

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 2

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 2

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**EMERGING REALITIES AND  
THE CHURCH IN ASIA**

**DAY 4  
OCTOBER 20, 2022**

## PRESS NOTE

### 20TH OCTOBER 2022

20th October 2022, the fourth day of the segment 'Emerging Realities' at the FABC General Conference began with the Holy Eucharist, celebrated by Bishop John Baptist Lee Keh-mien of Hsinchu, Taiwan. H.E. Francis Xavier Cardinal Kriengsak Kovithavanij opened the morning session by leading the Adsumus. The morning prayer, played over video, was led by the Philippines-Malaysia-Papua New Guinea-Thailand province of the Daughters of St Paul.

H.E. Cardinal Kriengsak introduced the topics for the day - dialogue, peace and reconciliation; geopolitical and social shifts impacting Asia and reflections on ways of building bridges in the context of inter-intra religious dialogue, in the light of *Evangelii Gaudium*.

H.E. Charles Cardinal Maung Bo SDB, President of the FABC, speaking of a mission of dialogue, peace, and reconciliation as a new way for the Asian Church, contextualized Asia as a country of great opportunity, optimism and survival. Adding how war has been a way of life, and describing the many threats to peace, H.E. Cardinal Bo stressed the need for the Church to be reactive, to be an agent of peace, initiating dialogue, advocating for equality, and standing up to power with 'empty hands'.

**“...every jubilee calls for metanoia - let us challenge ourselves to let peace-making be the new evangelisation”**

Mentioning that 'every jubilee calls for metanoia - let us challenge ourselves to let peace-making be the new evangelisation', H.E. Cardinal Bo concluded by calling his listeners to 'fight for peace'.

The next speaker, Dr. Edmund Chia, professor of theology and Co-director of Interreligious Dialogue at the Australian Catholic University in Melbourne, highlighting the key moments

in the Asian Church's journey of dialogue, sought to emphasize the lessons that could be learned from them. Speaking of the history of dialogue, the appreciation of other religions, and the Asian Church as a learning Church, Dr. Chia praised the FABC as an example of a Church of dialogue, citing it as something to be proud of.

Mr. Lawrence Chong, Co-Moderator for the Singapore Archdiocesan Synodal Committee and Consultor to the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue, speaking in the context of inter-intra religious dialogue, especially for young people, proposed ways to build bridges. Suggesting that Church leadership had to show credibility to the youth, develop capability for the youth, and create a future of involvement and dialogue with them, Mr. Chong called on his listeners to be better at dialogue with the youth.

**“Emphasizing how the reality of agape was the fundamental principle of the document on which every initiative can be built, and that in dialogue with other cultures and religions, realities are more important than ideas.”**

The session was followed by a round of plenary group discussions and questions.

Prof. Edmund Terence Gomez, professor of political economy in the Faculty of Economics and Administration at the University of Malaya, spoke on the next topic, 'the political and economic trends driving Asia today'. Providing a comprehensive view of Asia's political history, Prof. Gomez elaborated on authoritative rule, the people's power movement, the effects of corruption on democracy and high industrialisation, along with adding context to current geo-political struggles. He reminded his audience that asking 'who is the state?' and 'where does power lie?' are the keys to understanding geo-political constructs in their countries.

In the afternoon, Fr Bryan Lobo SJ, Dean at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, elaborating on the topic 'The Church in Asia Proclaiming the Gospel: Ways of building bridges in the context of inter-intra religious dialogue in the light of *Evangelii Gaudium*', reiterated the Pope's message about being pilgrims journeying alongside one another. Emphasizing how the reality of agape was the fundamental principle of the document on which every initiative can be built, and that in dialogue with other cultures and

religions, realities are more important than ideas, Fr Lobo underlined how dialogue must be characterized by openness to truth and love. The session was followed by group discussions.

Fr. Pedro Walpole SJ, a Network Catalyst of the River Above Asia Oceania Ecclesial Network, describing the organization’s purpose and efforts in ecological preservation, stressed the importance of sustaining the food, environment and livelihoods of people, and invited the representatives to connect with those who could help effect change.

The day concluded with H.E. Cardinal Kriengsak leading the representatives in the Alma Redemptoris Mater.





## **Dialogue, Peace, and Reconciliation: A Pathway for Asia**

H. E. Charles Maung Cardinal Bo, SDB

*Archbishop of Yangon*

*President, Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences*

Very good morning to all. As President, they have given me an extra grace of time allotted, 15 plus minutes. The moderator, Bishop Francis, would agree to that, although you did not announce that earlier. I'm starting with a Bible quotation. It's quite negative to my topic. "I am for Shalom, and thus I speak, but they are for war. I am for peace. I ask for peace, but even as I open my mouth, they are ready to fight" (Psalms 120). When I say peace, peace, peace, they say fight, fight, fight.

Look at our Holy Land. The Israelites and Palestinians have been fighting since the time of Moses. So, who is to be blamed? Definitely Moses. God asked him, Moses, where do you want to take these people? Moses was very poor in speech, and he was stumbling. I want to go to Canaan. Canaan? Okay, take them to Canaan. Actually, Moses did not mean Canaan. He meant California. We have heard presentations and talks from the theologians, professors and scholars. Now you will hear the voice of the son of a farmer. Dear friends, dear brothers, and sisters, we have gathered to discuss what

could be our new goal to be at the service of Asia. In our efforts to enhance our multiple gifts and graces, very especially, we are here to deal with a new goal, the mission of dialogue, reconciliation, and peace-making. So, is this the new way of being the church in Asia? The topic looks very simple, but it is a very difficult topic.

A continent of great optimism and opportunities. Asia is a divinely ordained continent. She is the mother and creator of all great religions. She continues the great spiritual tradition of mindfulness, yoga, meditation, etc. It is the oldest human continent next only to Africa, but it is vibrantly young population, 60 % of our world youth, around 700 million, live in Asia. Human assets are the greatest asset of Asia. It is a continent of riotous colours of diversity. Both in population and diversity, dividend Asia is far ahead to the West. It had a great past, and it will have a glorious future. The whole church looks at Asia and Africa to carry the missionary task. Asia is also a continent that learned to put its wounded past back and get on with the business of human development.

**“Human assets are the greatest asset of Asia. It is a continent of riotous colours of diversity.”**

Japan is a great example. Once this continent was deeply wounded, yet it learned to heal itself from the falling wounds. A continent of conflict, superpower rivalry, proxy wars mutilated Asia. A continent of the only nuclear holocaust, never forget Hiroshima and Nagasaki. A continent of various wars, genocide like Cambodia, Myanmar, at least for 70 years that never has been any year without fights and conflict. A continent that faced huge displacement like India, Pakistan, Vietnam, and Myanmar again. A continent of distress migrants.

A new goal to the Asia church is preventive peace mission against relapse into violence. Ukraine reminds us, be on guard, seek peace before hatred takes over. War affects all. War is between Ukraine and Russia, but it is a great warning. War anywhere will infect the globalized economy and inflict starvation in the poorest nations when the economy collapses. Some are guilty, all are responsible. Church needs to be proactive with early warning measures and reactive to be with the accompaniment of victims of conflict in Asia.

Violence, the second original sin of human beings. Anthropologists like René Girard warns us, violence is in the congenital disorder in human beings. Unless checked by grace and common sense, genocides are dangerously possibilities. So even the first pages of the Bible shows, fraternal bloodletting occurs. The only first family, a family of three or four, killing happened. War is a way of life. Humans have been at war with one another 92 % of the time. Of the past 3,400 years, peace was for just 268 years of them and just 8 % of recorded history. In the 20th century, man has killed 135 million of his fellow human beings. That is a warning sign to Asia of the 21st century. It is the epicenter of modern conflicts. For example, India and Pakistan have border issues. India and China, the South China Seas.

**“War is a way of life. Humans have been at war with one another 92% of the time.”**

Major challenges to peace in Asia.

Big power rivalry in the South China Sea. Even threat of a third world war erupting in this region. Even during the COVID lockdown, the arms industry stock market did not close. Of the nine nuclear powers, four are in Asia: China, India, Pakistan, North Korea. Myanmar, we don't have yet. Perhaps we may get supply from China and from Russia. Countries of democratic deficit headed by strongmen.

Climate change and real -time threat of island nations like Maldives, Fiji are disappearing. Major challenges to peace in Asia. After disregard of indigenous rights, Asia holds the biggest indigenous population without any rights. Great poverty, enormous riches and grinding poverty. Asia holding the biggest number of poor in the world. The emergence of hate speech through internet, mobile phone, Facebook. Majoritarianism, majority bullies the minority all over Asia. Subcontinental conflicts inside many countries.

Militarization, nuclearization and arms race in Asia. The epicenter of nuclear arms race, South China Sea conflicts, and increased danger of nuclear proliferation in the current climate is not an immediate concern. But with Russia showing bad example, this could become an existential danger to the people of Asia.

## The Church as a peacemaker in Asia.

Church in Asia used the formal and non-formal means of constantly working for peace in Asia. People to people talk, one to one talk. Non-discriminatory service delivery, especially during natural man-made disasters such as Tsunami, earthquakes, earthquakes, floods. Providing the much-needed human security, especially to the most vulnerable people through education and health service.

**“Church in Asia used the formal and non-formal means of constantly working for peace in Asia.”**

Great witness by people like Mother Teresa, Nobel Laureate for Peace. Direct action through religions for peace. We have at least over 100 countries religions for peace is heading. Accompanying the victims of violence.

## Challenges.

Minority complex in many countries--Lack of influence with government and civil society. Of course there might be some exception like his Eminence, Governor William Goh was telling in Singapore they have a good connection with the authorities. India also has some influence there. The Philippines church also has influence over the people and the authorities and the government.

Threefold dialogue again with poor, cultures and religions need for greater attention. We have this in the Bandung Convention mentioned again and again of this one. But we have papers and documents. Sometimes even the bishops. FABC papers and documents are the richest, I would say, compared to other continental conferences. But we never read them. That is the first mortal sin. We never take those into action. That is the second mortal sin. When you get the books and we embellish our libraries, that is the third mortal sin.

Working towards economic and environmental justice. Collaborating more with the civil society organizations and the diplomats. Campaigning on global stage against militarization. When we look at the UN



Security Council out of five, Russia and China with veto power. Those two big bullies. So, we are all mentioning UN structures have been over 70 years and very old and outdated. It needs new structures. If these two are still in the Security Council, I think there is little future for UN.

Promoting a culture of peace and reconciliation through working at the grassroots level. A special call to the Asian church. As we sail through this great jubilee, we are reminded that every jubilee calls or metanoia, a change of heart and direction. Our own themes talk about that they went a different way. Let us challenge ourselves. Is it normal business as usual? Just peace is the proclamation of the kingdom for the Asian church. That does make the following at the action plans and incorporate into our synodal planning.

Peacemaking as the new evangelization. Reconciliation as a new evangelization. Peace with justice with justice and human society. Peacemaking as the interreligious proactive presence. Multi layered preventive approaches with the individual, among communities, national and regional collaboration with the UN and ASEAN.

Let us not forget that the great encouragement of Jesus our Lord. Blessed are the peacemakers; they will be called children of God. Special prayer for the Asian church. Make us an instrument of peace. Fight evil. Empty hands will win over the might of armed evil. Only justice and nonviolence can heal the world and bring lasting peace. Fight and fight with empty hands with their resolute heart. Evil has an expiry date. The longest night of silent tears will end in dawn.

Let us become the soldiers of Christ fighting for a world without want. Let us work towards by consigning war and conflict to the garbage

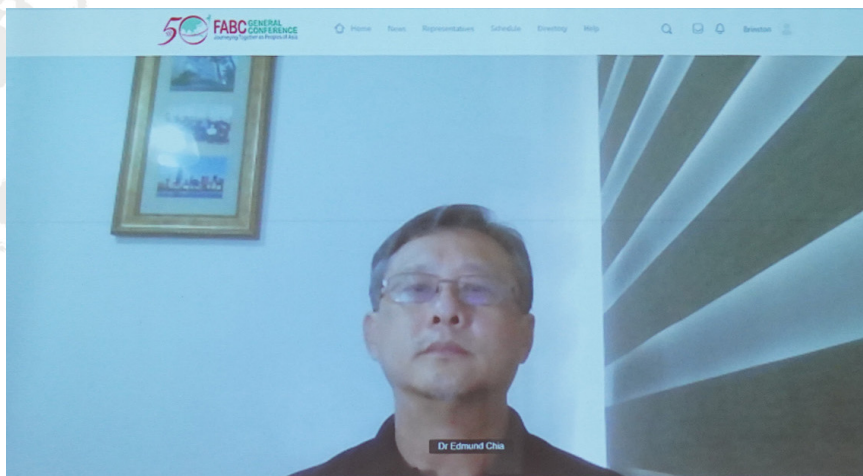
of history. Let us also always remember history is full of men and women who took on the arrogance of power. Just with the power of empty hands and the power of a heart burning with zeal for a peaceful world. And they won. Heroes of peace, those who fought for justice with empty hands and won against the power. Peace through witnessing. Profiles in courage in simple acts of selfless love is etched in the memory of humanity. This is Sr. Anne from Myitkyina, with a prayerful gestures move mountains. Good will always win.

Let us march ahead initiating dialogue. Proclaiming peace as the good news. Healing and reconciling a wounded world of the planet. Sorry, there is a phone call interrupting. Hello? I'm occupied with a talk. Francis, which Francis? Is it Penang or from Bangkok? Or from Assisi or where? Oh, from heaven. St. Francis of Assisi speaking from heaven. He wants to give a message to the general audience, general conference. Yes, yes. Oh, it's a surprise for us. Please give the message and I will pass on to my brothers and sisters. Please carry on. Thank you. (Video clip playing the Cory Henry song "Fighting for Peace").

People believe me I know  
 Life can be so heavy  
 But you're not alone  
 You gotta get up  
 There's no time for putting down  
 We gotta move on  
 We can't give up now  
 I keep on fighting  
 I keep on fighting  
 I keep on fighting  
 I keep on fighting  
 Ohh, ohh-ohh-ohh  
 Ohh, ohh-ohh-ohh  
 One day  
 Said it won't be long  
 (Won't be long)  
 We will stand together  
 Together, together as one  
 But until then we got so much work to do  
 (So much work to do)

If we want to see, see our dreams come true  
Keep fighting for peace  
Keep fighting for peace  
Well, I'm fighting for my family  
Fighting for myself  
Fighting to make a difference  
Even fighting for my health  
Said I'm fighting for my life  
Fighting for the better days ahead  
Fighting for my people  
And fighting for the things left unsaid  
Ohh, ohh-ohh-ohh  
Keep fighting for peace  
(Gotta keep fighting)  
There's no time  
(No time)  
To give up now  
You gotta keep fighting  
Keep fighting for peace  
One day  
One day we're all gonna be free  
But we gotta keep fighting  
(Keep fighting)  
Yeah  
There's so much work to do  
So we gotta keep fighting  
Keep fighting for peace

Thank you.



## **Dialogue, Peace, and Reconciliation - A pathway for Asia**

Prof. Edmund Chia

*Professor of Theology and Co-Director of Interreligious*

*Dialogue Center*

*Australian Catholic University, Melbourne*

Good morning, your eminences, your excellencies, dear brothers and sisters of Asia. It is an honor for me to be appearing before you. As some of the most senior Bishops may remember, I served as FABC Secretary for Inter-religious Dialogue some 25 years ago. I then left Asia and spent the last two decades teaching first in Chicago and then in Melbourne. A lot of my research and writing have been on Asian Christianity and FABC theology.

So, it is a privilege for me to be exploring a theme of journeying together as peoples of Asia, especially with reference to the topic of dialogue, peace, and reconciliation. We have been asked to focus on the ministry of dialogue. Indeed, the praxis of dialogue differs from what traditional Christianity advocates, enabling us to see how the Asian Church and they went a different way.

My presentation focuses on the key moments of FABC and the Asian Church's journey of dialogue. We can call these watershed moments or important milestones, but I believe they are grace-filled theological moments. I believe that the lessons from these key moments continue to be

relevant for the Asian Church today. So instead of offering any new insights, I will simply remind us of the thinking and wisdom offered by our own Asian Bishops and theologians over the years.

When Pope John XXIII convened the council, the church's relationship with other religions was not initially on the agenda. An encounter with the Holocaust survivors changed that, resulting in the schema on the Jews being drafted. Upon hearing that Bishops from the Middle East and other Muslim-majority countries feared that this would be seen as the church siding with Israel in the Arab-Israeli conflict of the 1960s, they asked that a statement of respect for the religion of Islam be included. Hearing this, the bishops from countries where Buddhism and Hinduism are in the majority asked that a similarly positive statement be made about the religions of their compatriots and ancestors. It was these interventions by the council fathers, many of whom were Asians, that resulted in *Nostra Aetate* being a document about the church's relationship with religions in general, as can be seen in Article 2 on Buddhism and Hinduism and Article 3 on Islam, both of which precede the originally intended statement on Judaism, which is Article 4.

While *Nostra Aetate* paved the way for the Universal Church to engage in inter-religious dialogue, it is the Asian Church that has most helped in mapping out the trajectories for its implementation. If *Nostra Aetate* urges Catholics to reject nothing that is true and holy in other religions, the Asian Bishops' meeting committed the bishops to an open, sincere, and continuing dialogue with our brothers and sisters of the religions of Asia. Fr Felix Wilfred asserts that the word dialogue best captures the orientation and theology of the Asian Bishops. To be sure, the Asian Bishops' meeting was signaling the birth of the Asian Church, where its vision of dialogue was clearly articulated in the works of Father Arévalo. And now the heirs have found their own voice; they can now speak for themselves. It is now the time of the Heirs.

**...the word dialogue best captures the orientation and theology of the Asian Bishops. To be sure, the Asian Bishops' meeting was signaling the birth of the Asian Church, where its vision of dialogue was clearly articulated in the works of Father Arévalo.**

The word dialogue was first used in church statements only with Pope Paul VI's 1964 *Ecclesiam Suam*, where he urged that the church must enter into dialogue with the world in which it lives. When the Bishops met for the first FABC Assembly in April 1974, dialogue served as its guiding principle, strategically adopting the theme of the September 1974 Synod of Bishops, which was on evangelization. The theme of the Taipei assembly was "Evangelization in Modern-day Asia." *Evangelii Nuntiandi* mentions the word dialogue only once. The FABC I statement mentions dialogue at least a dozen times, specifically proclaiming that evangelization in Asia has to involve a dialogue with the great religious traditions of our peoples.

FABC I not only established dialogue as a new way of being Church, but it also spelled out that it has to be through the triple dialogue. This is how Cardinal Rosales put it: Asia's Bishops, reflecting on the situation, history, and needs of the Asian peoples, decidedly assigned to themselves the challenges of evangelization among the people, namely the triple dialogue.

Cardinal Quevedo refers to this as the Asian view of evangelization. Firstly, in view of the many poor in Asia, the Church has to be engaged in a dialogue with the peoples of Asia, especially the poor. Secondly, in view of the many cultures of Asia, the Church has to be in dialogue with the Asian cultures. Thirdly, in view of Asia being the cradle of ancient major religions, the Church has to be in dialogue with the religious traditions of Asia. This is the triple dialogue approach to evangelization.

**“FABC I not only established dialogue as a new way of being Church, but it also spelled out that it has to be through the triple dialogue.”**

The Asian Church is a church of dialogue. With the formation of the Theological Advisory Commission, FABC embarked on deep study of the pastoral issues affecting the Church in Asia, producing theses on them. The first of these was on interreligious dialogue, taking the form of seven theses, all of which have provided guidance to the Asian Church in its relations with other religions. These include perceiving other religions as complementing and not in competition with Christianity, considering interreligious dialogue as integral to the Church's mission and the demand of the Trinitarian faith, and seeing both dialogue and proclamation as essential to the Church's mission of evangelization.

Like the BISAs, the BIRAs were the most noteworthy forum for Bishops to learn about interreligious dialogue. Archbishop Stanislaus Lokuang, who chaired the office which first organized them, informed that they were designed to assist the Bishops of Asia in discovering and implementing the interreligious aspects of the Church's mission in Asia. The first three series of BIRAs focused on a single religion and dialogue with the Catholic Church. BIRA IV was a series of 12 programs dedicated to the theology of dialogue. Meanwhile, the BIRA V series brought together groups of Bishops with their counterparts in other religions for interreligious dialogue on the theme of Harmony. Following on the recommendation of BIRA V, the BIRAS were established to train grassroots and pastoral workers. The last 20 years have seen the continuation of the BIRA VI series.

The 1998 Synod of Bishops in Asia was the first time the Asian Bishops were gathering as a collective outside of Asia, most specifically in Rome, to reflect on evangelization in Asia. This was truly a Grace moment as it provided the occasion for the Asian Bishops to speak on behalf of Asia, especially to Vatican officials, some of whom have little understanding of the experience of Christians in Asia.

In commenting on this momentous occasion, Fr. Peter Pan says that with surprising boldness and candor, humbly but forcefully, the Asian Bishops can affirm that the churches in Asia not only learn from but also have something to teach the church in Rome, as well as The Universal Church, precisely from the experiences as churches not simply in but of Asia. Thus, if the 1970 Asian Bishops meeting marked the birth of the Asian Church, the Asian Synod can be regarded as the coming of age of the Asian church.

Let us now look at how the bishops responded to the Synod's *Instrumentum Laboris* (1998) and *Lineamenta* (1996). With regard to how we appreciate other religions, the Bishops of Vietnam reminded the Synod that from time immemorial, three great religions—Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism—have flourished in their land together with many people's popular beliefs deeply rooted in the soul of the Vietnamese people. The Indian Bishops added, in a country and a continent of many living religions, to be religious itself means to be inter-religious, that is, to live amicably in dialogue.

The Thai Bishop suggested that the Asian Bishops are satisfied with their own religion and feel that they are able to lead their personal and social life in a proper and peaceful way. Evangelization must recognize the traditions of other religions as friends or even relatives living together. On the theme of learning, the Taiwanese Bishops advised that the Catholic Church can also learn from other religions—their hospitality, openness, and mild and humble attitudes in dialogue.

Meantime, the Episcopal Conference of Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei entered, the church can, like the Asian religions, learn to be more open, receptive, sensitive, tolerant, and forgiving in the midst of the plurality of religion. The Korean Bishop said, “We have to study, re-evaluate the meaning and role of the great traditional religions in Asia. They do play a part in the salvific economy of God.”

**“The foundation of the new law is in the grace of the Holy Spirit, who is manifested in the faith which works through love.”**

From the floor of the Vatican aula, Archbishop Leo Jun Ikenaga (Japan) compared the 16th-century arrival of Christianity to Japan with the introduction of Buddhism in the 6th century. Half a century was what it took for the Japanese to accept Buddhism as the religion of their land, but with Christianity, it was another story. Buddhism crept in easily Christianity did not. Bishop Bunluen Mansap (Thailand) added, “Could it be said that this is the good news that the Buddhists can offer us? In our work, we try to be witnesses to Christ, but we also realize that our Buddhist friends are evangelizing us by their values.”

In another more recent forum, Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle pointed out that the major organized religions in Asia have articulated concepts and practices about salvation or the good and meaningful life that we are looking for. Now, even if the ancient Church insists that dialogue is the new way of being Church, it has not been an easy vision to follow. Plenty of challenges abound from within. Archbishop Felix Machado (India) once mentioned that “inter-religious dialogue is not perhaps the easiest or sometimes even a happy part of our pastoral commitment. It demands patience and has to be

seen in the light of the mystery of the cross.”

Archbishop Angelo Fernandez bluntly points out that among Christians themselves, there are some with fundamentalist attitudes who refuse to accept the church’s new and positive understanding of non-Christian religions and their place in the gospel plan of salvation. Someone has summed up the position into us: arrogance and ignorance. Suffice to say, committing the church to dialogue is no mean feat.

As I mentioned at the beginning, a lot of what I talked about is what I have been writing about. Please indulge me as I share some of these books with you, much of which focuses on FABC theologies. Let me close by referring to the opening address the Cardinal Oswald Gracias mentioned that Bishops in South America often refer to Puebla, Medellin, and Aparecida, wishing that the same can be said about Asian Bishops. Well, from my own experience and research, I must say that quite a number of scholars and church leaders from North America, Europe, and Australia often refer to the FABC, wishing they could do the same about statements from their own Episcopal conference. To be sure, FABC’s vision of a church of dialogue has not only inspired but is the envy of many from other continents. We can surely rejoice in this as we celebrate 50 years of FABC’s existence. I thank you for your kind attention.

**“To be sure, FABC’s vision of a church of dialogue has not only inspired but is the envy of many from other continents.”**

God bless you all and the Asian Church.





## **Church Leadership, Youth, and Interreligious Dialogue**

Mr. Lawrence Chong

*Co-Moderator for the Singapore Archdiocesan Synodal Committee*

*Consultor to the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue*

Good morning, Eminences, Excellencies, Graces, Reverend fathers and sisters. I am so happy to be able to join you at this moment at FABC. My name is Lawrence Chong, and I've been given the topic to share about dialogue, peacebuilding, and reconciliation as a way of the Church in Asia. The organizers have specifically asked me to provide input on building bridges in the context of inter-intra religious dialogue, especially among younger people in the Church in Asia.

Cardinal Bo started off on a very good note by mentioning that this is indeed a Pentecostal moment, a star to follow, and a challenge to move forward with Jesus. He said, "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." Pope Francis recently challenged the Bishops in Canada to address the challenge of secularization and restructure spiritual life in new forms and ways of existing. According to Pope Francis, "secularization represents a challenge for our pastoral imagination," and "an occasion for restructuring the spiritual life in new forms and for new ways of existing." Inspired by Pope Francis and Cardinal Bo, I would like to give my intervention in three

aspects, three Cs: credibility to the youth, capability for the youth, and creativity with the youth.

To share a bit about my personal journey, I started getting involved in inter-religious dialogue as a youth in the Focolare Movement. As a youth leader in a parish, I was also involved in inter-religious dialogue. In 2005, I joined Religions for Peace and eventually served as the youth moderator for Asia from 2007 to 2013. Since 2020, I have been privileged to serve as a consultant to the Dicastery for Inter-Religious Dialogue. Regarding intra-religious dialogue, I have been involved in the Pastoral Conversion of the Parish project, where we research and explore the transformation of parishes with around 13,000 parishioners since 2020. Additionally, I have been involved in the transformation of Catholic organizations such as a large Catholic University in Taiwan, Global Catholic Media, and the regional Catholic charity network since 2019. I also serve as an electoral coach in Catholic strategy and management for Catholic leaders in the seminary, lay leadership and parishes since 2020. Moreover, I am the co-chair for the synodal process in Singapore. This is just a quick summary of all the different areas where I have contributed and hope to contribute further to your discourse.

In 2018, I was invited by CCA to attend their Asian Christian Youth Assembly, where I shared my experience as a Catholic and my views on family values. This assembly brought together youth pastors, youth workers, and experts in mission and evangelization to exchange ideas for advancing the Kingdom of God in the region. It made me realize how wonderful it would be for Catholics to have a similar event where young people can collectively shape something for the region by sharing ideas and talents.

We are currently experiencing a beautiful age of historic initiatives, from the Document for Human Fraternity to the Francesco Economy, which is shaping social-economic dialogue, and the synodal process that is ongoing, and Fratelli Tutti, this is truly a golden age for pastoral initiatives and dialogue. If we look at our situation as the Asian Church, we are a global Church with a global youth movement, it seems to me that we don't really have an identity as Asian Catholic youth. I mean, we have the Asian Youth Days, but we don't really have other platforms where youth involved in dialogue and pastoral work can come together and exchange experiences and support one another concretely. We often receive church methodologies

from Rome and other global sources, but what about our Asian methods? How can we localize them and learn from others in this region who are bringing about pastoral transformation? We need to adopt these approaches creatively by making them more relevant and useful for Asia.

### Credibility to the Youth

From my experience serving in the church as a young person, it's not always easy to stay motivated. As you get closer to church leadership, you really have to steal yourself to continue serving. I call this the Three D's that kill the credibility of church leadership when it comes to young leaders. When there's a lack of unity among church leadership for common action, when church leaders are not interested in intra-dialogue, or when they dismiss initiatives from Rome or bishops' conferences, it discourages young leaders and confuses their understanding of the Catholic Church. Additionally, if we hear discouraging sermons focusing on past failures, it demonstrates a lack of faith and hope in Jesus Christ. These toxic environments do not encourage young people to continue serving in the work of mission and evangelization.

What I've learned, both personally and from other young leaders, is that we don't need much. All young leaders need is to meet leaders who have faith and believe that God continues to act in our time and inspire them to do the extraordinary. We need hope despite the difficulties and a demonstration of charity in action, especially within church leadership. For example, during a pastoral conversion program and strategy session for a parish of four thousand, we combined spiritual community building, intergenerational sharing, open dialogue, and a real understanding of difficulties and broken relationships that need reconciliation. Through the use of church methodologies and dialogue, the youth and young adults found hope in the process of positive change. It is possible to restore credibility if we engage

**“All young leaders need is to meet leaders who have faith and believe that God continues to act in our time and inspire them to do the extraordinary.”**

in these processes of reconciliation in a methodical manner, aligning with the methodologies used by the church, such as the Synod process.

## The capability of young leaders and young adults in the church

What I've often observed is that we have a lack of real empowerment processes for young people to join church leadership early. There is also a lack of realism where church leaders try to protect youth from inter-religious formation, despite the reality of Asia's diverse cultural dialogue. We have the tools and instruments for inter-religious dialogue in the church, and it can actually strengthen the faith of young people rather than diminish it. Additionally, we need to localize pastoral work in Asia and make efforts to translate guidelines and content from Rome and other sources to be more relevant in our context. A lot of our contents and approaches are still too Western. Furthermore, we need a network of Asian Catholic youth leaders that can support and collaborate virtually.

Based on my personal experience as a young person volunteering in the church, I believe we urgently need an Asian class of youth and young adult leadership for the church. We need access to and understanding of Asian methods and structures for pastoral conversion and transformation. We should learn from examples in different Asian countries and understand the inter-religious and intercultural challenges specific to our region. Creating an Asian community of youth and young leaders for the evangelization of Asia is essential.

I propose the establishment of a future Catholic Asia Pastoral Institute that would serve as a registry for young leaders working in the church in Asia. It would gather data for pastoral evangelization work, integrate inter-religious and intercultural dialogue into practical guides, and provide case studies, application, and learning points. Additionally, we should have an annual future Catholic Asia summit where senior Catholic leadership and young leaders come together to discuss pastoral challenges, strategies, and Asian church policy. This would help shape better exchanges and institutionalize an Asian Catholic strategy and policy integrating the views of youth. Lastly, we should foster gatherings of Asian Catholics strong in technology and innovation to explore how tools can advance our evangelization efforts and impact future

**“I propose the establishment of a future Catholic Asia Pastoral Institute that would serve as a registry for young leaders working in the church in Asia.”**

generations.

### Creativity with the Youth

Lastly, I hope that we can create a Future Catholic Asia Tech Platform. A gathering of Asian Catholics strong in tech and innovation on how such tools can help to advance pastoral work and dialogue in a fast-growing Asia. This will generate another type of energy to integrate tech, dialogue and faith into an interesting force for change to impact future generations.

It has been brief; I Hope it has been helpful. Thank you for this opportunity and I hope to be of service for all of you. Thank you and God bless.





## **Inter-intra religious dialogue in the light of *Evangelii Gaudium***

Fr. Bryan Lobo, SJ

*Director, Department of the Theology of Religions  
Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome*

The topic given to me is The Church in Asia: Proclaiming the Gospel reflections of *Evangelii Gaudium* to help understand better the way of building-bridges in the context of inter and intra-religious dialogue. The *modus procedendi* of my presentation will be that in the beginning, I shall present some snippets from the text *Evangelii Gaudium*, especially from numbers 244 to 254. After presenting those snippets, I shall narrow down on one theme or reality that I think is the underlying principle of the whole document, and perhaps of quite a few documents of the Pope. After that, I will give some comments and reflections on that theme, and then conclude my presentation.

The first snippet will obviously have the theme of ecumenical dialogue. We're talking about intra-religious dialogue here, and we know that the Pope presents points that perhaps may be known by us personally, but the way he presents it has got a certain freshness to it. And therefore, it has made a great impact on the hearts of the faithful, both Christians and even non-Christians. He says that we must never forget that we are pilgrims

journeying alongside one another.

This means that we must have sincere trust in our fellow pilgrims, putting aside all suspicion or mistrust, and turn our gaze to what we are all seeking—the radiant peace of God’s face. Trusting others is an art, and peace is an art. It is true that we have to have sincere trust in our fellow pilgrims if we want to walk with them towards our goal, towards peace, and towards God.

**“This means that we must have sincere trust in our fellow pilgrims, putting aside all suspicion or mistrust, and turn our gaze to what we are all seeking.”**

We must put aside all suspicion or mistrust. The Pope says that given the seriousness of the counter-witness of division among Christians, particularly in Asia and Africa, the search for unity becomes all the more urgent. If non-Christians see us divided, it would be a huge counter-witness to the mission itself. This is a topic that we reflect a lot upon, especially in India.

The Pope says that the commitment to unity, which helps them to accept Jesus Christ, can no longer be a matter of mere diplomacy or forced compliance, but rather an indispensable path to evangelization. It is not a unity of diplomacy, but a commitment with a conviction to create unity among us because it is an indispensable path to evangelization.

**“Moving on to interreligious dialogue, the Pope states that an attitude of openness in truth and in love must characterize the dialogue with the followers of non-Christian religions.”**

Moving on to interreligious dialogue, the Pope states that an attitude of openness in truth and in love must characterize the dialogue with the followers of non-Christian religions, in spite of various obstacles and difficulties, specially forms of fundamentalism on both sides (EG 250). Here it is interesting

that we have to hold the truth, all of us. But sometimes, each one thinks that he has the truth, and that is what creates conflict. Perhaps the word Love

could be the theme that unites all of us, that perhaps would not create those conflicts that we normally see among religions. Love seems to be at the very base of all our realities and activities. If love is not at the base of all that, then I think it cannot even be Christian.

The Pope talks about fundamentalism on both sides, recognizing even a certain kind of fundamentalism in Christianity. It is not only the Muslims who had this fundamentalistic traits, but even Christians and Hindus as well. The Pope says, “This dialogue... as the bishops of India have put it, (is) a matter of ‘being open to them, sharing their joys and sorrows’” (EG 250). Being open to the others comes naturally to us Indians in the context of multiculturalism and multireligiosity. The bishops of India have really suggested this kind of openness to share the joys and sorrows to non-Christians. I think even the Pope also claims that “What is not helpful is a diplomatic openness which says “yes” to everything in order to avoid problems, for this would be a way of deceiving others and denying them the good which we have been given to share generously with others. Evangelization and interreligious dialogue, far from being opposed, mutually support and nourish one another” (EG 251).

This whole aspect of diplomacy, which comes in with a double standard, cannot be used in our activity for interreligious dialogue. We are not trying to deceive. We are trying to be as open as possible, and our intentions of evangelization also have to be clear when we dialogue interreligiously in our context. According to the Pope, “In order to sustain dialogue with Islam, suitable training is essential...” (EG 253). And this is true. It is not a new idea; it has existed in the Church right from the time of the Dominicans and others who decided to study the scriptures of Islam and prepare the missionaries to face the onslaught of attack. And when I say attack, I do not just mean physical attack, but also intellectual and spiritual attacks against Christianity. I refer to very rational questions against the faith of Christianity that were actually creating a lot of problems, even to the

**“This whole aspect of diplomacy, which comes in with a double standard, cannot be used in our activity for interreligious dialogue, because we are not trying to deceive but to remain open.”**

Christians themselves. Therefore, even when Saint Thomas Aquinas writes the *Summa contra Gentiles*, one of the intentions was to help Christians come to a certain conviction about their own faith amidst the onslaught of Islamic questioning.

“Faced with disconcerting episodes of violent fundamentalism,” says the Pope, “our respect for true followers of Islam should lead us to avoid hateful generalizations, for authentic Islam and the proper reading of the Koran are opposed to every form of violence” (EG 253). There is this tendency of generalizing, and looking at all Muslims, even though they may not be physically, into terroristic activities. There is this tendency to look at all Muslims as supporters of terrorism or as supporters of violence. And if the Koran is read properly, this could be debatable, but still, what the Pope is trying to say is that there is a certain hermeneutic that needs to go over the reading of the Koran that cannot end up in violence.

I shall now narrow the themes down to just one theme or one reality. And that reality, I call it a reality precisely because, the Pope himself makes a distinction between realities and ideas. I claim that the reality of agape becomes the fundamental principle of this document, including the following documents like *Fratelli Tutti* and *Laudato Si'*. Agape should become also the underlying principle of our missionary endeavor in the Asian context. We have, in a way, worked for interreligious dialogue, and interacted with other religions. We have gone a long way in studying the scriptures of the non-Christians and in our dialogue with non-Catholics. We have done a lot after Vatican II.

What the Pope is actually telling us is, in a way, known to us already. But the moment we consider Agape as the underlying principle, then I think we hit upon a reality on which every other idea or initiative in this regard of interreligious dialogue, and the proclamation of the Gospel depends upon. Therefore, I would like to develop this fundamental principle with certain reflections and consolidate it, which may again seem quite obvious to us, but when we concentrate on this principle, we see that it leads us to a foundational understanding that needs to be kept in mind in the future when proclaiming the Gospel in the Asian context, in the interreligious and pluralistic context of Asia.

I shall give some quotes of the Pope to show how love or unconditional love is at the center of his document. Agape is already the

theme at the very beginning in the initial stages of this document, and that is why love itself becomes the very foundation of the *Evangelii Gaudium*. The first passage I have chosen is number 36 of *Evangelii Gaudium*. The Pope says, “All revealed truths derive from the same Divine source and are to be believed with the same faith. Yet, for giving direct expression to the heart of the Gospel, in this basic core, what shines forth is the beauty of the saving love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ” (EG 36). While he is talking about revelation and our beliefs, he actually suggests that the basic core of all this is love, a love that God made manifest in Jesus Christ. This point needs to be kept in mind while having any kind of discussion on the topic of dialogue or on the topic of missionary activity in the Asian context.

In the next point, while talking about the hierarchy in the virtues and the acts which proceed from them, the Pope affirms, “What counts above all else is Faith working through love” (Gal 5:6). Works of love directed to one’s neighbor are the most perfect external manifestation of the interior grace of the Spirit: The foundation of the New Law is in the grace of the Holy Spirit, who is manifested in the faith which works through love” (EG 37). Usually, when one speaks about faith, one tends to relate it to the truth and to Revelation. Because of this, one also tends to create a certain defense for the Christian faith, with dogmas entering into the whole process. Hence, it tends to become a kind of apologetic of the faith. Perhaps, to some extent, we have to defend the faith.

**“ It is not just faith against the law, but its love that is at the very center of faith and the law in Christian life. ”**

But then again, the Pope has made a decision, at least in this passage, he made it very clear, that he wants to focus more on love. He talks about faith working through love, not about faith seeking

understanding in new cultures, in new contexts, and in pluralistic contexts. It is faith working through love and works of love that is obviously directed to one’s neighbor. Here we are talking about the foundation of a New Law and the grace that manifest itself through love. It is not just faith against the law, but its love that is at the very center of faith and the law. In that sense, taking a cue from the Pope’s love paradigm that generates joy for proclaiming the gospel, the following thesis could be stated that agape should be at the very heart of the Gospel proclamation in Asia. And Agape

is an unconditional and self-sacrificial love. It is not just any kind of love, it is agape. That is what will finally lead us to the Kingdom of God in Asia. This is my main proposal in this presentation.

In this Apostolic Exhortation, Pope Francis mentions an important fact that realities are more important than ideas. As I said sometime at the beginning, we may have many ideas how to proclaim the Gospel in Asia, but agape is the single reality that should be the driving force of all missionary ideas. Agape is the hub to which all other initiatives of interreligious and intra religious dialogue are connected. If we lose that hub, we lose too the center; if we lose Agape, we lose everything. In this way, we will just be doing mission without the needed impact.

Some reflections of agape and issues connected to it would therefore be essential at this point. The first question surely comes from the issue of whether it is a conditional or unconditional love. The proposal is that it has got to be unconditional. If it is agape, it has to be unconditional. It may seem a bit dangerous to some missionaries the moment they feel that there can no condition. There must be certain conditions in our dialogical initiatives or in all these missionary activities. But in the proposal of agape, conditions could backfire or could make an initiative backfire. In the present scenario, if we do mission with self-interest, however noble it may be, such as leading towards baptism or joining the church, it will always be counterproductive. Because such love will not be respected as pure love by the Asian society.

Now someone may object by saying that the earlier missionaries came to Asia to preach and proclaim the Gospel with conditions for baptism and get more people to come to Church and frequent the sacraments. They

**“Now someone may object by saying that the earlier missionaries came to Asia to preach and proclaim the Gospel with conditions for baptism and get more people.”**

did with those conditions, and they became successful. But I guess, that is not completely true because, first of all, the situation was different. There was a political power that was backing those missionaries. And even that kind of objective in mind, it can be said that they were not 100 percent successful in Asian countries such as in India or in Indonesia. Christianity in Asia today is just 2.2 percent, and only half of that constitutes the Catholic

population. So having these conditions probably will not help.

**“Though the condition was the salvation of the other for which the missionary went through great sacrifices, the problem was that any condition was always looked at as a hidden agenda.”**

And there is a reason behind that. Let us talk about the condition of salvation. Though the condition was the salvation of the other, of which the missionary went through great

sacrifices, the problem was that any condition was always looked upon as a hidden agenda. This makes even our goals of bridge building and dialogue appears sinister. The moment there is a condition, whatever the condition maybe, the other person, first of all, is not going to understand that goal. It is not the case that the other religions do not have goals for salvation but that they have their own version and notion of salvation. But any kind of condition in mind, while we proclaim love, the love that we want to show in Jesus Christ, the condition is seen as an element that makes our love impure. There is a hidden agenda behind the conversion; and that is how the Christian missionaries were seen and will always be seen if a love is conditional. And, when we think that we are proclaiming for the benefit of the other, that is for their salvation, the condition of salvation may seem noble to us but not to a Buddhist. Buddhists are more interested with nirvana. A Hindu is more interested with Moksha, which is losing one's identity in the Brahman. In these ideas of liberation, namely moksha or nirvana, one sees psychologically, the dying of the ego, the loss of the ego, and the living of the divine eye in the person. Now our idea of salvation, from the point of view of Buddhism and Hinduism, is the promotion of egoism. This means that Christians are thinking always of about themselves, and on how they can go to God. This is the reason why we want to save ourselves. Although, we can also talk about the communitarian salvation. In this type of journey, the person instead of trying to liberate himself from the enslavement of egoism, actually enters into a kind of spiritual egos.

There could be other ways of convincing a Buddhist and a Hindu that egoism could also exist in their ways of thinking. But this is just to present before you, that ideas of salvation also differ, and the moment that we talk about salvation, they may not want that salvation. But they will surely want a spiritual joy and unconditional love, and that is what they

are seeing and what they are seeing also in the Pope. And that seems quite attractive. It seems genuine, authentic and attractive. They are attracted to charity. This has also been my experience with the Buddhist in my stay with them for a month. They said that they would never have thought of opening a clinic for the Buddhists within and around them to give free medicine to all of them. They were attracted by the Charity that the Christians were doing in their hospitals, clinics, and schools. In many of their schools, they are giving free education to girls. The Buddhists are attracted with this charity and make them get into an activity that they will not have gotten to if they have been by themselves.

**“The core principle of most of Pope Francis’ document, and his governance and missionary impulse is love or agape, which he demonstrated symbolically by washing and kissing the feet of believers.”**

The unconditional love is very much in keeping with the maxim of Jesus that says, “love thy neighbor as thyself.” When Jesus says that, that neighbor need

not just be a Christian or Catholic or non-Catholic but obviously a Hindu, a Buddhist, a Jain, a Muslim, and everybody for that matter. Similarly, that is the dictum of Pope Francis as well. His desire for evangelization, the Pope states that it should not be seen primarily as a doctrinal growth but as a growth in love (EG 161). The Pope wants to root his ministry on love. It becomes very clear when he states, by quoting Jesus and other New Testament authors to stress, that we need to love our neighbor as ourselves because the whole law is fulfilled in that one statement of Galatians 5:14. The core principle of most of Pope Francis’ document, and his governance and missionary impulse is love or agape. And this love is seen symbolically when he washed and kissed the feet of a Muslim, a Hindu, along with other Christians and Catholics on Maundy Thursday on March 24, 2016.

If we get into some theological reflections on this proposal, the first question that we asked is: what about revelation or dogmas that we profess in our creed. Aren’t they to be proclaimed even if they appear scandalous or foolish. We certainly need to proclaim the truths of revelation, but before all that agape needs to be manifested. For example, a hungry person comes to my door, I do not start by proclaiming the Creed to that person. It is my love that will make me understand or at least to be sensitive in that situation

of the other. And to sense that the person is really hungry and to fill him with food rather than with Dogmas and the Christian faith. And after that perhaps he will be ready to accept or even listen to me. “For God so love the world that he gave his only son.” Now, if we read this, we can obviously say that even before the dogmas, before the incarnation, and before the great missionary act of the second person of the Trinity, it was in the heart of God that made him the second person, Jesus Christ to us and for our salvation. If it was not for love in the first place, God would not even have incarnated. Love precedes revelation. Love is at the very heart of Missio Dei and the why of all proclamation.

Even after the incarnation, the Son of God maintains the love proclamation as central to his mission. And this is what we even see in the life of Jesus. When the law has to be used against sinners, Jesus was the one who supported sinners and all that support was because he wanted to show the love of God in those situations. If all the law and the prophets hang on to these two commandments “love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself,” then we could even say that all revelations hang on upon these two commandments. The fundamental principle of Kenotic Christology is that the life of Jesus is the revelation of God’s self-giving love. This is true even when we are talking about incarnation in a self-kenotic way, which is actually the be-all and end-all of the act of love.

We are now going to give an evolutionary backing to agape. Agape lies at the very heart of things or at the very bottom of creative reality lies agape. And this is the new discovery of evolutionary scientist, because with Darwin, the survival of the fittest becomes the upmost philosophy or idea of evolution. Therefore, all of us have the selfish gene and each one of us is fighting for survival in some way or the other. And in a way, even the idea of heaven or salvation, etc., was part of that survival instinct in all of us. And it has not been totally abrogated, it is part of evolution. But scientists found out too that altruism and agape, and they even use this word agape, has been found too in the animals. Hence, it is also part of the

**“Therefore, we have to hold on to agape as the very center of all our dialogical activities and missionary activities, because real conversion happens only through love.”**

human reality. Altruism is noticed in their research among bees, ants, termites and dolphins. If, on the one hand, competition is part of evolution, then, on the other, cooperation is also part of evolution. In short, the proposal for agape is realistic. It belongs to evolution itself. Therefore, we have to hold on to agape as the very center of all our dialogical activities and missionary activities. Now in terms of the relationship between conversion and agape, real conversion happens through love. In our presentation of our Christian faith, if at all there is a conversion from non-Christians, that conversion should take place because of one principal agent, and that is agape.

“**She wanted people to be converted at the level of the heart, a kind of metanoia, to return to God by becoming better Hindus, Muslims, Catholics, or whatever in faith they belonged to.**”

did not tell her to go and baptize people in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This makes one wonder why Jesus did not give her the same instructions he gave to his apostles. Perhaps Jesus wanted another methodology to be put into practice. We have seen the consequences of her decision. Let us consider what she said regarding conversions, as many accused her of doing charitable work with the intention to baptize and convert people to Christianity. Here is what she said: “Oh, I hope I am converting. I do not mean what you think. I hope you are converting hearts. Not even almighty God can convert a person unless that person wants it. What we are all trying to do by our work, by serving the people, is to come closer to God. If, in coming face to face with God, we accept Him in our lives, then we are converting. You become a better Hindu, a better Muslim, a better Catholic, a better whatever you are. Better, we come closer and closer to Him.” Her intention was clear. She wanted people to be converted at the level of the heart, a kind of metanoia, to return to God.

We shall just go to some examples which we all know. Mother Teresa, who was called by Jesus to serve the poor. Interestingly, Jesus appeared to her a vision when she was on the train, but he

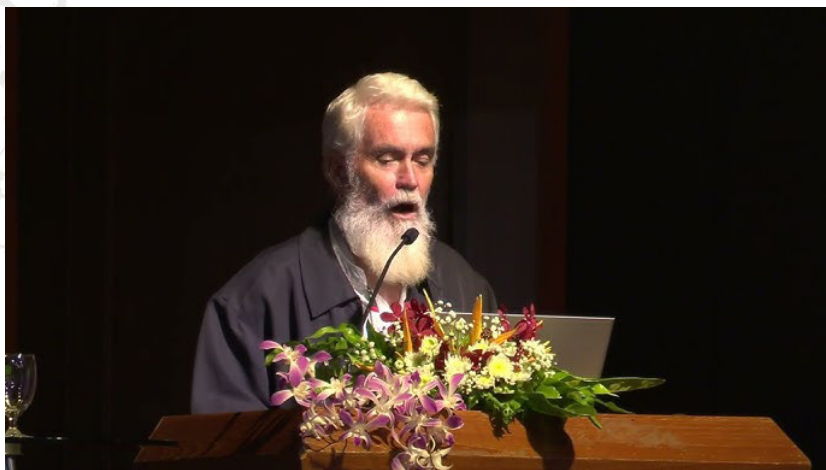
Even if we take the example of Francis of Assisi, one might think that when he encountered Sultan in Egypt, he should have tried to convert him through miracles or other means. But that is not what happened. Francis of

Assisi did not go with the Bible in hand, proclaiming the gospel. The oldest source states that Francis made little progress in converting the sultan, but they understood each other. Francis's rule, written at the same time, shows his advocacy for a peaceful attitude towards Muslims. The way the apostles proclaimed the gospel was the method inspired by the Holy Spirit for their times. However, the history of mission reveals that the Holy Spirit changes its methodology or paradigms for different ages. Different paradigms guided by the Holy Spirit can be identified throughout the history of the Church. These include the apostolic paradigm, the monastic paradigm, the penitential paradigm, the colonial paradigm, the modern paradigm, the postmodern paradigm, and the proposed Agape paradigm.

Vatican II, guided by the Holy Spirit, offers a new Pentecost and a dialogical paradigm in mission and proclamation. For Pope Francis, the Holy Spirit presents us with the Agape paradigm. Through Agape, we find joy, which is emphasized in this text as “gaudium.” As people embracing the primary missionary paradigm of Agape for Asia, we aim to share our joy, point to the beauty of the horizon, and invite others. It is through attraction, not proselytization, that we strive to make an impact.

With this, I conclude. Thank you,





## **River Above Asia Oceania Ecclesial Network (RAOEN)**

Fr. Pedro Walpole, SJ

*Coordinator of the River Above Asia Oceania  
Ecclesial Network (RAOEN)*

Good afternoon, Eminences. I would like to talk about the River Above Asia and Oceania Ecclesial Network. We are talking today of peace and dialogue, we need in today's world the reconciliation of peoples, oceans and lands. Coming from the Synod of the Amazon, the value of ecclesial networks was highlighted specially in engaging the indigenous and their relationship with all life. According to Cardinal Oswald Gracias, "I see that what's happening [in the Amazon region] is really a worldwide phenomenon of disgracing [indigenous] people. The most intense and consistent cry has been the violence against the indigenous people, the killing of these people—their leaders, and the violence against their culture, they need to be [protected] against that at all costs." The greatest killing in this context and stage is really the economic drive where they are certainly excluded.

Looking at the local territories, the larger biome; Oceania is the River of Asia feeding all rivers. Biome is how land, ocean and climate come together. It is very much an integral ecology. The Focus in Asia Oceania is looking for that basis for reconciliation. Due to island vulnerabilities, disaster risk reduction, and biodiversity loss, we have to look for culture-based solutions that need for reconciliation and solidarity with action from

the local and global.

Ecclesial networking and synodality. According to Cardinal John Ribat, Archbishop of Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, “I see we are all affected by what is happening to mother earth. This helps me to realize that we are united in a way. We are in the same region; we are in the same experience. This calls us to respond in a way that unites us in caring. How can we begin a kind of network that will bring out what we have in our region? How can we be united in our response?” In March 2019, an Oceania working Group came together during the Integral Ecology International Conference held as a Synodal Response from the Amazon and Other Biome/Essential Territories for the Care of Our Common Home. The group shared experiences how they feel what is happening in the region.

The RAOEN Network Coordination is a simple network. It has a steering committee, a secretariat, and a consultative group, and the different Federations of Bishops along with the Dicasteries. And we are trying to engage the other engage the other ecclesial networks across the globe to be part of this.

Process of Change – RAOEN. We are seeking a process of change, and this process we have taken in FABC earlier documents of Dialogue, Discernment, Deeds, and Desires, the hopes particularly of the youth.

Voices from the Margins. From Fiji, “The ocean is probably the most important part of the planet that we need to care for. This is the area that we must put a lot of investment and caring for the ocean.” Archbishop Peter Loy Chong, President of the Federation of Catholic Bishops’ Conferences of Oceania (FCBCO). From Papua New Guinea, “Free, prior, informed consent (FPIC) in Papua New Guinea is a novel concept. Many are unaware of what FPIC is or yet, it is not discussed, so there will be numerous human rights issues in many [mining] development areas.” Samantha Kuman, Advocacy Officer, The Centre

**“These voices from Oceania remind us that caring for creation and protecting human rights must remain central, since both are indispensable foundations for solidarity, reconciliation, and genuine evangelization.”**

for Environmental Law and Community Rights. And many others have contributed their voice for this advocacy.

A further step for this is working with communities. We have developed toolkits in facilitating community expressions of relationship and belonging with the land and sea. A way to directly engage local communities is to undertake community mapping which is “story-telling through a bigger sheet of paper.” The concept of community mapping is to enable others to see on paper how local and indigenous communities are expressing their relationship and sense of belonging to the ocean, and how the changes in the ocean and climate are affecting their lives. Community mapping is also a way to highlight the diversity of local knowledge and cultures, the integrity of the realities on the ground, and be enable deeper reflection on the faith experiences and sense of community.

**“Reflections on oceans, forests, people, and climate call for dialogue with nature and community voices. The Church in Asia-Oceania must weave faith, ecology, and solidarity into future responses.”**

Reflections on oceans, forest, people and climate. The approaches and future plans should weave stories about the following various aspects: ‘dialogue with nature,’ community mapping, youth reflections, basic ecclesial communities, and

UN Faith-ecology engagement approaches from Asia/Oceania. “Churches work at the community level. They know where the people are and where they are vulnerable and what can be done. Asia is very religious. If we work through different religious leaders, we can really build-up. This is why FABC and FCBCO are important and can give a voice to what is happening on the ground. How do we get communities to say what they need and respond accordingly?

Ecclesial Networks Alliance for Integral Ecology. There is an urgent need to develop a creative dialogical space in an adequate environment in order to respond to the appeals made in *Laudato Si’*, and to enact the structural transformations it puts forward. The Amazon Synod, and the experience of REPAM (Pan-Amazon Ecclesial Network), together with the

evolving processes in other territories and biomes including the Congo Basic (REBAC), the Oceania and Asia Region (RAOEN – River Above Asia and Oceania Ecclesial Network), Mesoamerica (REMAM), The Gran Chaco and the Guarani Aquifer territory, as well as those in Europe (ELSiA) and North-America Canada and the USA, with the support of the Laudato Si’ Research Institute and the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, offer an opportunity to join hopes and strengths to accompany some of the key territorial processes which serve the reforms led by Pope Francis to respond to the cries of the world’s poor and of our common home.

We have been working with the Vatican Covid-19 Commission Southeast Asia Task Force, and came up with the following report, “Going a Different Way by Caring for the Good of All in our Common Home”. This document presents a provisional summary of a regional workshop held from 4-6 October 2022 in hybrid format (online and at Balay Laudato Si’ in Mindanao, Philippines). The workshop is a culmination of a year-long listening process across six Southeast Asian countries regarding Covid-19 and interconnected concerns, new ways towards forming a more resilient world for all and reinforcing the Church’s role towards integral human development. This provisional summary is to humbly share our learnings with the FABC Assembly.

My final request with you are the following:

- a) Connect us with someone in your diocese or office, we will link with them and send this information.
- b) Share with us connections with indigenous communities their stories and their actions
- c) May the local bishops and FABC continue to support RAOEN and the call for integral ecology.

To learn more about RAOEN, please visit <http://www.raoen.org>. Thank you.







**EMERGING REALITIES  
AND THE CHURCH IN ASIA**

**DAY 5  
OCTOBER 21, 2022**

## PRESS NOTE

### 21ST OCTOBER 2022

21st October 2022, the fifth day of the segment ‘Emerging Realities’ at the FABC General Conference began with the Holy Eucharist, celebrated by H.E. Louis-Marie Cardinal Ling Mangkhanekhoun IVD, Vicar Apostolic of Vientiane, Laos. President of the day’s sessions, H.E. Charles Cardinal Muang Bo, opened the morning session by leading the Adsumus. The morning prayer, played over video, was prepared by Sr. Catherine P.K. of Cambodia-Laos.

H.E. Cardinal Bo introduced the topics for the day - Synodality, reflections on Prædicate Evangelium, leadership, governance, and considerations on FABC 50 years on.

The first speaker, H.E. Jean-Claude Cardinal Hollerich SJ, Relator General of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, speaking on the Synod on synodality, explained the process of how the document was developed, and spoke of his experience working on it. Stressing the Holy Father’s emphasis on everyone walking together with no exclusions, H.E. Cardinal Hollerich described the Synod as a Synod of the Church, where the consultation of peoples became the heart of the Synod, and where Christ and His mission remains the centre of the Church.

Fr Clarence Devadass, providing a summary of the small group discussions, recapped the theme of the week as ‘reading the signs of the times’. Using the framework of consultation, conversation, conversion and communion, Fr Devadass summarised the discussions with three key points: celebrating successes, recognising the gaps, and identifying the opportunities ahead by looking for new pathways.

Professor Doctor Josef Sayer, Director of Misereor from 1997 to 2012 and member of the FABC 50 Organising Committee, reflecting on Prædicate Evangelium and the opportunities for new forms of leadership and governance for the Church in Asia, provided a comprehensive explanation of the Prædicate Evangelium, using four central points: the preamble,

principles, general norms and dicasteries. With emphasis on the Holy Father's reformations, the paradigm shifts, the importance of participation of all, and the application of the dicasteries, Monsignor Sayer outlined the points of the document that were especially relevant to the Asian Church, and concluded with questions on the application of the document for reflection. The session was followed by a plenary conversation with Monsignor Sayer and H.E. Cardinal Gracias.

Prof. Christina Kheng, professor of pastoral leadership and management at the East Asia Pastoral Institute (Philippines), and member of the Commission on Methodology of the General Secretariat for the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, spoke on the topic 'new forms of leadership and governance in the Church in a synodal way'. Going back to the roots of synodality, Prof. Kheng asked her listeners, 'what current forms of leadership in your Diocese promote synodality and what forms are contrary to it?'. Along with key principles of synodal leadership and governance, Prof. Kheng also provided concrete suggestions to put the principles into practice.

Bishop Pablo Virgilio Siongco David, President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, reflecting on how new forms of leadership could be promoted, added context through the history behind the first council of Jerusalem, and St Peter's role in it. Underlining the Church as one rooted in scripture that also responds to the signs of the times, Bishop David provided insights on the Holy Father's reformations, and highlighted methods toward taking a better path forward.

Prof. Jonathan Tan, professor of Catholic Studies at Case Western Reserve University in Ohio, spoke on the next topic, "FABC 50 Years On: Negotiating Challenges and Seizing Opportunities". Introducing his background of work and analysing the demographics of migration and the changing population, and the rich documentation of the FABC, Prof. Tan described how Christianity has moved on from grounded geography to virtual and online communities of faith, and trends that would arise in the next fifty years.

H.E. Cardinal Bo led the gathered representatives in the angelus, concluding the day.



## **A Synodal Church for the Life of Asia**

H.E. Jean-Claude Cardinal Hollerich, SJ

*Archbishop of Luxembourg*

*Relator General of the XVI Ordinary General*

*Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*

Thank you very much, dear brother Cardinals and Bishops, dear colleagues in priesthood, and dear sisters and brothers in baptism. A synod about synodality, surely it went through your head that it is a very difficult title, and it is very difficult to speak about. So, when I get asked, “What is all this Synod about?” I normally answer, “It is a Synod about the Church.” We are 60 years after Vatican II, and Vatican II defined the collegiality of the bishops. This was first pursued in the program of the First Vatican Council, which had to disband because of political reasons. But, of course, in the mid-twentieth century, that could be addressed in a different way.

Pope Paul VI established the Synod of Bishops based on this collegiality. But Vatican II and its teaching about the Church is more than the collegiality of Bishops. We speak about the Church as the People of God, a priesthood based on baptism, the Holy Temple of the Spirit. Pope Francis takes these elements up and integrates them into synodality.

Now, synodality is bigger than just the collegiality of the bishops. We see a new development. It started with the Synod of the Families, but there was a large consultation before. It was already mentioned in this assembly, and before the Youth Synod, there was even a pre-synodal meeting of young people. A lot of what these young people have said and decided went into the *Instrumentum Laboris* for the Synod.

When we look at the Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon region, there was a whole network of people who prepared this Synod. And now it is even more because the Synod was opened by the Pope in October 2021. So, we are already in the Synod, and we do not speak about the pre-synodal consultation, in fact, but the consultation of the People of God is part of the Synod.

**“The consultation faced challenges, from COVID restrictions to differing views, yet it became a remarkable success with 112 bishops’ conferences sending their synthesis.”**

Of course, this consultation was not perfect. Some people did not like the idea, some people did not understand it, and then we still had the COVID19 crisis. In some countries, it was very difficult to gather people. But nevertheless, it was a

tremendous and unprecedented success. 112 Bishops’ conferences sent their synthesis out of a total of 140.

And believe me, those who did not answer, I give you one example, and you understand why, was the Latin Bishops’ of Ukraine. So, that is not a total of 114. They also have very good reasons. Even 18 dicasteries of the Roman curia answered and participated. 13 Oriental churches, consecrated life women and men answered. So, there was really a large participation all over the world, and we got a lot of sentences. It was a pleasure to read them.

But of course, one single person cannot read all these syntheses and understand everything. So, we had a meeting in Frascati where 25 experts gathered from all continents, and I am very happy that we have a few people here who participated in this process. If you could just stand up, that people might see you and acknowledge you. Thank you.

And they did a tremendous job. Everybody had homework to read some synthesis and pick up what was most important in these sentences. But it was divided in such a way that every sentence was read by several people, ensuring a good balance. Then, praying together, reflecting together, and putting things together. We had two writers because we believed it was not enough to publish such a document just in Italian. So, we decided that all the Synod documents would be published in Italian and English simultaneously. Hence, we had two writers, one Italian and one English.

We were also fortunate to have the Council of the Synod, including Cardinals and Bishops, as well as eminent people from Asia who were present. They unanimously approved the document. However, these documents still needed reworking due to certain modification proposals that we received and had to consider. We also wanted to give examples of what the people of God had said, and many good examples were included. But as the document was being prepared, we realized that we had too many quotations from one continent and not enough from another. So, we had to reread and find quotations that were more evenly represented from all the continents.

Initially, I had hoped to present this document today, but as the correction work continues, it will most likely be published on the 27th of this month at 12:15 Roman time. Therefore, I cannot speak about the document itself, but I can share my experience. First, my personal experience is that I have to be a good listener because, as a relator, my role is not to put all my thoughts into the document. That would be a misuse of the responsibility I have been given. Instead, I need to listen to what the people of God are saying, try to understand it based on my experience, and help put it into words.

**“First, my personal experience is that I have to be a good listener because, as a relator, my role is not to put all my thoughts into the document.”**

However, such a document cannot be written by a single person alone; a team is needed. It is beautiful to work in such a team in a synodal way. But as the Archbishop of Luxembourg, I also had to listen to my Church.

Some of you might have had the same experience. Some people use the Synod as an opportunity to express things they have always wanted to say,

**“None of us is perfect, and even if we try to fulfill our mission as bishops wholeheartedly, we sometimes fail.”**

not necessarily in a synodal manner, but sometimes in a regressive way, as the Pope would call “indietrismo,” going back to past times. As bishops, we need to pray, discern, and also listen to criticism.

None of us is perfect, and even if we try to fulfill our mission as bishops wholeheartedly, we sometimes fail. I observed this in my own diocese, and it was very helpful for me. It made me understand that when the Pope speaks about synodal conversion, I am also meant to be included.

Now, let’s come to the synthesis of the different Bishops’ conferences, and allow me to highlight some common points. The first point is “let us walk together.” The Pope often says “caminamus juntos,” meaning there should be no exclusion. When I presented the first draft to the Pope, he was very happy and emphasized that everyone must be included. In this study, there are homosexuals, divorced, and remarried people. African churches spoke about polygamy, people without education, the poor – those on the margins of the Church. We cannot walk without extending our hands to these sisters and brothers. Of course, this does not mean that we approve of polygamy, but it signifies walking together, accompanying people, and giving everyone a place in the Church. Perhaps this can lead us to a more evangelical attitude towards people. We can be inspired by Christ, and people have written that they see the deep attitudes of compassion and love of Jesus in our Church. If we take the image of a tent for the Church.

The tent must be enlarged. We must make our tent larger to accommodate all the people and, of course, their tensions. There are people who ask for blessings of homosexual couples, while others ask for the Latin Mass. The tensions are wide-ranging, and as bishops, we often have a lot of tensions to carry in our churches. So, I would like to pray that we can carry these tensions with patience and humility, and these tensions will help us to be in the process, and this process will bear fruit. This is the thinking of Pope Francis, and it took me a long time to understand it. He bears the tensions and looks for the fruit that comes out of them.

We should be in communion with all of these tensions and their differences. And our communion is based on the Eucharist, that is also in *Lumen Gentium*. But we are also the people of God walking through time and led by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit plays a significant role in this new ecclesiology. And perhaps a bit of correction because our Orthodox brothers and sisters have always emphasized that we are more Christ centered and not-enough spirit center. I think the synod will allow us to have this new balance.

As we walk through time, with Christ as our center, it is only natural that some people may walk a little quicker, while others may be slower. Some will walk before Christ, some behind Christ, it is also clear that some people are at the right, and some at the left of Christ. The important thing is that Christ should remain our center, as it is only through Christ that we can see others. When Christ is our center, we can see others through Him, which helps us walk together.

Now, a very important word is participation, which leads to co-responsibility. In many syntheses, people express frustration at the parish level because their opinions are not considered by their priests. They feel that their voices are not heard, or that the priest acts differently from what was discussed. This often leads to discussions on clericalism. So, how can we achieve greater co-responsibilities where the priesthood of all the baptized and the ministerial priesthood can coexist and truly become a ministry of service? We must not speak of the power of the hierarchy, but the authority rooted in service.

**“We must not speak of the power of the hierarchy, but the authority rooted in service.”**

When we talk about co-responsibility, we must address the role of women. Nearly all the syntheses mention women. It is something we cannot ignore. Based on different culture, people speak differently about women in Western Europe and other countries, with some asking for the diaconate or priesthood for women, while others may not address it at all. But all countries said that women are not just servants of the priests. However, all countries acknowledge that women have a responsibility in the Church,

and we should show this by appointments and others to demonstrate that women are co-responsible. Just as Christ became human and not just male, the baptism of men is not more valid than the baptism of women. This should have consequences in how we work together and share this co-responsibility.

Of course, All these Church is missioned by Christ. If we speak about structures without considering mission, we have a problem. The mission of the Church is first to proclaim Christ's death and resurrection for us, but this proclamation can take many different ways. While bishops and priests are called to announce the Gospel through words, the Pope often emphasizes that it can also be proclaimed through our lives and lifestyles, which is even more important. In his encyclical letters, the Pope points out what constitutes the proclamation of Christ in this mission of the Church.

What is proclamation of Christ in the world today? Again *Laudato Si'*, integral ecology, where climate is not the center, but man is the center. Hence, we must change our lifestyle to address the seriousness of the

**“This ecological conversion is always a conversion to Christ first, and we cannot be missionary disciples of Christ without living that conversion.”**

environmental crisis. This ecological conversion is always a conversion to Christ first, and we cannot be missionary disciples of Christ without living that conversion. *Fratelli Tutti*, this universal brotherhood, is

essential in a globalized world. The person next to us is not just our neighbor in our country; but the people closest to me are from the margins, those abandoned by society worldwide. These are great challenges. I am confident that a more synodal Church will also be more missionary. Many people in my country think that mission is solely the job of the priests, but it is the mission of the Church. However, unless we make people co-responsible, they will not fully embrace the universal mission of the Church and will remain mute sheep. We do not want mute sheep because every question is a sheep and a shepherd.

This Synod is a great opportunity for the Church. We do not do the Synod on synodality just because it is a chance or because of the postmodern world demands it, although these reasons are perfectly valid. We do it because the Church, in its essence, is a synodal Church. Even if we haven't lived it so clearly in the past centuries, it belongs to the depositum fidei of the Church.

I apologize for speaking one minute too long. Thank you very much.





## **Summary of Group Discussions on the Emerging Realities**

**Fr. Clarence Devadass**

*Member, FABC 50 Organizing Committee*

Thank you, Your Eminence. Good morning, everyone. I have 10 minutes to give a little summary of the conversations that we have had in this past week. I've put this as the emerging realities of Asia, the summary of group summaries of week two. Now, we will all agree that it has been a very intense second week, and it is going to be even more intensive exercise to summarize all those conversations that we have had into some key points. Now, it is even more daunting to present this, especially when you have had a cardinal presenting a synthesis on synodality, and now I have to present a little synthesis about what we have had.

As we come to the end of week two, it is so appropriate that this morning's Gospel and the homily also was about reading the signs of the time. Jesus says, "interpret the times." And so, it is in that light that I would like to look at what has happened in this past week with regard to our small group conversations and your responses.

But before I do that, just to keep in mind that we realize that, as we look at the reports, and some groups have also indicated the names of bishops from which countries they come, we realize that the breadth and

depth of Asia makes it almost impossible to understand the diversity of issues that impact this continent. And also, the responses have been very, very diverse. So, in that light, I just want to keep this at the back of our minds.

Now, I call this The Big C, the alternative Big C lunchtime. Many of you have been going to the shopping mall called Big C. Now, this is the other Big C that I offer, which we have gone through in week one, prior to week one, and now week one, week two, and hopefully in week three. I call this the consultations, conversations, the conversion, and communion.

During the regional consultations in which many of you have been involved, we realized that we will need volumes to describe all the issues that concern Asia. And in that light, we identified 15 emerging trends that were neither exhaustive nor written in stone. But these 15 emerging trends gave us a little framework, a catalyst for deeper conversations that we have had in this past two weeks.

Just very quickly, I'm just going to go through this. I'm not going to read them, but these were the 15 that were published as the guide document, and you can also get them. You also have received them in FABC Papers Number 165.

Week one and week two were intended for that second level, which is the conversations that we have had. And while we actively listen to the country reports I presented to you last week, the 12 concerns that could be identified, this is just to refresh our memories.

And so, we enter into week two, and our conversations were focused on some key concerns in Asia as these also converge with your own concerns that were raised. And the methodology that we had employed or engaged with to be supported with theological foundations and papal documents. Some of you had asked in the beginning why we are revisiting Fratelli Tutti, Laudato Si', and Amoris Laetitia, and it is for this reason that we looked at it as theological foundations with the support of papal documents. And this past week, these are the 14 topics that we have somehow covered, even though they were brief. But these were some of the things that were intended to spark deeper and more profound conversations. And as we did that, we also recognized that there were many other concerns that were not

addressed, and we acknowledge that too.

What do the small group conversations reveal? And I would like to offer you a three-step framework for us to look at the group reports. It is not possible to list down everything that had been said, they are exhaustive. But in the sense that we want to look at it from three key points of how we can look at it.

One of the things that the reports show is that we celebrate our successes. In the reports, you will ask what activities, what things are being done, and we recognize that there are many, many things that are happening throughout Asia in the churches. In the reports, they show in the form of a call to action, formation, awareness, etc.

What the group conversations also show is that, as you listen to one another, you have broadened your horizon, and you also discovered new creative, you can say, pathways or Asian responses to the breadth and depth of the concerns of Asia. So, I think the first step is to be able to recognize that a lot is already being done. And not that because this was a concern and nothing was done, it is just to be able to recognize and celebrate the good work that is already in Asia.

The second step of the framework is to also recognize the gaps and to look at the 20 reports throughout all the different topics to be able to recognize just seven gaps that I was able to draw. I'm sure you can add on to this list or even reduce, but this is what I was able to do.

The magnitude and the gravity of the issues before us can be very overwhelming. So, I think some are saying that it's too much, you know, we do not know where to begin, we do not know what to do. And the reports also show that the emerging issues reveal themselves in different places in different ways. So, the gravity of certain issues may be pronounced in one particular area of Asia but not in another part of Asia. Hence, to be able to recognize that in some places, some things are more important than other things in other places.

**“The magnitude and gravity of the issues before us can feel overwhelming, with some saying it's too much, that we do not know where to begin or what to do.”**

It also shows that the issues that we have been discussing are deep. The roots of these things are deep and far-reaching. In other words, no part of Asia is exempt from the effects of these emerging trends and concerns. It also shows that some of the responses lacked networking. In other words, in some parts, it is more active, in some parts, it's not. It sometimes depended on a personality, whether it's the priest or whether it's the bishop who is active or very aware of a certain concern, and that is promoted, but it lacked networking with others. It also shows that we have a lot of documents already in all these different issues, but it seemed to lack praxis. It means we have it on paper, we have it in documents, but what is translated into action seemed to have a gap in that area.

**“It means we have it on paper, we have it in documents, but what is translated into action seemed to have a gap in that area.”**

Much has been spoken about the formation of seminarians and clergy, and many of these concerns should become pastoral priorities for different countries, for different regions.

Moreover, I want to offer some opportunities, some keywords that I have grouped together so that all your responses could come under these umbrellas. And there are 10 opportunities, and I'm just going to run through them very quickly.

Some of the words that we have seen. (1) Accompaniment, that have come up in our concerns for youth, for the different groups of people, they have asked for families' accompaniment. (2) Listening has come out very strongly, also to be able to listen to the voice of the people. Cardinal Hollerich has also mentioned that in the synodal process, listening. Thirdly would be (3) communal discernment, as working together, listening to one another, and to discern together where the spirit of God is leading.

Another opportunity here is (4) inclusivity, that no one is excluded from the church, that to be able to include everyone, everyone finds a place in their church. So, we have heard words like the church being the field hospital and other words to describe how we have to be inclusive. (5)

Creativity, in terms of how we reach out, evangelization with digital online, on-site, to be able to be creative. (6) Advocacy is another area that has come out quite clearly, how the church has to advocate different issues for the people. (7) Collaboration, to work together, whether within the conferences or also between neighboring conferences, to work together for issues that transcend or go beyond just a local diocese or parish, to work together as one and to share resources.

I think (8) dialogue has come out very clearly, inter-religious dialogue, intra-religious dialogue in the reports also. We have spoken about (9) peace or bridge-building with one another through dialogue. It is not just inter-religious dialogue that we're talking about, dialogue with others, with governments, with other agencies in order to bring about peace. And the last point that kind of sums it all up is the (10) synodal process, the synodality, the togetherness, working as one church. So, these are the ten opportunities that we see in the group conversations.

So, the task remains, how do we connect all these dots, how do we connect all these gaps and opportunities? And I think this is where we move into week three, looking for new pathways, having seen the country, listened to the country reports, seen the concerns. What do we do? And hopefully, as we move into week three, we will find new pathways for the church in Asia. Thank you very much.





## **Reflection on Prædicate Evangelium**

**Msgr. Josef Sayer**

*Director, Misereor (1997-2012)*

*Member, FABC 50 Organizing Committee*

Your Eminence, Excellencies, dear sisters and brothers, just as Saint John Paul II saw the need to revise Saint Paul VI's constitution for the Roman Curia after 20 years and enacted his Constitution Pastor Bonus to reform the Curia in 1988, Pope Francis saw the need to draft a new constitution 30 years after Pastor Bonus. What made him do this? You will certainly remember the resignation of Pope Benedict, which came as a surprise to everyone. This was associated with many discussions that were also confused very intensively and openly by the Cardinals themselves in the pre-conclave of 2013 because they were concerned about the well-being of the church and its mission in today's world.

From the many suggestions and to prepare the church for the challenges of the 21st Century, Pope Francis decided to initiate a reform of the Constitution. To work this out, Pope Francis set up a Council of Cardinals consisting of eight representatives from all the continents and the Curia itself. Among the eight is Cardinal Oswald Gracias. This Council should support him in the governance of the church. In its elaboration, not only the opinions of the Congregations of the Curia and the Pontifical Councils were taken into account, but also all the bishop conferences around the world, including all

conferences of Asia. Worldwide, all of them were asked to comment on the draft, to contribute their criticisms and their suggestions for improvement. So, we see Pope Francis did not limit the participation in the reform of the Curia merely to the Council of the Cardinals. A broad participation of the universal church was important to him. All their experiences, criteria, and criticism were carefully studied and processed in a long working process.

What are the central points of the new Constitution that our Pope Francis put into effect on Pentecost this year? And what are we particularly touched by in Asia? In my approach, I will follow the structure of the new Constitution, starting first with the Preamble, second followed by the part of the Principles, third the part about the General Norms, fourth the explanation regarding to the dicasteries, Curia, as well as the economic organisms of the Curia. For reasons of time, I will confine myself to some central aspects.

## I. Preamble

The programmatic orientation of the new Constitution is brought to a precise denominator in the first two words of the new Constitution: Praedicate Evangelium. This is the mission that our Lord Jesus Christ entrusted to his disciples and to the people of God as a whole. To have testimony in word and in deed, and the exercise of mercy, the Church has to fulfill the mission for the good of all people and humanity. In the foot washing, see John 13, Jesus has given us his example of his serving, especially to those who suffer (Preamble 1). For this mission, the Church is called to reform, to missionary conversion. (Preamble 2). It is within this context that the reform of the Roman Curia must take place. That is, the administrative work of the Curia must be recognizable and carried out under the key point of the proclamation of the paschal and missionary conversion (Preamble 3). This programmatic orientation which Francis gives to the Roman Curia through the new Constitution, he had already partly outlined in his programmatic document for his pontificate *Evangelii Gaudium* from November 2013, enabling in the sense of the wider implementation of the Vatican Council.

**“For this mission, the Church is called to reform, to missionary conversion.”**

The reform of the Curia is furthermore to be understood from the perspective of the communion ecclesiology. It is a matter of living the new communion of Jesus Christ. The reform of the Curia and the Church must reflect the communion of Jesus with his disciples.

The life of the new communion gives the church the face of synodality, that is, "the faithful people, the College of Bishops, the Bishop of Rome all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, all have to learn from each other. After the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of the Pentecost, this has to be done synodically under the guidance of this same Holy Spirit. It means journeying together in the world of today" (Preamble 4). What has been said so far already gives reasons to important programmatic conclusions here in Asia, which can be summarized in the following keywords: a) Praedicate Evangelium as a programmatic orientation of all church activities. b) missionary conversion, and c) communion. Following the example of Jesus with his disciples and from this to form a synodal church in which all listen to each other, and all listen together to the Holy Spirit.

The Service of Primacy and the College of Bishops. As successor of Peter and the apostles, the Pope and the bishop lead the Church (see LG 18). And form one apostolic college, one episcopal body with Peter as its head. Based on this collegial union, therefore all the episcopal conferences, which by the power of Divine Providence, have developed in the course of time, must be looked at. They are united in the *communio ecclesiarum* based on the *communio fidelium*.

The understanding of the governance of the Church presented in the number 5-7 of the Preamble on the basis of the *Lumen Gentium* has profound consequences for the Curia. Consequently, if the Pope and the bishops both as successor of the apostles are leading the Church, then there must be a paradigm shift in the Curia. The Curia can no longer stand between pope and the bishops but has to serve both (Preamble 8). This is the key to understanding of the reform of the Curia with profound consequences for the bishops' conferences, the continental federation and the dioceses, also in Asia.

Graphically, the new constellation, Pope, Curia, bishops can no longer be expressed in a vertical line, with the Pope at the top, the Curia in

an immediate position, and below the bishops and the bishop conferences. Instead, according to the Vatican Council Lumen Gentium 18, the new image corresponds to a triangle, that is at its apex, namely the Curia under the Pope and the College of Bishops having to serve both. Such a decisive change according to the Vatican Council requires a mind change not only within the Curia itself but also in the bishop conferences and among the shepherds of the dioceses. In fact, if the latter would continue to consider the Curia as an apparatus of power, superior to them and not in function to serve, everything would remain the same, and the reform would miss its intended target.

Let us turn to another central point of the reform, as laid down in number 10 of the Preamble and number 5 of the Principles. Each Christian by virtue of baptism, as a central

**“Each Christian by virtue of baptism, as a central point, and not only the ordained are missionary disciples of Jesus Christ.”**

point, and not only the ordained are missionary of disciples of Jesus Christ. Consequently, the reform of the Curia must therefore include the participation of, “lay women and men, also in roles of government and responsibility” (Preamble 10). Since the leadership function in the Curia is not bound onto the ortho but is potestas vicaria conferred by the Pope on certain persons, lay people can also exercise leadership function (Principle 5). Such stipulation in the Constitution also has significance for us in Asia, in organizations of the dioceses but also, we have to consider it, in the episcopal conferences.

The reform of the Curia also implies an inner reform with regard to the collaborators by means of the spirituality of the Vatican Council, that is a Samaritan spirituality so Saint Paul VI in his closing address at the end of the Vatican Council. It means serving the wounded, vulnerable, the needy person, the wounds of Asia, the wound of nature. Serving the wounded even if you don't know them or even if they may consider you as their enemies. For us, this could mean letting our specific forms of spirituality in Asia, there are a lot forms, all to be influenced by the conciliar and Samaritan spirituality.

## II. Principles at the Service of the Curia.

In the second part of the new constitution, The Principles, it is once again emphasized that the Curia has to serve the Pope and the Bishops. This is also clearly stated in the third part of the new constitution, in the General Norms, both Articles 1 and 3. It means that the Preamble, Principles, and General Norms all stipulate this paradigm shift. This is therefore something fundamental to the reforms of the Curia and cannot be made relative by any attempt of interpretation.

For reasons of time, I would like to refer to three examples more in the part about Principles, because they affect us as Church in Asia in special way. In number 2, it is underlined that the reform is carried out in a spirit of sound decentralization, leaving to the

**“...the reform is carried out in a spirit of sound decentralization, leaving to the bishop of the particular churches those questions which they know well at local level.”**

bishop of the particular churches those questions, which they know well at local level because of their proximity. We have to remember also *Evangelii Gaudium* 16 & 32 that the Pope is talking about sound decentralization. With the stipulation of sound decentralization, the principle of subsidiarity is taken up from the social doctrine of the Church which Pius XII has already established as valid within the Church. We have to consider this very clearly, there was a long discussion if subsidiarity is only for outside and for the society but not inside the Church. But it is very clearly said that for Pius XII subsidiarity is also valid within the Church.

The service of the Curia in cooperation with the Bishops exists in the place, for example, and we have to consider the new wording in comparison with *Pastor Bonus*: a) recognizing and supporting the work of the bishops, b) giving advice, c) supporting their work in solidarity with the option for the poor, the vulnerable, the human family and peace, d). supporting the initiative of the bishops and bishops' conferences so said people may have life in fullness of Christ. (Principles 3). Such a description again reflects the

fundamental change in the perspective of the new Constitution, and provides a cooperation and recognition are priorities in the sense of a synodal Church rather than control and exercise of power. This of course, requires a change of mentality on part of the Curia, but also and, I repeat, on the part of the bishop and the bishop conferences in their dealing with the Curia.

This new spirit is also characterized in number 4 of Principles. Since the Church embraces many people and cultures throughout the world and this includes a great treasure of experiences in evangelization, the Curia has tasked of collecting and processing these experiences and creative initiative of particular churches and also the bishop conferences for the good of the whole, with the aim of promoting dialogue and helping one another. And not in a way considering these new things immediately with reservation of the so-called controlling orthodoxy.

### III. General Norms

**“Due to the Preamble, the Principles and the new statements of the Visita Ad Limina, situation is now characterized by different spirits that of cooperation, and no longer, for example, of distrust, discomfort, and fears.”**

Since the third part article 1, which is decisive for the role of the Curia serving the Pope and the bishops has already been presented above, I would only to like to refer to Article 33.

This article deals with the general secretariat of the synod and stipulates that all Curia institutions have to cooperate with it. The name is now General Secretariat of the Synod, and no longer Synod of Bishops. It means the General Secretariat has now the function for the Synod in general also for us in Asia. Furthermore, I want to mention only the Article 40 and 42 of the General Norms, which deals with the aspects of Visita Ad Limina because this regards all bishops and bishop conferences in a possible 5-year rhythm. This is where the spirit of the Preamble and the Principles have an impact. In Articles 40, paragraph 2, it is stipulated that in the state report of the respective particular church, which you have to do it before the ad limina visit, a realistic description

about its condition should be made. In addition, and for this absolutely new, the report should also give an evaluation of support received from the Curial institution as well as the expectations towards the Curia in terms of cooperation. Such stipulation would have been unthinkable in Pastor Bonus of John Paul II. Moreover, the summary of the most important statement of the Report is now made by the respective bishop himself, and no longer by the staff member of the dicastery and their subjective assessment. As already stated in the Principles, now it is repeated that the conversations are expected to be open and cordial, encouraging and stimulating in order to contribute to the well-being of the whole Church. Due to the Preamble, the Principles and the new statements of the *Visita Ad Limina*, situation is now characterized by different spirits that of cooperation, and no longer, for example, of distrust, discomfort, and fears. But on the other hand, this requires also a change of mentality of you the bishops and the presidents of the bishops' conferences, referring to the new constitution.

#### IV. Dicasteries

In this section, I would like to focus only to some aspects important for us in Asia. A constant reference is made to the cooperation with the bishop conferences and their continental federation, for example FABC. This is most important in us in Asia.

There was a lively discussion about the new order of the dicasteries, especially about why the first dicastery was suddenly that of Evangelization and not anymore the Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith. In principles, all dicasteries are equivalent, but from the programmatic title of the Constitution, *Praedicate Evangelium*, which states the reason the existence of the Church and the wording in the Preamble, the logical consequences follow, if from Jesus Christ Our Lord, the evangelizing mission so fundamentally defined the Church, it follows the order of dicastery begins with that of Evangelization.

**“From Jesus Christ Our Lord, the evangelizing mission so fundamentally defined the Church, it follows the order of dicastery begins with that of Evangelization.”**

It is also important to note that the dicastery now, this of

Evangelization has two sections. The first one which deals with the fundamental question of evangelization worldwide. Deliberately, it does not take up the narrow focused of the task of the former Pontifical Council for New Evangelization, which was created for those areas where once Christian but now are very much under a process of secularization. No this was not the option. The First Section is generally about the fundamental questions and challenges of evangelization worldwide, and therefore, for us in Asia, the cooperation with this Section is very important. The Second Section is concerned with what used to be called the Congregation of the Propaganda Fidei, which concerned with a new particular churches, which you know it very well. The importance, Pope Francis attaches to this very dicastery, and the extent to which he pushes aside the ideal discussion about the Dicastery of Doctrine of Faith versus Evangelization is evident from the fact that this dicastery is presided by the Pope himself, just as the Pope presided the Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith until the 1960s of the last century.

**“The Curia and the Church as a whole are first made aware of the fundamental redemptive significance of God’s mercy to which we are to respond with merciful actions towards people and humanity.”**

A real novelty is this Dicastery for the Service of Charity, which the Pope has deliberately set as the Third Dicastery. What used to be the Office of Apostolic Alms, has now given the rank of the Dicastery. If Saint John Paul II introduced the feast of

Mercy Sunday, our Pope Francis is now taking a step further in the spirit of the 2015-2016 Holy Year of Mercy, which we celebrated through in Asia, in our Churches, with an open Holy Door. The Curia and the Church as a whole are first made aware of the fundamental redemptive significance of God’s mercy to which we are to respond with merciful actions towards people and humanity.

The Dicastery for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments (Article 88-102). Article 89, paragraph 3 mentions a real decisive innovation for us in Asia. “With the Episcopal Conferences, the Dicastery encourages reflection on possible forms of inculturation of the liturgy and accompanies their contextualization” (PE 89). I will underline that it did not say form but forms of inculturation. It is important to see the plural form. Such paragraph

means a real breath of fresh air, in particular, for us in Asia, which is with its diverse cultures. Compared to previous very tight restriction exercised by the former Congregation for Divine Worship. For the Bishop Conferences in Asia, here is a creative space opens up to better service with inculturated liturgy, it's a hard work but a necessary work.

Dicastery for Bishops (Article 103-112). Here I would like to point only one aspect that is of particular interest for the bishop and episcopal conference and for the bishops in Asia in general. The selection, criteria for bishop candidate in Article 105 paragraph 2. "The Dicastery, in agreement with the Episcopal Conferences and their regional and continental associations, establish the criteria for the selection of candidates. (I have to point your attention to the English translation says, in consultation. But the original Italian text, says in agreement. In agreement is something different than in consultation.) These criteria must take into account the different cultural requirements and be periodically evaluated." This means that a single set of criteria no longer applies worldwide. However, it also results in the task for the bishop conferences to demand and help shape consequences of these paragraph 2 of Article 105.

**“The starting point is not ideal concept of what young people families, family life, etc. should be, but very concretely, the reality of life with all its positive and negative sides, its difficulties and also failures and breakdowns is taken as basis.”**

the People of God, cardinals, pope, bishops, priests, and laity all form the people of God, but there were specific congregations for the bishops, the clergy, the religious, and so on. Francis was not contend with this, in the sense of the second chapter of Lumen Gentium, and so he created this new

Now some points to the new dicastery, I want to refer only to the dicastery laity family and life. The dicastery was already established by Pope Francis in 2016. We have to realize the following astonishing fact. There was no separate congregation for the vast majority of the people of God, the laity. We all form

dicastery for Laity. If we study the text of the Dicastery, we will notice the following also important us in Asia. The starting point is not ideal concept of what young people families, family life, etc. should be, but very concretely, the reality of life with all its positive and negative sides, its difficulties and also failures and breakdowns is taken as basis. Contextualization has taken place. In addition, the text speaks systematically about the involvement of the bishop conferences and the cooperation with them, all this can be very helpful for our approach to the diverse cultures and peoples in Asia.

The integral human development Dicastery, we have already Msgr. Fabio, so it is not necessary to talk about it.

I would like to go to the fifth part, which is economic organism. I would like to close with a brief reference to the Article 205 to 207 of the New Constitution. With this part,

**“For him, it was not a matter of first creating a complete text of the new Constitution, and only then beginning the reform.”**

Francis has succeeded in something that had not been accomplished before, namely, the reorganization of the Vatican’s economic area. Often enough, this was the reason for scandals. It had been seen by the pre-conclave as a special problem area demanding a fundamental reform. Pope Francis has paid special attention to this reform from the very beginning and he has already implemented reforms step by step over the years. What is now found in the New Constitution is ultimately the written version of the new order already implemented. It includes the following organisms: Council for Economy, Secretariat for Economy, Administration of the Patrimony of the Apostolic See, Office of Auditor General, Commission of Confidential Matter, Committee for Investigation. These little examples of reforms also show how Francis proceeded with his reforms efforts. For him, it was not a matter of first creating a complete text of the new Constitution, and only then beginning the reform. Francis has, so to speak, from the beginning of 2013, successively through the dialogue with the Councils of the Cardinals but also with other bodies and persons, already carried out steps of the reform of the Curia.

## Conclusion

Beyond the already presented proposals of the different part of the Constitution, now let us ask what more can we gather for our bishop conferences, dioceses, and the Church in Asia, precisely from the specific approach of our Pope Francis. What I am going to present now, is intended to open up ways of understanding and point out impulses for questions,

**“It is rather based on my observations with regard to the work of the Council of the Cardinals, the close involvement of incorporation with some of the Cardinals in a working group from the very beginning from 2013 onwards.”**

not in the sense of an attempt to instruct or teach from the outside. It is rather based on my observations with regard to the work of the Council of the Cardinals, the close involvement of incorporation with some of the Cardinals in a working group from the very beginning from 2013 onwards.

1). what is at stake is to grasp and implement the program of the new Constitution, which with the Praedicate Evangelium, the first two words, precisely pinpoint by our Holy Father, as the reason for the existence of our Church. The Praedicate Evangelium is most closely connected with the credibility of the Church. Everyone will agree on this. To regain a damaged and lost credibility is not an easy task. But this was exactly the starting point of the Cardinals in the pre-conclave 2013, and also of our Holy Father Francis, what characterized the pre-conclave was the will to face the real situation, not to whitewash anything, to name things openly, and plainly as prerequisites for the reform and to confront the threats of the credibility at the root. Following as suggestion from the pre-conclave, our Holy Father immediately took up the idea of a systematic consultation by Cardinals from all continents, so as not to be dependent only in the inner circle of the Curia. He established the Council of the Cardinals with the task of assisting him in the governance of the Church and drafting of a new Constitution. As an

analogy to the Council of Cardinals, do we have a group of persons from the various sectors of our diocese beyond the usual internal consultative persons to discuss with us as pastors on regular basis, openly and without blinders, the situation of the diocese and to assist us in our governance.

2). Let us go further step back. Do we have in our bishop conference, in our diocese, something analogous to a pre-conclave, that is, from time to time, a momentum, a pause in which everything can put on the table in an uncensored way and a kind of inventory and status determination can take place.

3). The Church is made up of people and is not a perfect society. How do we deal with mistakes? Do we have in our culture, in our diocese, in our bishop conferences, in our committees?

4). how can we avoid or block a problem in time, and create opportunities to continuously reduce tension and take pressure out of the kettle. As Francis has exemplified with the continuous reforms, especially with the economic sector and the new dicasteries, for example, the Laity and Integral Human Development.

5). What attention do we pay to a well-established economy in our diocese, in our episcopal conference so that no scandal can arise that can undermine the credibility of the Church and the especially the proclamation of the Gospel.

6). But we do not want to look only into our culture. Have we, according to part 4 of the Principles, of the New Constitution also develop a creative culture in which the creative initiative, new ideas, best practices examples in our parishes, dioceses, and bishop conferences are collected, appreciated, and presented as an inspiration and models for others, and not immediately placed under suspicion due to lack of orthodoxy. Not only learning from mistakes, but dealing with creatively with the creative initiative with our young people giving them open space of women groups, indigenous peoples, religious etc. in developing new dynamics.

7). Finally, in the Preamble, the Church is described as a synodal one with

a synodal face. Would it not be therefore recommendable immediately independently of the synodal process initiated by the Holy Father and structured together with him by the Cardinals Mario Grech and Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich to look for ways, in which, such a mutual process of listening and learning from journeying together can be established and consolidated in the future as well. It is necessary to be sensitive all together to the work of the Holy Spirit within the people of God, but also to his work in the world, and also to learn from it, a world in which the Church is embedded, and in which she has to put Praedicate Evangelium, the evangelization into practice.

Thank you for your kind attention.





## **Synodal Leadership in the Diocese**

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Good afternoon, everyone. We had a really good discussion this morning on the global Synod as well as Praedicate Evangelium, the reform of the curia. From the questions and comments that are coming from the room, I can sense this emerging interest in seeing how we can manifest the same spirit of these activities and reforms back in the diocese.

This afternoon, we will be looking at the new pathways. The question I would like to start with is, what are the new ways by which we will return? Based on this morning's discussion, I would like to explore how you can bring some of these back to your diocese. There is already a growing interest in synodality, but it's important to be aware that sometimes synodality is misunderstood or certain aspects are overemphasized to the point of neglecting others.

Let us begin by going back to the roots of synodality. What exactly is it, and what are the ways that it be misunderstood? Synodality is not just a pet project of Pope Francis, or it is not just a fad, or is it something new

from Vatican II. According to our own Christian anthropology and our view of humankind and our theology of creation, we see the world as the family of God. And this comes out very well in *Gaudium et Spes*. *Gaudium et Spes*, by the way, is still one of the best sources of Catholic anthropology in the Church. The document stresses the dignity and vocation of every human being. It is important to start with humankind in general. Everyone is called to participate as co-workers in the Divine mission of love. Humans have an intrinsic social nature and are meant to be in community. Each of us has diverse gifts and is called to have mutual collaboration. We have a developmental history and a sense of being on the journey, already and not yet, with the active presence of divine grace working with humanity.

Synodality is not just a vision for the Church; but really it is the foundation of God's vision. It is a call for the whole of humanity, and the Church's role is to give witness through synodality.

That is what *Lumen Gentium* in Vatican II tries to recover. We just witness the value and symbol of synodality and so we have the phrase "the People

**“The common baptismal dignity signifies that everyone is co-responsible for God's mission, and communion is our identity and call.”**

of God" captures the equivalent principles between *Gaudium et Spes* and *Lumen Gentium*. The common baptismal dignity signifies that everyone is co-responsible for God's mission, and communion is our identity and call. We have diverse charisms that are meant to be brought into synergy, and we are all on a pilgrim journey. The Church is always in need of purification and always on the way, so there is no need to be anxious if things are not going well in your diocese. The Risen Christ is always with us, and we are the body of Christ. Christ continues to work closely with us.

The image of hikers in the forest represents synodality well, which represents the 5 elements of synodal leadership. (1) We are all meant to be companions (2) finding the way forward together (3) by following God's spirit, (4) nurturing the vocation of everyone, (5) towards fullness of life. And each of the five key aspects of synodality is essential. In this model, no one person has all the answers, and everyone must be included. Everyone travels, seeks, and discovers the way together.

In this kind of this model, what kind of leadership and governance

is needed for a group that is traveling like this? This afternoon, I would like to focus on “synodal leadership in the diocese.” I invite you to look back at your diocese, your experiences where you were a lay person, as a priest, and when you became a bishop. What current forms of leadership promote synodality and which ones are contrary to it in your diocese. Now, let’s examine some caricatures of current forms of leadership that are not really in line with synodality or inhibit it.

The first form is what I call the “solo leadership,” where only the leader decides everything. No consultation. “Participation” is in implementation only. Direction changes when the leader changes. The leader controls

**“While leaders may have good intentions and believe me, they know what is best for the parish or diocese, they may unknowingly slip into solo leadership, determining everything by themselves.”**

everything usually.

A lot of parishioners often complain when a new parish priest comes and abolishes everything put in place by the previous one. This creates

anxiety about whether the new priest will change everything again. While leaders may have good intentions and believe me, they know what is best for the parish or diocese, they may unknowingly slip into solo leadership, determining everything by themselves.

On the opposite end, I call it the “Hands-Off Leadership.” Individuals and groups are left alone to go their own way. No guidance. Competition, disunity, survival of the fittest. Formation of “mini kingdoms.” Many of the priests misunderstand Pope Francis’s notion of the inverted pyramid as hands-off leadership. They interpret it as stepping aside and letting the laypeople do everything without guidance or engagement from the leader. This is not synodal leadership. These results in a lack of guidance, and individuals start building their own kingdoms, leading to a survival of the fittest mentality. When this issue is identified, it’s often too late to engage, and feelings of powerlessness arise. This is another wrong interpretation of synodality.

The third scenario is the “CenterPoint leadership,” where the leader interacts directly and manages every person and group without any

interaction among peers or intermediate bodies. While this approach may work in a small organization of four or five people, it becomes exhausting and leads to burnout in larger settings such as big parishes or dioceses. CenterPoint leadership is not synodal either.

**The ship remains where it is, unwilling to venture into deep waters, because it is afraid it will get broken.”**

The next one is the “Bureaucratic leadership,” which is a well-known form where the hierarchy is rigid, and conformity to rules is expected. It operates in a top-down manner with little flexibility. There is also called the “Maintenance leadership,” which is a scenario where everyone participates equally, but the focus is on maintaining the ship, but the ship is not going anywhere. The ship remains where it is, unwilling to venture into deep waters, because it is afraid it will get broken. Everyone is very happy in maintaining the ship where it is.

Finally, there is “black box leadership,” where consultation exists, but it’s one-way up going up to the leader. Feedback and suggestions may enter a “black box,” leaving people uncertain about how decisions are made or why they differ from their suggestions. This lack of circularity and transparency leads to skepticism, suspicion, and distrust.

Quotations from various Asian countries’ Synod reports reflect the reality of these leadership scenarios. For example, the report says, “Almost all matters having to do with the life of the Church are characterized as top-down in their approach.” “The laity in general feel that they are not called upon to use their gifts and talents at the service of the Church, either at a parish or diocesan level. Moreover, they are not recognized or encouraged to be leaders. They feel that they are treated as second class citizens.” We are a long way with that inverted pyramid structure of leadership. Another quotation says, “Some lament over ‘consultations that are devoid of real conversations,’ and meetings as mere venue for information dissemination whereby the lay are heard under the guise of consultation but in reality, it is only a means for ratification and immediate execution.”

These are the consequences: 1) lack of growth in people’s development, faith life, co-responsibility, discernment; 2) lack of

commitment and mission; 3) lack of unity; 4) leader burn-out; 5) poor quality of outcome; and, 6) lack of witnessing as People of God.

Considering the five key elements of synodality mentioned above, what are its implications for leadership and governance. The following are the principles of synodal leadership and governance, that will indicate what we need to improve in our diocese.

1). *Mutual Learning* – “A synodal Church is a Church which listens, which realizes that listening is more than simply hearing. It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth (Jn 14:17), in order to know what he ‘says to the Churches’ (Rev 2:7) (Pope Francis, October 2015). This is about sharing vulnerability and sharing wisdom. Everyone is vulnerable, everyone has wisdom. And if we can sit around the table like this, mutually listen and learn from one another, then we can start how to learn to become a synodal Church.

2). *Helping each one to find his/her buried talents and nurturing them.* Listening to their untold stories. Fostering development of potential and responsibility. Specially in Asia, there are many scenarios where people’s gifts and talents are buried, because we have an education system that makes us conform. We are taught to conform to a certain way, to memorize the answer, and then produce the answer during examination. The individual charism is suppressed, also in the Church. We have to learn the art of listening to people’s untold stories. We are too quick to judge and condemn, but we need to learn to sit with people, to spend time, and waste time to let the untold stories come out. And if we spend enough time, perhaps we will find the solution together. This is about accompaniment, sacred presencing, fostering the development of everyone’s potential. Your job when you go back home is to help your leaders dig into the soil all these hidden treasures, and hidden talents of the people where their treasures have been buried for so long.

3). *Promoting inter-dependence, solidarity, breaking-down silos.* Think about your diocese. What are the different silos that are forming up

and how can you and your leaders break them down.

4). *Keeping “one foot raised,” moving God’s reign of love forward. Embracing the *squilibrio*.* To be always on the move, but also supporting one another. And not to be the ship that never sails out because you are so afraid to break. Do what Pope Francis calls embrace the *squilibrio*, meaning a time of disequilibrium, because when you go and sail out into the deep, there will be always a bit of disequilibrium experience by the boat. You must learn how to navigate that, otherwise, we will never be on mission. We will never be going out.

5). *Giving importance to the process and not just to accomplishments.* Transformation happens during the process. Very often that kind of solo-leadership, because we are so passionate about the mission that we want to get there and achieve it as soon as possible. Hence, we just want to tell people what to do. Synodality is about building the community, promoting everyone’s potential and their development. And so, we need to take time what Cardinal Hollerich said, we need to stay with tensions, because the tensions will make us grow, and reach our fuller potential. We realize that the transformation happens during the process and not when you get to the end. Do not worry if your pastoral plan is like two steps forward and one step backward. Sometimes, one step forward and two steps backward. This is not an indication of failure, but an indication of the significance of the process. Even in this current global synod, we are focusing so much on the process. Let us take time. If we get something wrong, let us go back and listen again.

How do we put all these principles into practice? I like to offer some concrete suggestions. Somethings you can do when you go back home. First, Develop people’s capacity for communal discernment in a gradual way.

In our educational system, we are not taught to discern. Most of us, especially in Asia, we are taught to memorize and reproduce answer during the exam, to conform and to follow the rules. So this quote from Pope Francis is worth revisiting: “Today, the Church needs to grow in discernment . . . This is put very clearly in the pastoral perspectives and objectives of *Amoris Laetitia*. We are used to a ‘yes you can or no you can’t mentality... Generally, above all, we who are part of the religious setting of life as priests and bishops often show little ability to discern, we don’t know

how to do it for we have been educated with another theology that is more formal. We go as far as ‘you can or you can’t’ (Pope Francis, Fraternal and Spontaneous,” La Civiltà Cattolica Perspectives, 2018).

So to make this paradigm shift, it takes time. Do not be disappointed. It does not happen overnight. This attitude of ‘you can or you can’t’ makes us go back to the document and look at them in a static way. Even with the text of Vatican II. For example, we say this is not written in Vatican II, so why are we doing that now. That is what is happening with Synodality.

That word is hardly mentioned in Vatican II. Or, if we are looking at the whole People of God, the role of bishops, the collegiality of bishops, is no longer important. That is not case. What is important is that we look at things from a

**“We can’t be fixed and frozen in structures and rules forever; the Church’s teachings are a journey of development.”**

developmental point of view. To see Councils and Church’s teachings as a journey of development, from Nicaea to Constantinople to Chalcedon, we cannot stop there. We cannot freeze it. So if we look at earlier councils and the like, the smaller trees, and we see, “Oh, this tree is very good. Let’s put in place a lot of canon law and the structures to implement it,” but we forget that it’s part of a developing journey. We can’t be fixed and frozen in those structures and those rules forever.

We have to be aware that the original idea has to keep developing. We have to keep exploring and let it grow. The same thing was happening with the Pharisees. They were putting all these thousands of rules and laws in place, and that ended up freezing the the Jewish tradition. And Jesus was trying to break through that, to move them forward, and not to be calcified and frozen in those structures. That’s why, more and more, we are sensing the growth of synodality, which includes the whole People of God. But that doesn’t mean that the collegiality of Bishops is destroyed. No. We all have to take it as part of a development of that whole idea. The key question is, how is God’s spirit moving us forward? We have to keep going back to that question.

And it is about the art of the pilgrim hermeneutic. This phrase was used by Pope Francis in his homily last year to launch the Synod process in his own diocese. It is a very nice phrase. We have to relearn this pilgrim hermeneutic, and that requires faithfulness to an unfolding journey. It is not faithfulness to one document per se, because of our tendency to be fixated on a particular document. Faithfulness to an unfolding journey requires two key skills: *ressourcement* and *aggiornamento*. Going back to the roots of our sources and updating. And we have to remember the sources of discernment is not different. People arguing for what they want, but it's really first looking at our faith tradition, scripture, and especially in scripture and church teachings, and looking at the concrete data and hearing people's stories. The power of real stories. And that is what Paul and Barnabas did

“**The art of the pilgrim hermeneutic requires faithfulness to an unfolding journey, going back to the roots of our sources and updating, while listening to real stories and reflecting prayerfully.**”

when they shared the stories to the Gentiles, both at the center and the periphery. It is listening to the sciences and the humanities but also interpreting intelligently and not just taking everything as the gospel truth. But even our faith tradition evolves, you know. So everything has to be reflected upon and

understood more deeply in a prayerful spirit. This is something we have to recover, the art of the pilgrim hermeneutic.

So, we develop people's capacity for communal discernment in a gradual way.

1. Start with small but concrete steps
2. Choose an issue that needs consultation with some groups of people but not too many. For example, restructuring of a ministry, re-deployment of land use, formation of a new center.
3. Decide on process and participants for this communal discernment. See [www.synodresources.org](http://www.synodresources.org). Engage the help experienced persons. Some episcopal conferences are sharing expert facilitators.
4. Provide training and resources
5. Carry it out with a timeline
6. Review the experience together and note the learning points.

When you slowly keep on doing this, the capacity for communal discernment will gradually grow in your diocese. Communal discernment entails a process that involves all participants, including the decision taker. There are four elements:

1. Receive relevant information, the data, the knowledge from the sciences have to be given out to the people. They have to spend time to pray with it, reflect, and evaluate it.
2. There should be some dialogue where there is sharing of insights from prayer and reflection; listening deeply to one another; having opportunities to ask questions and respond to each other, and examining together each idea, viewpoint and perspective.
3. To consider the Church teachings and the guiding values and to really understand them.
4. To pay constant attention to how the Holy Spirit is moving the group (heart and head) and develop the conclusion progressively, review and fine-tune.

Another important element in understanding communal discernment is the connection between decision-making and decision-taking. According to the International Theological Commission, “In a diocese, for example, it is necessary to distinguish between the process of decision-making through a joint exercise of discernment, consultation and co-operation, and decision-taking, which is within the competence of the bishop, the guarantor of apostolicity and Catholicity. Working things out is a synodal task; decision is a ministerial responsibility. A correct exercise of synodality must contribute to a better articulation of the ministry of the personal and collegial exercise of apostolic authority with the synodal exercise of discernment on the part of the community”. (International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, 69). The final decision is not arbitrary, disconnected from the communal discernment, or based on leader’s personal preference but one in which the community’s “sense of the Spirit” plays an integral part.

Decision-making is the process that you bring everyone to the table, and decision-taking has to be integrated in the whole process. That is why people are skeptical about communal discernment because

the one who takes the final decision does not respect the whole process of discernment. You have to be part of it. And people learn synodality when they do a synodality. Hence, it is important to start with something that they do. It is part of the *sensus fidelium*.

People learn synodality when they “do synodality.” According to the FABC Continental Synodal Report, “All the dioceses expressed that the consultation was a ‘synodal moment’... Of the people who had been interviewed...many said it was their first time to be consulted and to be listened to.” People are saying that the process has taught them to be synodal.

**“People learn synodality when they ‘do synodality.’ The process of consultation teaches them to be listened to and to participate in communal discernment.”**

*Second, Promote relationship, collaboration, and leadership at the intermediate levels.*

Encourage persons or groups in related fields or locations to come together. Eg. Social services, spirituality, formation, youth. Share information, work together, address common concerns, support one another. Intermediate associations serve as platforms for voices on the ground to be expressed and raised up. It includes too self-regulation. It means delegate some decision-making authority suitable for their level. (subsidiarity, leadership development). This process builds subsidiarity so that they can journey with each other. For example, in this FABC small groups, it allows everyone’s voice to be heard. It is not possible to do it and listen to everyone in the plenary.

*Third, identify diocesan pastoral priorities together and take action.*

To have a good pastoral plan that responds to the signs of the time must be done through participative communal discernment. We must include the voices from the margins. We must involve everyone in charting new frontiers, experimentation, implementation, and evaluation of the diocesan pastoral plan. In this way the whole diocese is on mission, and everybody is responsible for mission. Responding together is an expression of co-responsibility, a Church that goes forth together.

*Fourth, Renew formation at all levels.*

Youth, adults; laity, religious, clergy and seminarians should have formation that deepens the faith through the spirituality of synodality, human development, discernment and pastoral skills. It includes both formal learning and informal learning. Formation should show the way by modeling synodality instead of simply telling about it. It is good to adapt the practice of “active inquiry” as a pastoral habit, which is asking questions so as to know more deeply.

*Fifth, Lead as a team.*

You don't have to do everything alone. No doubt you are responsible for the governance of your diocese. But you can form team in governance so that you won't be like the centerpoint leader who is stretch in every way and burn out, no time to pray, no time to reflect and read.

Coming here as individuals but going back as companions. New ways of walking together in leadership.

- Form learning circles for emerging trends: eg. Climate-induced displacement
- Bilateral/multilateral co-operation: eg. Human trafficking
- Advocacy, joint campaigns
- Partnership to share/transfer expertise: eg. Digital media
- Fraternal accompaniment: eg. Joint retreat.

I want to end with this reflection on “synodality, leadership and governance as new pathways for the Church in Asia” that a new way for us, perhaps, is to share our joys and challenges together, to walk together with the God who walks with us. Thank you.





## **Synodality, Leadership, and Governance: New Pathways for the Church in Asia**

**Bishop Pablo Siongco David**

*Bishop, Diocese of Caloocan*

*President, Catholic Bishops' Conference*

Dear brother Bishops and fellow servant leaders in the Church of Asia, dear brothers and sisters in this FABC 50 conference, good afternoon. I have been requested to address you on the topic “Synodality, Leadership, and Governance: New Pathways for the Church in Asia.” You may remember that last Tuesday, Cardinal Jose Advincula of Manila referred to the First Council ever to be convened by the church, and that was the Council of Jerusalem, held in 50 A.D. The church in Jerusalem headed by the apostles, was functioning then as the central authority.

What occasion that First Council was the fact that some people in the Jerusalem leadership were feeling that their authority was being undermined by the church of Antioch on account that the new pathways that their missionaries were taking. Specifically, it had to do with Paul, whose aggressive missionary activities among the Gentiles was causing some negative reactions among the Jewish Christians. Instead of just ignoring the reactions, Paul made it a point to reach out to the central leadership body

in Jerusalem to seek their counsel, while sharing to them about the new pathways, which he was convinced the Holy Spirit was leading the Church

**“People in Jerusalem felt their authority was being challenged by the Church of Antioch because of Paul’s missionary activities among the Gentiles. Instead of ignoring the reactions, Paul sought counsel from the central leadership, convinced the Holy Spirit was opening the doors to Gentile converts.”**

to namely the opening of the doors to the Gentile converts to the Christian faith. And St. Luke, whose feast we celebrated last Tuesday, tells us about this in Acts 14:27. If you follow the text very closely, the opposite personalities on the issue were not really Paul and Peter,

but rather Paul and James-not James the Son of Zebedee, but the other James otherwise known as the brother or the relative of the Lord. This is the James that Paul himself speaks about in Galatian 2:12 who had presumably who sent a team of Judaizers to spy on what the Church at Antioch was up to.

I am, therefore, wondering why we have gotten so used to referring to Peter as the apostle to the Jews, and Paul as the apostles to the Gentiles. Well, understandably, that comes from St. Paul himself Galatian 2:7. And that was of course before the Council was resolved or the Council resolved the issue when Paul still tended to caricature the Jerusalem Church as limiting the mission to the Jews. In fact, all of them including Paul himself, began as apostles to the Jews. Even Paul tells us how their initial evangelizing mission were directed mainly to their fellow Jews who gather for the Sabbath in the synagogue, in the homeland or in the diaspora. But it was Paul who dare to shift his attention to the Gentiles, who gather in the outer courtyard of the synagogues, the one called proselytes in Greek. When the insiders, meaning the mainstream Jews, rejected them. It was the Gentile outsiders who apparently greater interest in their message.

But St. Lukes tell us that Peter himself had also begun to show interest in the Gentiles as narrated in Acts 10. Remember the story of Cornelius on account of a message that Peter had received through a vision. Among the apostles, it was the other James, the one called the “relative of the

Lord,” who seemed to have actually insisted on keeping their evangelizing mission focused on their fellow Jews. I imagine him probably quoting Jesus reminding them to go mainly to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And so, James was not that keen on Paul’s idea of welcoming the Gentile converts to Christianity, without first circumcising or judaizing them.

It was in such a tense situation or conflict with regard to the mission that Peter first assumed his role of leadership in the apostolic community. Instead of siding with one or the other, he stood between James and Paul, and he made the move to keep together, by serving as facilitator of dialogue right there at the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15. He also kept the communion between Jerusalem and Antioch.

**“Peter consistently played the role of the bridge-builder, the promoter of communion. No wonder we refer to the Office of Peter as Pontifex Maximus, literally ‘The Supreme Pontiff’ or ‘the Greatest Bridge-Builder.’”**

You know, if the secular jargon had already lived back then or in those times, and if they were to report on the Council of Jerusalem, they

would probably have labeled James as representing the “conservative” or “traditionalist,” and Paul as representing the “progressive” or the “liberals” in the early Church. Well, Luke tells us that it was Peter, who consistently played the role of the bridge-builder, the promoter of communion. No wonder, we refer to the Office of Peter as Pontifex Maximus, which literally means “The Supreme Pontiff” or “the Greatest Bridge-Builder.”

In the Church, whether local or universal, it is never a choice between one or the other. Part of the wisdom of the Church is precisely its gift of being able to keep together the traditionalists and the renewalists, to rise above the labels, and to call them all her children. There will never be a time when we give up keeping the Church anchored on Tradition and Scripture. Just as there will never be a time when we will give up on the principle of *ecclesia semper reformanda* -- A Church constantly renewing herself in response to the signs of the times. And so, while Pope John XIII called on the Council Fathers to “aggiornamento” or updating or renewal, he, at the same time, made sure that it was done simultaneously with what

the French would call *ressourcement*, or a healthy return to the sources or an anchoring on the apostolic tradition.

Pope Francis is not any different, like Peter who respected the missionary dynamics of the local Church of Antioch. Even as he led the role of keeping them together in communion with the mother Church, which back then, was not yet Rome but Jerusalem, Pope Francis has also consistently balanced the functioning of the central or universal Church authority in Rome with that of the local conferences and Synods of bishops.

**“Pope Francis, like Peter, balances the authority of the universal Church with the dynamics of the local Church, respecting local missions while maintaining communion with the central Church.”**

How often have we heard Pope Francis say that he wants to see a greater decentralization of some Curia functions, and a greater participation of the Conferences, of Bishops in the roles of leadership and governance? And haven't we heard him say that very often unity does not have to mean uniformity. Let me point out one very concrete example to further illustrate my point.

We all know that Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on Liturgy, the *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, called for a “fully conscious and active participation of the faithful” in the liturgical celebrations of the Church. One of the most important expressions of this principle has been the moved to adapt the use of vernacular language for liturgical celebrations. And yet, already 60 years from the time of Vatican II was convened, most of the dioceses in our countries, and in various parts of Asia, are still using unofficial, meaning, *ad experimentum*, vernacular translations of the Roman Missal and other liturgical rites. So far, only a few of our own major language groups in the Philippines have succeeded in getting our liturgical text approved by the Congregation, now called the Dicastery for the Divine Worship in Rome. When we all know how quickly language has evolved, don't we, and how, by the time, a proposed translation is approved, it would have become archaic already.

In September 2017, to give the issue of approving translations of

liturgical text, a more immediate action, Pope Francis issued the document *Magnum Principium*, modifying Canon 838 of the Canon Law. The document opens with a statement, “The great principle, established by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, according to which liturgical prayer be accommodated to the comprehension of the people so that it might be understood, required the weighty task of introducing the vernacular language that their authority was being undermined by the church in Antioch due to the new pathways taken by their missionaries. Specifically, it was related to Paul, whose aggressive missionary activities among the Gentiles caused negative reactions among the Jewish Christians. Instead of ignoring the reactions, Paul reached out to the central leadership in Jerusalem to share with them about the new pathways, which he believed the Holy Spirit was leading the church towards. These pathways involved opening the doors to Gentile converts to the Christian faith, as mentioned by Saint Luke in Acts Chapter 14, verse 27.

If we closely follow the text, we will see that the opposing personalities on this issue were not really Paul and Peter, but rather Paul and James. I am referring to James, also known as the brother or relative of the Lord, not James the son of Zebedee. This is the James that Paul speaks about in Galatians Chapter 2, verse 12, who had apparently sent a team of Judaizers to spy on the church in Antioch.

“**All the apostles, including Paul and Peter, began as apostles to the Jews. Paul shifted his mission to the Gentiles, and Peter also began reaching out to them, as shown in the story of Cornelius in Acts 10.**”

I wonder why we have become accustomed to referring to Peter as the apostle to the Jews and Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles. Understandably, this comes from Saint

Paul himself in Galatians Chapter 2, verse 7, and that was before the issue was resolved by the Council. At that time, Paul tended to characterize the Jerusalem Church as limiting its mission to the Jews. However, all of them, including Paul himself, started as apostles to the Jews. Paul even tells us how their initial evangelizing missions were primarily directed towards their fellow Jews who gathered in the synagogues, whether in the homeland or in the diaspora. It was Paul who dared to shift his attention to the Gentiles,

who showed greater interest in the message when the mainstream rejected them. Peter himself, as narrated in Acts Chapter 10, also began to show interest in the Gentiles, prompted by a vision he received, including the story of Cornelius.

Among the apostles, it was the other James, the relative of the Lord, who seemed to insist on keeping their evangelizing mission focused on their fellow Jews. Perhaps he quoted Jesus, reminding them to go primarily to the lost sheep of the House of Israel. James was not keen on Paul's idea of welcoming Gentile converts to Christianity without first circumcising or judaizing them.

In such a tense situation of conflict regarding the mission, Peter assumed his role of leadership in the apostolic community. Instead of siding with one or the other, he stood between James and Paul and facilitated dialogue at the Council of Jerusalem, as described in Acts Chapter 15. He also maintained communion between Jerusalem and Antioch.

If secular journalists had existed back then and reported on the Council of Jerusalem, they would have probably labeled James as representing the conservatives or traditionalists and Paul as representing the progressives or liberals in the early church.

Well, Luke tells us it was Peter

who consistently played the role of the bridge builder, the promoter of communion. No wonder we refer to the office of Peter as Pontifex Maximus, which literally means the Supreme bridge builder or the Supreme pontiff, the greatest bridge builder. In the church, whether local or universal, it is never a choice between one or the other. Part of the wisdom of the church is precisely its gift of being able to keep together the traditionalists and the renewalists, to rise above the labels and to call them all her children.

**“Peter consistently played the role of the bridge builder, the promoter of communion. The Church’s wisdom lies in keeping together the traditionalists and renewalists, rising above labels, and calling them all her children.”**

There will never be a time when we will give up on the need to keep

the church anchored on tradition and scripture, just as there will never be a time when we will give up on the principle of *Ecclesia semper reformanda*, a church constantly renewing herself in response to the signs of the times. Pope John XXIII called for the Council to be an *aggiornamento*, an updating or renewal, but at the same time ensured that it was done simultaneously with *ressourcement*, a healthy return to the sources or an anchoring on the Apostolic tradition.

Pope Francis follows a similar path. Like Peter, who respected the missionary dynamics of the local church in Antioch while keeping them together in communion with the mother Church (which back then was not yet Rome but Jerusalem), Pope Francis consistently balances the functioning of the central or universal Church authority in Rome with that of the local conferences and synods of Bishops. He often expresses his desire to see greater decentralization of some curia functions and greater participation of the conferences of Bishops in leadership and governance roles. He frequently emphasizes that unity does not have to mean uniformity.

Allow me to provide a concrete example to further illustrate my point. The Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, called for

**“Even after 16 years since Vatican II, many dioceses in our countries and various parts of Asia are still using unofficial and experimental vernacular translations of the Roman Missal and other liturgical rites.”**

the full and active participation of the faithful in the liturgical celebrations of the church. One important expression of this principle has been the use of vernacular languages in liturgical celebrations. However, even after 16 years since Vatican II, many dioceses in our countries and various parts of Asia are still using unofficial and experimental vernacular translations of the Roman Missal and other liturgical rites. Only a few major language groups in the Philippines have succeeded in getting their liturgical texts approved by the Congregation for Divine Worship in Rome.

In September 2017, Pope Francis issued the document *Magnum Principium*, modifying Canon 838 of the canon law, to give immediate action to the issue of approving translations of liturgical texts. The document

emphasizes the great principle established by the Second Vatican Council that liturgical prayer should be accommodated to the comprehension of the people, required the weighty task of introducing the vernacular language into the liturgy and preparing and approving the versions of the liturgical books, a charge that was entrusted to the bishops,” he says. Well, he is talking about the great principle, and we thought that this “great principle” that Pope Francis is speaking about, had already been adequately addressed in the aftermath of the Council. Yes, indeed, it was. But as usual, you can have dogmatic constitution that will lay down the fundamental principles of the reforms being adapted but without any clear implementing rules or regulations, as they would call now adays IRRs, they will just remain in paper and will not achieve the reform that had been originally approved by the council. When the tasked is assumed mainly by the Roman Curia offices, than by the local Conferences and Synod of Bishops, the result is very easy to predict.

You know, his Eminence Cardinal Lazaro of the Dicastery for the Clergy, made us all laugh yesterday, when he quoted Pope Francis, saying, “Historians tell us it takes at least 100 years for a Council to take effect, to really take effect.” Well, Pope Francis says, “we’re halfway there already.”

The most important principle that have been embraced by Vatican II in relation to leadership and governance in the Church are in encapsulated in two words: collegiality and subsidiarity. Collegiality, on the one hand, is the principle by which authority is practiced in the spirit of *communio* among office-holders in the Church on many levels, in the national and continental conferences of bishops, as well as in the general synods of bishops in Rome.

Well, lately, Pope Francis has also reminded the bishops that the spirit of synodality should not just be among bishops, or the ordained leaders of the Church, if synodality has to do with promoting a greater communion, participation, and mission in the Church, then bishop should make sure that we are able to get the

**The most important principle that have been embraced by Vatican II in relation to leadership and governance in the Church are in encapsulated in two words: collegiality and subsidiarity.”**

sensus fidei fidelium through synodal consultations and opportunities for communal discernment, that would also involve the rest of the faithful: the laity, the religious and the clergy included, as well as other sectors of society that impact the life and mission of the Church. And so, the coming continental synod will have to be more than just the FABC.

Subsidiarity, on the other hand, is the principle by which collegial authority is divided up into layers and decisions are made at the appropriate levels. It works in exactly the same way in our particular churches as it does in the universal Church. The

**“Subsidiarity, on the other hand, is the principle by which collegial authority is divided up into layers and decisions are made at the appropriate levels.”**

principle is basically the same. Leadership is best exercised in a ministerial collegium. What the subsidiary units can do best and are in a position to decide for themselves, the higher units must respect. It is basically the concept of shared authority and participatory leadership that kind of leadership that enhances, not undermines communion. So, collegiality and subsidiarity are actually the antithesis to the institutional tendencies of the Church to function like an absolute Monarchy with an overcentralized system of governance. Well, expectedly, it is bound to happen when the Roman Curia is structured in such a way that it is more conscious of its political function of governance as a state than its pastoral function of serving the communion of the universal Church. It is what happens, when ecclesiastical authority is not properly grounded on the Church’s pastoral and ecclesial dynamics.

The *modus vivendi et operandi* of the Church on the universal level will tend to replicate itself in the local Church levels. It will reflect itself in the way we bishops, we ourselves, govern our own dioceses. We can run them also like a mini-Vatican state, with a functioning bureaucracy that tends to prescribe rather than recommend a common template for all the parishes. Among the most common consequences of such a style of governance is the stifling of creativity and the hindering of a greater efficiency and effectiveness in the operation of the subsidiarity entities of our dioceses like the vicariates, parishes, the mission stations, and the basic ecclesial communities.

Do we not all have our own diocesan curia offices that sometimes also tend to overdo their authority over the parishes, and do so in the name of the bishop? I like to believe that it was with this in mind that Pope Francis convened his Council of Cardinals in 2016 in order to consult them as to what might be the most important issue in the reform of the Roman Curia, namely, the healthy decentralization of decision-making in the Church, in a manner that promotes the conciliar principle of collegiality and subsidiarity.

Dear brother bishops, we are convening this FABC Conference at a very auspicious time in the Church's history when Pope Francis is pursuing a kind of a reigniting of the fire of Vatican II. You know, in my country the Philippines, we have a kind of rice cake called "bibingka." And this "rice cake" is baked in an earthen pot that is fired up with burning charcoal above and below the claypot. Pope Francis seems to be cooking up his reform in the same way, with fire above, and fire below. By fire above, I am alluding to the Vatican Curia reform, which I have earlier mentioned about.

**“Pope Francis seems to be cooking up his reform in the same way, with fire above, and fire below.”**

It was the topic discussed earlier by Msgr. Josef Sayer. The new Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* recently put together and published to replace the old one *Pastor Bonus* by Pope John Paul II. The fire below, through the Synod on Synodality, which began with the consultations from the lowest levels of the local Churches around the world. We expect this process, which has progressed from below, from the parish to the diocesan, to the national, continental and global levels. We will have to decide yet, when between January and March of 2023, we will be holding our own continental Synod for Asia.

The other day a Letter was sent by the General Synod Secretariat announcing that the global Synod will happen in two sessions. Well, one session will happen in October 2023, and a second session in October of 2024. That means that we may have to wait until early 2025 before we can have the fruits of the Synod properly articulated in an Apostolic Exhortation that will take the *sensus fidei fidelium* very seriously.

I think you will agree with me, if I say, synodality has consistently been Pope Francis' main platform of papacy. He has named three important interrelated components as communion, participation, and mission. I am inclined to call it a "revisitation or a refresher of Vatican II." After all, synodality is really just another term for conciliarity in reference to Vatican II. Concilium is just the Latin version for the Greek term Synodos. Well, we take it for granted that since Vatican II was an ecumenical council and its dogmatic constitutions and decrees had been approved in the spirit of synodality, the succeeding pontiff were duty bound to pursue the implementation of its key resolutions that are most reflective of its aspirations for an ecclesia semper reformanda.

It was not always the case, of course. The reason for this had to do precisely with the dual dynamics within the central operations of Rome. First as a political state run by a bureaucracy, on the one hand, and a central expression of the universal Church, *communio*, one that respects the primacy of the Bishop of Rome who presides in pastoral charity over all the Churches around the world, on the other hand. The dynamic tension between these two, is what I think Pope Francis tried to address in the *Praedicate Evangelium*. Basically, to make sure that the Roman Curia gets to function in a manner that is also respectful of the conciliar principles of collegiality and subsidiarity.

Perhaps, FABC can discuss more exhaustively the areas of concern that in our communal discernment are best left to the subsidiarity leadership of the national conferences of bishops, and their continental federations. Would this include such concerns as a more meaningful participation in the nomination, election, coordination, and disciplining of bishops? The possibilities can be explored and a dialogue, we can engage in a dialogue about these possibilities. Suffice it to say that these are being gradually brought to life by the Holy Spirit through the interplay of both the dynamics of *aggiornamento* on the one hand, and

**“Did not the Council of Jerusalem uphold the decision of the Church of Antioch to do mission work to the Gentiles and allow Gentile converts to be baptized without requiring them to undergo circumcision or what we might call a Judaization?”**

ressourcement on the other that guided the Second Vatican Council. Did not the Council of Jerusalem uphold the decision of the Church of Antioch to do mission work to the Gentiles and allow Gentile converts to be baptized without requiring them to undergo circumcision or what we might call a Judaization? In short, what the Church of Antioch and their presbyters could decide for themselves, the central authority in Jerusalem, did not have to impede. It is because, they were also following the promptings of the same Holy Spirit. They only provided some guidelines that would help the Gentile Christian converts to behave with pastoral charity towards their Jewish Christian brethren, such as by avoiding such conduct that would scandalize them or offend their sensibilities.

I, therefore, hear Peter's voice of sobriety in the voice of Pope Francis, who strengthens communion within the Catholic Church by strengthening the Conferences of Bishops in their collegial exercise of authority from the national to the continental, to the global levels. To the overzealous advocate of centralize governance who fear that promoting participatory decision-making among the bishops might compromise the unity of the Church, well I hear a Petrine voice that assures them that is move towards greater synodality both ad intra and ad extra is the better path towards the Universal Church's growth in communion, participation, and mission.

Thank you.





## **FABC 50 Years On: Negotiating Challenges and Seizing Opportunities**

Prof. Jonathan Tan

*Catholic Studies, Case Western*

*Reserve University, Ohio*

Greetings to all the bishop delegates, honored invited guests. Thank you very much for this opportunity to speak to you, to address this assembly. My presentation today is meant to be an exploration of the FABC's 50 years from now. I have tried to discuss topics that were not covered earlier in the week and add to what other speakers have already brought up. These topics are not meant to be the only ones, but rather recommendations for points or issues that the FABC could consider over the next 50 years.

When we talk about ressourcement, it is not just at the national level but also the Universal Church. Even for us in the Asian Church, looking back at what our predecessors have done is crucial. For example, the document "The Spirit and Work in Asia Today" by the OTCS (Office of Theological Concerns in Southeast Asia) from 40 years ago is worth revisiting. It emphasized listening to the Spirit, accompaniment, and discerning the Spirit's work in Asia today. Let us use this as a starting point to explore the next 50 years and read the signs of the times.

Christian communities in Asia must listen to the Spirit at work in many communities of believers who live and experience their own faith, who share and celebrate it in their own social, cultural and religious history, and that they (as communities of the Gospel must accompany these others in a common pilgrimage toward these others in a common pilgrimage toward the ultimate goal, in relentless quest for the Absolute, and that thus they are to be sensitively attuned to the work of the Spirit in the resounding symphony of Asian communion.<sup>1</sup> The Asian bishops then were very patient and prophetic talking about having to listen to the Spirit, about accompaniment and discerning the Spirit at work in Asia today. What is the Spirit telling us, reading the signs of the times.

I have written extensively about the FABC, starting with my very first FABC paper in the year 2000. It remains one of the major works ever written on the theological methodology of the FABC and is available in Gregorian or

**“ I have written extensively about the FABC, starting with my very first FABC paper in the year 2000. It remains one of the major works ever written on the theological methodology of the FABC and is available in Gregorian or FABC Papers number 108. ”**

FABC Papers number 108. I have also written a book titled “Christian Mission Among the Peoples of Asia,” where I used the FABC’s approach to mission to articulate a mission theology and practices for Asia. This book has been recognized as one of the 15 books in Mission Studies by Orbis and the IBMR. These are sources you

can refer to if you’re interested in my work related to the FABC. Additionally, I wrote another book to celebrate the FABC’s 50th anniversary, published by Fortress Press and ISPCK, marking the years 1970 to 2020.

Today’s presentation draws on some of that work, but it goes beyond the book since the task given to me was to look at the next 50 years and suggest what should be done. In the first part, let’s briefly look at Asia to ensure we are on the same page. My approach will be interdisciplinary,

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<sup>1</sup> FABC II, “The Church—A Community of Faith in Asia, art. 8.2, Bangkok, 1982, in Rosales and Arevalo 1992, 320.

combining theology, mythology, and sociology. We will also consider sociological data, as too often, theology and mission are uninformed by such data. This data reveals aspects we may not have previously noticed.

So, you know, I use the data from the Pew Forum. When we look at the Asia over 100 years, the Christian population of Asia has grown. We know that the Christian population of Asia is also very young compared to

“**By the year 2050, based on current projections, China will have the largest number of Evangelical Christians, surpassing the United States and North America.**”

Europe and North America, as you can see here. If you look at countries with Asian populations, such as China, India, and Indonesia, they have a huge number of people. By the year 2050, based on current projections, China will have the largest number

of Evangelical Christians, surpassing the United States and North America. Bishop delegates, you have to take into account that this is a vibrant place, the center of mission where Christianity, especially Catholicism, is growing.

At the same time, we have talked about diversity. It's something hard to visualize, so I use charts from the Pew study. Asia has almost 60 percent of the world's population. You can see the number of Hindus, Buddhists, followers of folk religion, and other religions compared to Christianity. The FABC will always have to deal with this diversity in a manner that Latin American bishops or bishops from Europe or North America don't really have to deal with. This is part of our reality as the Church in Asia.

Another way of looking at it is comparing Africa, Europe, North America, and Latin America, where Christianity is the majority. They don't have to think about diversity in the same way. They can focus on issues like the environment, ecology, and indigenous matters because they can take for granted that Christianity will always be the majority. In Asia, we cannot run away from diversity, with such a tiny population of Christians and so many adherents of other religions.

When we look at Catholics in Asia in 1910 and 2010, the Catholic population has also grown significantly compared to elsewhere, but it

remains very small as a share of the total population of the continent, as you can see in this chart.

Now, I've identified the following eight points that we need to look at in the contemporary context of Asia, which summarize what other presenters have already talked about. These are things that we always must deal with as the Church in Asia.

1. High population growth + youth population equals 2/3 of world's population
2. Massive poverty – wealth gap, imbalance in wealth distribution
3. Environmental Degradation from overexploitation of natural resources
4. Immense migration (as a result of 1, 2 & 3) above) that results in the Asian peoples on the move, bringing their religions and cultures with them in a transnational and global reality.
5. High diversity & pluralism – diverse cultures with different worldviews and many religions that continue to be influential and growing.
6. Multiple belongings, hybridities, and intersectional identities arising from intercultural and interfaith families across Asia.
7. Devotional and popular ritual practices that are shaped by subaltern masses living out their faith in hybridized forms that synthesize fold and popular identity markers with the Gospel message.
8. Religious violence – challenges of ethnocentrism, religious exclusivism, communism, nationalism in many parts of Asia.

### Key Characteristics of Asian Catholicism

1. Except for the Philippines and Timor-Leste, Asian Catholics comprise a minority community facing all the challenges of the majority-minority power dynamics.
2. The challenges of young adults and massive migration specially in the face of social, economic, political, and environmental forces and pressures.
3. Intersection between faith, culture, and ethnicity
4. Importance of popular piety and devotions
5. Ongoing reality of violence, martyrdom and persecution
6. Quest for dialogue in a pluralistic Asia.

These are some of the ideas that I also presented regarding intersectionality and other topics when talking about Asian Catholicism.

It's not just a secular idea or intersectionality that sociologists in the U.S. and elsewhere have been talking about. Our Latino colleagues in the United States, when talking about *theologia en conjunto*, in response to *Lo cotidiano*<sup>2</sup> the daily lived-experiences. It's not just Latin American theologies, but a kind of theologizing *en conjunto* as Latinos in the United States.

The challenges of Migration in Postcolonial Asia. Top emigration countries (2010):<sup>3</sup> 1.) Mexico—11.9 million; 2) India—11.4 million; 3) Russian Federation – 11.1 million; 4) China – 8.3 million; 5) Ukraine – 6.6 million; 6) Bangladesh – 5.4 million; 7) Pakistan – 4.7 million; 8) United Kingdom – 4.7 million; 9) Philippines—4.3 million; and 10) Turkey – 4.3 million.

Now, let's start with the first point, migration. To visualize it, if we look at the World Bank data, five of the top 10 sending countries are in Asia: India, China, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and the Philippines. When people migrate, they bring their religion along with them. For example, in the Arab Peninsula and Persian Gulf states, we often think of it as a region of Islam, but there are 2.5 million Catholics. This is how migration and religion intersect in the region.

When we look at it visually, it's mind-blowing. The largest Catholic parish is not in Europe or the United States, but in Dubai, specifically St. Mary's Church in the UAE. They have over 300,000 parishioners officially, unofficially around half a million. They have up to 40 masses in 12 languages, with over 80,000 hosts distributed weekly in three days because Friday to Sunday is a holiday, accommodating the Muslims' holidays as well.

To give you an idea of the size of the Filipino community, the Simbang Gabi is a significant event. It's like the *posadas* in Latin America, a series of novena Masses in the last week of Advent leading up to Christmas. In 2014, there were over 14,000 Filipinos attending, and the church couldn't accommodate everyone. They had to hold the Simbang Gabi in the car park. This shows the reality of migration and how it affects the Catholic community.

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<sup>2</sup> See: Orlando O. Espin, Carmen Nanko-Fernandez, Gary Rieber-Estrella, Jean-Pierre Ruiz, Neomi De Anda, etc.

<sup>3</sup> World Bank, *Migration and Remittances Factbook*, 2011, p. 3.

Migration is not just about the abstract issues of trafficking, abuse, and exploitation. We also need to empower migrants to witness their faith in the places they now call home, even in the heart of the Muslim world. When you see 14,000 people attending Simbang Gabi every night, it's a vibrant expression of faith. While we can discuss migration in terms of trafficking children, women, abuse, exploitation, but at the same time, we talk about Christian witnessing in the heart of the Muslim world.

My colleague, Professor Catherine Gomez, a Singaporean Eurasian Catholic, and I conducted fieldwork to study migrants. In understanding the challenges of transient migrants,<sup>4</sup> we identified the following categories: 1) transient migrants; 2) transient migration; and 3) transient mobility. We often think of migrants as making a permanent move, such as refugees or those who are exploited and abused. However, there is also a silent majority of educated and professional, migrants who are transient. They may study in one country, work in another for several years, and retire in

**“They are the prime drivers of world Christianity globally. These transient migrants include professionals like engineers, doctors, nurses, teachers, IT professionals, and international students.”**

yet another country. They are the prime drivers of world Christianity globally. These transient migrants include professionals like engineers, doctors, nurses, teachers, IT professionals, and international students. They are educated and middle class or above, and they play a

significant role in shaping world Christianity.

The results of our study have been published. The site we studied in Singapore is published in *Kritika Kultura*, a journal published by Ateneo. The site in the Philippines is published in a book. In our study, we interviewed about 88 respondents in Singapore. The Christian faith featured

<sup>4</sup> Gomes, Catherine and Jonathan Tan, “Christianity as a Culture of Mobility: A Case Study of Asian Transient Migrants in Singapore,” *Kritika Kultura* 25 (2015): 215-244.; “Christianity: A Culture of Mobility” in Catherine Gomes, *Transient Mobility and Middle Class Identity and Migration in Australia and Singapore*, 185-208. Singapore: Palgrave McMillan, 2017.

prominently in the answers of 88 respondents in Singapore, with more than one third, that is 30 out of 88 of the respondents identified as Christians. We did not initially ask them about religion, but we wanted to see what they would say without us prompting them. Many of them identified as Christians, and we wanted to understand how Christianity helped them. What we found is quite different from what we often hear from church parish priests. These transient migrants often don't fit in with the local population and turn to Christianity as a means of coping. This demographic is significant, including professional IT workers and others. In Singapore, for example, one-third of the residents are transient migrants. If you take out the IT professionals from India, China, and elsewhere, the Singapore economy would collapse. This shows the importance of understanding the experiences of these migrants.

The results revealed that Asian foreign talent transient migrants who identified themselves as Christian turn to Christianity as a way of coping with everyday life in transience. On one level, the Christian groups they join allow them to create a sense of community while being away from the home nation. This sense of community, however, is with other Asian foreign transient migrants, rather than with locals, such as sharing the same nationality and ethnicity dominate. The results of the study contribute to the ongoing intersecting discussions on the (transient) migration experience, community and Christianity.

One interesting finding was that when we interviewed them, we discovered that they tended to hang out with other transient migrants rather than with the locals. They would go to church for Mass, but they formed their own groups among themselves. Additionally, online communities play a crucial role for transient migrants. Even before the pandemic and live streaming, migration and online communities have fascinated sociologists.

Transient Migrants and Online Communities.<sup>5</sup> Eight Filipino Catholic transient migrants. Four in Saudi Arabia who are a graphic artist, caregiver, mechanic, and engineer. Four in the UAE who are an electrical engineer, company administrator, teacher, and machine operation. The

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<sup>5</sup> Agnes M. Brazal and Randy Odchigue (2016) "Cyberchurch and Filipino Migrants in the Middle East" in *Church in an Age of Global Migration: A Moving Body*, eds. Susanna Snyder, Joshua Ralston, and Agnes M. Brazal, 187-200. New York: Palgrave Mcmillan.

study shows indicates the “rise of online faith communities of Filipino Catholics built on Facebook, WhatsApp, Youtube videos, livestreaming of Sunday Eucharist and other liturgies, online discussion groups, in the absence of churches and clergy. How do they form their own community?”

An Indonesian information technology in Singapore speaks of nourishing his Christian faith through online downloads and Christian Youtube channels featuring pastors and preachers (Gomes and Tan 2015, 226). Transient Christian identity is often nourished and maintained by social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, as well as messaging apps such as Weibo, QQ, Renren, and WeChat, all of which are popular with transient migrants from mainland China, as well as WhatsApp and Line for transient migrants from other parts of Asia (Gomes and Tan 2017, 190). Since the 2020s – emergent new religious communities online on Tiktok, Discord, and Steam.

In the past, the grounded geography of Christianity meant that the institutional church is structured upon communities of faith meeting in physical buildings that are built on specific geographical regions. The growth of Asian Christian transient migrant communities poses new challenges and opportunities for the FABC. Many transient migrants often

**“Many transient migrants often turn to Christian, as well as virtual and online communities of faith in their quest for finding meaning, networking, and constructing their own faith and social identities.”**

turn to Christian, as well as virtual and online communities of faith in their quest for finding meaning, networking, and constructing their own faith and social identities. Online communities of faith nourish the resilience of these transient migrants in the face of the many challenges of living in transience.

These online communities are significant for missiology and ecclesiology. Our ecclesiology is often constructed based on grounded geography, with physical buildings in geographical regions like parishes and dioceses. However, online communities are real for migrants. They provide a sense of solidarity and belonging in the liminal space of being a migrant.

It is crucial for the Church to accompany migrants where they are, including online spaces. This is especially important in places like Saudi Arabia, where building churches is not legally allowed. Online communities become a way for migrants to connect and practice their faith.

In Saudi Arabia, where there are no churches or priests, the 1.5 million Catholics find ways to navigate the restrictions of no churches and no priests. You cannot build a church in Saudi Arabia. These online communities provide support and a sense of community for them. Because you cannot enter as a priest in Saudi Arabia without getting caught, the option for transient migrants is to create an online church or virtual community that

“**These online communities provide support and a sense of community for them. Because you cannot enter as a priest in Saudi Arabia without getting caught, the option for transient migrants is to create an online church or virtual community that goes beyond the reach of Saudi law.**”

goes beyond the reach of Saudi law. The study by Agnes Brazal and a colleague on eight Filipino transient migrants in the Persian Gulf highlights the absence of physical churches in such regions. In this context, transient migrants experience their own liminality and rely on coping mechanisms.

While transience may be *lo cotidiano* for transient migrants, it is not still an experience in uprootedness, loneliness, and a yearning for home. Historically, as a universal religion that spread throughout the world because of transnational movements, Christianity plays an important role in helping transient migrants make sense of themselves and their faith experiences in strange and unfamiliar settings (Gomes & Tan 2015, 233-234). When we talk about being transient, it is not necessarily a positive experience. It entails feelings of uprootedness, loneliness, and a yearning for home. Even if someone is earning a significant income as an IT professional, they can still experience this loneliness. This is where Christianity, as argued in our

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<sup>6</sup> See Jonathan Y. Tan, “Ministry Meets Social Networking: Connecting with the Digital Natives.” *New Theology Review* 22, no. 4 (2009): 36-44. Reprinted in *SEDOS Bulletin* 45 Nos. 9/10 (2013): 204-210.

study, plays a crucial role.

It's something that I believe both the FABC and local bishops, clergy, and dioceses need to address. The issue of assimilation also comes into play. In sociology, there is often a discussion about whether migrants should assimilate, such as speaking the local language instead of their native language. This also applies to the Church. Do we expect these transient migrants to assimilate into local parishes, or should they form their own communities? This tension exists not only in secular states but also within the Church. I have written about online communities as early as 2009.

Yet just because transient migrants embrace Christianity and make Christianity a part of their identity, it does not necessarily signal their assimilation into the broader host society or acceptance by their fellow Christians in their host society. Taking Christian transient migrants in Singapore as an example, by embracing Christianity on their own terms, these transient migrants “have consciously forces religious identities in opposition to the discrimination they have encountered” despite their shared Christian faith with Singaporean Christian because they have “created institutions that reflect their concerns and cater to their own needs.”<sup>7</sup>

Intersection between Faith, Culture and Ethnicity. Here are some of the practices of the intersection between faith, culture, and ethnicity. First, the ancestor veneration ritual, lunar new year Mass (2007) at St. Mary's Cathedral, San Francisco presided by Bishop Ignatius C. Wang, Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of San Francisco. Another is the Diwali (Deepavali) Mass in India at the Institute mater Dei (CRWI) in Santa Monica, Goa, India. Also, the Indian Rite Mass at the NBCLC 42nd Anniversary celebration, 6 February 2009. It is noteworthy to mention also the Misa ng Sambayanang Pilipino in 2010 at St. Vincent School of Theology, Quezon City. The Misa ng Sambayanang Pilipino was finally approved last year after such a long time. Popular piety and devotion play a

**“ Popular piety and devotion play a significant role in Asian Catholicism. It goes beyond just attending Mass or going to church. ”**

<sup>7</sup>Gomes & Tan 2015, 234.

significant role in Asian Catholicism. It goes beyond just attending Mass or going to church. Popular devotions hold immense importance in places like the Philippines, India, Vietnam, and Sri Lanka.

Importance of Popular Piety & Devotions. Informal home-based daily or weekly rituals. Community's identity formation and maintenance.

Popular devotions play an important role in shaping and maintaining ethnic culture and identity. When Asian Catholics participate in popular devotional services, they are not only nurturing their faith and spiritual life, but also asserting their religious, ethnic, cultural, and transnational identities simultaneously.<sup>8</sup> When we talk about Asian Catholics, it is not just the mass, the importance of popular devotion is very strong.

“**Popular devotions play an important role in shaping and maintaining ethnic culture and identity.**”

Some examples. Indian popular piety: Feast of Our Lady of Good Health, Velankanni, India (August 29 to September 8). Millions of Catholic, Hindu, and Muslim pilgrims gather in a liminal space. Hybridization of ritual practices, e.g. bathing in the sea, shaving one's head, walking on knees, rolling in the shrine. This is the largest Marian pilgrimage. In Sri Lanka, we have the Shrine of Our Lady of Madhu. It is very important because it was a place of refuge during the long running civil war. It was also an important source of consolation for the Sri Lanka Tamil Catholics. For the Filipinos, they have the Santo Niño, the Black Nazarene, Simbang Gabi, Our Lady of Antipolo and others. For the Vietnamese, they have the Our Lady of La Vang, the Marian Days and others.

Ongoing Reality of Martyrdom. We are aware of the Martyrs of Nagasaki, namely St. Paul & Companions, martyrs of Korea, China, the 117 Vietnamese Martyrs, but also the ongoing martyrs in Orissa, India. Martyrdom is also a question of justice with the victims of martyrdom and violence. Also, in Sri Lanka where the Tamils, where the Shrine of the Our Lady of Madhu (20 Nov. 1999) was bombed due to the fight between the

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<sup>8</sup> See Jonathan Y. Tan, “Asian American Marian Devotions as Ritual Practice.” *New Theology Review* 23 No. 3 (2010): 35-44.

Tamil Rebels and the Sri Lankan Army.

Importance of Dialogue in pluralistic Asia. The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) core approach is the threefold dialogue with Asia's diverse (1) cultures, (2) religions, and (3) the poor and the marginalized. The FABC's theological approach is an intersectional theological approach that is rooted in and seeks to respond to the contemporary existential realities of Asian Christians as vibrant minority communities of faith amidst their fellow neighbours who belong to the great religions of Asia,

**“The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) core approach is the threefold dialogue with Asia's diverse (1) cultures, (2) religions, and (3) the poor and the marginalized.”**

whose lives are shaped and impacted by the intersecting forces of cultures, religions, and subaltern socio-economic realities. Hence, the FABC's theologizing may be defined as critical and pragmatic intersectional theologizing which: 1) embraces the diversity

and pluralism of postcolonial Asia, 2) seeks to serve life – young and old, women and men, 3) promotes harmony among Asians across religious, ethnic-cultural, and socio-economic classes in response to the hatred and violence that is destroying the social, cultural, and religious fabric of many parts of postcolonial Asia, 4) advocates for harmony with environment and ecology, 5) integrates the intersecting facets of intercultural, interreligious, and liberationist dimensions in its theological reflections.

Dialogue is an important aspect that needs continuous attention. It serves as a reminder for us to always discuss and address these matters. The following are some of the Five Points that I discuss in my book, focusing on how the FABC's intersectional theologizing addresses these issues. One significant point that I would like to highlight before concluding my presentation is the importance of harmony with the environment and ecology. This is often overlooked in discussions about the FABC, but it has always been a topic of concern for them.

Let's begin with the Chinese character for harmony 和. The left side represents the rise of the green stalk, while the right side depicts a mouse symbolizing the grain, plant and the environment, with the mouth representing humans. This image beautifully illustrates the concept of

harmony between nature and humans, the balance of the ecosystem. It is crucial to recognize that the care for the environment and the theology of harmony are intrinsically linked, and this has been emphasized by Asian bishops since the 1980s and 1990s. According to FABC, “harmony and peace call for respect for the earth. She is the mother of whose dust we are made and to whose womb we shall all return. The usurpation of the fruit of the earth by some and deprivation of others of the same results in the rupture of harmony among peoples (BIRA IV11).<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, it says that “respect for nature and compassion for all living things are ingrained in the Asian religions and cultural traditions. Today in Asia owing to the many factors, the natural environment with which man should be in harmony is being wantonly destroyed through deforestation, industrial pollution, depositing of nuclear wastes, etc. Christian life and witness should manifest greater sensitivity to nature and to all sentiments. Hence, we recommend that Christians join forces and cooperate with all movements of followers of other religions and secular groups engaged in maintaining balance and harmony in our ecosystem and protecting nature and its riches from destruction.”<sup>10</sup>

A good summary of the theology of harmony can be found in BIRA IV/12, 34, where it says that believers in any place are called to come together in silence and love before creation to accept the God-given order and harmony of nature, to counteract the forces of exploitation and ruin.

**“Harmony with nature brings harmony of hearts and harmony in human relationships.”**

Harmony with nature brings harmony of hearts and harmony in human relationships” (Hua Hin, 1991).<sup>11</sup> The Asian Christian Perspectives of Harmony makes this point too. “Harmony with nature requires

humans to reject an anthropocentric view of the universe, and to respect all of creation as vestigial Dei. This respect generates a harmony which reflects God’s providential love for his creatures. Humanity is called to discover in

<sup>9</sup> Rosales and Arevalo 1992, 320.

<sup>10</sup> (BIRA IV/11, Recommendation 2) (Sukabumi, 1988), Rosales and Arevalo 1992, 323.

<sup>11</sup> Rosales and Arevalo 1992, 331.

the universe God's very presence (Ps. 104, 109), and to cocreate with him, making the earth more fruitful" (5.1.1.3).<sup>12</sup>

And finally, the FABC VI Plenary Assembly asserts that "ecology is once again brought to our pastoral attention. And urgently so, since we see in the countries of Asia the continuing and unabated destruction of our environment... Life, especially in a third world setting, is sacrificed at the altar of short-term economic gains. The Lord, the Giver of Life, calls our discipleship in Asia into a question on the time bomb issue of ecology. Choosing life requires our discipleship to discern and act with other faiths and groups against the forces of ecological destruction" (15.4) (Manila, 1995).<sup>13</sup>

In Asian Christian perspectives, harmony with nature and harmony in human relationships are interconnected. One cannot be achieved without the other. It is important to expand our understanding of harmony with nature. Although this topic seemed to have been forgotten for some time, it is crucial for us, as Asians to discuss this again and ask ourselves our contribution to the global Church and embrace this spirit of catholicity. Thank you



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<sup>12</sup> Eilers 1996, 287.

<sup>13</sup> Eilers 1997, 11.



**Emerging Realities in the Church of Asia**  
*Summary of Small Group Conversations (Week 2)*

**FABC** GENERAL CONFERENCE



**EMERGING REALITIES  
AND THE CHURCH IN ASIA**

**DAY 6  
OCTOBER 22, 2022**

## PRESS NOTE

### 22ND OCTOBER 2022

22nd October 2022, the sixth day of the ‘Emerging Realities’ segment of the FABC General Conference began with the celebration of the Eucharist by H.E. Ignatius Cardinal Suharyo Hardjoatmodjo. H.E. Oswald Cardinal Gracias, the President of the day, led the gathered representatives in the Adsumus, and the morning prayer, hosted by the country of Indonesia, was led by the video prepared by Sr. Elisabeth Sukamdo OP, Chairwoman of the Women Religious.

The session began with Cardinal Gracias explaining the process and group discussions for the day, which were focused on the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the pastoral priorities of the Church in Asia.

Dr. Naoko Murayama, Regional Coordinator of East Asia and Oceania of the Migrants and Refugees Section of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, speaking about the refugee crisis, suggested ways by which the representatives could respond, asking them to learn, listen, support and collaborate.

Plenary discussions presided over by H.E. Cardinal Gracias followed, based on the common data collected from the group discussions, which included courage as a minority, active listening, openness, harmony, dialogue and reconciliation, a united Church, the Asian-ness of the Church, ongoing formation, focus on the young people, ecology, migration, witnessing and spiritual formation, and the poor.

Prof. Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, founder and Director Emeritus of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK), speaking on the topic, ‘The Climate Emergency: Risks and Responses’, provided comprehensive insights on the documentation of climate change, the global decisions taken, how climate change is measured, and its effects. Prof. Schellnhuber also highlighted a tentative timeline during which change was still possible, and concrete measures that could be taken in response.

Mons. Indunil J Kodithuwakku K, secretary of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue, spoke on the importance of creating open dialogue, especially in a continent as diverse as Asia, followed by a continuation of the plenary discussions.

The evening concluded with a Holy Hour, led by Bishop Winston S. Fernando SSS of Badulla.





## **Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development**

Ms. Naoko Maruyama

*Regional Coordinator of East Asia and Oceania*

*Migrants and Refugees Section*

*Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development*

I am Naoko Maruyama and for those that I have not yet had the pleasure of meeting, I am the regional coordinator for Asia and Oceania of the Migrants and Refugees Section, which is part of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development of the Vatican. It is a very lengthy title; I apologize for that. I just have a few points here just to talk about. In Asia, there is not a single country in Asia that is not affected by climate change or issues surrounding human mobility.

In Asia, we have countries that are sending, receiving transit and origin-countries and so there are migrants, refugees, internally displaced persons, stateless persons and victims of human trafficking that are all present in Asia, and whose vulnerabilities are even further exacerbated by climate change issues.

Asia is the most vulnerable region in the world. We have heard this reality over the week from the presentations of experts. Now that we have this information and knowledge, we have to ask: what can we do as bishops in Asia to make a change, to make an impact, to address these issues and to help these people?

I just wanted to give a few points for your considerations. First, in order to know how to respond to a problem, I think that we must begin first by understanding what the problem is and what does it entail. We need to educate ourselves. Start with a general education. Study the different types of migration, their root causes. What is human trafficking? What is the difference between refugees and displaced persons, internally displaced and stateless persons? Study the existing materials and resources that are out there and available to us. From there, learn about what are the most prominent issues present in your local contexts. Is your country mostly affected by natural disasters? Which causes the displacement of persons? Are there many people leaving your countries for work or for studies?

**“First, in order to know how to respond to a problem, I think that we must begin first by understanding what the problem is and what does it entail.”**

**“You have to know too who are the existing and active actors in your local church?”**

Are there many people coming into your countries for the same reasons? Study also the existing church documents and pastoral guidelines from the migrants and refugee’s section. I can say that we have produced so far five pastoral orientations that serve as guidelines for the church on how to respond to these issues. Then also learn about what is the work of the local church in your country. What are they doing already. You have to know too who are the existing and active actors in your local church?

Do you have an Episcopal Commission or Migrant Commission, or a migrant desk? Who are active pastoral workers? Are there religious congregations that are working on these issues? Are there laypeople, lay experts that are already doing this? Are there Catholic organizations such as Caritas or ICMC that are already working and present in your local contexts?

Second is listen. We are here practicing synodality and listening is the key towards a synodal church. You should listen to the active actors who are already present in your local churches and see how they need support from you as bishops.

Third is to support and collaborate. Find out how you as a bishop and a leader of your local church can support the already existing work that your local church is doing and collaborate with them, with your brother bishops, and other organizations, including the government in your region.

To summarize, the key points are to learn, to listen, to support, and to collaborate. I know that these points seem to be another enormous task for our bishops since you already have full of responsibilities and full of work. But the great thing is that you do not have to do this alone. I can confidently

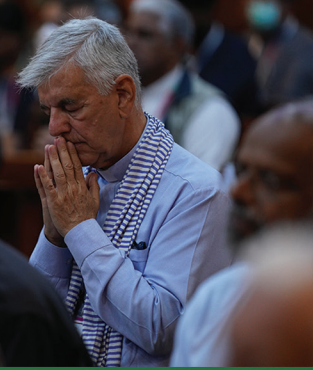
**“I know that these points seem to be another enormous task for our bishops since you already have full of responsibilities and full of work. But the great thing is that you do not have to do this alone.”**

say that every country here present and even in Asia has at least one migrant commission, a desk, a ministry, a congregation, or a Catholic NGO, such as CARITAS or ICMC that is present, active and currently working in your countries. I urge you all please to learn, to listen, and to really support the work of the church there. There are so many amazing initiatives, so much work that are already being done. And all you need to do is to just connect with them.

I would like to assure you too that the Migrants and Refugees

Section is here to help facilitate that link to help you collaborate. So please go out and see and listen to what is already existing so that we can all work together to help all of the most vulnerable. Thank you very much.







**WORLD MISSION SUNDAY  
EUCARIST AND VIRTUAL VISITS  
TO PARISHES IN ASIA**

**OCTOBER 23, 2022**

**PRESS NOTE**  
23RD OCTOBER 2022

## **HOLY EUCHARIST AND PARISH VISITS**

Sunday, 23rd October, of the FABC General Conference began with the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, presided over by H.E. Oswald Cardinal Gracias, and con-celebrated by Archbishop Cabrejos Vidarte, Archbishop Ledesma, Archbishop Kikuchi and Msgr Josef Sayer.

On the occasion of Mission Sunday, H.E. Cardinal Gracias reminded the congregation that Mission is the essence of the Church, that, taking the example of the tax collector and the pharisee, ‘we must be God-centered, and not I-centered.’ He stressed, ‘our mission is not a numbers game, but to make Jesus real in the world’, highlighting the many forms of evangelisation at work. Calling the youth, the women, the marginalized to be the ‘first collaborators’ of the Church, and asking the representatives to listen to the Holy Spirit’s guidance, H.E. Cardinal Gracias concluded, ‘Let us make Asia, by our work, our life, and our words, a better Asia.’

In the morning, the representatives participated in virtual ‘Parish Visits’, with Churches from across Asia, including parishes from Mumbai - India, Dhaka - Bangladesh, Seoul - Korea, Lahore - Pakistan, Yogyakarta - Indonesia, Patheingyi - Myanmar, Sabah - Malaysia, Darkhan - Mongolia, and parishes from Taiwan, Brunei, Laos, Sri Lanka, Kazakhstan and the Philippines.

Representatives were divided into groups, with each group ‘visiting’ two parishes. The visit began with an introduction and video from the parish, followed by a conversation with the gathered delegates. Delegates spoke to the parish representatives about culture, parish life, daily lives of the Catholic population, celebrations of feasts and shared common joys and struggles. The visit ended with a final blessing for the parishes by the FABC representatives.

## Virtual Visits to Parishes in Asia

1. Objective: On Mission Sunday, an essential part of the FABC General Conference is the virtual parish visitation of the bishops to the different parishes in Asia “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.”
2. Dynamics of the parish virtual visit: The visit comprises two main parts: First, the video presentation of the parishes; and second, the dialogue between the parish and the bishops.
  - a. The video Presentation contains the following: 1) The basic information about the parish, the community or diocese, 2) The Eucharistic community, which features the unique cultural practices integrated in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, 3) Features unique inculturated devotional practices, 4) snippets of parish organizational activities and programs and their contribution to the life of the parish, 5) Features pastoral activities in the wider community, which are conducted outside the parish compound, 6) presentation of the key issues and challenges faced by the parish, and 7) Finally, the pastoral programs that address the issues and challenges.
  - b. Dialogue with the bishops: The conversation is a platform for the bishops to deepen their understanding of the parish life in various context, listen to the aspirations of the people of Asia, and discern the message of the Holy Spirit. The parish representatives include but not limited to the following: Parish Priest, Leaders of the Parish Pastoral Council, A Woman representative, A Youth representative.

The parish virtual visit ends with the blessing of the bishops to the parishioners.

3. The parish virtual visit utilized the Virtual Environment Platform (VEP) prepared and arranged by Sir Edwin Lopez and Alex Lopez of EWTN in collaboration with Fr. Nigel Barrett and Mr. Brinston Carvalho, FABC 50 Media Center.
4. The Parishes – please connect to the link to view the parish presentations.



	Country	Parishes and Video Link
Room 1	<b>India</b>	<b>Our Lady of Lourdes Parish – MaladWest</b> <i>Archdiocese of Bombay</i> Parish Priest: Fr. Michael Pinto Video link: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l_c18iR3zcs">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l_c18iR3zcs</a>
	<b>Taiwan</b>	<b>Holy Family Church, Taipei</b> Parish Priest: Fr. John Jao Chih-ch'eng, SJ Asst. Parish Priest: Fr. Vincentius Haryanto SJ <i>Link:</i> <a href="https://drive.google.com/file/d/1OIOTopvLbDwRmCRhu93jmpBKfuFE-NBY/view">https://drive.google.com/file/d/1OIOTopvLbDwRmCRhu93jmpBKfuFE-NBY/view</a>
Room 2	<b>Bangladesh</b>	<b>Holy Rosary Church-Tejgaon, Dhaka</b> Parish Priest: Fr. Subroto Boniface Gomes Video link: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Gjwi--WXPc">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Gjwi--WXPc</a>
	<b>Korea</b>	<b>Gahoe-dong Catholic Church, Archdiocese of Seoul</b> Parish Priest: Rev. YOUN Jongkuk Mark Video link: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7rivUv12_MA">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7rivUv12_MA</a>
Room 3	<b>Pakistan</b>	<b>Our Lady Queen of Angels Parish</b> Bhai Pheru, Phool Nagar, Archdiocese of Lahore, Parish Name: Rev. Fr. Adnan Kashif OFM Cap. Video link: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vXgo26n1Qlo">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vXgo26n1Qlo</a>
	<b>Myanmar</b>	<b>St. Peter's Cathedral Parish</b> Pathein Diocese in the Region of Ayeyarwaddy <i>Parish Priest:</i> Fr. Felix Soe Win Msgr. Henry Eikhlein <i>Diocesan Administrator</i> <i>Pathein Diocese</i> Video link: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t2-stGnrwZ4">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t2-stGnrwZ4</a>
Room 4	<b>Sri Lanka</b>	<b>St. James Church, Gurunagar's Parish</b> Diocese of Jaffna, Sri Lanka Rev. Fr. Arulanand Yavis - Parish Priest Rev. Fr. James Nathan -. Co-Pastor Video link: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QYaNuugq-Zo">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QYaNuugq-Zo</a>
	<b>Indonesia</b>	<b>Paroki Hati Kudus Tuhan Yesus</b> <i>(Sacred Heart of Jesus) –</i> <i>Ganjuran - Yogyakarta -Indonesia</i> Parish Priest: RD. Raymundus Sugihartanto, Video link: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hR5pZKez9Vc">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hR5pZKez9Vc</a>
Room 5	<b>Brunei</b>	<b>Church of Our Lady of Immaculate Conception</b> Seria, Brunei Darussalam Parish Priest: Fr. Robert Leong Video link: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VWca779UMN8">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VWca779UMN8</a>
	<b>Laos</b>	<b>St. Luke Parish</b> <b>Apostolic Vicariate of Pakse</b> Parish Priest: Rev. Fr. Anthony Adun Hongsaphong Assistant Parish Priests: Rev. Fr. Thomas Kandavong Douangmany I.V.Dei , and Rev. Fr. Vincen Vu Huong Lac, C.Ss.R Video link: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ngpoKznZ3rg">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ngpoKznZ3rg</a>
Room 6	<b>Malaysia</b>	<b>St Michael Parish, Penampang, Sabah</b> Parish Priest: Rev. Fr. Wilfred Atin Video link: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2qDV2T4o75s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2qDV2T4o75s</a>
	<b>Mongolia</b>	<b>Mary Auxilium Parish in Darkhan, northern Mongolia.</b> Parish Priest: Rev. Fr. Andrew Tin Trung Nguyen, SDB Video link: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vyDkYwDiUgk">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vyDkYwDiUgk</a>
Room 7	<b>Kazakhstan</b>	<b>Our Lady of All Nations Church</b> <b>Astana</b> Parish Priest: Fr. Pawel Blok O.F.M. Conv. Video link: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vNQ7nXN_ubo">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vNQ7nXN_ubo</a>
	<b>Philippines</b>	<b>St. Roque Parish</b> Archdiocese of Cebu Parish Priest: Fr. Victor Carmelo Diola Video link: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fu8CqKdktLQ">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fu8CqKdktLQ</a>

# INDIA



# TAIWAN



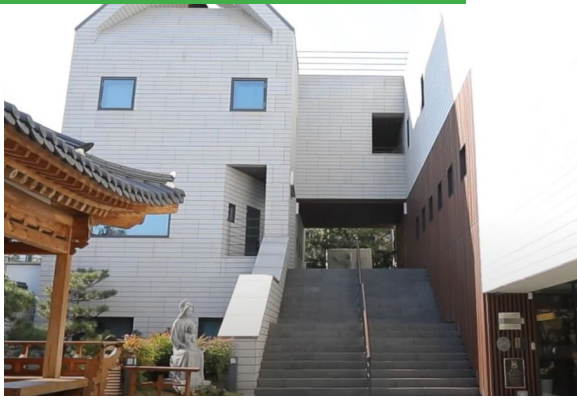
**BANGLADESH**



**Holy Rosary Church-Tejgaon**  
*A symbol of Christian Tradition & Service*



KOREA



FABC Virtual Parish Visit

# Gahoedong Parish in Seoul, Korea



PAKISTAN

# Visit to Our Lady Queen of Angels

Multan Road Bhai Pheru, Punjab. (Archdioceses of Lahore)



# MYANMAR



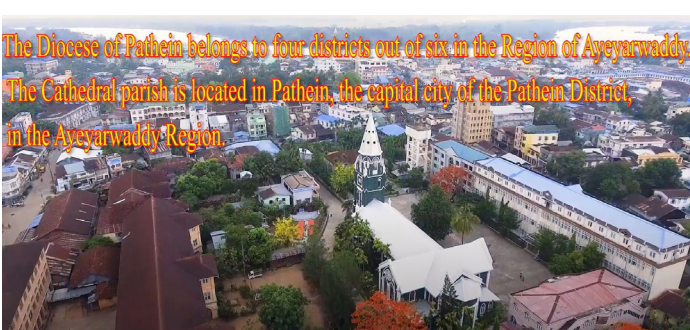
## VIRTUAL PARISH VISIT IN ASIA: MYANMAR (St. Peter's Cathedral Parish of Patheingyi Diocese in the Region of Ayeyarwaddy)



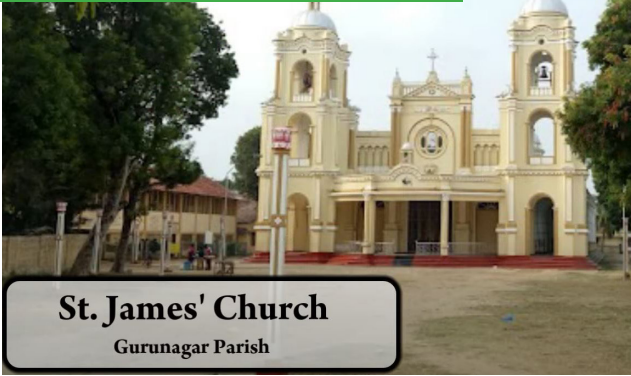
St. Peter's Cathedral parish is one out of thirty-six parishes in the Patheingyi (Formerly Bassein) diocese which consists of 63,373 Catholics, 106 priests inside and outside, 53 men and 130 women religious, and 103 catechists in the Region of Ayeyarwaddy where 6,871,826 civil population with multi-religions and multi-cultures exist.



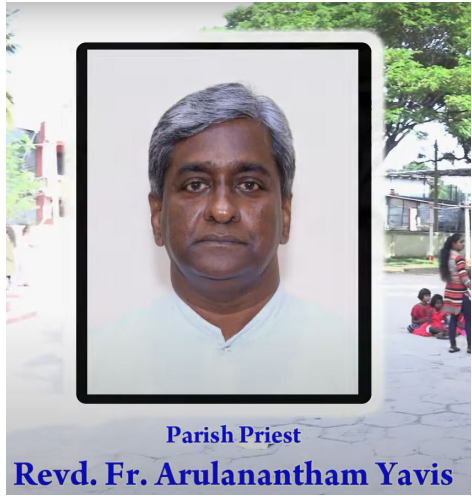
The Diocese of Patheingyi belongs to four districts out of six in the Region of Ayeyarwaddy. The Cathedral parish is located in Patheingyi, the capital city of the Patheingyi District, in the Ayeyarwaddy Region.



# SRI LANKA



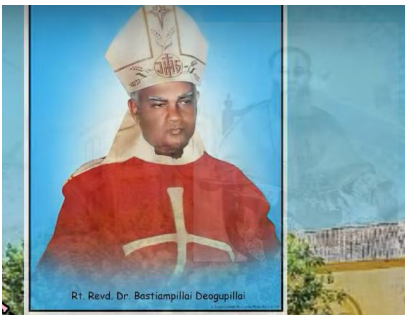
**St. James' Church**  
Gurunagar Parish



Parish Priest  
**Rev. Fr. Arulanantham Yavis**



Rt. Rev. Dr. Jerome Emlavud Piliu



Rt. Rev. Dr. Bastiampillai Deogupillai



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# INDONESIA



# BRUNEI



## APOSTOLIC VICARIATE IN BRUNEI DARUSSALAM

Population: 430,000  
Catholic: 3%



No. of Catholics: 2000



No. Catholics: 10,000



No. of Catholics: 2000

Area: 5,270 sq km

## CLERGY IN THE APOSTOLIC VICARIATE IN BRUNEI DARUSSALAM

Fr. Arin Sugit  
Ordained 8/12/2008  
Current church:  
Our Lady of Assumption

Fr. Paul Shie  
Ordained 16/8/1999  
Current church:  
St. John's Church

1 Seminarian and  
1 FSIC sister under  
formation

Fr. Robert Leong  
Ordained 10/8/2003  
Current church:  
Immaculate Conception



# LAOS



Lao PDR had divided into 4 Apostolic Vicariate, with the number of over 50,000 Catholic believers, there are about 172 parishes across the country.

One priest has to take responsible for at least 4-6 villages.

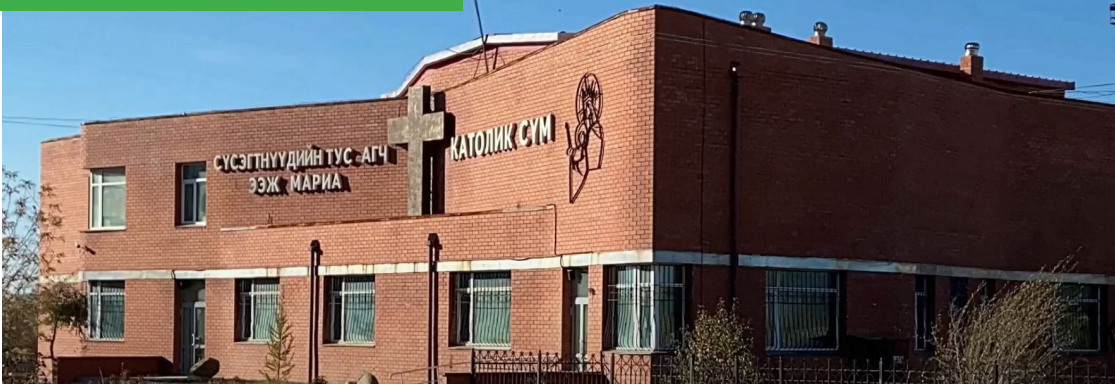


**MALAYSIA**

**ST MICHAEL'S PARISH PENAMPANG,  
SABAH, MALAYSIA**



# MONGOLIA



# KAZAKHSTAN



## Mother of All Nations Roman Catholic Church Astana, Kazakhstan



# PHILIPPINES















**DISCERNING NEW  
PATHWAYS FOR THE  
CHURCH IN ASIA**

**DAY 1  
OCTOBER 24, 2022**

## PRESS NOTE

### OCTOBER 24, 2022

Monday, 24th October, the first day of the segment ‘Envisaging New Pathways’ of the FABC General Conference began with the Holy Eucharist, celebrated by Bishop Joseph Đo Mnh Hùng of Phan Thiet, Vietnam. The President of the day, H.E. Charles Cardinal Maung Bo, led the representatives in the Adsumus, and the morning prayer, hosted by Myanmar, was led by the video prepared by Myanmar’s Fr. Dominic, Fr. Hubert, Fr. Paulinus and Sr. Catherine.

The day began with a video recap of the previous segment ‘Emerging Realities’.

Archbishop Héctor Miguel Cabrejos Vidarte OFM, President of the Conferencia Episcopal Peruana and of the Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano y Caribeño (CELAM), sharing an in-depth look into the experiences and history of CELAM, the effects of Vatican II and the Episcopal Conferences, added context to the development of the Church in Latin America and its part in ecclesial networks.

H.E. Oswald Cardinal Gracias gave an overview of how the week ahead and the sessions for the day would progress, and introduced resource-person Mr. Leslie D’Souza, who led the representatives in several sessions based on self-assessment and leadership in preparation for the days ahead.

“**Moving from the ecosystem where I am to the ecosystem of where I can be.**”

For the first session, Mr. D’Souza, reflecting on the theme ‘and they went a different way’, called the representatives to be ‘new-age magis’, who will forge a new path forward. Explaining the ‘Theory-U’ methodology - ‘moving from the ecosystem where I am to the ecosystem of where I can be’, Mr. D’Souza led a session on ‘presencing’; seeing, understanding, feeling, sensing, followed by an evocation activity.

The next session focused on the three divides in Asia; the ecological, social, spiritual divide between ‘self’ and ‘others’, the way of bridging them, and the levels and importance of listening. Mr D’Souza, underlining the root meaning of leadership, spoke about the need to develop an open mind, heart and will, and conducted a group-survey activity on listening.

The afternoon began with a journaling activity; with representatives answering questions about themselves, their habits and the systems they work in. Next was an empathetic walk, with representatives pairing up to listen to each other, while leaving assumptions and impressions behind. This was followed by a case clinic activity, where groups were handed case studies based on leadership and the levels of listening, to discuss and reflect on, a journaling activity based on the case study, and a sharing with the representatives as a whole.

**“The three divides in Asia; the ecological, social, spiritual divide between ‘self’ and ‘others’”**

The day concluded with the angelus, led by H.E. Cardinal Bo.





### **Fraternal Address**

**Archbishop Héctor Miguel Cabrejos Vidarte, O.F.M.**

*Archbishop of Trujillo, Peru*

*President of the Peruvian Episcopal Conference*

*President, Conferencias Generales del Episcopado Latinoamericano y Caribeño  
(CELAM)*

I deeply appreciate the fraternal gesture for inviting CELAM to be present on this occasion to discuss the present and future of the pilgrim Church in Asia. With great simplicity, I come to share the experiences of our performance in Latin America and the Caribbean. It is a pilgrimage that gathers a long history, which goes back even to colonial times, with the celebration of synods and councils.

In the middle of the last century, the fragmentation of ecclesial work in Latin America and the Caribbean, the weakness of communications and the need to share pastoral work in the Region began to be observed. Given this. Bishops Helder Camara (Brazil) and Manuel Larrain Errazuriz (Chile), enthusiastically fostered the idea of promoting episcopal and ecclesial coordination and support. This is how CELAM emerged in 1955.

CELAM was founded in the heat of the challenges and changes of the Church during that period, in light of the sands of time, and 10 years before the completion of the Second Vatican Council that marked the Church and is still in full force. And while the Second Vatican Council was taking place, several bishops from Latin America, along with other bishops and theologians of the time, promoted the “church of the poor” concept, affirmed by Saint John XXIII.

The creation of CELAM was motivated by the need to respond to times that required a prophetic voice of the Church around the Continent facing the social, cultural, and paradigmatic changes of a time that required

**“At the CELAM creation base were always the principles of communion, collegiality and ecclesiality.”**

of communion, collegiality and ecclesiality. The synodal perspective was there from the beginning since it was the only way to get together and interpret the new realities and look for new answers.

greater communication and reflection by pastors in such changing contexts. At the CELAM creation base were always the principles

For this reason, the General Conferences of the Episcopate of Latin America and the Caribbean had immense importance for the pastors and for the entire Church of pilgrims in the Region. Their arguments and conclusions have been references for the evangelizing work.

The first one, held in 1955, in Rio de Janeiro, and from when CELAM was founded, sought for pastors to reflect together on critical situations on the Continent and responses from faith, seeing the need to give life to a service organism to the Episcopal Conferences of the Continent regarding this task of communication, reflection and pastoral guidelines for action, this is how CELAM was created.

But from time to time, the need arose to hold General Conferences with the Bishops of the Region, so that together they could update analyzes and reflections in the light of faith, as well as continue to identify pastoral lines and strengthen formation. In this regard the Theological Institute for Latin America (ITEPAL) was created, which is now the Biblical Theological

Pastoral Center (CEBITEPAL), by bringing together in a single organization the three Schools that confirmed it: the Biblical, the theological and the social ministry.

The Medellin Conference of (1968) was a magnificent event for hosting the Second Vatican Council and the prospects for its creative application in the region, evidencing the necessary preferential option for the poor. Human promotion was emphasized as a consubstantial element of any evangelization process and growth in faith.

In 1979, was held the General Conference of Puebla, which followed Medellin, and reaffirms the preferential option for the poor, and elaborates important proposals for a comprehensive evangelization. In the Conference of Santo Domingo, in 1992, 500 years after evangelization began in the Continent, an important reflection is made on inculturation, and its great challenges for the new evangelization.

In 2007, the Aparecida Conference was held, and its conclusions are still being assimilated and we are making efforts to put into practice. It raises, in the face of the Change of Epoch that it detects the great challenge of the Continental Mission, but not as a “conventional mission”, but as a Permanent State of Mission seeking that Peoples have Life and Live in abundance with the missionaries disciples work; the contents of Medellin and Puebla are taken up, particularly from the inaugural speech of Pope Benedict XVI, who pointed out that the option for the poor is contained in the Christological faith. We still have an outstanding debt with Aparecida that was discussed in the First Ecclesial Assembly of November 2021 in Mexico.

**“ In 2007, the Aparecida Conference was held, and its conclusions are still being assimilated and we are making efforts to put into practice.”**

CELAM in light of the signs of the sands of time and the challenges for the Church, as “Ecclesia semper reformanda” has been re-structuring at various times to better serve the People of God and pilgrims in the Region through the Episcopalians Conferences. Thus, at the 37th General Assembly of CELAM, it was agreed to open a Renewal and Restructuring process,

which organizationally meant forming 04 Pastoral Centers based on See Judge-Act.

In “See”, the Knowledge Management Center (CGC), in “Judge” the Biblical Theological Pastoral Center (CEBITEPAL), and in Act. the Networks and Pastoral Action Center (CEPRAP); likewise, and as a Transversal Center the Communication Center (CpC). But the key word and concept is articulation, because is not about that each Center goes “by itself” but rather that it performs pastoral action in articulation and Synodality.

The perspective and prospective of the General Conference of Aparecida, its challenges and the Pope’s request regarding the pending issues of the Conference of Aparecida, gave rise to the realization of the First Ecclesial Assembly that is unprecedented in Latin America and the Caribbean, also the first at the Universal Church level.

The Assembly Meeting was held in Mexico between November 21 and 28, 2021, under the protection of Our Lady of Guadalupe, was preceded by a prior consultation, or listening to all the people of God (Bishops, priests, religious, lay men and women, and peripheries representatives).

Pope Francis emphasizes as a crucial point of his pontificate rescuing the role of lay men and women within the Church, walking together with the bishops and all the clergy and religious life, seeking social, economic, political, and religious conditions that allow the fulfillment of life in this world, which is also the Kingdom of God.

70,000 people participated in the listening process and 1,030 attended the event, of which 900 were virtual and 130 in person. We were enriched by the illuminating participation of Cardinal Bo and Cardinal Gracias, among other illustrious prelates who. With their presence, reflections, and messages, gave us especially important contributions.

Currently we are in the final edition of the Conclusive Document that we have called “Towards a Synodal Church that goes out to the peripheries: Reflections and Pastoral Proposals from the First Ecclesial Assembly of Latin America and the Caribbean” and will also have a “popular version”. The document gathers the background, challenges, and pastoral proposals of the Ecclesial Assembly.

In the same perspective of the Ecclesial Assembly, CELAM has been promoting the continental process of Synod on Synodality, interacting with the 22 Episcopal Conferences that have already prepared their respective conclusive documents, since the perspective of communion, participation and mission is the same and that the Ecclesial Assembly has marked.

Thus, CELAM has formed two large working Commissions at the continental level, one on the Appropriation of the Document Content of the First Ecclesial Assembly, and the other to monitor the process of the Continental Synod on the path to the Universal Synod. Both Continental Commissions are articulated from the Presidency of CELAM. We can also say that CELAM seeks to reflect its new structure in the New Statutes that are about to be approved by the Holy See, and that express the Restructuring and Renewal of CELAM in all its instances.

The CELAM Headquarters itself, as a “physical” meeting place, has special importance in the service to the Church and pilgrims of the Continent, and on July 12 of this year the New Headquarters in Bogota was inaugurated, whose realization has been the product of a great effort and will allow to host in its different environments the religious pastoral agents who wish to perform their Meetings, Conferences, Retreats, since it is a large place with adequate spaces and services.

In my opinion, I simply want to express what the Latin American and Caribbean Church has done in trying to be faithful to the conciliar teachings and, even more, to the experience of the first Christians and the path towards synodically. We have no doubt that the ecclesiology of the People of God is not opposed but needs episcopal collegiality. But, in the same way, we are truly clear that we all feel part of the Church, and work towards synodically, and in this regard we will be able to have a greater evangelizing capacity.

In essence, CELAM’s contribution to the Church in Latin America and the Caribbean is manifested in the following:

Seeking to be faithful to its prophetic vocation in response to the voices of the Latin American and Caribbean peoples and that is expressed in the preferential option for the poor that has identified the evangelizing mission of the Church in this Continent.

Its original reception of the Second Vatican Council through the General Conferences of the Latin American Episcopate, and more recently, through the First Ecclesial Assembly of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Its permanent support for the reflection and pastoral action of the Church in Latin America, in communion with the Bishop of Rome, with a fraternal and collegial sense at the service of the Episcopal Conferences.

Its offer of training spaces with a Latin American perspective to various ecclesial and social actors of the Church in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Its work articulating networks for pastoral action at the continental and transcontinental level responding to the challenges of migration, human trafficking, care for our common home, defense of human rights, children, youth, and vulnerable women, indigenous peoples and Afro descendants, Catholic education, among others, promoting in this process the configuration of ecclesial networks such as the Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network (REPAM), the Mesoamerican

**Its work articulating networks for pastoral action at the continental and transcontinental level.**

Ecclesial Network (REMAM), the Ecclesial Network of the Guarani Aquifer and Gran Chaco, the Latin American and Caribbean Ecclesial Network for Migration. Displacement, Refuge and Human Trafficking (CLAMOR), the Centrality of Children Project, and the Ecclesial Conference of the Amazon (CEAMA).

The preparation and dissemination of studies and research related to problems of the Latin American and Caribbean reality, which allow not only to have a well-founded diagnosis, but also vital action prospects for the Church, in light of the Social Doctrine.

The promotion of communication, meetings, and socialization of pastoral action experiences between the different episcopal conferences and ecclesial networks in Latin America and the Caribbean, in communion with the Holy See, providing spaces and communication means to favor participation, listening, work in Synodality, both religious and laity.

The testimony of a synodal Church that goes out to the peripheries is possible, disciples and missionary, mystical and prophetic, enthusiastic about caring for our common home.

The offer of subsidies, publications, and multimedia content to promote the Pope's Magisterium and the Latin American Magisterium. Contributing to the formation and updating of bishops, priests, seminarians, religious men. And women, lay men and women.

The effort to be a sign and referent of the Church's collegiality in Latin America and its catholicity, in tune with the pastoral guidelines of the Pope's magisterium.

I would like to end this brief reflection by informing you that the Holy Father has entrusted CELAM the analysis, selection and monitoring of the projects that will be financed by the Fondo Populorum Progressio. Dear brothers, I invite you to renew your passion for Jesus, for his Gospel and his People. May the Lord bless you, and the Blessed Virgin fill you with tenderness.





## Theory U Approach, the Christocentric Way

Mr. Leslie D'souza

*Chairman, PrePearl Training Development, India*

Thank you so much Your Eminences for giving me this opportunity to spend the next two days with you. The theme of the FABC 50 General Conference about Journeying together as people of Asia is very important, but I would like to highlight the aspect of going a different way.

Reflecting on the notion of going a different way, I wonder if it would have been easier for the Magi to go back the same way they came. We have to acknowledge the temptation they might have faced to retreat, as it could have

**“Reflecting on the notion of going a different way, I wonder if it would have been easier for the Magi to go back the same way they came.”**

been very tempting. They were tired, and the palace they could have entered would have been welcomed in a grand way. They would have received a phenomenal welcome, and the gifts they would have received could have been 100 times more valuable than what they gave to Jesus. However, they didn't choose that path. They had to let go of all that and, by doing so, they

allowed something to come forth—the story and history of our salvation.

To my mind, the three kings, the Magi, made a magnificent sacrifice. They possibly had to let go of something inside of them that could have tempted them, and they took a different path. I believe that all present at this gathering, including the Cardinals and Bishops, are also seeking to take a different path in their lives. I would like to emphasize the important lesson that the Magi's actions brought forth—we as Magi of today are in search of the face of Jesus in Asia. Because the Magi acted in a particular way, something has emerged. It is the opportunity for them to witness the history of our salvation.

The objectives of our sessions for the next two days. 1). To draw on the learnings of what was co-initiated and co-sensed by the participants during the conference thus far, 2) Leverage the concept of Theory U for transformation and change. Cultivate a social field leading to new pathways, unfolding the best potential for the Church in Asia. 3) Envisaging new pathways-at an individual level and regional/country level.

### The church in Asia

Let me start my reflection on The Church in Asia by quoting the homily of Cardinal Bo at the beginning of your General Conference. According to him, “the cross is our faith journey. Our faith journey begins and starts from the cross, and we were led by fishermen and tentmakers.” This took place more than 2000 years ago. We can approach and manifest ourselves in a way like a honeycomb approach. In this way we are attractive, and people come to us. He draws a parallel to bees building honeycombs, highlighting their dedicated focus and attention to their intention.

**“According to him, ‘the cross is our faith journey. Our faith journey begins and starts from the cross, and we were led by fishermen and tentmakers.’”**

The first lesson is that if we are looking at the Church in Asia, it's

good that we have the right direction, right strategy, right approach, but more important, there is some interior work that needs to be done by me and by each one of us. What is that interior work? It is the ability to go deeper inside and try and understand what is that interior condition that is present within me today. That is responsible for the external conditions that is really happening.

According to one successful CEO, “the success of an intervention depends on the interior condition of the intervenor. And this is not seen but gets manifested in the behavior of the leader.” If we must look into the



issues of leadership today such as the World Economic Forum and others, there is tremendous gap between knowing and doing. If something must radically happen, and this knowing and doing gap must find a resolution.

**“Yes, we do understand, but it’s up to us to be able to act and interact with what’s really happening. It means that we need to cultivate the soil on which we are working.”**

In the words of a famous author, “everything we know is collapsing because it’s not sustainable. As a church, sustainability is so very critical. There was a question asked to a parish team and the parish priests about what will happen if the Parish priest is not there. The response was beautiful. They said, “Yes, we do understand, but it’s up to us to be able to act and interact with what’s really happening. It means that we need to cultivate the soil on which we are working.” It

really means studying the interactions and relationships of all the molecules within the soil. Unless we do that in our diocese and our church, of getting deeper into that, it's not going to be the change that we really want to see.

**“... one of the biggest lessons I have taken from COVID-19 is that the world is interconnected.”**

COVID-19 has taught us some magnificent lessons. And one of the biggest lessons I have taken from COVID-19 is that the world is interconnected. We had a firsthand experience of how interconnectedness and the whole web of interconnection

really happens. Going back to the first statement I made, the three kings acted in a way what emerged was story of salvation that could continue. It wouldn't have otherwise.

So, because of this, we need to reflect very deeply because what I say and what I do as an individual is not in isolation. It's going to have an impact somewhere, whether it's right, wrong, good, bad, or ugly. I like this beautiful phrase of the second U.N Secretary General who said, “You can count the number of seeds in an apple, but you can't count the number of apples in a seed.” That's really what your interior condition is going to do. You need not know how many apples are growing on the trees, but they are all there, and they are growing.

This whole aspect, if we ignore it and if we are not able to accept that I, as an individual, am responsible for the system that's emerging out in which I am living, then there is no change that's going to happen. For leaders, this is the most critical and important thing. They cannot take themselves out of the situation in which they are. The lens of observation has to be turned not only outside but also inside, and that's going to help us discover a lot of things.



A second fundamental principle is that “energy follows attention.” Think for a moment about your own lives and what you’re focusing on. What are you attending to more? Don’t you feel that giving your attention to something rewards you in the way you would like? If the attention isn’t there, there isn’t energy for what you may want to happen.

While we, as leaders, can’t be everywhere, it becomes a very humbling acceptance of the fact that leadership is not just about being on top or having power. If we want to cultivate the whole social system, then leadership must be cascaded. Leadership has to move down the line because we are human at the end of the day. For me, this is very critical and important.

I would like to spend a moment to discuss the iceberg model. The decisions being made on a daily basis, whether in the government or the church or any organization, have consequences that even the decision makers may not want, but the consequences are all there for us to see and experience. So, the first message for us at the level which we are in the church is the message of “I am part of the system.” Only if I accept that,

**“So, the first message for us at the level which we are in the church is the message of ‘I am part of the system.’ Only if I accept that, I can see the system.”**



I can see the system. If I'm not part of the system, I can't see it. I will be defending it or passing it off to someone else. Unless I can see the system as it is, I can't think of making the change I want to make.

This is going to stop if we accept these old habits, behaviors, and transformations will give way to something new and different as we journey together. We want to go down beyond what we see on the surface, the behaviors. We want to go down to the structures and thoughts. We do not actually see the paradigms that have become ingrained within us. But the bottom line is, we all know what leaders do and how they do things, but what we do not know is the interior condition of that leader that drives him, and the source of his inspiration.

**“We want to go down beyond what we see on the surface, the behaviors. We want to go down to the structures and thoughts. We do not actually see the paradigms that have become ingrained within us.”**

Given the same conditions, two different leaders may have two different sources of information, and they act in different ways. And what emerges is two different things. We have seen this in our parishes with the appointment of parish teams. What emerges is a consequence of the way we behave. So, the reflection for us now is to discover the deeper systemic forces that exist within us and in our diocese, causing us to repeat behaviors and achieve results we do not want. Can we journey within, find out what's not visible on the surface, and use tools and techniques to go deeper into that? I'm sure this is something we will invest some time in the next two days.

A very important part of this entire Theory U journey is presencing. It is all about presencing. So, I would like to invite you to an exercise on presencing. While we do this, I invite you to loosen yourself up and leave your hands free. Please sit down with both your feet on the ground. If you feel more comfortable standing, you may stand but let both feet be on the ground. Keep all mobiles away from you and let nothing distract you during this exercise of presencing. It is a valuable tool, and I invite you to use

whatever tools we are using during these two days in the work that you do.

I will also share with you the source of knowledge and experience. It is free of cost, and for me, this is really hope. Something wonderful is happening deep down in my heart. Despite all the challenges and reports we read, I'm convinced that there is something dying, and what is dying is this whole aspect of "me first." What is dying is the belief that bigger is better. What is dying is the feeling that we have to let go because something beautiful can come our way. COVID has taught us that.

“**Relax and take a few deep breaths. Feel the relaxation. Now, slowly move your attention downwards, down to your legs, to your feet, to the lower parts of your feet.**”

Now, are we all ready with our feet on the ground? I invite you to close your eyes if you're comfortable with it. If not, you can keep your eyes open. Relax and take a few deep breaths. Feel the relaxation. Now, slowly move your attention downwards, down to your legs, to your feet, to the lower parts of your feet. Imagine if you were a tree, you would have roots going downwards.

While you don't have physical roots, you can still feel the connection downwards. Imagine this connection going all the way down to the middle of the Earth. Feel that connection.

Now, slowly move your attention upwards, up your legs, up the spine, up to the upper part of your head. Attend to this connection as it tends upwards. As you attend to this connection, be open to the inspiration and guidance that is coming down onto you from above, from the Holy Spirit. Imagine that you are in a state where the power of the Spirit is now resting on you.

Now, slowly move your attention to the middle part of your body, to your heart. Not just your physical heart, but the whole energy field of your heart. Remember that this energy field is opening together with the power of the Holy Spirit in you. Notice how this part of your body is being connected horizontally across all the relationships you have. The entire energy field is touching every relationship, including your relationships with people at work.

Allow yourself to be connected horizontally to all those beings around. Attend to your heart and the connections that flow into it and out of it. Now, I would like you to picture one person whom you truly love. Notice how focusing your attention on that person further opens your heart and allows it to connect more deeply with deep appreciation and love. Now, extend this quality of connection to our global community, with a special focus on our region in Asia. Connect with that whole larger source that shares this common journey we are on. Turn more deeply and clearly together with the knowledge of the source of who we really are.

Now, extend your heart even more broadly to all the human beings and species on this planet. Try to embrace this entire social field in that deep quality of your heart, including all your friends, the people you know, the people you don't know, and especially the people whom you find difficult. Bring them into your heart and create a space broad and deep enough for all. Now, slowly let go of that and come back to the present moment. Relax for a brief moment, open your eyes, and let us continue our day from this place of strength and connection. As you feel comfortable, come back with your eyes open into the presence of the room. Thank you very much.





**DISCERNING NEW  
PATHWAYS FOR THE  
CHURCH IN ASIA**

**DAY 2  
OCTOBER 25, 2022**

## PRESS NOTE

### OCTOBER 25, 2022

25th October of the FABC General Conference began with the Holy Qurbana, celebrated in the Syro-Malabar rite by His Eminence Mar George Cardinal Alencherry, Major Archbishop of Ernakulam-Angamaly. H.E. Francis Xavier Cardinal Kriengsak Kovithavanij, President of the day's sessions, led the representatives in the Adsumus. The morning prayer, hosted by the country of Japan, was led by the video prepared by Sr. Clara Akhito and the Handmaids of the Holy Eucharist.

Mr. Leslie D'souza, continuing with the next session on 'Theory-U', 'Presencing and Absencing' began with a short explanation of moving from 'downloading' past patterns to 'performing' new improved methods. The representatives continued with a group case study, followed by a sharing on what they had learned.

In the afternoon, representatives were divided into groups of fifteen and given specific topics to discuss, based on a framework. The topics and inputs were structured to be included in the drafting of the final FABC document. It was followed by collation and feedback.

The day concluded with the angelus, led by H.E. Cardinal Bo.





**DISCERNING NEW  
PATHWAYS FOR THE  
CHURCH IN ASIA**

**DAY 3  
OCTOBER 26, 2022**

## PRESS NOTE

### OCTOBER 26, 2022

26th October, the third day of the segment ‘Envisaging New Pathways’ of the FABC Press Conference began with the celebration of the Holy Eucharist by His Excellency Most Reverend Mathias RI Iong-hoon, Bishop of Suwon, President of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Korea. The President of the day’s sessions, H.E. Oswald Cardinal Gracias, led the representatives in the Adsumus, and the morning prayer, hosted by Korea, was led by the video prepared by the Secretariat of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Korea.

H.E. Cardinal Gracias explained that the day would include discussion on the first drafts of the Final Message and of the schema of the Final Document, as well as discussion of the FABC Structure.



Prof. Susan Pascoe, AM, member of the Taskforce for the Continental Stage of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, speaking about the next stage of the Synod on synodality, explained three key points: a recap of what had happened so far, the continental stage of the Synod - how it was being carried out - and how it will go forward, through the FABC Assembly. Highlighting the processes and purpose of the Continental stage, Prof.

Pascoe emphasized how ‘the document will truly represent the voice of the people of God’.

Next, the first draft of the Final Message - which will be the message from the FABC General Conference to all the peoples of Asia - was introduced, and participants were invited to give detailed feedback and suggestions on the Message. Following that, the groups of the previous day presented short reports on their topics of discussion, in the context of ‘envisaging new pathways’.

The General Schema of the Final Document of the FABC General Conference was introduced by Bishop Pablo Virgilio Siongco David, member of the Commission on the Final Document, and was followed by questions, suggestions and interventions by the participants.

Next, participants divided into groups based on country and region, to discuss the restructuring of the FABC, based on a few key points; dreams, changes, areas of collaboration, etc, with each group sharing a report on their discussion. The day concluded with a short prayer, led by Bishop Allwyn D’Silva.





## Document on the Synod on Synodality

Professor Susan Pascoe

*Member, Taskforce for the Continental Stage*

*General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops*

Well, good morning, colleagues. I am delighted to be here amongst you, and as a late arrival, it was lovely to walk into the spirit of collegiality that is pervading your meeting together. As Cardinal Gracias mentioned, I

“

**I am here really to lay out how we might go about it in the Continental stage...**

”

am here to speak to you today about the next stage of the Synod on synodality. I will give you a little bit of a recap of where we have been and then take you into some of the details. I am aware that last week Cardinal Hollerich spoke to you about the concept of synodality and where it sits in the life of the church, so you have got a

very good grounding in the key elements. My role is much more practical. I am here really to lay out how we might go about it in the Continental stage and to see if there is any accompaniment which I or the General Secretariat for the Synod is able to do.

So let us start, and we're just going to very briefly look at the journey so far. The first of the quotes here comes from a book I'm sure many of you

have read. It's a book called "Dare to Dream," and it's Pope Francis's key messages to the people of God but written in a language that is accessible and that anyone can understand.

We can see that this is somewhat consistent with the message we had in that last short clip yesterday evening – to be creative, to dream, and to use our imaginations. And this is what Pope Francis is wanting us to do – to plant dreams, draw forth prophecies and visions, and allow hope to flourish. It wasn't that great yesterday morning that with that word cloud that kept changing – hunger, tiredness, other sentiments came in, but hope stayed in the middle. So that was a wonderful thing to see at this meeting. The purpose of the synod is not to write documents, but "...to plant dreams, draw forth prophecies and visions, allow hope to flourish, inspire trust, bind up wounds, weave together relationships, awaken a dawn of hope, learn from one another, and create a bright resourcefulness that will enlighten minds, warm hearts, give strength to our hands, and inspire [...] a vision of the future filled with the joy of the Gospel."

If you haven't read that book, "Dare to Dream," I encourage you to get hold of it. It's a beautiful short book. Austin Ivereigh, the journalist, assisted Pope Francis in writing it.

Now, those of you who were involved in the first stage in the local churches and are on the discernment for the synod, you will know that this is the main question that was asked. This was the overarching question, and then there were ten other questions. So it's a long question, and it asks "How does this 'journeying together', which takes place today on different levels (from the local level to the universal



one), allow the Church to proclaim the Gospel in accordance with the mission entrusted to her and what steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow as a synodal Church?” That’s a very dense question with lots of sub-elements to it, but that’s the overarching question. And we will come to the end, and you will see that rather than ten questions that we had in stage one, there are only three questions in stage two.

If you recall, the local stage, that was the stage that was to be within parishes, dioceses, Episcopal conferences. It was from the 17th of October (2021) last year until the 15th of August this year (2022). Initially, it was going to be a shorter period, but people in the local churches made it clear to the Vatican that they needed more time.

And so, the extra time was granted, which was very important because what emerged from that were very solid and thoughtful submissions based on a discernment process. 112 of the 114 countries in which the Catholic Church operates sent a submission, and we were told that was unprecedented. The People of God were invited to speak, and they wanted to speak. In addition to that, 1,080 submissions were put forward by various groups. These groups included the superiors general like the UISG, lay movements like Saint Vincent De Paul and so on, as well as individuals and other groups with specific issues they wanted to address. So, there were 1,080 separate submissions in that stream. Additionally, 112 submissions came through Episcopal conferences.

The 1,080 submissions were summarized by a group of people at the synod, and they presented a summary of the key issues on the first day when we got together to summarize all the documents. But those of us who were asked to summarize the documents (30 of us from around the world were invited to Rome). We were taken very quickly outside of Rome to Frascati, where we stayed for 12 days. We worked 12-hour days. We were told that if we couldn’t commit all our time to this exercise, we should not say yes and should leave the space for someone else who could

**“The 1,080 submissions were summarized by a group of people at the synod, and they presented a summary of the key issues on the first day when we got together.”**



be available 24/7 to do this work.

Before we got there, each of us was sent a group of between 10 and 20 submissions. We were asked to set aside time in early September and to prayerfully discern upon those submissions. We needed to read them at least three times in a prayerful state. The first time, we read through and became familiar with the contents from each country. The second time, we read them with a template and analyzed the documents, identifying

key issues, obstacles, hopes, frustrations, and more. We were also asked to select quotes that would give voice to the people from that particular Episcopal Commission. Finally, during the third reading, we were asked to summarize across the group of submissions we had.

When we arrived in Frascati, we were expected to know in detail the contents of the submissions that had been entrusted to us so that we could faithfully represent the views of the people of God who had spoken through that submission process. We began the process prayerfully, with meditation and getting to know one another. Then, we formed groups based on different criteria such as Continent, gender, ecclesial status, and emerging themes. We analyzed and discussed the submissions, slicing and dicing the information from different perspectives. Every group had different submissions, providing unique insights. This process continued for about seven days, exhausting but dedicated to drawing forth the voices of the people of God without imposing our own views. We focused on identifying common issues, joys, hopes, frustrations, and fears.

After going through that process for long enough, writers took the templates we were using and started grouping them on the wall of the chapel, creating an annotated space. We were invited to add our thoughts and annotations with Post-it notes, expressing agreement, disagreement, or connections between different themes. In other words, from the emerging consensus, we were refining our understanding.

We were in the chapel, prayerfully reflecting, thinking, and coming back to it. After that process, the writers developed a first draft. Pope Francis, heavily invested in the Synod, wanted to see the first draft, even though he had been warned it might not be very polished. The writers emailed the document to him at 2:20 AM. I'm told he gets up at 4:30 AM. When Cardinals Grech and Hollerich met with him at 8:30 AM, he had taken a look over the document, though not in detail, and they briefed him on it. This

feedback and response from the Holy Father provided comfort for those of us in Frascati, knowing we were on the right path.



We went back to our meetings at that point. I should add that the members of the commissions involved in planning the Synod (theology, spirituality, methodology, and communications) were not in Frascati, as there were about a hundred members in total. They were invited to reflect on the draft and provide feedback during a lunchtime Zoom meeting. This was another way we received feedback from well-informed individuals who understood the process but were hearing it for the first time.

I want to emphasize the honest, authentic, rigorous, and prayerful process that took place. This is the voice of the people of God. The 30 people assembled there had no business imposing their own views or interpretations.

**“This is genuinely the voice of the people of God.”**

This is genuinely the voice of the people of God. I want to highlight that because it is important.

Moving on, the key decision-makers, some of whom are in the room, including

Cardinals Gracias and Bo, who were members of the Council of Ordinaries overseeing the General Secretariat for the Synod, arrived in Frascati. I felt sorry for them because they arrived in the evening of the tenth day, had dinner at 8 o'clock, and then went into briefings that lasted until 10:30 PM. The next morning, they began their 12-hour day. Initially, they met with those of us who had been in Frascati in small groups to understand the process. Then, they had the responsibility of reviewing the emerging second draft and approving it. Fortunately, we know that they did approve it since we have a document being released tomorrow.

That's what has happened so far. It has been a tremendous journey, and I don't want to underestimate the work that has happened in parishes, community groups, and dioceses because that's what was contained in those submissions. People were disciplined to submit 10 pages, although not every country adhered to that discipline. But mostly, they did, and it was quite a discipline because it forced them to distill their thinking and focus on the essence.

Instead of calling it an "Instrumentum Laboris," because it's going back to the people of God and we want to use language that they understand, it's called the "Document for the Continental Stage." It's deliberately written in language that most people will be able to understand. It's being released in eight languages after going through a process of translation. The intent now is for you to take it back to your diocese through your Episcopal conference and discern based on it. I'll come back to that, but to finish the story, this

“**Instead of calling it an 'Instrumentum Laboris,' because it's going back to the people of God and we want to use language that they understand, it's called the 'Document for the Continental Stage**

”

period for the Continental phase is effectively from the start of November through the end of March. It's not a long time, only from November 1st to March 31st next year. We'll talk about that in a minute, but it gives you a sense of the stages.

The seven continents involved will send their submissions to the General Secretariat, and they will be summarized in a similar way. The summary from the continents will form the basis of the Instrumentum

Laboris that goes to the assembly in October next year. The pope announced last Sunday that this is to be a two-stage process. The intent is that in between the assembly in October 2023 and October 2024, it goes back to the people of God for comments. Cardinal Gracias sometimes talks about this as circularity. The hope of this process is that all the baptized understand they have a role in the life of the Church, and taking something back to them is very significant.

So, what are we looking for in this Continental stage? It is different from the stage in the local churches because now we have the first version of what people want for the Church in the third millennium. Your task is to make concrete or practical the insights and overall vision that has emerged. From the perspective of Asia, you need to look at the documents if it resonates with your experience and identify any specific aspects of Asia that may be overlooked. This is an opportunity for you to provide input and suggest areas that need emphasis. You are also being invited to formulate the open questions.

At this stage, the focus is on going deeper, not opening the entire debate. You are not yet suggesting answers or deciding on courses of action. Importantly, the document for the Continental stage is not a draft. You are meant to formulate it as you see fit, without just arguing about phrases. You have the flexibility to shape it according to your needs. You can submit up to 20 pages, considering the large regional issues at play.

Now, let's get more practical to the Continental Stage in Asia. The following are the key elements to planning the Continental Stage.

FABC executive decide its approach to developing a submission from the Catholic Churches in Asia across its 19 members (and 4 associate members)

Emphasize the ecclesial dimension in the DCS discernment process along with episcopal



participation on the final Asian document due to GSSB by 31 March 2023.

Establish a FABC Taskforce to plan the ecclesial discernment on DCS.

Member episcopal conferences share with each other their approaches to organizing and conducting discernment on the DCS with all the People of God suitable for their culture and context.

It should be noted that a Question and Answer to be provided with DCS, and final section advising on Methodology -GSSB in accompaniment.

**“The Church offers a structure, framework, guidance, and accompaniment, but not a rigid template to follow.”**

I must apologize if this overlaps with your own thinking. Regarding the planning process, the FABC executive, responsible for the Catholic churches in Asia, needs to decide on their approach to developing a submission. The Church offers a structure, framework, guidance, and accompaniment, but not a rigid template to follow. The emphasis is on involving the full range of the People of

God, including priests, religious, bishops, and laity. The voice of priests, in particular, was noted to be relatively weak during the previous stage, so it would be beneficial to ensure their input is stronger in the Continental stage.

A task force, possibly the FABC executive or a smaller group, needs to be formed to oversee the discernment process. Additionally, you need to decide if the Episcopal conferences want to share their approaches to organizing and conducting the discernment, or if there are culturally specific elements that make sharing helpful. In Oceania, for example, with only four Episcopal conferences and the Eastern churches, the task force includes representatives from the Eastern churches to ensure their voice is heard. Starting tomorrow, you can find details on the Vatican website about the Continental stage, including questions and answers, as well as slides that can be used in dioceses or with various groups.

In most regions, the regional discernment process will take place, which may need to be conducted online, although in-person meetings are preferable. Given the emphasis on the marginalized and the poor, it may be easier to engage them at the level of the Episcopal conference. Time constraints should also be considered in managing the process.

**“You are asked to discern on a document that summarizes the views of churches worldwide regarding their lives as Christians.”**

For the Continental stage, there is a more targeted approach compared to the open invitation of the first stage. You are asked to discern on a document that summarizes the views of churches worldwide regarding their lives as Christians. It is up to you to decide how to conduct the discernment process within your diocese or Episcopal conference.

Regarding coordination, the FABC needs to reach an agreement on the duration of the discernment process. The continent is expected to receive all submissions, including those from religious groups or lay movements, if applicable. It is important to note that the intent for this stage is for all submissions to come through the continent.

For the first stage, individual submissions were allowed, but for the Continental stage, it is encouraged that all submissions come through the Episcopal conferences. There is no specific process for the universal aggregation to review individual submissions. The process involves synthesizing the discernment within the Episcopal conferences and then across the FABC. Most regions, including Oceania, are forming discernment and writing groups composed of spiritual guides, theologians, and writers from each Episcopal conference. This process will result in a draft document that will be presented at the FCBC assembly in Suva.

In terms of the timeline, Oceania has chosen the first week of Lent as the time to bring people together for consideration. You can decide whether this is the point for the summary across the Episcopal conferences or the start of final deliberations. The nature and breadth of the discernment process, including the number and duration of groups, will be determined by each Episcopal conference. It is important to note that this process is a

deeper contemplation and not starting from scratch.

In more detail – Step 1: Regional Discernment on DCS (1 November 2022-Mid-Jan 2023):

- Conduct virtual or in-person regional discernment meetings on the Document for the Continental Stage (DCS) in all 19 ECs of the FABC
- Individual Episcopal Conferences decide on the nature and breadth of the process mindful that it is not a new beginning in the listening and reflections for the Synod, but a deeper contemplation on the issues raised in local Churches and summarized into the DCS.
- Establish ecclesial groups in each of 19 episcopal conferences comprising ordained, consecrated and other baptized members of the People of God, possibly with supporting experts. Place emphasis on those not included in the local phase – e.g. marginalized youth, women etc. it will be important for the members of these groups in Asia's episcopal conferences to contain some of those who will then be selected to work in a Discernment and Writing Group for Asia.

When organizing the discernment process, it is encouraged to include a mix of ordained, consecrated, and baptized members of the people of God. Efforts should be made to hear the voices of marginalized groups such as youth, women, divorced and remarried individuals, LGBTQI+ individuals, migrants, and refugees and other groups that we consider at the margins in relation to the Church.

In more detail – Step 2: Regional Discernment on DCS (1 November 2022-Mid-Jan 2023):

- Following discernment on DCS in the 19 episcopal conferences (and possibly other groups such as RI or lay movements), gather a Discernment and Writing Group in person to discern on reflections from the 19 episcopal conferences and other groups and DRAFT a consolidated document for Asia for consideration of the FABC Assembly in February-March.
- Discernment and Writing Group likely require five or more days in period of January to February 2023. This should be an in-person

exercise with a spiritual discernment process.

- The Discernment and Writing Group consist of nominees from those involved in DCS discernment in their episcopal conferences and others mindful of the ecclesial nature of the discernment in the Continental Phase. (As this is a working group the target size should reflect this.)

It is recommended to have at least one nominee from each Episcopal conference in the discernment and writing group for continuity. The size of the delegation will vary depending on the region.

In more detail – Step 3: FABC Assembly: 26 February – 3 March 2023

- Gathering of those charged with consideration of DRAFT submission from Discernment and Writing Group summarizing the 19 (and others?) submissions from FABC Episcopal Conferences on the Document for the Continental Stage.
- The fruits of the two stages of DCS discernment from episcopal conferences, and then the Discernment and Writing Group are written as a DRAFT submission. Once again, those assembled will go through a discernment process.
- And adjustments that emerge from this weeklong sessions should then be submitted for final approval – either at the end of the session (as in Frascati) or as a separate session.
- The deadline for submission to the Synod Secretariat is 31st March 2023. There will be a separate process in Rome to summarize what comes from the 7 continents and an Instrumentum Laboris to be provided in a timely manner to the delegates of the October 2023 Assembly.

It was mentioned earlier that this practical approach aims to provide a clear understanding of the steps involved and how to effectively execute them. The intention is to make the process feel manageable and not burdensome, as organizing the content is a focused and targeted exercise.

Thank you.





**FINAL MESSAGE AND  
SCHEMA**

**DAY 1  
OCTOBER 28, 2022**

## Final Message and Schema of the Final Document

**PRESS NOTE**  
**OCTOBER 28, 2022**

28th October, Friday, of the FABC General Conference began with the Holy Eucharist, celebrated by H.E. Giorgio Cardinal Marengo IMC, Apostolic Prefect of Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

The participants joined in the Song of Asia, and H.E. Oswald Cardinal Gracias led them in the Adsumus. The morning prayer, hosted by the country of Nepal, was led by the video prepared by Fr Stephen SDB and team.

Reverend Monsignor Michael James Nazir-Ali, priest of the Personal Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham in England and Wales, speaking on Christ and religion, and the Church in the world today, stressed ‘it is Christ who makes, renews and reforms the Church’. Talking about the process of Apostolic transmission, its traditions and how it engages with change, he emphasized how the Synod should work, and that ‘the first requirement of the Synod must be praying together’.

H.E. Joseph Cardinal Coutts presented the revised draft of the Final Message, which was followed by an in-depth plenary discussion.



Bishop Pablo Virgilio Siongco David presented the revised draft of the Schema of the Final Document, paying attention to the revisions suggested by the representatives. The participants then divided into groups, with each group examining a different section of the document in depth.

H.E. Charles Cardinal Bo welcomed Papal Envoy H.E. Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle to the FABC General Conference. Greeting all, H.E. Cardinal Tagle conveyed to the gathered representatives the Holy Father's reassurance of "my closeness to everyone". Mentioning the Holy Father's prayer to Mother Mary, that 'the joys, sorrows and pain of the people of Asia may enter her heart', H.E. Cardinal Tagle reminded his audience to persevere, and that, 'very often, there are still surprises of God towards the end'.

The group reviews continued, with each group presenting their comments at the end. The day concluded with H.E. Cardinal Gracias leading the representatives in the angelus.





## Christ and religion, and the Church in the world Today

Msgr. Dr. Michael James Nazir-Ali

*Personal Ordinariate, Our Lady of Walsingham in England and Wales  
Oxford Centre for Training, Research, Advocacy & Dialogue (OXTRAD)*

Thank you, Your Eminence, for your gracious introduction. I must say that I feel unworthy of the kind words you have said about me. This morning, I had intended to speak about Christ and the religions, as His Eminence mentioned. However, Cardinal Gracias is keen for us to discuss

“ **I want to begin by emphasizing that it is Christ who forms and renews the church. He is the one who brings about its reform.** ”

the church and the world today, as this is the challenge we all face. Additionally, we will explore how this relates to synodality and the synodal way that has been emphasized. Therefore, I want to begin by emphasizing that it is Christ who forms and renews the church. He is the one who brings about its reform. This understanding must be our starting point. In the letter to the Ephesians, it is stated in the first chapter that Christ

fills his church with all his fullness. And in the letter to the Colossians, Paul writes about Christ within us is the hope of glory. These passages highlight the presence of Christ within us individually, but also in the collective

sense as God's people, the church. It is important to acknowledge both aspects: being in Christ and Christ being in us. This understanding is crucial to comprehending Paul's teachings about the church. The concept of being grafted as branches into a vine signifies our unity with Christ, while Christ being within us represents his transformative power, as he continually shapes, reforms, and renews us. This process in the church is intricately tied to the transmission of the apostolic tradition and teaching. Today, as we celebrate the Feast of the Apostles, it is fitting to reflect on how this tradition is passed down from generation to generation, across cultures and individuals. Of course, the effectiveness of this transmission can vary.

**“It is important to acknowledge both aspects: being in Christ and Christ being in us.”**

We have witnessed both exemplary and flawed instances of this process. Earlier today, we saw a beautiful example of this transmission in action in Nepal. Nevertheless, different people receive this tradition, and they may discern unique aspects within it that others might not have noticed, even among those who have been faithfully transmitting it. For example, the Exodus trajectory in the Bible, depicting God's liberation of an enslaved people, resonates strongly with those who are oppressed, exploited, or facing various forms of slavery. It is no surprise, then, that this trajectory is found in the African-American musical tradition. It shouldn't surprise us when that happens.

**“...the definitive commentary on Saint John's gospel will come from India.”**

William Temple, who wrote a very fine commentary on Saint John's gospel (which we've been thinking about this morning), used to say that the definitive commentary on Saint John's gospel will come from India. This is due to India's rich philosophical tradition, which allows

its people to notice things in John that other, more pragmatically minded individuals might overlook. Pope John Paul II used to speak of the feminine genius in reading the Bible. The way women read the Bible can be different from how men read it, and men can learn from women's approach. Perhaps women can also learn from how men read the Bible, but that's a different story.

This process of transmitting the tradition and perceiving its nuances is ongoing within the church and all around us. It is happening in the present day. The question that arises in our ever-changing world is how this unchanging Apostolic tradition engages with change and addresses new issues. While ecclesial traditions like the Orthodox value the transmission of the Apostolic tradition, we also need a way to engage with what is new. Not every claim to new knowledge is genuine, but some are authentic. This is where the Catholic Church, in my opinion, has been indebted to John Henry Newman. His doctrine of development is crucial, not only in the church but also in dealing with changing paradigms of knowledge.

“**The question that arises in our ever-changing world is how this unchanging Apostolic tradition engages with change and addresses new issues.**”

Newman’s doctrine of development emphasizes that in engaging with the new, the Gospel must be conserved at all costs. The fundamental nature of the Gospel, encompassing creation, redemption, and reconciliation, cannot be compromised. Additionally, Newman highlights the importance of a conservative action on the past. References to the councils of the church and papal writings in Catholic documents invoke the past for the sake of the present, providing resources to engage with the present. Continuity of principles is also essential, as exemplified by the early church’s stance against infanticide. The sacredness of the human person, which informed their stand, continues to guide the church’s approach to new knowledge about embryos, fetuses, and the development of new life.

Furthermore, Newman emphasizes the anticipation of the future. The church’s teachings today, such as those concerning the beginning and end of life, should always consider potential future implications. There is a recognition of the slippery slope phenomenon, where extreme circumstances today may be used to justify further actions in the future. For instance, in the United Kingdom, the Abortion Act of 1967 was initially passed to allow for abortion in specific hard cases, such as incest or rape. But it has now become a free-for-all for any reason whatsoever and up to any limit whatsoever. Euthanasia or assisted suicide, or whatever you want to call it, more recently in many European countries, began dealing with very hard cases of terminal

illness and unbearable pain. However, what has actually happened is that children who are depressed are now being euthanized. So the anticipation of the future, what we do today, and the effect it might have in the future is important.

Yet, once this engagement with new knowledge occurs, we must ask how we know if we are remaining faithful to the apostolic teaching. Different solutions have been proposed, such as the Vincentian canon that states what has been believed everywhere, by all people, at all times. However, we must remember that at one point, the majority of the church had become Arian in its Christology, and it was only Athanasius contra mundum (against the world) who stood out against a church going in the wrong direction. So, that cannot be a sufficient criterion on its own.

Some people say that the Bible must be the standard. Indeed, as *Dei Verbum* says, the Bible is something that has been given once for all, and it stands within the stream of Apostolic tradition, not outside it. But it is once for all. By it, the church orders all of her life. That is why the scriptures remain central to how we think about the church, our world, culture, and our relations with people of other religions. It is important to note that scripture does not contradict Apostolic tradition, and Apostolic tradition cannot contradict scripture. They belong together as a whole.

In studying the Bible, we must bring forth every critical insight and appreciative insight available. We look behind the text to see the oral traditions and stories that now exist in the Bible in a finished form. We examine the motivations of the writers, why they wrote these things, and how the books were edited and compiled. This work is done by scholars, and it is necessary work that cannot be evaded. However, the scholars do not have the final say. They can examine what was behind the text and what is in the text, but ultimately, it is the church that must interpret what the Bible means.

The interpretive task of the church in this matter is significant. Revelation as a whole must be related to culture and context. Culture refers to the habits, customs, values, and worldview of a people, while context relates to their socioeconomic reality and the state in which they are found. Revelation must engage with culture and context, and when Christians do

this, they come as those who embody the Revelation themselves. They do not bring Revelation in a disembodied way to the engagement with culture and context.

**“Professor Lamin Sanneh... used to say that the Christian Revelation is completely translatable into every culture without remainder. He called it the translatability of the faith.”**

Professor Lamin Sanneh, a Muslim convert to the Christian faith and a prominent Catholic mission theologian originally from Gambia in Africa, used to say that the Christian Revelation is completely translatable into every culture without remainder. He called it the translatability of the faith. He compared this with Islam, which also is a worldwide and missionary faith. However, he believed that there is a residual “Arabicness” about Islam that is found everywhere. The call

to prayer is always in Arabic, and the Quran must be read in Arabic, or it is not considered genuinely read. According to Lamin Sanneh, this is not true of Christianity. There is no sacred language for Christians. While it is wonderful to hear Latin singing or read the New Testament in Greek or the Old Testament in Hebrew, Christianity transcends any specific language or cultural form.

But there is no sacred language. The Aramaic that Jesus spoke, although we had a very European Jesus this morning, was Jesus’ mother tongue. However, the New Testament was translated into Aramaic (Syriac) after being written in Greek. The old Syriac version dates to around 150 A.D. So, the process of translatability continues all the time, rendering the good news of Jesus Christ into every culture and context wherever we may be.

Yet, are there any limits to inculturation? In his influential encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, Pope John Paul II stated that there were two limits to this process. Firstly, echoing John Henry Newman, he mentioned the nature of the Gospel itself. Whatever the process of enculturation may be, it cannot compromise the Incarnation, the atonement of Christ for our sins, the resurrection of new life in Christ, and the transformation of creation. None of these fundamental aspects can be compromised in the process

of inculturation. The debate lies in how these limits are understood and applied in specific situations.

Secondly, Pope John Paul II emphasized that inculturation should allow you and I to recognize the same faith in one another. Inculturation should not create such divergence that Christians in different cultures cannot recognize the same faith. It is the task of the whole church to ensure that Christians in different contexts can recognize and affirm the same faith.

These points about limits and criteria for inculturation are essential in approaching our task of engaging with culture and context in a principled way. Another approach promoted through joint meetings between the Vatican and the World Council of Churches focused on criteria for inculturation. They explored how the mind of Christ relates to culture and context, aiming to make the gospel intelligible, inspire people with the gospel, and inform them about living a new life in Christ.

The goal of this engagement with new knowledge and inculturation is unity in diversity. There must be a legitimate diversity that belongs to and enriches unity, rather than undermining it. The presence of the Eastern churches, with their unique liturgical practices and traditions, exemplifies this diversity that feeds unity.

The Catholic Church has been blessed under God's Providence to preserve the deposit of faith—the whole deposit of faith—through Scripture and Apostolic tradition working together. This is a significant responsibility that should not be taken lightly. The sacred deposit of faith and the sacred ministry are crucial considerations. While the Church serves the word and is not its master, it also serves the world. The Word should not be left without interpretation, teaching, and propagation. These two aspects of the church's treasure have always to be kept together. We were being reminded of the apostolic succession this morning because of the Feast of the Apostles. The apostolic succession, of course, has to

**“The Catholic Church has been blessed under God's Providence to preserve the deposit of faith—the whole deposit of faith—through Scripture and Apostolic tradition working together.”**

do with the transmission of apostolic authority by the laying on of hands. But it's not only that; it is not just something mechanical. It also has to do with conveying the whole faith and life of the church. And those who receive it then have a duty to pass that on, to pass it on and not to keep it for themselves.

**“The sacred deposit of faith and the sacred ministry are crucial considerations. While the Church serves the word and is not its master, it also serves the world.”**

The sacred deposit and the sacred ministry then belong together, and this brings me to the question of synodality. How is the sacred ministry to engage with the deposit in the light of a changing world, new knowledge, and the requirement to involve the whole people of God? As we were hearing earlier from Professor Pascoe, synodality means walking together in the way, but the first requirement of synodality must be about worshipping together. It has to do with praying together. If the church is not a praying church, it will not be an authentically synodal church. That also has to do with the celebration of the Eucharist, participating in the body and blood of the Lord together.

We cannot emphasize this too much, that synodality is not just about activism or about issues of one kind or another. It has to do with the Eucharistic life of the church, the fact that we are in communion with one another, worshipping together, and participating in Christ's body and blood together in a way that has been ordered from the very beginning and reflects the relationship of the sacred ministry to the sacred deposit.

And then, of course, synodality means consulting the whole church about the issues that the church faces from time to time in different places and at different times, but also universally throughout the world. But in this consultation, we have to be quite careful about what we are doing. I was glad that one of the bishops during the discussion had said that those who are being consulted also need to be catechized. If we are consulting an un-catechized laity, what are we going to get? We will simply get a reflection of the culture around them. We won't get anything more than that. And I think

the bishop also said some may even need to be evangelized.

Secondly, the consultation, the ecclesial consultation, is not just any consultation. The ecclesiality of the consultation has to be maintained. That means that the natural formations of being church have to be respected, whether that is in the family, the domestic church, the parish, the diocese as the local church, or even clusters of local churches expressed nationally or supranationally. Consulting with the natural formations of being church is quite different from coming under pressure from various pressure groups.

**“So we must make sure that the consultation is of a catechized laity, a theologically educated priesthood.”**

We live in a world of instant communication, which is a good thing. What we've had this morning could not have happened perhaps in another generation. But it also has dangers because small groups of people can become very active in one cause or another, and there is no end to these causes. Today it's one thing, tomorrow it will be something else, and the day after something else again. So we must make

sure that the consultation is of a catechized laity, a theologically educated priesthood, and that it takes place in authenticity determined by the natural formation of the church in different manifestations.

Thirdly, the question of the *sensus fidelium*. The *sensus fidelium* is not just what the laity or the priesthood, together or separately, may think at any time. It has to be informed by what the apostolic tradition has always taught. It has to be principled in its engagement with new knowledge and articulated in the end by those with the authority to teach, that is to say the bishops of the church gathered in council, together with the bishop of Rome. The *sensus fidelium* has both a synchronic aspect, something which has to do with the time in which we now live, of course, this is what the church as a whole is saying today, but it also has a diachronic aspect, that is to say, what the church has said throughout the ages. Both these aspects need to be kept together if we are going to have a rounded sense of the *sensus fidelium*.

Thirdly, synodality also has to do with discipline in the church. It has to do with saying, in the end, after listening to everybody and everything, what can be acceptable and what is not acceptable. From the very beginning,

exclusion, whether from the Eucharistic life of the church or from ministry or whatever it may be, has been for the sake of restoration and inclusion. But whether we like it or not, those who are bishops here will know this: sometimes discipline has to be exercised in love for the sake of restoration and future inclusion. I think to pretend that this does not happen is to live in a fool's paradise.

And then there is, of course, decision-making. Some decisions will have to be made; it can't just be prolonged consultation. Some things will have to be said about the nature of the priesthood, about marriage and family, about the sacredness of the human person, about the poor, and so on, by the church in due course.

**“Some decisions will have to be made; it can't just be prolonged consultation.”**

So synodality has to be about a proper conciliarity. If we look at the very first Council of the Church, the Council of Jerusalem, as recorded in Acts chapter 15, we find that the missionaries come back and report about the Gentiles coming to faith. The apostles call together the other apostles and presbyters. They listen to the missionaries and then the Apostles decide what is to happen. They then together with the presbyters go to the whole church and say, “Now we've made this decision about how the Gentiles are to live, what should we do about sending this news to the Gentile churches?” And then the whole church decides who to send. This is what we may call differentiated synodality. Different people in the process of synodality has different functions.

In the early councils of the church, it wasn't just the bishops. Athanasius was a deacon at Nicaea; he wasn't yet a bishop, but he played a very important part in the council. Religious and clergy of different kinds have played a role in both ancient and recent councils of the church. But in the end, it is the bishops gathered together in council who have a particular charism, a particular authority, a particular responsibility to articulate the faith in given circumstances on given issues, together with the bishop of Rome.

This is illustrated very well by what happened at the Council of

Chalcedon in 451, which was deadlocked between the Monophysites and the so-called Nestorians. It was the Tome of Leo the Great, when it arrived from Rome, that made the difference, solved the problem, and articulated the Chalcedonian Christological definition for the rest of the church, which we still acknowledge and profess.

So, a differentiated conciliarity, a particular function for the bishops together with the Bishop of Rome, is the right expression of synodality. But again, when the bishops meet with the Pope, they will not just be talking about issues; they will, in the end, have to make some decisions; otherwise, the process so far will result in frustration.

Something clear will have to be said about the issues we are facing. And once again, the bishops, whether they say it explicitly or not, will have to say that certain things are excluded, not everything that people will want the church to give them. There will be difficulty about this, and it has to be handled very sensitively and properly so that false expectations are not raised. And if they have been raised, then people will have to be told at some time that they cannot be fulfilled. This is not an easy task, but it will have to be done.

I know you are embarking, Your Eminence, on the next phase of synodality, the Continental phase. And then there is, of course, the universal one coming. It is important to structure this well in a way that is helpful for the churches and for the Church at large.

“**The Church is generally not renewed by structure. The Church is renewed by Apostolic and pneumatological movements.**”

But, if I may say so, don't put all your faith in structures. The Church is generally not renewed by structure. The Church is renewed by Apostolic and pneumatological movements. One such movement is the monastic movement that pushed people out into the deserts of Egypt and Syria. It was a massive spontaneous movement of people seeking a deeper experience of God, Christ, and the work of the Spirit. By moving out into the desert, they miraculously renewed the whole Church.

An interesting example is Athanasius, who was a learned man in Greek culture despite being Egyptian. His alter ego, Anthony of Egypt, couldn't read Greek. Yet, they worked together for the renewal of the Church. In the Middle Ages in England, the parish clergy could not preach. However, when the Franciscans and the Dominicans arrived, they preached. If they were not allowed to preach in the Parish Church, they preached outside. Their preaching renewed the Church and made the Franciscans and the Dominicans popular in Europe, including the United Kingdom.

The missionary movement is another example. Bishop John Bosco shared yesterday how missionaries not only made new Christians but also renewed culture economically, socially, and educationally. Though the modern missionary movement had its share of mistakes and assumptions, we should not forget the sacrifice of these missionaries. Many of them took their coffins with them to Africa, which is a remarkable display of dedication and sacrifice. We know of many who were martyred on this continent and in Asia for the sake of propagating the faith. So what I'm saying is that, of course, we need good structures to efficiently do our work. However, the renewal of the Church comes by allowing the Holy Spirit of God to work, enabling movements born of laypeople, religious, and clergy. Bishops should not be excluded from this; they can also be involved in renewing the Church. That is how the Church will be renewed, not simply by dedicating all our time to structures.

Thank you very much.





## **Fraternal Greetings**

H.E. Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle

*Papal Envoy to the FABC 50 General Conference*

Thank you, thank you, your eminence. Greetings to all of you friends, brothers, and sisters in the Lord. You see how lonely it could get if you're a Special Envoy of the Holy Father. You are separated from the rest, and uh yeah, it was a good decision to stay here. Aside from the distance from the nunciature coming here, it's also good to be with brothers and sisters. This is not supposed to be a talk, a conference. I think I will have an opportunity to share tomorrow. This is simply to greet you.

Yesterday morning, before going to the airport, I had my regular meeting with the Holy Father. I told him that I would be coming here. So aside from the video message that he had already sent to us, I asked him, "Is there anything else that you want to convey to the churches in Asia?" And he said, "My closeness to everyone." He said, "Please affirm to them how close to me, to my heart, the churches of Asia are."

I have already conveyed that. And yesterday also, his letter appointing me as an Envoy was published. And it is significant that the opening part of the letter was an invocation of the Blessed Mother, Queen and Mother

**“The Holy Father is praying to Our Lady so that the tiredness, the pains, the sorrows, and the joys of the peoples of Asia may enter her merciful heart.”**

of Mercy. The Holy Father is praying to Our Lady so that the tiredness, the pains, the sorrows, and the joys of the peoples of Asia may enter her merciful heart. You know, the heart of the Mother of the Lord and also our mother. What a beautiful way to open a letter. It is not the regular template for an appointment that starts with, “I, by the will of God...” And some of us write that way to our priests: “I, by the virtue of my appointment, Bishop of this..., sending you to this village parish, with all of ....” But here, the Holy Father, you know, begins with a prayer and to a mother. I want to assure you again of the Holy Father’s closeness to all of us.

I’m sure you are all very tired at this point. You all look tired. And maybe you’re all very eager to go back to your dioceses and the respective areas of mission. But I have a request. Very often, there are still surprises of God towards the end. And if you are found sleeping already, the surprises might not be caught. Yes, we all need to rest. But at the same time, with a certain alertness. You know, the wise men, whom we are invoking also, you know, they traveled another way because they had been warned in a dream, by a dream. So, when you are falling asleep here, make sure you dream. And in your dreams, you might get some surprise, up to the last moment. Okay, please continue sleeping and dreaming while talking with one another. Thank you very much. Thank you, thank you.





**FINAL MESSAGE AND  
SCHEMA**

**DAY 2  
OCTOBER 29, 2022**

## Final Message and Schema of the Final Document

### PRESS NOTE

OCTOBER 29, 2022

29th October, the last working day of the FABC General Conference, began with the Holy Eucharist celebrated by H.E. Charles Cardinal Bo, Archbishop of Yangon, Myanmar and President of the FABC, who celebrated his birthday today. H.E. Cardinal Bo led the representatives in the Adsumus, and the morning prayer, hosted by Kazakhstan, was led by the video prepared by Sister Irene Alberto of the Consolata Sisters.



H.E. Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle, Papal Envoy to the Conference and Pro-Prefect of the Dicastery for Evangelization, spoke on the emerging context of young people today, the changing landscape of social media and artificial intelligence, and its impact on evangelisation. Highlighting how social media has changed the self-identity of youth, their feelings of belonging and empathy for others, how the speed and limits of the medium impact their ability to infer, critically analyse and empathise, the importance of deep reading, and the danger of digital crimes and the monopoly of media by businesses, H.E. Cardinal Tagle described social media as not only a means for connectedness, but a powerful tool creating a new humanity. Illustrating social media and digital communication as a world in itself that

follows its own rules, H.E. Cardinal Tagle concluded with, ‘social media is a world that needs evangelisation’.

Bishop Adrianus Sunarko OFM presented the final draft of the Message from the FABC General Conference to the peoples of Asia. This was followed by a vote, and the final draft was passed.

Bishop Pablo Virgilio David, member of the Commission on the Final Document, presented the final draft of the Schema of the Final Document, explaining the further edits that had been made. This was followed by a round of plenary discussion.

In the afternoon, H.E. Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle addressed the Bishops privately. Final comments on the Final Document followed, and a vote passing it. Fr Bill LaRousse explained the logistics of the process by which the continental Synod would be carried out.

H.E Charles Cardinal Bo, gave the final address. Thanking God for the grace of the past days, H.E. Cardinal Bo described the Asian Church as a church of the poor, of the young, and of dialogue, and spoke of the immense progress the Church has made in the last fifty years. He thanked the host of the conference - H.E. Cardinal Kriengsak, H.E. Cardinal Gracias for his guidance, the Church in Thailand, and everyone present for all the work put in.

The evening concluded with H.E. Cardinal Gracias leading the representatives in the Litany of the Saints of Asia and the Angelus.





## **The Impact of Social Media and A.I. on Evangelisation**

H.E. Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle

*Papal Envoy to the FABC 50 General Conference*

Good morning to everyone, and happy birthday again, Your Eminence Cardinal Bo. Now we know the real reason why the General Conference was convened on these days. It was to coincide with the birthday of His Eminence Card Bo, and we thank the Episcopal Conference of Central Asia for the beautiful morning prayer. I was blessed to have participated in the inauguration of the new Episcopal conference through Zoom, and with the Holy Father, we went to Kazakhstan. Congratulations to the new Episcopal Conference of Central Asia.

Cardinal Gracias asked me to give a conference with you. The timing is not ideal because you will vote on the final statement today, so please do not take this too seriously. I'm giving this talk not so much as the papal envoy but as a bishop from Asia, and I want to share some thoughts with you. We agreed With Cardinal Gracias that I could reflect on social media and artificial intelligence as they impact the call to evangelization.

As we have noted, social media has been a blessing to the world, especially in democratizing information and knowledge. Through social media, knowledge is no longer confined to a small elite group but is now

easily shared. During the pandemic, thanks to social media, we maintained some form of connectedness. Through social media, many parents suddenly realized that they could also be teachers and catechists.

We don't need to repeat all the blessings of social media. However, we are also being asked to be attentive because the use of social media changes our view of the human person. In a very subtle way, social media could change our understanding of a human being, affecting our relationships and our

**“Social media could change our understanding of a human being, affecting our relationships and our involvement in transforming society.”**

involvement in transforming society. It is a very subtle transformation. For example, many of us grew up believing that part of being human is to work, to find decent work for a living, and for the sake of creativity. But nowadays,

thanks to artificial intelligence, it is AI that does the work for human beings, and some work that humans used to do, we don't do anymore.

When I was a younger boy in school, spelling was stressed, and we had to memorize addition, multiplication, and subtraction. Now, artificial intelligence does what humans used to do. What happens to the human being? Are we developing a new form of illiteracy? Are we pretending to be developing as human beings, or are we beginning to see a form of underdevelopment where efficiency and profitability matter? But, then, the growth of the human mind, creativity, and critical thinking, all of those might disappear.

With that as a background, I want to share three points. First, I want to focus on the youth, the context of the youth, and their relationship with social media. During these past days, the concern about the youth has surfaced a lot. I want to share some results of a study by the Foundation Gravissimum Educationis, established by Pope Francis in 2015, to support integral education and fraternal coexistence in preparation for the Synod of Bishops on the youth. This Foundation surveyed 16,773 young people, ranging from 16 to 29 years of age, studying in 68 universities worldwide, from Catholic and non-Catholic institutions. They focused on three elements: 1) how young people look at themselves (Identity: the I), 2) the we, and then 3) the they (the others). What did the survey show?

Regarding the I, which is about identity, the result refers to an illusion of self-sufficiency. The youth get this false or illusory sense of self-sufficiency from the affirmation they get through social media. They exhibit themselves, post photos, and post what they eat. According to the survey, it is some form of exhibitionism. You have to advertise yourself, and some of them even post photos that are quite provocative. And according to the survey, young people do that to determine how many people will notice them. How many people will “like” me? This attitude has become a compulsion on social media. In order to receive “likes,” not only once but constantly from their circle and anyone who has access to their profile, and then with the number of likes they get, they say, well, I am good. And they feel secure.

The survey says social media has become a tool for this illusory self-sufficiency, which comes from affirmation from a small circle of those who “like” them. If you do not like somebody, you will be unfriended and blocked. So they will listen only to this small circle that tells them I “like” you, even if there are only four or five. They will construct a world where they say, “Yes, I can make it, I am like.”

The second is related to the first: the We. One of the researchers, Byung Chul Han, sounds Korean but definitely Asian, says “The digital inhabitants of the net do not assemble those who live in the internet. They actually do not assemble. They lack the interiority of assembly, which would bring forth a We. They form a gathering without assembly, a crowd without interiority.” I think the distinctions are very fine. They believe they are assembling, but no, they are gathering. However, a gathering is not necessarily an assembly; an assembly needs interiority. And a crowd could be gathered without interiority. And this is his fear. His fear is that the neoliberal economy does not constitute a ‘we’ among us, a ‘we’ that would make us incapable of collective action. In fact, individualism and atomization are making collective action shrink, he says. We have become isolated individuals. Isolated individuals, he says, characterize today’s society as not the crowd but loneliness.

“A crowd could be gathered without interiority. And this is his fear.”

Society is characterized by loneliness, not the interiority that makes us really an assembled community. Whatever affirmation I get for myself

comes from a very restricted ‘we,’ which is also very individualistic. They just look at each other and affirm each other. And outside of that circle, there is no more room for gathering or assembly.

This leads us to the third context, the ‘them.’ According to the study, we live in an increasingly globalized society that is more interconnected and has more networks, yet paradoxically, we care less and less about others.

Although we are more connected, we do not communicate as much. This is the paradox. According to the survey, many young people are connected through the net many hours of the day, but they do not communicate. Being

**“Being connected to the internet does not guarantee communication.”**

connected to the internet does not guarantee communication. And so, he says, we have circles being reduced without real empathy and communion. In fact, this behavior that we see is looking for loyalty. And if I don’t find loyalty, I will withdraw from the circle, including our group of loyal friends.

This is the trend, but not all young people are like this. This trend applies to young Catholic and non-Catholic young people. And according to the survey, this happens in a very subtle way. This is especially true for the inhabitants, that is, the world they have inhabited, learned to inhabit, and, in a very unseen way, have been transformed. Where do they find their self-worth? In an illusion of self-sufficiency. Where is my ‘we,’ my family? Only those who agree with me. And so, how do I deal with the so-called others? Well, I don’t care. Really, I don’t care. I care only for them if they join my circle. If they are not part of my circle, then I am sorry; they will disturb my self-sufficiency.

As I said, not all our young people are like this, but this is the emerging context. This brings me to my second point, which is related to youth and social media. This may sound strange, but I have chosen this second point because many of us in different parts of Asia, we engage in the educational ministry. Educational ministry is our main contact with the youth. Even non-Catholics and non-Christians appreciate our Catholic schools and our educational ministry. May I ask His Eminence Francis Xavier how many students you have in your school here at Bhan Phuwan? There are around 4,000 students. How many are Christians? There are only .5 percent or less than half percent Christians. The school is a fertile ground

for intercultural and interreligious encounters.

One of the studies conducted by the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences on changing media in a changing world invites us to understand the youth and the future of society through the impact of social media. In one of the articles entitled, “The impact of digital mediums on the development of critical analysis and empathy,” we complain many of our young people lack critical thinking analysis. As a result, empathy is also lacking. One of the studies of the Pontifical Academy of the Social Sciences gathered psychologists and neuroscientists to analyze the impact of social media, and they found out that one of the problems and, therefore, one area of the solution is reading.

This study analyzes the value of reading and the impact of the lack of reading, deep reading. The study opened with a quotation from Walter Ong, a Jesuit- an Asian, who says, “Technologies are not mere external aids but also the interior transformation of consciousness, and never more when they affect the world.” This is a good reminder. We might think of technology simply as an external tool, but using it often changes the interiority. It changes our consciousness. I guess those of you from my generation were trained to write and type. And then came the computers; I noticed that when I started using the computer, my handwriting became bad.

It might look like just a tool, but there is something changing within you. According to Walter Ong, especially when the concern is a word, and in Asian cultures, a person of the word, the person who keeps their word, is important. And here comes reading. According to the researchers, human beings are never meant to read. It is not in our genes to read. It is in our genes to survive. When we are hungry, we look for food; when we are thirsty, we look for water. Some use alphabets, and some use characters. When I came to Thailand, I did not suddenly change my genetics to be able to read Thai characters. No, it is not in our genes. You have to be taught, and you have to develop it. The relationship of a character, a vowel to a sound, and then with constant practice, the connection of the different letters to form a word, and then the word to relate it to your experience, and you use imagination, that’s reading.

And through constant practice, the mind, or the brain circuit,

develops with time and with constant use of that skill of reading. It is through deep reading that the brain develops analogical inferential affective analytical and contemplative capacities. All of these develop over time as you continue reading.

“**All the nuances and subtleties disappear.**”

Here comes the comment about the digital world. As we said, the presence of social media has made sharing knowledge more equitable and democratic. However, we see in the digital type of reading that it involves the quick and fast processing of multiple

bits of information. Your text messages must be limited to ten words; video message is limited to 1 minute. All the nuances and subtleties disappear. They are more concerned about the number of lines and the number of words rather than presenting the complexity of the truth in its context.

Rapid processing has disadvantages. Skills such as inference, critical analysis, and reflection are not given room. This develops only with deep reading. Especially when a student, a young person, starts reading novels and short stories, their imagination works. The reader is able to enter the world of somebody else and tries to imagine how that person in the story lives and feels. Empathy develops. Critical thinking, inference, analogy, and empathy also develop. Our young students are used to watching rather than reading. According to the study, this very simple thing of reading printed books and articles, spending time to make sense of ideas, and then verifying from my own experience whether the ideas written are true or not takes time. This art slowly disappears and is being replaced by so-called quick and swift reading. The authors say that if we ignore this lack of development in reading skills, we might wake up one day with citizens who have no ability to analyze the situation critically. And how do we expect them to be prophetic if their minds have not been trained in analogical, inference, and critical thinking? And also, we might develop a generation without empathy. Empathy is a feeling towards a friend than for a stranger. However, narratives, especially the intimate kind found in novels, have the remarkable power to create a safe space where readers can make strangers and strange others their friends. When reading a novel, slowly, things and persons who are strangers through reading become familiar; they might become friends, and we develop empathy through reading.

I thought of focusing on this because many of us have schools. Does reading still get the attention that it deserves? A study like this alerts us to the need for reading. And it is not just for intellectual prowess, but as the authors of the articles showed, it will impact the type of society we will build. Are we producing citizens who can discern and have developed a critical intelligence and, coupled with empathy, the capacity to empathize with those they do not know? The suggestion of the authors was for the students up to the age of 5 to be brought up in storytelling by parents or grandparents and some children's books. They said that, up to age 10 or 11, education in school should be printed books. Only after the age of 11 can they have a hybrid education. That is the proposal of the authors. I do not have the expertise to say that that is the right proposal, but I want us to be alerted on this. We might be thinking, how do we develop critical thinking, prophetic thinking among our young people, and our citizens, and our faithful? We might be thinking of seminars, and more seminars. Do they know how to read? Have they developed the skill of reading, and are we producing future leaders with critical minds but also with empathy? For these scholars, the best way to develop those characteristics now is to pay attention to deep reading and patient reading, which takes time.

**“The best way to develop those characteristics now is to pay attention to deep reading and patient reading, which takes time.”**

I think you will have such an experience when the draft of the final statement is presented to you. Reading with patience, every word should be with or between, should it be for or to. We need the critical thinking of bishops, religious, and lay people, but with empathy. But then look at the next generation. What if our seminarians, our novices, have not grown in the context where they don't read or have not acquired the training in reading?

We are celebrating the 60th anniversary of Vatican II. I wonder how many have read the documents of Vatican II? How can we expect a critical reading of the signs of the times with empathy if we did not read the documents of Vatican II?

My final point is the context of the youth in relation to social media. I have spoken about how social media has been changing the context regarding their self-identity, sense of belongingness, view of others, and concerns for others. Secondly, social media's present swift, quick reading style impacts critical thinking analysis and empathy. The brain's reading circuit is underdeveloped when no patience is devoted to deep reading.

**“The best way to punish him is to commit suicide, so that for the rest of his life, he would feel guilty.”**

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Finally, while we celebrate the blessing of social media, we are aware too that many crimes are happening nowadays through social media, such as new forms of slavery, the abuse of minors, and the abuse of the girl child; it's a real scandal. attended the meeting in Abu Dhabi on the online abuse of minors. Around 70 percent of the abused minors through the internet worldwide--more than 70

percent of the cases--have been promoted by the families of the children. It is becoming more difficult to detect because it is happening inside the homes. To make the sad story sadder, the payment to the families also happens online. We all do bank transactions online, so even criminal transactions, financial transactions happen online. I guess we are all familiar with the so-called dark web of assisted violence and assisted suicide. It was painful to assist in the funeral of one boy, a 15-year-old, who committed suicide. His friends told the parish priest and the principal of the school that a group of them, young boys from the same school, would connect to a website every evening at around 10 pm, and there was this mysterious big brother or someone who would start a conversation. How has your day been? And this boy who committed suicide once told a story that my father got mad at me. And this mysterious someone said your father is evil. Every evening, it says your father is evil and deserves punishment. The best way to punish him is to commit suicide, so that for the rest of his life, he would feel guilty. And the boy got brainwashed, he did it.

Three days ago, the Holy Father told the priests studying in Rome in the different universities and the Collegio there to please avoid

pornography available so easily through the internet. The trafficking of women and children also happens through the internet. People who are being sold for cheap labor also happen through the internet. So yes, social media are definitely a means of human communication and connectedness. But as we see in the recent events of our lives, and society, they are not merely means. They are not only means of communication. They are also a powerful tool. They are creating a world, creating a new humanity. With its own consciousness, and the business world that controls even politicians, they control our use of internet. They know how many times we visit this particular advertisement and this type of news. Their algorithms tell them we are inclined towards this circle, and they will keep bombarding us with data so that we would become more and more entrenched in that mentality. And then you also buy their products. So, social media are tools, but not just tools. They are a world in itself, a world that tries to recreate our world and humanity according to their agenda. So, if it is a world, then we just do not use social media for evangelization. Social media is one of the world's spaces that needs to be evangelized. And right now, it is one of the omnipresent ecosystems affecting not only Asia but the whole world. How to evangelize that is a matter for further study. I appreciate the contribution of the different scientist who are telling us, or giving us, indications. I think we should listen to them so that here in Asia, with some countries known for their technological prowess, evangelization might need to enter that world and bring the values of the Gospel.

Thank you for your patience, please read the documents of Vatican II, and the documents of FABC. Thank you very much.





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**CLOSING EUCHARIST  
AND CEREMONIES**

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**(Assumption Cathedral, Bangkok)  
OCTOBER 30, 2022**



### **Homily at the Closing Eucharist**

***Wisdom 11,22-12,2; 2 Thess 1,11-2,2; Luke 19,1-10***

His Eminence Luis Antonio G. Cardinal Tagle

*Papal Envoy to the FABC 50 General Conference*

As we bring the FABC 50 General Conference to a close in this Eucharistic Celebration, we make our own the words of the psalmist, “I will praise your name for ever, my King and my God.” We praise God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit for journeying with us and for calling us, the Churches in Asia, to journey together with each other and with the peoples of Asia. We thank the local Churches who have participated in the consultation prior to the Conference, the various committees who made sure the proceedings provided a space, a sacred space, for discerning God’s action in God’s people, the experts, the guests, the Bishop-delegates, the wonderful people of Bangkok and Thailand, the Royal Thai Government and the hardworking staff that attended to our needs. You have shown what journeying together means. To all of you, I bring a message of communion and closeness from His Holiness Pope Francis, who has been journeying with us these past days even from Rome. Our Blessed Mother, the angels and saints, especially the Saints of Asia, have been our constant companions too.

Journeying Together as Peoples of Asia, “and they went a different way” (Mt 2). This has been the theme, the experience and the future of the general Conference convened to celebrate the foundation of the FABC 50 years ago. Then, now, and in the future, there is no other path for FABC but

to journey together. We might think or ask yes, we need to journey together. That is life. That is mission. In many Asian cultures, life is often likened to a journey. But why together? And if we really have to do it together, how can we do it together? Our readings for this Sunday's Mass, especially the Gospel, point us the way. I have three points to share with you.

The first point. Jesus was on a journey. "Jesus came to Jericho and intended to pass through the town." He "intended to pass." There he encountered Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector and a wealthy man, probably amassing wealth through dishonest conduct. Jesus told Zacchaeus, "Come down quickly for today I must stay at your house." I must stay at your house. Jesus intended to pass through the town. Look at the words used: Intended! Must! He also said, "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save who was lost." Jesus wills the journey. Jesus intends to go to the house of Zacchaeus. Jesus chooses him as a companion on his journey. Journeying together must be intended, chosen and willed. We cannot leave it to chance. We cannot be indifferent to it. I will journey with you. We will journey together. I intend this. I seek this. We intend this. We seek this.

The second point. Who did Jesus choose as a partner or companion on the journey? Not the purest, not the most upright, not the blameless,

**“Jesus will enter his house, his heart, his wounds, his shame and bring all of it to their common journey.”**

not the one who will make him more acceptable to people, not the one who belonged to his circle. He chose Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector, considered a traitor to his people for he collaborated with occupying oppressive forces. Zacchaeus is someone nobody wants to journey with. You will ruin your

name by walking with Zacchaeus. But there is a good spot in his heart. He wants to see Jesus. He climbs a sycamore tree because he is small in stature in order to see Jesus, but probably also so that others will not see him. He can see but not will be seen. Surprise! Jesus sees him and commands him to come down quickly, to show his face to the crowd and to walk with him to his house. Jesus will enter his house, his heart, his wounds, his shame and bring all of it to their common journey.

God wants us to journey with those who might differ from us, with those who are hiding from other people, the isolated, the friendless, the

despised, the shamed, the unseen, those in dark alleys and slums, those crossing mountains, rivers and hills in the dark of night so no one would see them, and also those hidden in high political, financial and military offices. God wants the Church in Asia to journey with the poor, depressed and marginalized, the refugees, migrants, displaced and indigenous people, the wounded and exploited earth, the youth, the women and the families. We will walk together as we together face rejection, extremism, threats to life, violence, conflicts, the ambivalence of the digital revolution and our neighbor religions and cultures.

**“God wants the Church in Asia to journey with the poor, depressed and marginalized, the refugees, migrants, displaced and indigenous people, the wounded and exploited earth, the youth, the women and the families.”**

The third point. What type of journeying together will it be? Where is its destination? With Jesus it will be a journey of mercy and compassion, not of condemnation, of patience, not of destruction. It is a journey that ends in the land of justice and charity. Zacchaeus finally felt treated as a human being. Jesus called him a son of Abraham. Accepted as human with a face and dignity, he began to see the poor and those he had hurt as human too. He would repay those he might have

**“With Jesus it will be a journey of mercy and compassion, not of condemnation, of patience, not of destruction. It is a journey that ends in the land of justice and charity.”**



defrauded beyond the demands of justice. Half of his belongings he would give to the poor. They have become his brothers, sisters and partners in his unfolding journey in life.

Journeying Together as Peoples of Asia and “they went a different way” (Mt 2). Jesus shows us the different way – different from ways that disturb communion and sow division, different from ways that keep other



people unseen and non-existent, different from ways that show no mercy towards neighbors. Jesus is The Way and shows a different way. He promised that he will be with us until the end of time. We will never be alone in our journey. He is Emmanuel, God with us, forever. Let us walk with Him. And like Jesus let us walk with each other and the peoples of Asia.

**“Jesus shows us the different way - different from ways that disturb communion and sow division, different from ways that keep other people unseen and non-existent, different from ways that show no mercy towards neighbors.”**

I am certain that Pope Francis would love to address to you the words of Saint Paul, “Brothers and sisters, we always pray for you, that God may make you worthy of his calling and powerfully being to fulfillment every good purpose and every effort of faith, that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in Him, in accord with the grace of our God and Lord Jesus Christ”. Amen.



## Closing Speech

His Eminence Charles Cardinal Bo, SDB  
Archbishop of Yangon

*President of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences*

It is my happy duty to share a word of thanks to our merciful God for the grace of these days. As our Holy Father mentioned, Pope St. Paul VI encountered in Asia a continent of poor masses who were awakening from fatalism to a life worthy of man. Asia was also a continent of the young who were awakening to their rightful roles in society. Finally, Asia has always been home to ancient faiths and diverse cultures that were becoming more

and more committed to building a fraternal community of nations. The Church, therefore, could not but realize that we were called to be a Church of the poor, a Church of the young and a Church in dialogue. While we engaged in the triple dialogue with the poor, with cultures and with cultures, we were also painfully aware of and praying in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in the Church of silence, who - by bearing the Cross as Christ did - spoke more eloquently than any of us living in less oppressive societies. Fifty years later, we realize that we cannot divorce the cry of the poor from the cry of the earth. The Church of the poor must therefore become

**“The Church of the poor must therefore become the Church in harmony with creation. Heeding the wisdom of our brothers and sisters in indigenous communities, the voice of the oppressed must become the voice of our sister, mother earth.”**

the Church in harmony with creation. Heeding the wisdom of our brothers and sisters in indigenous communities, the voice of the oppressed must become the voice of our sister, mother earth. “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the land”. Fifty years later, we realize that the youth have already populated the world wide web, just as our forebears braved the seas and conquered mountains to explore and discover new habitats. Because of the young, Jesus is already in the web: transforming lives and building communities. The Church of the young has become the Church swimming and navigating the new frontier of the web. Aware of the many dangers we

face in the digital continent, we cheerfully confirm: “Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God”.

Fifty years later, we realize that dialogue has become not only relevant but also indispensable to a world that has grown more fragmented and prone to violent conflict. The Church in dialogue must become more and more a Church of bridge builders. With Jesus, we proclaim “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God”.

Fifty years later, we realize that the space for the free exercise of religion cannot be taken for granted. Freedom must sometimes be bought by the sweat of our brow and redemption achieved by the blood of martyrs. With the Church of silence, we pray the blessing: “Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”. We stand also with those who suffer abuse and violence. As we work for a world that is safe for children, women, migrants and refugees, we pray, too, “Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied”. The Church of silence is also the Church of redemption and hope.

Dear friends, thank you for making time for this Conference. To the wonderful people of Thailand, thank you for graciously hosting us. To the Church in Thailand, thank you for your cheerful witness and hospitality. To all who worked and prayed for the fruitfulness of this Conference, thank you. May God hear your every prayer. May God bless you with good health, prosperity and peace.











**GENERAL CONFERENCE  
GUIDE DOCUMENT**

## **FABC 50 General Conference Guide Document**

*Theme:*

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

### Preamble

Fifty years have passed since the beginnings of the Federation of the Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC). On the occasion of this anniversary, the FABC plans to gather the Church 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’ (Evangelii 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 now 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)

As a preparation for this General Conference, a widespread consultation was made and was recognized as an important step towards this renewal process of the Church in Asia and the FABC. Consultations were carried out at various levels: (i) Four regional gatherings; (ii) FABC Offices; (iii) An online survey to capture the aspirations of the general public.

Based on these above consultations, this guide document looks to expand the emerging realities and challenges confronting Asia and the Church, along with the Church’s presence in that Asian context. It may not be possible to encapsulate in this paper all aspirations and expectations of the Church in Asia, but it is the hope that this document then will act as a catalyst for greater and more profound reflections for the benefit of the Church in Asia at the General Conference.

## PART ONE

### Emerging Realities and Trends of Concern in Asia

#### 1. Global Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has probably caused the greatest disruption and human suffering in recent times. Emerging as an atypical pneumonia in Wuhan, China in December 2019, the World Health Organization

characterized the novel COVID-19 sickness as a pandemic on 11th March 2020. The severity of a new disease to which humanity had hitherto no exposure to, put the world into a ‘pause’ with governments enforcing lockdowns, travel restrictions and mandatory quarantines to contain the spread of COVID-19 and shore up public health infrastructure. Asia has had mixed success in managing its pandemic response – some countries have been doing fairly well in containing the spread of the virus, while others have not. Restrictions are expected to continue, albeit hopefully at smaller scales, as and when hotspots emerge. The pandemic has also affected the working of the Church in her worship and pastoral initiatives.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the imposition of preventive and management measures for its control has interrupted everyone’s life, cutting across age, social status and other boundaries. Healthcare, economy and livelihoods, food security, education, recreation and socialization, safety – everything has been impacted and altered. The implications are many and effects critical, particularly with respect to equity of access. This unprecedented deviation from normal has prompted a collective examination of life as a whole.

On the other hand, the lockdowns also brought about another kind of impact on the environment, evident from a near-global fall in pollution levels. It is an unequivocal indication that the “normal” of hitherto human activity is not sustainable. This time of trial, Pope Francis has said, is an opportunity to prepare our collective future. He emphasized the need to reconnect with our real surroundings, contemplate the natural world, rethink our priorities and eliminate inequalities.

## 2. Globalization

The process of globalization in Asia has had positive and negative impacts on the social, cultural, religious, economic and political aspects of human life. Globalization, when understood as a worldwide process of integration and interaction, could bring peoples closer together. For example, we see a growing solidarity in situations of disasters, and a growing search for strategies to deal with overarching problems such as combatting climate change, poverty, hunger and diseases. There is a greater awareness of mutual dependency and associated with this an ongoing exchange of experiences, there is greater access to knowledge and technologies.

Globalization has also brought about a growing awareness to overcome unequal distribution of resources and opportunities. Seen in this light, one can say that globalization favors a multi-faceted dialogue among peoples and could be a means to promote harmony.

However, 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 to 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. They disrupt and destroy local production and markets, dictate the work conditions, thwart the ILO standards, exploit the poor ruthlessly and violate human rights, at times corruption may be involved. The greed for profit and unlimited growth also increases inequality in Asia and leads to asymmetric development processes.

This type of globalization is also characterized by the concentration of decision- making processes rather than engaging broad participatory processes, subsidiarity and inclusiveness. Globalization also tends to impoverish human lives by cutting off people from their roots and traditional cultures and languages and imposing a dominant cultural uniformity.

The question must not be neglected of who will have a profit or loss from globalization. Who has a special interest in globalization? What kind of internationalization of businesses and economy are they talking about? What about the regional economic areas and now what about the shift in the axis of influence to Asia in the 21st-century? Goldman Sachs for example in its economic forecast, highlighted the trend towards mainland China becoming the largest and India the second largest economy by the year 2050 in terms of GDP. The shift in the axis of influence, the underlying concepts and its consequences for the different peoples in Asia and worldwide must be observed and, in doing so, not to forget the crucial orientation towards the “world common good” as described in the social teaching of the Church, especially in *Laudato Si* (LS) and *Fratelli Tutti* (FT).

### 3. Climate Emergency

The current COVID-19 pandemic affecting the world has interrupted our lives to an extent that many other aspects of our lives have taken a back seat. Nevertheless, here in Asia, we recognize that the long-term challenge facing humankind in the 21st century is the human-made climate change and the associated ecological crisis. The well-being of many future generations both in Asia and worldwide, depends on us making significant lifestyle changes and learning to cope with them. In the Paris Agreement 2015, all states unanimously committed to reducing global warming to below 2°C, preferably to 1.5°C. Scientific data shows that we have only a very limited time window to take counter-measures and therefore, there is an urgency to act. However, according to IPCC reports so far governments together with their people and the economy have not taken sufficient measures to address this emergency. It has been noted that there is a lack of will to act in more developed nations because climate change is not considered a common challenge in their daily life. Such apathy only leads to the deterioration of the planet, our “common home”.

Countless people in Asia are already suffering due to weather extremes, drought, typhoons, deforestation and forest fires, and even conflicts over water use. Changes in precipitation and water availability have also direct consequences to the food supply. Given that Asia is home to many of the countries that are vulnerable to climate change, millions of people will suffer due to rising sea levels, air, soil and water pollution (e.g., mobility, industrial and mining activities, non-sustainable agriculture), the “throwaway mentality”, the loss of biodiversity, and waste management. All of these are crimes against nature and the future generations.

With Pope Francis’ encyclical *Laudato Si* on environment and social challenges, the Church now has a Magna Carta to deal with this crisis, there is a need for greater dialogue within the Church as well as with other religions, social groups and those responsible for politics and for the economy. As Church, we need to turn the sufferings of nature and the poor (cf. LS 49) into our personal sufferings (cf. LS 19) in order to achieve a real conversion in lifestyle, production models and consumption patterns (cf. LS 206). In view of the common destiny of future generations and the integrity of creation, there is an urgent need to bring everyone together to a new dialogue.

#### 4. Digitalization

Since the dawn of this new millennium, the world of digital communication and interaction has developed in a rapid upward curve so that this has become the part and parcel of the human way of life. Human communities are able to communicate with each other with greater ease and the communication of information can be swift. Even though digitalization is part of the millennial way of life, many others too have also adapted to these new forms of multi-faceted modes of communication and social interaction. The greater implications of digitalization on ordinary human life can also be seen in the way businesses are operated, consumer buying, entertainment, medical, and even worship. In more ways than one, digitalization has improved efficiency and productivity at various levels of human life.

Despite the benefits that digitalization and its culture have brought to our lives, we also see the challenges they impose. Issues concerning personal security and privacy, crime and terrorism, media manipulation and objectification, depersonalization and hate crimes, fake news and identities, over reliance and social disconnect, bullying and addiction are just some of the challenges that the digital culture brings together with the benefits. It can also be said that digitalization may also have contributed to the decline in the spiritual lives of the people and also vocations to the priestly and religious lives. We also see digitalization being used by governments and corporations to exert power and to influence culture. Moreover, a digital divide 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 of these and even more warrant our attention as we move into newer digital and virtual worlds.

#### 5. Urbanization

Around half of Asia's population lives in cities and this trend of moving to cities will continue to increase. There are positive implications of urbanization that include easier access to employment opportunities, cultural activities, social services, technological advancements, transportation and communication, quality educational and medical facilities, improved

standards of living and a more open and tolerant environment as people of many social layers, races and religions live and work together.

The culmination of the Gospel is symbolically a city, the city of the New Jerusalem which forms part of the peaceable home that fulfils God's promised justice for the poor, salvation for the humble, and the renewal of creation (cf. Rev 21-22).

Urbanization also presents challenges such as insufficient space for new houses causing the expansion of cities into rural areas. In cities we are seeing a wide gap between the rich and the poor, joblessness, development of slums, child labor, high cost of living, impersonal relationships, water and sanitation problems, environmental damage, poor health facilities, spreading of diseases, insufficient and inconvenient of mobility, and crime. Many young people from rural areas migrate to cities in hope of a better life, leaving behind the older generation. In the cities, they often take up menial jobs to support themselves and their families. They are most vulnerable to economic downturns with job losses and even incurring debts as with the COVID-19 pandemic. Although we also notice how urban dwellers are moving to the rural areas for a more laid back, healthy and simpler lifestyles. Impacts of the rural-urban shift and interdependence need to be explored from both sides. The expanding suburbia around major cities in Asia could also be an interesting study of socio-economic and cultural development.

## 6. Migrants and Refugees

Asia is a continent of “people on the move” in search of a better life through employment and educational opportunities. Many migrants find refuge in their adopted city, country, or region. Where local, national, regional, or international policy welcomes, protects, and integrates migrants, their welfare is promoted, their rights are upheld, and they contribute to the culture and economy of society. Migrant Catholics bring new opportunities and vigor to local Churches.

When migration is not properly regulated through bilateral treaties or similar instruments, irregular and clandestine migration become prevalent. This results in the criminal trafficking of persons, organized smuggling, and tourists and workers overstaying visas. Irregular migrants

thus suffer in inhumane ways that include arrest, detention, deportation, exploitation, and alienation of inherent human rights.

Although migrant workers contribute much to the economies of their own countries and regions, these suffer the dislocation of human and cultural capital and other social costs. Migrant workers must contend with unfair labor practices (contract substitution, unjust wages, etc.), limited rights, lack of accommodation, prejudice, discrimination, verbal, physical, sexual, and other forms of abuse. Although they lift their families out of poverty, their children are usually adversely affected by the absence of one or both parents in their early development.

Asia is home to countless refugees and internally displaced persons who flee war, violence, religious persecution, natural disasters, and extreme environmental events. Populations, especially indigenous peoples, are invaded by development projects that deprive them of their ancestral domains. Lack of civil recognition or forced displacement render some residents and refugees stateless – a status which the Geneva Convention has not recommended. The Church needs to recognize and act on the status of refugees in Asia.

## 7. Political Governance

In a world of globalized politics, the necessity for a new and far-sighted integral way to handle pandemics, social, economic and ecological crises of our times must be desired so as to build greater resilience against threats that impede justice, peace and harmony (cf. LS 197; EG 183). There is a need for a politics that provides safe space for the people's voice, respecting human dignity, and at the same time respecting the principle of subsidiarity. Politics engaged in promoting the global common good is a "lofty vocation and one of the highest forms of charity" (EG 205).

The COVID-19 and the climate crises show clearly that politics should not be driven by a neoliberal economic system, an "efficiency driven paradigm of technocracy", or even an "absolute power of a financial system" (LS 189). Similarly, political governance must be subjected to a constitution. The fundamental law of the land should provide the appropriate checks and balances against the abuses that arise when the separation of executive, legislative and judicial powers is not respected, when the secularity of the state is undone by religious intolerance, when military leaders do not recognize

the priority of civil authority, and when any political party or ideology marginalizes others. We recognize that bureaucratic red tape, graft and corruption, violent language, extrajudicial killings, disregard of the human and social rights, and many other issues across Asia are affecting different groups of people especially the minorities, the poor and the vulnerable in such a way that causes disequilibrium to the overall peace and harmony in our societies. We also see rising situations where freedom of expression and especially freedom of the press are being suppressed. Ethical principles, respect for just laws, and principles of subsidiarity are being manipulated and even not upheld where legitimate opposition is undermined by the use of power and corruption.

## 8. Transformation of Cultures

Asian cultures are predominantly collective and therefore the individual is most often seen as embedded within a group where the individual finds one's ancestry and meaning. The Asian culture has never been static and therefore it has been evolving over centuries as greater exposure to other cultures can only enrich one's own. To a large extent, the Asian culture is also shaped by one's faith and beliefs because they in turn shape the cultural values of the communities. The diversity of Asian cultures is not only the uniqueness of Asia but also adds value to the world community. Much of the Asian cultural diversity is seen not only through its languages, culinary expressions, and costumes, but also in attitudes, demeanor and behavior which characterizes the Asian people.

With the dawn of colonialism, the idea of progress was often associated with imitating the colonial culture. This then led to traditional cultures being weakened and thus giving rise to a hybrid-form of a culture. The wave of globalization is also impacting traditional cultures, values and human behavior. The greater movement of peoples and the migration phenomenon adds to cultural transformation and adaptation. In this way, Asian spiritualities, wisdom, and values that have shaped these communities in the past are now less significant and important in the face of homogenized forms of living in a global village. Retracing the Asian customs, traditions and values could contribute to the overall global human community in its quest for a better living.

## 9. Youth

“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 movements of renewal 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. (Ecclesia in Asia, 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” (Christus Vivit 84).

Expanding mass and social media provide the youth with transnational and intercultural venues for developing forms of verbal and non-verbal communication for an increasingly pan-ethnic generation. This has also empowered them with the awareness and opportunities to effect positive change in matters concerning justice, human rights, climate change, gender, animal welfare and a range of other issues that they are passionate about.

However, where the youth have access to the internet, they are also vulnerable to being exposed to online gaming and pornography. Many develop internet addiction, which provides a virtual escape from stress but contributes to depression, social anxiety, and other ills. Many young people fall prey to violence, abuse, risky sexual behavior, trafficking, prostitution, and ideologies that devalue marriage and family. We see this especially where education, employment, and societal safeguards (robust family life, cultural and religious values, and criminal justice system) are lacking. Moreover, many young people whose parents migrate for work are deprived of a stable family life at a stage when the presence and guidance of parents are crucial.

## 10. Gender Issues

Harmony and love for family have generally guided gender roles and responsibilities in Asian societies. A recent international research 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 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” (EG 104). However, 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 which includes shifting gender identities, are largely unacknowledged even as LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) communities continue to make themselves heard in the midst of rejection in families, communities and society at large.

## 11. Family Values

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... 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). The people of Asia “hold the family to be a vital source of strength, a closely-knit community with a powerful sense of solidarity” (EA 6), hospitality and stability.

Many children in Asia grow with both parents in extended/joint families. Death due to human tragedies, violence, wars and natural disasters deprive some of them of one or both parents. Migration to work in urban centers and abroad forces members of families to separate. Nevertheless, the support of close kin (grandparents, uncles, aunts, elder siblings, cousins, etc.) usually enable 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. Most of those who can study enter the state education system. The Church’s schools, colleges and universities make a significant contribution to the private education system.

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

## 12. Indigenous People

In recent decades, we have seen a greater sensitivity and awareness for the indigenous peoples, especially for their very precarious life situations. It is recognized that Asia comprises a majority of the world’s self-identified indigenous groups. They not only represent the immense cultural riches but also offer the rest of world wisdom and practices for better human living. In many parts of the world, indigenous knowledge and agricultural practices for adaptation to climate change are increasingly being given recognition.

The cultural diversity that indigenous peoples offer is sometimes considered by governments, and even church leadership, as a “problem” that affects unity. We acknowledge that dealing with a vast plurality of cultures isn’t always easy. Thus, there are times when the identity of the indigenous peoples is not adequately respected. In some cases, arbitrary demarcations don’t respect their existence for centuries. The right to an autochthonous territory, to land, their own language and ways of thinking, their forms of expression and rites, their sustainable economy and lifestyle adapted to the environment, their individual and social rights are often in tension with the interest of governments. Political and economic interests (access to land and water, mining, logging, etc.) can also lead to exploitation, displacement, oppression and even in some places to extrajudicial killings. Social disregard, neglect of access to education and health systems are becoming widespread in a capitalistic economy. The pressure to conform to a globalized world influenced through social media also does not escape the indigenous communities.

The socio-cultural, political, economic and ecological challenges would require an increased accompaniment and support. In situations of exploitation, the Church, given her prophetic tradition, should be the voice for the indigenous peoples and 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 the same way, 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.

### 13. Human Dignity

The respect for life and the human person is of great importance in Asian societies. Since the individual cannot be seen apart from a larger community, human dignity is not only respect but also embraces sanctity and autonomy which are intrinsically imbued in the human person. The values of respect for children and reverence for the elders, are somewhat trademarks in an Asian household. Care for the poor, the vulnerable, and those on the margins of society are also considerations that are included in the non-formal education of the young. From conception to the end of life, the dignity of human life has to be protected. The sacredness of the human life and its connection with the divine is yet another important trademark in the Asian communities.

However, due to human greed, selfishness and even exploitive economic structures, the human person can be quite easily reduced to merely an object or even a commodity. Sex tourism and human trafficking, voiceless and stateless people, caste and gender discrimination, child brides, the poor and marginalized, gender and religious violence, kidnapping, child labor and inhumane working conditions, and many other issues that are on the rise, confront and challenge the Asian peoples.

Violation of human rights by the state and exploitation of the Asian peoples are also threatening the human persons right to live a dignified life as this prevents the ability to fulfil one's full potential. Despite having constitutional guarantees to protect human dignity there still remain gaps in the upholding and implementation of personal and social rights in many countries in Asia. Recognizing this lack of respect for human dignity must impel the Asian churches to be protagonists and promoters of justice,

mercy, respect for persons, reconciliation and harmony in this vast Asian continent.

#### 14. Religions in Society

Religious and ethnic diversity is a feature of Asian societies. All religions can contribute to the good of society and harmony among believers of different faiths. Generally, there have been good relationships among the different religions in Asia. There are also interfaith marriages and families all over Asia. Religious beliefs and practices contribute significantly to the formation of personal moral criteria, sound judgment and give meaning to life and provide an ethos that integrates and links social, political, economic and cultural values.

However, in spite of the positive and constructive interreligious relations, there is a sense that this situation has incrementally worsened. Secularism has promoted a divided and polarized society which leads to more “religiously” motivated conflicts. There is the presence of religious fundamentalism and extremism often used for self-serving ends. There are places where religious freedom is limited, and it is estimated that at least 60% of Asian countries have problems with religious freedom. According to the Pew Research Centre, between 2007 – 2017, there has been an increase from 4% to 4.8% in the Asia-Pacific region relating to laws and policies restricting religious freedom.

Multi-religious societies usually have a majority religion that often may be identified with the society or nation as a whole. The manipulation or use of religion, including the emotional attachment to it, for ideological, ethnic or partisan political reasons can lead to conflictual situations and violence.

The minority religious populations in each country need to have their religious freedom and human dignity protected. There are experiences where the rights of minorities are not respected and women from minority communities are being abducted, forced to convert to the majority religion and to marry. Belonging to a minority group could also lead to being involved in fake legal cases and employment opportunities being negatively affected. Unfortunately, religion is sometimes used in these cases and there could be cover-ups of malevolence.

## 15. Transforming Church

The Church in Asia has come a long way from the time the first missionaries arrived in this vast continent. In the modern era with the arrival of Christianity over four centuries ago, Asia has seen steady growth in Catholicism and now represents almost 12% of the world's total Catholic population (approximately 61% of the Catholic population of Asia is located in the Philippines). According to the World Christian Database 2010, Catholicism started the twentieth century as 1.2 % of the Asian population, but ended the twentieth century at 3%, making significant growth. Regions, where early missionaries found it difficult to enter for mission activity, are now beginning to flourish in the faith. The peoples of Asia have also become missionaries in their own right as they also give life to the Church in many other parts of the world. Despite the challenges faced in Asia, the Church remains vibrant and energetic in many places.

The growth of the Church in Asia has been marked by several factors: the increase of local and indigenous clergy and religious, greater lay participation in the life of the Church, access to education (formal and non-formal), the Church's involvement in social justice issues, integral human development, community building, interreligious and ecumenical dialogue, and a host of other ministries that have been integral to the life and mission of the Church in Asia.

Despite a growing Church, she is not without hurdles and challenges. There are places in Asia where the Church is discriminated against due to the lack of religious freedom. The Church is still too self-referential (self-absorption), she is not sufficiently open to processes for transformation in society and challenges from the globalized world. 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. This is often seen in the lack of collaborative lay participation in decision-making processes which could impede the promotion of an accountable and transparent check and balance in the Church. These are just some of the many other hurdles and challenges the Church in Asia has to confront as she looks towards transforming herself for the future.

Asia today, once again, is in a period of transformation. The changes are vast, deep, and swift. There is also a grave crisis of polarization which seems to be sweeping through most Asian countries. Composed as they are of many racial, linguistic and religious groups, the Asian nations have not yet found a cohesive stability whereby all groups can exist in harmony.

## PART TWO

### Church in the Asian Context

The Church in Asia is cognizant of the variety of challenges faced in an ever changing future. The concerns raised in the previous section are probably only a fraction of the wider concerns and realities confronting Asia and her peoples. The attempt to articulate some of these “macro concerns” are intended to stimulate deeper reflections and finding new pathways amidst the changing and at times fluid situations that impels the Church to action. Despite these challenges, the Church in Asia has been responding in a variety of ways within this vast continent, recognizing that the diversity that cuts across Asia makes it more demanding as there cannot be a “one solution fits all” approach. In this light then, we are aware that not only is the Church involved in short-term or immediate relief works, which is often seen by many, but also in long-term efforts to effect change through formation, systemic and structural changes, advocacy, and also defending the vulnerable. Many of these are also carried out by collaborating and networking with non-governmental and civil society organizations for the good of all. These partnerships have only accentuated the fact that the Church does not exist for herself, but she is at the service of all the peoples of Asia as she continues to announce the kingdom of God and transforming our realities in the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, LG 5).

Recognizing that the concerns raised have far-reaching consequences in the lives of the people, the FABC renews its commitment to be at the service of the Churches in Asia as we journey together as peoples of Asia. The Church’s response cannot just be an automatic, involuntary, and unthinking reaction but must be a response that is well discerned, grounded in Scripture, tradition, magisterial teaching, and pastoral practice that promotes unity and sustainability. As we begin to envision new pathways within this changing social, political, economic, ideological, religious and

pastoral landscape, it is necessary to provide some foundations for an expansive reflection. These should include identifying the kind of Church we are called to be, discovering the aspects of Asian culture that deepen being Church in Asia, and living the Christian mission in a given context. While doing this, we continue to search new ways as to how the FABC can facilitate this reflection based on a three-fold foundation as proposed here: (i) Aspects of Asian Culture for A Prophetic and Responsive Church, (ii) Images of Jesus for Asia and (iii) Envisioning an Image of the Church in the Asian Context. As we broaden our reflection, may we be assisted to visualize future pathways for the Church in Asia and the FABC.

### 1. Aspects of Asian Culture for a Prophetic and Responsive Church

Asia is the birthplace of many religions and religious diversity is one of the characteristics of this region. Given that Asia is the world's most populous and most extensive continent, accounting for 60% of the global population, it is not surprising that Asian cultural expressions are not homogenized. This heterogeneity is due to the diverse cultures and languages, ethnic composition and also historical background that shapes the Asian landscape. For these reasons then, values, customs, and beliefs, which are important to the Asian people, are often laced with elements of mysticism and spirituality into the different cultural expressions.

The Churches in Asia are born and continue to grow within such contexts and therefore the aspects of being Church in Asia cannot be void of the experiences of Asian cultures that are already imbued in the lives of the people. It is in this background that we realize that what is quite common across Asia is that there exists a sense of the divine in Asian societies and aspects of prayer, meditation and contemplation are somewhat integrated into the Asian ways of life and also the Church. The integral relationships with the divine also expresses itself in the way Asian people think and relate with one another. There is a sense of harmony, respect, sensitivity, care, and generosity that flows from this awareness of the divine – an interconnectedness that finds meaning in relationships with the self, the other, God and the cosmos.

It must also be acknowledged that these relationships don't always express themselves in ways that they are intended – violence, discrimination, and prejudice are but some of these negative manifestations that use cultures

and religions to justify many of these actions. However, Asian cultures with their diversity provide the Church with a locus to be prophetic and responsive in ways that promote wider avenues for dialoguing and engaging with others for the growth of the kingdom of God and to also define the way of being Church in Asia. It is from this cultural framework that helps us envision the image of the Church and ultimately the Asian face of Jesus.

## 2. Images of Jesus for Asia

God took on flesh and dwelt among us in Jesus (Jn 1:14) and shows us in Jesus' life, behavior and teaching (especially the parables) how God extends His love and care for every person and community, for humankind and for creation. Since God is love (cf. 1 Jn 4:8), God loves us all first and unconditionally.

In Jesus we can “see the face” of God (cf. Jn 14:7-11). Jesus as the Good Samaritan (cf. Lk 10:29-37) shows us God's unconditional compassion in situations of personal, socio-cultural, economic and political deficiencies. He sees the “victims” and does not pass them by for He cares for them without considering where they are coming from, their social status or if they belong to “my clan”, “my tribe”, “my country”, “my religion” or “my culture”. Inspired by the narrative of the Good Samaritan, our Holy Father Francis in his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* calls for the transformation of humanity into a responsible community of sisters and brothers to resolve the current crisis.

Jesus as the Good Shepherd (cf. Jn 10:11-16) knows us all by name. He offers a familiar relationship with him (cf. Jn 10:3-16). Therefore, he feels sorrow for the lost and seeks for them everywhere until he finds them (cf. Lk 15:1-7). He protects the flock against the “robbers” and the violence of the “wolves”. In a prophetic way, Jesus praises the peacemakers and those who thirst for justice. In contrast to human arrogance in certain socioeconomic, technocratic or political patterns of behavior and acting, He proclaims blessed the poor in spirit, the humble, the gentle, the pure of heart, the merciful and those persecuted for the sake of justice (cf. Mt 5:5-10). He aims for harmony. He cast out evil spirits (Mt 12: 18). His “Our Father” prayer (Mt 6:9-13) claims that God's will is to be done everywhere and everyone should have the daily bread. Forgiveness of sins and compassion are principles of behavior (Mt 18:21-35). God's kingdom is a kingdom of integral peace. Jesus came that all may have life and have it abundantly (Jn 10:10).

By declaring the poor blessed (cf. Lk 6:20-23) and that the kingdom of God is theirs, Jesus regards the needy and the other as “neighbors” and takes the option for the poor (cf. Lk 4:16-21; Mt 25:31-40). Jesus’ spirituality is rooted in God’s love and linked with the social reality of the people. Jesus also welcomes and blesses the children, and He defends their rights (cf. Mk 10:13-16; Mt 18:1-3,10). He appreciates the poor and the marginalized widow (cf. Mk 12:41-44). Transcending restrictive social, cultural and religious norms, He touches the unclean, the outcasts and re-integrates them into the community recognizing their inviolable God-given dignity (cf. Mk 1:40-45). He heals the sick (Lk 13:10-17; Mk 5:25-34). He eats with sinners (cf. Mk 2:15-17) and as Son of God, He forgives sins (cf. Mt 9:1-8) and gives hope and new life in desperate situations (cf. Mk 5:35-43; Mt 8:5-13).

He knows what families need to live on and calls for just wages (cf. Mt 20:1-15) and warns against gluttonous unsustainable lifestyles and consumerism (cf. Lk 16:19-31), envy and greed (Lk 12:13-21).

Through Jesus, God gives women a special place in history of salvation, according to the gospels. Mary, a young woman from insignificant backgrounds was chosen to become Jesus’ mother. She and Elizabeth praise the mystery of the incarnation and God’s rule in salvation history (cf. Lk 1:26-56). Mary contemplates occurrences in Jesus’ life in her heart. Women care for Jesus. Jesus’ dialogue with Martha reveals Him as Lord over death (cf. Jn 11:20-44). The dialogue with a Samaritan woman leads to the self-revelation of Jesus as Messiah (cf. Jn 4:6-26). Women persevere under the cross of Jesus at the hour of His suffering and death (cf. Mt 27:55f; Mk 15:40f; Lk 23:49; Jn 19:25).

Jesus forms community by gathering common men (cf. Mk 1:16-20; Lk 6:12) and women around him as disciples and they journey with Him (cf. Lk 8:1-3). He has special meals with them (cf. Lk 22:7-27; Jn 21:9-14). He calls them ‘friends’ including them into his friendship in the deepest sense which means offering his life for them (cf. Jn 15:9-15).

Jesus instructs them to detect His presence in the faces of the suffering (cf. Mt 25:40). He teaches them the fundamental rule of discipleship that He, the Son of God, didn’t come to be served but to serve and give His life as a ransom for the many (cf. Mk 10:45). As Teacher and Lord, He washes the feet of His disciples, setting an example for them to

follow (cf. Jn 13:3-15). As Jesus loved us, we also should love one another for this is His new commandment (cf. Jn 13:34f) that includes even the love of the enemies (Mt 5:43-48, Lk 6:27-36).

Jesus calls all humanity to conversion, every person, family, community and people with responsibilities. He proclaimed God's reign in a coherent manner and therefore got in conflict with selfish narrow minded religious and political authorities. They saw their rule questioned and ultimately condemned Jesus to death on the cross.

Jesus lived in mystical communion with His Heavenly Father, spending nights in prayer (cf. Mk 1:35) and especially in the Garden of Gethsemane before undergoing His Passion (cf. Mt 26:36-46). He persevered in an intimate communion with His Father until His last moment on the cross (cf. Mk 15:34, Lk 23:34, 44-46).

In the resurrection of Jesus, God's love and life overcomes death. Jesus appears first to Mary Magdalene and other women and sends them as apostles to His fearful and paralyzed disciples as witnesses of His resurrection (cf. Mt 28:1-10; Jn 20:11-18). With this, He passes far beyond the social, cultural and religious patterns of His society towards women.

Journeying with the disciples on the road to Emmaus, He listens to their grief and then proceeds to enkindle their minds and hearts while opening the Scriptures to them. He reveals himself as the Risen One by opening their eyes in the "breaking of the bread" (cf. Lk 24:13-35).

Through the resurrection of Jesus, God shows us that His love goes beyond the human structures of injustice that are linked to the premature deaths of children and the destruction of his creation. His love goes beyond the egoisms, sins and ideologies that are seen in the world. Showing His disciples His hands and His side - with the signs of the crucifixion, the Risen Jesus Christ imparts His peace and breathes on them, giving His Holy Spirit and sending them to proclaim the kingdom of God (cf. Jn 20:19-23).

Listening to His Holy Spirit the disciples are moved to bear testimony of how God's love works in Jesus and through him in the world. As members of His Church, they become sensitive to the acting of the Holy Spirit in all peoples and cultures. In His Spirit they recognize that He wants

to bring forward a humankind of fraternity and in social friendship.

### 3. Envisioning an Image of the Church in the Asian Context

The emerging realities call for the Church in Asia to greater participation, integration, and transformation, by promoting a culture of encounter.

This Church is compassionate, humble, respectful, and filled with merciful deeds. She is a people-oriented Church that is open, welcoming, and inclusive. She focuses on the family, but she is also a family and home that leaves no one behind. The Church is present where there are people suffering as a mother that heals, a sanctuary of the oppressed. While this Church is mystic and prophetic, she remains a sign and sacrament of personal, communitarian, ecological and economic conversion.

She is a Church of the poor, a servant Church, an outgoing mission-oriented Church that works for harmony based on reciprocity, complementarity, equality and justice. She is a synodal church, where everyone is a subject, a church that listens to the other, especially to the most vulnerable and marginalized, a church and discerns the signs of the times. Witnessing to God's Kingdom, she engages the public sphere and collaborates with civic society for integral human development.

Aside from the triple dialogue that the Church in Asia has been known for (dialogue with the poor, with religions and with culture), there is a need to add more areas of dialogue, for example, with the youth, with women, and even with those the church considers as 'sinners', with the environment and with technology. Considering that majority of its population are young people, the Church is therefore the "Church of the Young". As manifested with *Laudato Si'*, she is also a "Green Church" which recognizes the environment and social crises as a singular complex crisis that the Church needs to confront.

Furthermore, the unprecedented challenges of COVID-19 have extended us more than ever into being a "Digital Church" as she experiments with different formats and opportunities to connect with people and minister to them. She is very much aware however that the poor - which means majority of our people - do not have connectivity. The Church is challenged

on how she can be an egalitarian digital Church where the poorer members are empowered with connectivity so their voices too can be heard and enrich us all.

The Church is grounded in the local contexts. She is a church where the word of God is taking root in her soil and her faith is expressed through her own rich cultures. She is also an intercultural church, respecting the diversity of peoples and cultures, as well as celebrating the many symbols and traditions of Asian peoples. She promotes a community-based Church built in many different ways – for example the Basic Ecclesial Communities or the Basic Human Communities - as a locus and dynamic structure or space to live out the above vision of the Church in Asia. This includes cooperation with all who are working for a more humane world with the Church as a partner in networking with others, a communitarian church.

Finally, the Church in Asia is a Church of martyrs. Jesus' little flock is God's family, God's holy people on a pilgrimage through history in the company of all the peoples of Asia, welcoming the helpless and the hopeless, sharing the healing and grace of the Crucified and Risen One. Just as Jesus stands in the midst of the world as Truth and Life (Jn 14:6), so are his disciples both salt and light (Mt 5:13f), whose flavor and fervor may not wane. The prophetic voice of Jesus' disciples is still being silenced in many parts of Asia, but their blood continues to water the fields of Asia, making it God's garden, offering a witness of faith and bringing forth new generations who hope for the Kingdom of justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rm 14:17).

### PART THREE

#### Envisioning Possible “New Pathways” for the Church in Asia and the FABC

In the light of the changing realities and challenges that Asia is constantly having to confront, it is inevitable that as we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the FABC, the Church in Asia is also being propelled to look at new pathways to continue to be of service to the peoples of Asia. The founding of the FABC at a certain period in our history was in response to the particular needs and vision of that time, which was for a church of the poor, of the young, and of dialogue. In our time, based on the concerns and vision that will come from this General Conference, the Church in Asia will

need to reaffirm, renew, and revitalize herself and the FABC so that it be aligned to the new directions while being equipped to face these changes. Having received feedback from the various consultations, here are some points for consideration. These are not exhaustive but meant to provide a framework not only at the assembly but especially beyond, for envisioning the future role of the FABC.

1. The foundational vision of the FABC since its inception has expanded along the lines of the “triple dialogue” – with the poor, with cultures, and with religions in order to bring about a “New Way of Being Church”. This has been the theological-pastoral axis of the FABC. Recognizing the changes all around us, there may be a need to revisit this “triple dialogue” and explore new concerns for a new era. In Asia, dialogue is the mode of being for the Church. As we do so, always keeping in mind that the focus should be on the ongoing “renewal of the Church” (cf. LG 8) to form a “community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice” (EG 24).

2. The FABC was conceived with the hope of creating a network among the Bishops of Asia. The sense of “collegiality,” “communion,” “solidarity,” and “synodality” formed the backbone of the FABC which also bore fruit in the bonding that was built through the years (cf. LG 23). The FABC concentrates its efforts on assisting bishops and episcopal conferences by offering support mechanisms that facilitate ongoing formation especially in the areas of leadership and collaborative ministry at the missionary service of the People of God. In this light then, the FABC could offer more platforms for listening and learning so as to assist bishops to be “Apostles of listening” (Pope Francis, Address to Bishops participating in the course promoted by the Congregation for Bishops and by Congregation for the Eastern Churches, 12 Sept 2019). “The bishop must always foster this missionary communion in his diocesan Church, following the ideal of the first Christian communities, in which the believers were of one heart and one soul (cf. Acts 4:32). To do so, he will sometimes go before his people, pointing the way and keeping their hope vibrant. At other times, he will simply be in their midst with his unassuming and merciful presence. At yet other

times, he will have to walk after them, helping those who lag behind and – above all – allowing the flock to strike out on new paths” (EG 31).

3. Over the past 50 years, the FABC has produced and facilitated a wealth of resources through its many initiatives, programs, and collaborative efforts. However, these resources are at times either underutilized or remain unknown to houses of formation and institutes of higher learning. These resources cover a wide range of topics and issues that concern the peoples of Asia. A greater promotion of these resources in the seminaries and other formation institutions could further be encouraged. It is the hope that this will inspire deeper reflections for more creative pastoral applications since “we need a church capable of walking at people’s side, of doing more than simply listening to them; a church that accompanies them on their journey” (Pope Francis, World Youth Day, Rio de Janeiro 2013). The FABC resources further provide a locus to “enter into fruitful dialogue with the contemporary world” while “taking into account the cultural and historical circumstances” (cf. *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation*, 2016 116, 118).

4. In an era where the means of communication has proliferated in ways never envisaged when the FABC was founded, the new digital era gives us the opportunity to improve communications and interaction among the churches that form the FABC. This should assist us in promoting greater ownership of and participation in the FABC by the respective churches. With the COVID-19 pandemic, we have extended ourselves to also have a digital pastoral approach. The use of the digital means of communication has given the Church new possibilities for online video catechesis, prayer services, conferences, meetings and bringing people together. We recognize that online technology has already been successfully utilized in many countries that broadcast the celebration of the Eucharist via digital media to assist those who are home bound, the hospitalized, the elderly and those caring for them who are unable to attend the Eucharist on Sundays. This provides many people the opportunity to share in some ways the fervent prayer of faith and adoration while being united with the Church digitally. The broadcasting of the celebration of the Eucharist via digital tools has been an approach

to spiritually support many people during the lockdowns caused by the pandemic. Though nothing can replace the physical presence of persons at the Eucharist and its community dimension, it has to be acknowledged that the broadcast of the Holy Mass has provided the Church a way to minister to her flock at a time when community celebrations were almost impossible. This use of the digital means of communication for meetings and conferences can be further utilized by the FABC as a new way for its operations. The FABC from the beginning has tried to bring a Christian ethos to all its activities in order to support Christian living and the service of the Gospel. These “tools” now provide the FABC “greater possibilities for communication thus turn into greater possibilities for encounter and solidarity for everyone” (EG 87).

5. Over the years, the organizational structure of the FABC has expanded to serve the various needs of the peoples in Asia, which include office structures, decision making processes, and collaboration at all levels. All of these demonstrate that the FABC has been responding to the needs of the churches in Asia. As we step into the future, it is an opportune time to re-look at the organizational structure in order to serve better in the midst of the emerging realities-challenges since “every renewal of the Church essentially consists in an increase of fidelity to her own calling” (Unitatis Redintegratio 6). Bearing in mind that “all renewal in the Church must have mission as its goal if it is not to fall prey to a kind of ecclesial introversion” (Ecclesia in Oceania 19).

6. In order to promote the effectivity and efficiency of the FABC, there is a greater need today more than before to enter into partnerships for the promotion of the common good of all. Working in tandem and in a multi-disciplinary manner with other continental associations of Bishops’ Conferences and organizations, the Church can only strengthen and widen the outreach even to the remotest parts of Asia. In recent times, the world has not only become a global village, but also a “virtual village”. There are many shared concerns which can be the starting point for this communication, collaboration and sharing of resources for the good of the local and universal Church. “When we feel that God is calling us to intervene with others in these social dynamics, we should realize that this

too is part of our spirituality, which is an exercise of charity and, as such, matures and sanctifies us” (LS 231).

7. The future of the FABC is dependent on the commitment of all the local churches in Asia who continue to share their gifts and resources, including human and financial. In its 50 years of existence, the FABC has been supported by the sacrifices and generosity of the sister churches throughout the world. The Churches in Asia now continue this generosity by committing to greater human and economic resources in order to promote and implement new pathways for engaging ever more fully in mission and dialogue. “Though it is true that this mission demands great generosity on our part, ... for it is first and foremost the Lord’s work.... This conviction enables us to maintain a spirit of joy in the midst of a task so demanding and challenging that it engages our entire life. God asks everything of us, yet at the same time he offers everything to us” (EG 12).

8. The foundations of the Church in Asia were laid by the missionaries who made the difficult journey to arrive in Asia and share the good news of Jesus Christ. Their conviction and zeal for the gospel led many of them to be martyred for the faith together with the peoples of Asia. Their Christian witnessing not only reminds us of a past but also inspires us today to be faithful to the mission of Christ. Today the Church in Asia not only acknowledges having received missionaries but now also contributes to sending missionaries, both lay and religious, throughout the world. The growing Church in Asia has much to contribute to the universal Church through its variety of religious and cultural experiences which are often rooted in the Asian communities. Finding new pathways is not just for the Church in Asia but ultimately for the growth of the universal Church. “With the Lord, she can experience the wonder, the amazement, of the missionary adventure without the need, conscious or unconscious, to be in first place, to seek or occupy any possible place of preeminence. How much we can learn from you, who are a minority in many of your countries or regions, and sometimes are overlooked or impeded or persecuted

minorities, yet have not let yourselves be carried away or corrupted by an inferiority complex or the complaint that you are not given due recognition! Go forwards: proclaim, sow, pray and wait. And you will not lose your joy!” (Pope Francis, Address of His Holiness at Meeting with the Bishops of Thailand and FABC, Bangkok, 22 November 2019).

These considerations are meant to provide some salient discussion points that may assist and inspire the FABC 50 – General Conference to seek out new pathways and for the Bishops to respond to the needs of the Churches in Asia in the years to come. It is hoped that the parameters provided here will act as a springboard to encourage a prophetic revisioning for the posterity of the Church in Asia and the FABC.

## Conclusion

It is said that “a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step” (ancient Chinese proverb) and 50 years ago, we as Church in Asia, took that “single step” of forming the FABC with hopes and aspirations of renewing our church in this part of the world. We have indeed come a long way since the conception of an idea to bring together Bishops across Asia for greater collaboration and partnership. As we stand here fifty years later, bearing testimony to the joys of this fraternal communion responding to the needs of Church in Asia with every changing decade, we can only give thanks to God for His faithful love and guidance.

As we move into a “new phase” and look towards the future, we take heed of Pope Francis’ call to “prepare the future” rather than “prepare for the future” as he asks of us to prepare a future full of hope amid chaos and uncertainty. Remembering the words of Pope Benedict who said, “to hope is to be open to the future and to be open to the future is to be open to God”, we need to look towards a collective future with an all-embracing vision for the Church in Asia. The consultations that have been carried out thus far that have culminated in this guide document gave us not only a glimpse of the challenges faced across Asia but also the aspirations of the Church in Asia to prepare the future with faith and confidence in our God.

It is our collective hope that the FABC 50 – General Conference can be the stepping stone to help us as the Church in Asia to rethink our commitment in relation to mission, worship and pastoral strategies. The pandemic has reminded us that we need a renewed vision for the Church in Asia and as we prepare for our General Conference, may we be guided by the Holy Spirit, who is the source of all renewal and regeneration. May our Blessed Mother accompany and sustain us with her intercession in our quest to journey together as peoples of Asia in finding new pathways for the glory of God (EG 31).









# APPENDIXES



## APPENDIX 1

### Mechanics of the Morning Prayers

Information was given about the Morning Prayer to be used during the conference. Different countries will be assigned a day. This will be coordinated by the Pauline Sisters and involving other groups of sisters. The schema of the Morning Prayer was presented.

INTRODUCTION	EXPLORING THE THEME	UNIVERSAL PRAYER	CONCLUDING
5 MINUTES	5 MINUTES	5 MINUTES	5 MINUTES
			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brief introduction of the country - a cultural Journey</li> <li>Origin / evolution of Christianity in the country</li> <li>Challenges &amp; opportunities for the proclamation of faith</li> <li>Prayer dance or any traditional welcome e.g. Aarti</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scripture reading in local language or English with a reflection - including relevant slides (questions) displayed on screen</li> <li>Reflection on the Scripture Text in AV form - mime / music / dance</li> <li>Silent reflection on questions for meditation with instrumental music</li> <li>Call to action i.e. lighting lamp or signing banner by participants/ delegates with a message in their languages / presenting an offering a symbolic basket</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For Asia</li> <li>For the country</li> <li>For FABC 50</li> <li>For aspirations of youth, women, children, elderly, families etc.</li> <li>For the universal church Hymn / Psalm - in national languages</li> </ul> <p>End with the Lord's Prayer</p> <p>*Petitions to be accompanied by static pictures on display</p> <p>*Above to be done in the local language with English subtitles</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Song of Asia - pre recorded by the country / played live</li> <li>A hymn sung in different languages of a country</li> <li>Any common prayer</li> <li>FABC 50 Prayer</li> <li>Any concluding hymn</li> </ul>
<small>You may use or adapt any one of the above</small>	<small>You may use or adapt any one of the above</small>		<small>You may use or adapt any one of the above</small>

This will be coordinated by religious sisters. They will take the initiative. This is for the awareness of the Contact Persons.



## APPENDIX 2

### Vademecum

#### Table of Contents

1. Introduction
2. Objectives
3. Phases
4. Participants
5. Special Roles
6. Organizational Chart
7. Calendar
8. Order of the Day
9. Maps of Baan Phu Waan
10. Guidelines for Relations with the Media

#### 1. Introduction

Planning for the first General Conference of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences began in 2014. The concept of it was discussed by the Central Committee and approved. Cardinal Gracias, who was FABC President then, presented the concept of a regional conference to the Holy Father, who approved it. The General Conference was scheduled for 2020 as it would coincide with the 50th anniversary of the Asian Bishops' Meeting held in Manila during Pope St. Paul VI's pastoral visit in 1970. This meeting is considered as the "beginning" of FABC.

In the light of new developments, changes and challenges faced by the bishops today as compared to their predecessors, the concept of convening a General Conference with the theme "FABC 50: Journeying Together as Peoples of Asia "... and they went a different way". (Matthew 2:12) was mooted. The objective this gathering is to listen to "what the Spirit is saying to the Churches " in Asia (cf. Revelation 2:29).

In 2018, Cardinal Oswald Gracias, as the Convenor of the General conference, appointed Bishop Allwyn D'Silva as Secretary of a Core Group to begin the process of planning. Regional consultations were held. A logo was chosen. A venue was proposed. A FABC Consultation Paper was sent to the member conferences. All of that was in 2019. Just as the responses to the FABC Consultation Paper were beginning to come in, the Covid Pandemic began.

The General Conference had to be postponed indefinitely. The preparations continued, albeit online. Based on previous consultations, a Guide Document was produced and issued on 29 November 2020 (cf. FABC Paper 165). The member conferences were then invited to deliberate on the Guide Document and provide feedback. Their responses were later published as FABC Papers 166 and 167.

As the pandemic restrictions were slowly being lifted, the Central Committee fixed the General Conference for October 12-30, with the inauguration set for August 22, 2022.

## 2. Objectives

The objectives of the General Conference are guided by Matthew 2:1-12, with the purpose of reaffirming, renewing, and revitalizing the Church in Asia:

- To affirm and celebrate the journey of the past 50 years.
- To become aware of the current and emerging realities and challenges confronting Asia and the Church.
- To search for the face of Jesus in Asia.
- To trace a vision of the Church in Asia at the service of the peoples of Asia and in communion with the Church throughout the world.
- To envision new pathways of service and journeying together as peoples of Asia.

## 3. Phases

The General Conference will be developed in these following four phases:

Phase 1: To deepen our awareness of the challenges in Asia today as we listen

to one another about the situations in our respective countries, conferences and rites.

Phase 2: To learn and understand the emerging realities impacting Asia and the Church in dialogue with recent papal documents.

Phase 3: To discern and envision new pathways for the Church towards a better Asia.

Phase 4: To articulate a new vision of the Church's way in Asia through a message and a final document.

#### 4. Participants

4.1 Members – The members of the Assembly are either *ex officio* or elected as delegates.

##### *Ex officio members*

- The President, Vice President and the Secretary General of FABC
- All Cardinals in Asia
- Presidents of Episcopal Conferences

##### *Elected members*

- Bishops elected by their respective episcopal conferences
- Bishops who are Associate Members of FABC

4.2 Fraternal Delegates – In the spirit of fraternal communion and solidarity, Presidents of other Continental Associations of Bishops' Conferences or Conferences outside Asia (or their representatives) may be invited to address the Assembly.

4.3 Representatives from Dicasteries of the Holy See – The Presidency may invite Dicasteries of the Holy See to send representatives.

4.4 Invited Guests – The Presidency may invite to the General Conference the following:

Representatives from other churches and Ecclesial Communities, other religions, and governments;

Representatives of institutes of consecrated life;

Representatives of women groups, youth and indigenous peoples;

Representatives of international funding agencies; and,

Others who may contribute their expertise to the General Conference

4.5 Bishop-Chairmen and Executive Secretaries of FABC Offices – The Bishop-Chairmen and Executive Secretaries may be asked to assist in the Secretariat.

4.6 Support Staff – The Support Staff will assist the Secretariat in the conduct of the General Conference.

## 5. Special Roles

5.1 The Assembly Presidents – The Presidency for the the General Conference shall consist of the Three Presidents who will:

- Take turns in running the General Conference each day;
- Receive formal motions from the participants;
- Decide the manner of voting (written ballot or show of hands; and,
- Decide whether a matter for votation is of primary or secondary importation.

N.B.L. A record of all voting results shall be kept by the FABC Secretary General. Matters of primary importance shall require a two-thirds majority of votes cast; other matters shall require an absolute majority. A member may appeal a decision of the Presidency to the General Conference only if supported by four Bishops' Conferences. The Presidents retain the right to vote in all matters.

5.2 The Adjunct Secretary – A Bishop shall be appointed as the Adjunct Secretary for the General Conference. He will assist the Presidency and help guide the General Conference.

5.3. Plenary Sessions – Only members of the General Conference (n. 4.1) have the right to speak and to a deliberative vote on resolutions.

Other participants may address the Assembly when indicated in the program or when recognized by the Presidency.

5.4 Workshop Groups – The purpose of the workshops is to promote freer, wider and deeper discussion of the Conference.

Each Workshop Group shall elect, from among its member Bishops (see N. 4.1), a Moderator and a Secretary, whose names are to be submitted to the General Secretariat.

The Moderator will guide the discussion, ensure its focus, promote participation, and preside at voting sessions.

The Secretary will take notes during the discussion, synthesize the main points (including divergent opinions), prepare the Group's Reports, and present them in the Plenary Session.

## 5.5 Commissions

5.5.1. Commission for the Dynamics of the General Conference – This group will be chosen by the Presidency and headed by the Adjunct Secretary. It is their responsibility to observe and study the smooth running of the program. They may provide suggestions and recommendations to the Presidency.

5.5.2. Commission on the Liturgy – It will be composed of three bishop members appointed by the Presidency. The Chairman of this Commission will be from Thailand. Tasked to coordinate all liturgical celebrations, they will be supported by the Liturgical Committee with representatives of the four regions of Asia.

5.5.3 Commission for the Final Message – it will be composed of five (5) bishops: The Vice President of the FABC and four (4) bishop representatives chosen by the Presidency, one from each region. The purpose of the Commission is to prepare the Final Message of the General Conference to the People of God in Asia in the following manner:

1. Under the direction of the Presidency, to propose a draft of the Final Message to be presented at a Plenary Session for discussion and revision.
2. Having deliberated on the proposed revisions, to present a final draft for final approval and adoption in a Plenary Session.

5.5.4 Commission for the Final Document -- It will be composed of the Presidency and five (5) other bishops from the four regions proposed by the Central Committee and elected by the Members of the General Conference (See n. 4.1). The Commission will elect its own Chairman and exercise the following functions:

- To gather elements and motions from the proceedings of the General Conference for the purpose of preparing a draft schema of the Final Document according to the see-judge-act methodology that will be discussed in Plenary Session;
- To draft some texts for inclusion in the Final Document schema that will be voted on by the members in the final Plenary Sessions;
- To present a draft of the Final Document to all Bishops' Conference by 6 January 2023 for consultation and revision; and,
- To integrate the revisions into a final draft that will be voted on at the Central Committee Meeting in February 2023.

5.5.5 Commission for the Minutes of the Plenary Sessions – it will be composed of three (3) bishops appointed by the Presidency and headed by the FABC Secretary General. These are its functions:

- To review and revise the Minutes of the Plenary Sessions prepared by the appointed secretaries.
- To endorse and present the revised Minutes to the Presidency for ratification and approval.

5.5.6 Commission for the Counting of Votes – It will be composed of four (4) bishops of the four regions appointed by the Presidency and headed by the FABC Secretary General. Their primary task is to count the votes during the General Conference and present a signed protocol with the results of each voting to the Presidency.

5.5.7 Commission on Juridical Matters – It will be composed of three (3) bishops appointed by the Presidency and headed by the FABC Vice President. They are to advise the Presidency on juridical matters and on appeals.

5.5.8 Commission for Communication – The Presidency shall appoint a Commission for Communication comprising of a Chairman Bishop and three (3) bishops from different regions of Asia. The Commission will report to the Presidency, the Secretary General and the Adjunct Secretary. These are its functions:

- To be responsible for questions relating to information on

the development and contents of the General Conference.

- To guide the communication process of the Media Office through the Secretary of the Commission.
- To propose to the General Secretariat a scheduled presence of the media at some plenary sessions (e.g. opening and closing sessions) of the General Conference.
- To invite Members and other participants to take part in Press Conferences, and to arrange press briefings for them.
- To review and authorize the reports that will initiate the Press Conferences.
- To provide the Media Office with those reports.

The Commission for Communication will be supported by a secretary who will act as the Coordinator of the Media Office.

### The Media Office

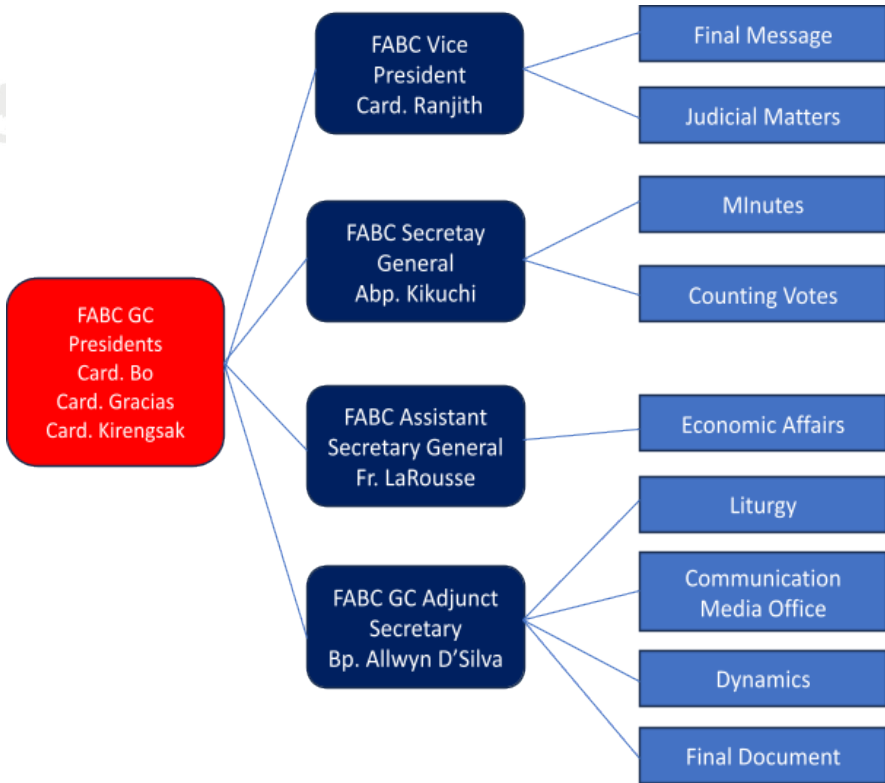
The Media Office, in the spirit of transparency, efficiency and accountability, will provide updates on the General Conference to the particular Churches, Bishops' Conferences, Church organizations and other agencies through the different media platforms.

It will work under the direction of the Commission for Communication and be governed by the guidelines approved by the Presidency. The Media Office comprises of the Secretary of the Commission for Communication – as Coordinator of the Media Office – and two collaborators.

The Media Office will provide accreditation to media professionals, contact journalists, photographers and radio or television operators for the General Conference.

5.5.9. Office for Economic Affairs – Headed by the FABC Assistant Secretary General, this Office will look into all financial affairs pertaining to the General Conference, including maintaining all financial records.

## 6. Organizational Chart



## 7. Calendar

October 12

- 16:30 Opening Eucharist (St. Michael Hall [SMH])
- 18:00 Opening Ceremonies (St. John Paul II Hall)

October 13-15

- Visiting Asia

*October 16*

- 09:00 Eucharist (SMH)
- 11:00 Talk Show with Asia

*October 17-22*

- Emerging Realities and the Church in Asia

*October 19*

- 17:00 Bishops' Meeting with the Bishop Friends of Focolare

*October 22*

- 15:00 Recollection

*October 23*

- 09:00 World Mission Sunday Eucharist (SMH)
- 11:00 Virtual Visits to Parishes in Asia

*October 24-26*

- Discerning New Pathways for the Church in Asia

*October 27*

- Pilgrimage to Ayutthaya

*October 28-29*

- Final Message and schema of Final Document

*October 30*

- 09:30 Closing Eucharist and Ceremonies (Cathedral)

## 8. Order of the Day

## Weekdays

- 07:00 – 07:45 Eucharist
- 08:00 – 08:45 Breakfast
- 09:00 – 09:20 Morning Prayer
- 09:20 – 10:30 Session I
- 10:30 – 11:00 Coffee Break
- 11:00 – 12:30 Session II
- 12:30 – 15:00 Lunch Break
- 15:00 – 16:30 Session III
- 16:30 – 17:00 Tea
- 17:00 – 18:30 Session IV
- 18:30 – 19:30 Supper

## Sundays

- 07:00 – 08:00 Breakfast
- 09:00 – 10:15 Eucharist (with Lauds?) in SMH
- 10:30 – 12:00 Virtual Visits
- 12:30 – 13:30 Lunch
- 18:30 – 19:30 Supper

9. Maps of Baan Phu Waan

10. Guidelines for Relations with the Media

- a) All official communications are made by the Presidency, the Secretary General, and the Adjunct Secretary through Press Conferences and other appropriate means.
- b) The Presidency, in collaboration with the Commission for Communication, will decide appropriate times to welcome the members of the media to the General Conference.
- c) Participants are free to respond to the requests of the media, while making it clear that he or she is doing so in his or her personal capacity.
- d) Keeping in mind that some of the reports and interventions may be sensitive and delicate in nature, the Bishops, guests and other participants will exercise prudence and discernment.
- e) The Media Office will coordinate all requests for particular interview from the media in a timely manner.



## APPENDIX 3 The Participants

### Table of Contents

Special Envoy of the Holy Father

Members of the Plenary Assembly

FABC Leadership

Presidents of FABC 50 General Conference

FABC 50 Adjunct Secretary

Cardinals in Asia

Delegates from Member Conferences

Delegates from Associate Members

Holy See Representative

Fraternal Delegates

Representatives from the Vatican

FABC 50 Organizing Committee

FABC Offices

Invited Guest and Partners

FABC Support Staff

Local Organizing Committee

FABC Media Team

## **SPECIAL ENVOY OF THE HOLY FATHER**

**His Eminence Cardinal Luis Antonio G. Tagle**

Pro-Prefect of the Dicastery for Evangelization

### **Assistants to the Papal Envoy**

**Fr. Paul Eakarath Homprathum**

Episcopal Vicar for Education

Education Department, Archdiocese of Bangkok

**Fr. Anthony Prajak Boonphao**  
Judicial Vicar  
Mother of Perpetual Help Church  
THAILAND

## **MEMBERS OF THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY** **FABC Leadership**

### **FABC President**

**Cardinal Charles Bo, SDB**  
Archbishop of Yangon  
Myanmar

### **FABC Vice- President**

**Cardinal Albert Malcolm Ranjith Patabendige Don**  
Archbishop of Colombo, Sri Lanka

### **FABC Secretary General**

**Archbishop Tarcisio Isao KIKUCHI, SVD**  
Archbishop of Tokyo, Japan

## **Presidents of FABC 50 General Conference**

**Cardinal Charles Bo, SDB**  
Archbishop of Yangon, Myanmar

**Cardinal Oswald Gracias**  
Archbishop of Bombay, India

**Cardinal Francis Xavier Kriengsak Kovithavanij**  
Archbishop of Bangkok, Thailand

## **FABC 50 Adjunct Secretary**

**Bishop Allwyn D'Silva**

Auxiliary Bishop of Bombay, India

## **Cardinals in Asia**

**Cardinal Jose F. Advincula, Jr.**

Archbishop of Manila, Philippines

**Cardinal George Alencherry**

Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church, India

**Cardinal Charles Bo, SDB**

Archbishop of Yangon, Myanmar

**Cardinal Baselios Cleemis**

Major Archbishop-Catholicos of Syro-Malankara, India

**Cardinal Joseph Coutts**

Archbishop Emeritus of Karachi, Pakistan

**Cardinal Patrick D'Rozario, CSC**

Archbishop Emeritus of Dhaka, Bangladesh

**Cardinal Filipe Neri Ferrão**

Archbishop of Goa and Daman, India

**Cardinal Oswald Gracias**

Archbishop of Bombay, India

**Cardinal William Goh**

Archbishop of Singapore

**Cardinal Ignatius Suharyo Hardjoatmodjo**

Archbishop of Jakarta, Indonesia

**Cardinal Michael Michai Kitbunchu**  
Archbishop Emeritus of Bangkok, Thailand

**Cardinal Francis Xavier Kriengsak Kovithavanij**  
Archbishop of Bangkok, Thailand

**Cardinal Thomas Aq. Man'yo MAEDA**  
Archbishop of Osaka, Japan

**Cardinal Louis-Marie Ling Mangkhanekhoun, IVD**  
Vicar Apostolic of Vientiane and Administrator of Luang Prabang Catholic  
Center, Laos

**Cardinal Giorgio Marengo, IMC**  
Apostolic Prefect of Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

**Cardinal Anthony Poola**  
Archbishop of Hyderabad, India

**Cardinal Orlando B. Quevedo, OMI**  
Archbishop Emeritus of Cotabato, Philippines

**Cardinal Albert Malcolm Ranjith Patabendige Don**  
Archbishop of Colombo, Sri Lanka

## **Delegates from Member Conferences**

### **Delegates from the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Bangladesh – CBCB**

**Archbishop Bejoy Nicephorus D'Cruze, OMI**  
(President)  
Archbishop of Dhaka

**Bishop Ponon Paul Kubi, CSC**  
Bishop of Mymensing

**Bishop Sebastian Tudu**

Bishop of Dinajpur

**Delegates from the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Central Asia  
– CECAC**

**Bishop Jose Luis Mumbiela Sierra (President)**

Bishop of Diocese of Santissima Trinità in Almaty

**Bishop Yevgeniy Zinkovskiy**

Auxiliary Bishop of the Diocese of Karaganda

**Fr. Anthony James Corcoran, SJ**

Apostolic Administrator of Kyrgyzstan

**Cardinal Giorgio Marengo, IMC**

Apostolic Prefect of Ulaanbaatar

**Delegates from the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India – CCBI**

**Cardinal Filipe Neri Ferrão (President)**

Archbishop of Goa and Daman

**Archbishop Felix Toppo, SJ**

Archbishop of Ranchi

**Archbishop Raphy Manjaly**

Archbishop of Agra

**Archbishop Thomas D'Souza**

Archbishop of Calcutta

**Archbishop John Moolachira**

Archbishop of Guwahati

**Archbishop John Barwa, SVD**  
Archbishop of Cuttack-Bhubaneswar

**Bishop Gerald John Mathias**  
Bishop of Lucknow

**Bishop Paul Toppo**  
Bishop of Raigarh

**Bishop Anand Jojo**  
Bishop of Hazaribag

**Bishop Varghese Chakkalal**  
Bishop of Calicut

**Bishop Sebastian Thekethecheril**  
Bishop of Vijayapuram

**Bishop Alex Vadakumthala**  
Bishop of Kannur

**Bishop Chacko Thottumarickal, SVD**  
Bishop of Indore

**Bishop Ivan Pereira**  
Bishop of Jammu-Srinagar

**Bishop James Thoppil**  
Bishop of Kohima

**Bishop George Palliparambil, SDB**  
Bishop of Miao

**Bishop Nazarene Soosai**  
Bishop of Kottar

**Bishop Joseph Raja Rao, SMM**  
Bishop of Vijayawada

**Bishop Shyamal Bose**

Bishop of Baruipur

**Archbishop Antony Pappusamy**

Archbishop of Madurai

**Delegates from the Syro-Malabar Church**

**Cardinal George Alencherry**

Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church

**Archbishop Mathew Moolakkatt, OSB**

Archbishop of Kottayam

**Archbishop Joseph Perumthottam**

Archbishop of Changanacherry

**Archbishop Joseph Pamplany**

Archbishop of Tellicherry

**Bishop Sebastian Vadakel MST**

Bishop of Ujjain

**Bishop Remigiose Inchananiyil**

Bishop of Thamarassery

**Bishop Jose Porunnedom**

Bishop of Mananthavady

**Bishop Jose Chittooparambil, CMI**

Bishop of Rajkot

**Bishop Rapahael Thattil**

Bishop of Shamshabad

## **Delegates from the Syro-Malankara Catholic Major Archiepiscopal Church**

### **Cardinal Baselios Cleemis**

Major Archbishop-Catholicos of Syro-Malankara

### **Bishop Joshua Mar Ignathios**

Bishop of Diocese of Mavelikara

### **Bishop Yoohanon Mar Theodosius**

Bishop of Diocese of Muvattupuzha

## **Delegates from the Konferensi Waligereja Indonesia – KWI**

### **Cardinal Ignatius Suharyo Hardjoatmodjo (President)**

Archbishop of Jakarta Diocese

### **Bishop Antonius Subianto Bunjamin, OSC**

Bishop of Bandung

### **Bishop Paskalis Bruno Syukur, OFM**

Bishop of Bogor

### **Archbishop Robertus Rubiyatmoko**

Archbishop of Semarang

### **Bishop Henricus Pidyarto Gunawan, OCarm**

Bishop of Malang

### **Bishop Adrianus Sunarko, OFM**

Bishop of Pangkalpinang

### **Archbishop Kornelis Sipayung, OFM.Cap**

Archbishop of Medan

### **Bishop Silvester San**

Bishop of Denpasar

**Bishop Benedictus Estephanus Rolly Untu, MSC**

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