opportunities in the pastoral field, making it really a field hospital.

Thank you for your patient attention.







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Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC)