

FABC 50 GENERAL CONFERENCE



JOURNEYING TOGETHER AS PEOPLES OF ASIA

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

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

Volume 1

OCTOBER 12-30, 2022
BANGKOK, THAILAND

Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC)



Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC)

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

Conference Proceedings
Volume 1

Editor
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ABOUT THE CONFERENCE

In 1970, on the occasion of Pope Paul VI's visit to Manila (November 28 - 30), the Asian bishops came together for the first time. From that meeting flowed the desire to strengthen the collegiality among them and a need to define and articulate what it means to be 'Church in Asia' in the spirit of Vatican II. This, then, gave birth to the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference - FABC.

The year 2020 marks the 50th anniversary of that significant moment. To observe this landmark, the FABC intends to gather in a General Conference to commemorate and to chart the direction for the coming years.

The underlying premise of this Conference would be to reflect on the key questions:

How can the Church in Asia continue to become 'Good News' in light of the emerging realities?

How the FABC could more effectively serve and support the Bishops and their Conferences in Asia?

How can the Church in our continent contribute to a better Asia?

BIBLICAL FRAMEWORK

Matthew 2:1-12

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PRAYER

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

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

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

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

THE SONG OF ASIA

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

Lyrics

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

Chorus 1

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

Chorus 2

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

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

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

Chorus 1

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

Chorus 2

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

Chorus 1

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



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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

4. And so, like the Magi, we as bishops of Asia and as representatives of the People of God, gathered together to read the signs of our times, to discern, to seek guidance and to discover new pathways. We remembered

certain phases of the Asian Mission in which Matteo Ricci and others like him proclaimed the Gospel not in a manner tied to the cultures of their country of origin, but in truly inculturated ways. Taking note of the great variety of cultures of the Asian peoples on the one hand, and the emerging realities, challenges and hopes of our peoples on the other, we embarked on a journey together,

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

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

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

Part One: JOURNEYING TOGETHER

Responding to the call of synodality

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Part Two: LOOKING AT ASIA'S EMERGING REALITIES

Recognizing the challenges confronting the Church in Asia

23. "When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of King Herod, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying: Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage" (Mt 2:1-2). Matthew characterizes the Gentile seekers as "Magi", i.e., people of wisdom who make the effort and take time to "look up" to the sky and gaze at the stars. This indicates that they meditated and sought the guidance of heaven about their concerns on earth.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁵ The *Talitha Kumi* program comes to mind.

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

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

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

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

31. Like the Holy Family that had to flee from Bethlehem and seek refuge in Egypt, many among Asia's poor are displaced either as local or foreign migrants. It was pointed out that by 2050 there will be more than 400 million migrants all over the world. While we acknowledge the right of people to migrate in search of a better life for their families, we are aware of the adverse effects of the consequent brain-drain. This continuous

migration of professionals - like nurses, doctors, caregivers, architects and engineers - to other countries cannot but aggravate the situation of underdevelopment in their home countries.

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

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

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

35. Many migrants are involved in low-skilled jobs. Most of them, having no fixed contracts, receive unjust wages and endure subhuman working conditions. The lack of governance and laws for the welfare of migrant

workers, such as the freedom to form or join unions, are among the many problems that governments need to attend to. Women migrants usually suffer the worst forms of harassment and abuse and are usually the least protected and the lowest paid. It is encouraging to see international and national organizations protecting the rights of migrant workers, listening to their complaints and appealing for their cases.

B. FAMILIES, THE BEDROCK OF SOCIETY:

36. The family is an integral part of society. The family is the place where values and virtues are first taught, where love and sacrifice are first experienced, where fidelity and forgiveness are first learned. Most Asians consider harmonious family life as a blessing. Pope St John Paul II affirmed: As “the normal place where the young grow to personal and social maturity” and “the bearer of the heritage of humanity itself”, “the family occupies a very important place in Asian cultures...” (Ecclesia in Asia [EA], 46).

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

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

39. In areas with greater access to social media, attitudes towards the

family are being adversely affected by cultural globalization (EA,39). Moreover, government population control policies also greatly impact attitudes towards marriage, childbearing, and childrearing.

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

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

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

42. However, things are changing. A recent Pew Research Center Survey⁸ has noted some improvements in terms of gender equality in different

⁶ FABC 50 General Conference Guide Document, p. 8

⁷ See especially M D, 29 and CV, 42.

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

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

D. GENDER ISSUES CONFRONTING THE CHURCH AND SOCIETY:

43. LGBTQI+ people are highly marginalized and face varied forms of stigma and discrimination based on their distinct sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions.⁹ For instance, while Georgia, Singapore and Thailand show some kind of leniency towards gay relationships; Afghanistan, Brunei, Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen on the other hand affirm that homosexual activity is punishable with the death penalty.¹⁰ Similarly, after the Taliban takeover, in 2021, LGBTQI+ persons have found it even more difficult to live in peace.¹¹

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

E. YOUTH CONFRONTING A NEW WORLD:

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

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

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

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

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

46. Due to a combination of several factors, youth in the Asia Pacific region today are better poised than ever before to participate in, and benefit from social, economic and political developments. Compared to previous generations, a higher proportion of young people in the region have completed primary schooling. They are better educated, with the gross enrolment rate at the tertiary level reaching 18 per cent and 15 per cent respectively for male and female youth. Across the region, young people have taken initiatives to participate in local, national and regional development as important and equal participants, rather than as passive bystanders unable to shape their own future. "The youth of Asia are often at the vanguard of social and religious transformation in many countries, leading various social emancipation and advocacy movements, participating in renewal movements in the Church, and emerging as leaders in the Church's pastoral programs and in Basic Ecclesial Communities" (FABC VIII 33). They "experience a deep thirst for spiritual values, as the rise of new religious movements clearly demonstrates". (EA,6). In the young, "we can see a desire for God... an ideal of human fraternity... a genuine desire to develop their talents in order to offer something to our world... a special artistic sensitivity, or a yearning for harmony with nature... a great need to communicate... a deep desire to live life differently", which are "real starting points, inner resources open to a word of incentive, wisdom and encouragement" (CV,84).

47. Although the present set of youth has numerous advantages and assets, it also faces a complex and rapidly evolving situation where new opportunities coexist with major challenges. Fierce competition is affecting the marketplace in the region. Youth often remain in a vulnerable situation and lack the requisite knowledge and skills to adapt to the changing economic and social environment. For instance, in Asia, youth made up 20.8 per cent of the labour force in 2004, but unemployed youth accounted

for nearly half (49.1 per cent) of the region's jobless people. Long-term unemployment leads to a wide range of social ills, such as delinquency and substance abuse, to which young people are susceptible and often feeds political unrest and violence. Drug abuse and other health risks are particularly high among those who are out-of-school.

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

F. THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY:

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

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

digital and virtual worlds.

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

52. Catholic media practitioners called on Church leaders to acknowledge that they too are influencers and have a compelling message to proclaim. Their suggestions for effective digital evangelization include setting up the Church’s own secure social media platforms and building up social communication teams in the local Churches. Reminding Church leaders that in the digital world, the story is the strategy, they made suggestions for a creative catechesis that utilizes the power of stories, images, metaphors and the like, to more effectively connect God’s Word to peoples’ lives. Eventually, young people, the so- called “digital natives”, are expected to lead in this ministry.

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

53. The whole world today has become one big global village and the process leading to this is called globalization which has led to the homogenization of culture. This phenomenon seriously impedes the multi-cultural way of life of the people of Asia and is termed ‘Cultural Globalization’. However, there is also ‘Economic Globalization’, wherein the economies of the various nations of the world are tied together. We recall the words of Pope John Paul II, in his 31st World Day of Peace Message (1997): “The vast geopolitical changes which have taken place since 1989 have been accompanied by veritable revolutions in the social and economic fields. The globalization of the economy and of finance

is now a reality, and we are realizing more and more clearly the effects of the rapid progress related to information technologies. We are on the threshold of a new era which is the bearer of great hopes and disturbing questions”.

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

55. What Dr. Manmohan Singh, the then Prime Minister of India, an economist, stated about India may truly be applied to the whole of Asia, viz. that we “have learnt how to bring about growth, but we have yet to achieve comparable success in inclusiveness?”¹³

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

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

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

H. THE CLIMATE CRISIS WHICH ENDANGERS OUR COMMON HOME:

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

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

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

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

61. Through the sufferings that we ourselves will have to face, we will recognize the little Child of Bethlehem in the faces of so many children and young people in Asia who are deprived of both their present and future dignity on account of climate change. The sufferings of Mary and Joseph are visible in the faces of so many parents who are unable to offer

their children a decent home, adequate nutrition, proper health care or education. We see the sufferings of Mary and Joseph also in parents who are forced by circumstances to migrate because of the effects of climate change on their environments, or in parents who have to flee from the violence of wars and armed conflicts as well as consequences of struggles over water shortage, and the disposal of hazardous wastes.

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

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

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

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

65. If Christianity has to coexist with other religions and worldviews in the modern world, which faces many changes and challenges in the context of globalization, consumerism, materialism, dehumanization,

and exploitation of nature, the Church and individual Christians must demonstrate to the world that they have something to offer in terms of values, commitment, beauty, joy and happiness. Indeed, a comprehensive worldview, which can provide viable ethical and moral guidelines to a world paralyzed by value relativism is the need of the hour! Hence, the coming decades present a golden opportunity, as well as a great challenge to Christianity.

Part Three: DISCERNING

What the Spirit is saying to the Church in Asia

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

67. The evangelist tells us the Magi saw the star and, journeying together, found their way to Jerusalem, a short distance from their real destination, Bethlehem (cf Mt 2:1). Matthew tells us that their quest for “the newborn king of the Jews” attracted the attention of Herod, the then ruling king of the Jews. “When King Herod heard this, he was greatly troubled, and all Jerusalem with him” (Mt 2:3). King Herod enquires from the chief priests and scribes, in order to find out where this “Messiah”, this threat to his power, “was to be born” (Mt 2:4). The chief priests and scribes search the Scriptures and, quoting Micah 5:1, point to “Bethlehem of Judah” as the prophesied birthplace of the “newborn King of the Jews” for whom these Gentiles were looking. Since it was the star that had guided these men this far, Herod “called them secretly and ascertained from them the time of the star’s appearance” (Mt 2:7). Then he sent them off to Bethlehem with the instruction: “Go and search diligently for the child. When you have found him, bring me word, that I too may go and worship him.” (Mt 2:8). After finding him, should they return to Jerusalem and entrust to Herod further information on the child’s whereabouts? This question required serious discernment.

68. The Church in Asia has had many similar encounters with political figures like Herod, and local religious leaders like the chief priests and

scribes of Jerusalem. Our early missionaries also encountered ruling political and religious authorities who felt threatened by their presence – and today’s missionaries too face similar difficulties. Some others offer ‘partnership’ and ‘collaboration’. How to deal with these varied situations demands constant discernment.

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

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

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

- A. accompany migrants, refugees, indigenous people
- B. give special attention to the family
- C. open new roles of leadership to women in the Asian Church

- D. address gender issues
- E. minister to the youth
- F. encourage the effective use of digital technology
- G. promote an economy based on inclusive growth in the context of urbanization and globalization
- H. care for our common home
- I. be bridge-builders and bridges, instruments of dialogue and reconciliation in Asia

A. ACCOMPANY MIGRANTS, REFUGEES, INDIGENOUS PEOPLE:

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

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

of the Philippine bishops to create a Personal Prelature to address such needs.

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

75. The Holy Father encouraged the Catholic Migrant community in Rome last year when he said in his homily, “You received the joy of the Gospel... and this joy is evident in your people... in your eyes, on your faces, in your songs and in your prayers. In the joy with which you bring your faith to other lands.”¹⁶ He said, “wherever they go to work, they sow the faith,” and he regards their “discreet and hardworking presence” as “a testimony of faith...through humble, hidden, courageous and persevering presence.”

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

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

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

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

B. GIVE SPECIAL ATTENTION TO THE FAMILY:

78. The family is the basic cell of society and one of the key factors for an authentic and stable culture. Furthermore, as Pope St John Paul II stated: "the family occupies a very important place in Asian cultures...(hence) family values like filial respect, love and care for the aged and the sick, love of children and harmony are held in high esteem in all Asian cultures and religious traditions" (EA, 46).

79. Indeed the 'Church of the home' has a special vocation to witness and proclaim the Kingdom of God. Parents as the original and primary

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

educators of their children model the practice of faith in a spirit of co-responsibility. As the first catechists of their children, they transmit the Gospel to them and from their children they themselves receive the same Gospel as lived by them! Such a family radiates the Gospel, while becoming an evangelizer of many other families and of the neighbourhood (FC, 123).

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

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

81. We therefore seek to promote families where all live together in mutual respect and harmony, and where parents make quality time for themselves and their children so as to assist their growth and development

as human beings and Christians. We strive to create Asian societies in which elders are respected and a culture of life is upheld. We hope to build in Asia societies where migrants are integrated and refugees are reunited with their families. We seek to establish a `civilization of love'¹⁸, wherein families help other families, elders mentor younger couples, and safe communities – both real and virtual begin to form themselves – where children and youth can gradually grow as mature citizens and eventually missionary disciples.

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

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

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

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

- i) Care is an important part of Catholic theology, Church history,

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

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

and the Church's mission of spreading the Gospel, where, in the spirit of the common good, we are called to care for others, especially vulnerable groups such as women, as we strive to give each what is due to them in justice. Care and justice are very important for women to move forward in the Church, and are values that the Church needs to continue to foster.

ii) Based on the notions of social friendship and political charity (cf. social encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* [FT], 88, 169), pastoral care should be offered by Church organizations to low-income women workers, foreign domestic workers, ethnic minorities, abused women and other vulnerable women.

iii) Based on Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), women as objects and subjects of liberation should be affirmed; they are subjects of history and agents of change.

iv) The Church should employ different ways to affirm solidarity with women, empowering them, supporting women self-help groups and advocating social transformation. Indeed the equal dignity of women and men flows from the affirmation that we are made in the image and likeness of God. Furthermore, this must be translated into shared and equal participation of women and men in all aspects of Church life, including leadership functions.²⁰

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

D. ADDRESS GENDER ISSUES:

86. Pope Francis in a recent interview affirmed that God loves all his children just as they are, and criticized as unjust, laws that criminalize

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

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

homosexuality, while calling on Catholic bishops to welcome LGBTQI+ people into the Church.²¹

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

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

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

E. MINISTER TO THE YOUTH:

90. Youth need guidance and support as they navigate through the most challenging part of their development and seek to grow in their journey with Christ. Teaching young people in the Church to grow in their relationship with the Lord prepares them to serve Christ in all they

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

F. ENCOURAGE THE EFFECTIVE USE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY:

96. Scientists have been speaking about a "fourth industrial revolution".²³

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

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

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

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

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

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

100. Globalization is dictating the world economy today. The Guide Document for FABC 50 General Conference states: “... when driven by the neoliberal economic system or self-serving political power struggles, globalization can also lead to the concentration of economic and political power in a few hands and transnational companies. This then causes neglect for multilateralism in solving worldwide problems at the expense

of the weaker countries, small companies, the indigenous peoples, the poor, the vulnerable, and the environment. With the goal of maximizing profit and exerting power by transnational companies which are often connected with the governments, they take advantage of the relative absence of rules and controls that should guide global liberal markets ... The greed for profit and unlimited growth also increases inequality in Asia and leads to asymmetric development processes”.

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

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

103. Since urbanization and globalization appear to be irreversible trends, it is imperative that the Church leaders are adequately informed about this emerging trend in Asia and be prepared pastorally to face the situation. Since cities are places of social, political, and economic influence, the growing urban Christian population in Asia needs to be formed and equipped with a deep faith and social and cultural skills to be a witnessing community of salt and light to minister effectively to the overall urban population. Interestingly, the culmination of the New Testament is symbolically a city - the New Jerusalem which forms part of the peaceable home that fulfills God’s promised justice for the poor, salvation for the humble, and the renewal of creation (cf. Rev 21-22).

H. CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME:

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

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

106. The 2015 Paris Agreement indeed was a landmark in the global response to climate change. To tackle climate change and its negative impacts, world leaders at the UN Climate Conference (COP 21) in Paris reached a breakthrough on 12 December 2015 in this historic Paris Agreement. The Agreement sets long-term goals to guide all nations: i) Holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2 degree Celsius above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 degree Celsius above the pre-industrial level, recognizing that this would significantly reduce the risk and impact of climate change; ii) Increasing the ability to adapt to the adverse impact of climate change and foster climate resilience and low greenhouse gas emissions development, in a manner that does not threaten food production; and iii) Making finance flows consistent with pathway towards low greenhouse gas emissions and climate-resilient development. The

Agreement is a legally binding international treaty. It entered into force on 4 November 2016. As of today, 194 Parties (193 States plus the European Union) have joined the Paris Agreement.²⁴

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

111. We have since constantly "wrestled with God" like our ancestor Jacob, and have attempted to overcome sin assisted by God's mercy. Despite our sinfulness, we are nevertheless called to serve as a "bridge over troubled waters", as a stairway, through which "angels could ascend and descend" so that God could once again walk with humankind. In due time, Jacob's dream would see its fulfillment in the very person of Jesus, the Son of God who came to serve precisely as the bridge himself (cf Jn

1:51). As St. Paul says, “For in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile all things for him, making peace by the blood of his cross [through him], whether those on earth or those in heaven” (Col 1:19-20).

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

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

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

caused? If we do not resolve to make amends and to carry out concrete acts of reparation? How can we work for reconciliation if we do get people to see forgiveness as strength rather than as weakness?

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

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

117. At the FABC 50 General Conference, we reiterated the resolve made several times in our past FABC Plenary Assemblies to initiate the necessary reform of both our initial and ongoing formation programs for the ordained ministries in a manner that promotes a more participatory Church and empowers the laity for roles of leadership. To be able to

do this, we have to attend to the ongoing formation of our seminarians, priests, religious and bishops. We need to come up with programs and structures of formation that are contextualized in our specific cultures and worldviews in the different countries of Asia. The ordained must learn to share roles of leadership with the laity and consecrated persons through the variety of ministries and services that we are all called to assume within the Body of Christ, according to the example of Jesus who at the Last Supper reminded the disciples, "I am among you as one who serves." (Lk 22:27).

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

Part Four: OFFERING OUR GIFTS

Asian Culture and Spirituality

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

120. In Matthew's portrait of the Magi who allow themselves to be guided by a star to a lowly home in Bethlehem, we see an image that is typically Asian, visitors stopping by and reverently removing the sandals off their feet as we have been taught to do when entering our own homes. This is the Asian way of reminding ourselves that 'family' is about creating a

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

sacred space together. And so we shake off the dust that clings to our feet and make acts of ablution that prepare us for the encounter with the Holy One in the inner recesses of our home. It is within the confines of a home that God makes a dwelling place and becomes present among us. We acknowledge that presence, most of all, in the fragile infant that needs all the care and affection of home and family.²⁵

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

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

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

124. It is significant to note that Jesus' kingship is revealed in the absolute poverty of the manger. Recognizing the salvific force of those living in poverty, and putting them at the center of the Church, the poor

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

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

call us to ponder the mysterious wisdom of God, often revealed to us by their very lives.²⁷

125. As Pope Francis observes in Fratelli Tutti [FT], “we need to develop the awareness that nowadays we are either all saved together or no one is saved. Poverty, decadence and suffering in one part of the earth are a silent breeding ground for problems that will end up affecting the entire planet.”²⁸ We believe that “each of us can learn something from others. No one is useless and no one is expendable. This also means finding ways to include those on the peripheries of life. For they have another way of looking at things; they see aspects of reality that are invisible to the centers of power where weighty decisions are made.”²⁹

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

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

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

²⁸Fratelli Tutti [FT], 137.

²⁹Ibid, 215.

³⁰Dominus Iesus [DI], 14.

around us.

129. The Church in Asia has much to learn from the strong cultural inclination to nonviolence of our ancestors. We have developed self-defence into an art, where the goal is never to harm, hurt or kill the offender but to preempt his moves, avoid his blows, and block his attacks until he perhaps falls under his own weight. The art of self-defence goes by many names in Asia but the principle is the same. When done collectively by a people that rises to oppose injustice in a consistently nonviolent way, it is given new names, such as Satyagraha by the Indians, one of the shining legacies of Mahatma Gandhi which led to the end of foreign rule in India, or “People Power”, by the Filipinos, which brought an end to dictatorship in the Philippines.

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

131. Dialogue has therefore consistently remained at the top of the FABC’s pastoral priorities from the very beginning. Among its many forms, we have focused in particular on what we call the triple dialogue—with our neighbour religious traditions, with our neighbour cultures and with the poor.³¹ In the light of synodality, Pope Francis has inspired us to widen the scope of dialogue beyond interpersonal communication, and to extend it to the synodal notion of accompaniment and conviviality. It

³¹ Thanks to the testimony of our Korean bishops, we have resolved to start doing as they do in their dialogues— namely, to no longer speak of faiths and cultures outside Christianity as “other” other religions and cultures, but as neighbour-religions and cultures.

never proceeds from a presumption of ill will because it is founded on the basic Christian principle that all human beings, having been created in God's image and likeness (Gen 1:26-27), are by nature good, even if that image has been damaged and obscured by sin.

132. When some of our local churches in Asia speak of the need of presenting Jesus with an "Asian face", it is because they belong to parts of Asia that received the Christian faith in a European garb, through the evangelization efforts of European missionaries. This is even more understandable in countries where the spread of Christianity is connected to their colonial past. It is ironic that some Asians tend to forget that Christianity first took root on Asian soil, and that the Son of God first took flesh in a culture and setting that was Asian. At the very heart of the later Greco-Roman articulations of the faith in the Scriptures, is a culture that is strongly Semitic and Asian.

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

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

135. In most other parts of Asia, wherever Christian evangelization work was mediated by missionaries from Europe, such as in the former colonies of Spain, Portugal, France, and Great Britain, or from North or South America, such as those that had reached the Philippines through Acapulco, some western expressions of Christianity remain evident in

religious art, architecture, and liturgical expressions. In such instances, there is understandably an effort to give an Asian expression to Christianity. Communion with Rome need not mean the “Romanization” of the Church in Asia.

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

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

Part Five: OPENING NEW PATHWAYS

Returning by Another Route

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

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

140. We, the Bishops of Asia did something similar when we came together for the FABC 50 General Conference. As we explained in Chapter Two, we

sought divine guidance in prayer and contemplation and human guidance in the person of 'experts' in different fields. Together, we looked at different realities through a 'virtual visit' to each Asian country. We looked at the realities of Asia, and discerned what the Spirit is saying to us. We offered Jesus the treasures we discovered. Hence, we are now ready to return to our dioceses by "another route", along new pathways that have been opened out before us by FABC 50. We could trace five pathways along which we wish to travel post the FABC 50 General Conference.

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

141. Christ, the Son of God assumed a humanity that was Asian. The first missions were to the countries of 'Asia Minor'. But the later Christianization of many Asian countries around the middle of the second millennium was tied to the European geopolitics, with the Spanish and Portuguese empires dividing the world among themselves. In many Asian countries, Christianity therefore came with an European garb. Often, the missionaries who were sent by their own religious orders rode on the royal patronage of the foreign powers.

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

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

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

FABC's insistence on dialogue with Asian cultures and religions by almost four centuries!

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

144. This missionary approach of adapting to local customs and respecting the culture of the countries to be evangelized did actually enjoy the support of Rome at the start.³⁶ Unfortunately, when other religious orders started missionary work in China during the 17th century, they reacted strongly to the inculturation and adaptation models of evangelization adopted by Valignano and Ricci, igniting a heated controversy that eventually attracted the attention of Rome and led to the so-called "Chinese Rites Controversy". As a consequence, Pope Clement XI, in 1704, issued the Decree *Cum Deus Optimus*, condemning these Chinese ancestor rites

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

³⁵ *Ibid.*

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

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

and prohibiting Chinese Christians from practicing them. One of the most serious consequences of this Decree was that it caused the formerly sympathetic Emperor to swing to the opposite extreme of imposing an imperial ban on Christianity.³⁷ The controversy over the Chinese Rites would last until the first half of the 20th century, when in 1939, Pius XII, through Propaganda Fide, finally came up with the new decree *Plane Compertum*.³⁸ It is very encouraging to note how the recent Popes have consistently upheld a more positive regard for the inculturated and dialogical missionary approaches of Valignano and Ricci³⁹. Pope Francis described Ricci as “a man of encounters, who went beyond being a foreigner and became a citizen of the world.”⁴⁰

145. At the FABC 50 General Conference, we felt the Church must go back to inculturated evangelization. Inculturation springs from the theology of incarnation and the paschal mystery. In Christ, God saves humankind by embracing our humanity and taking on a human embodiment or enfleshment, through his INCARNATION. St. Paul calls it the KENOSIS of God in Philippians 2:7-8, “He EMPTIED HIMSELF, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.” The underlying truth is: THE WORD BECAME FLESH. “He pitched his tent among us.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

C. FROM DIALOGUE TO SYNODALITY

150. Over the past five decades, the FABC has consistently pursued the

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

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

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

153. Since one of the most concrete fruits of Vatican II was the Synod of Bishops, we sense that Pope Francis has invited the Church to take

'synodality' seriously, expanding it in both directions—ad intra and ad extra. Ad Intra, within the Church, among our fellow baptized Catholics: the consecrated persons, the ordained, and the laity, especially women and young people. Ad Extra with the Church, outwardly directed to fellow Christians, fellow believers, fellow human beings, especially the poor, and all fellow creatures in our common home.

D. FROM PROCLAMATION TO STORY TELLING

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

155. His method is still the most effective one in this day and age: STORYTELLING. The world over people love good stories. There is always that 'child' within us that is drawn to listen when someone tells a story and begins with the usual, "Once upon a time..." or "In a far-away village by the sea..." or "One day there was father with two sons..." We recall that the theme of the Asian Mission Congress in Chiang Mai, in 2006 when we reflected on the face of Jesus in Asia, was "telling the Story of Jesus...". We also determined a methodology of nurturing our Basic Ecclesial Communities by promoting "storytelling" as the most characteristic way of living the life of an Asian Church, one that enhances true-to-life conversations that strengthen communion and build community.

E. FROM THE BEATEN TRACK TO NEW PASTORAL PRIORITIES

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

157. We will work towards renewing our ministries in all our local churches

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

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

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

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

natural calamities. We resolve to live out the spirit of complementarity and harmony by listening to others in genuine dialogue.

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

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

CONCLUSION

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

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

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

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

Blessed Lady, Mother of Jesus

Draw us near your Son's embrace.

All that we have we offer to him,

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

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

May he continue to take flesh in our Asian cultures.

May we learn to empty ourselves as he did,

That the world may see in us his Asian face

*And that in us, amongst us and through us
his light may radiate to the rest of Asia!*

AMEN.

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

THE SONG OF ASIA

Bless our God who walks with us

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

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

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

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

God the Father, mercy is your name, O Lord Jesus redeem our pain
Holy Spirit fill us with your fire of great love,
Bless our God who walks with us
Bless our God who walks with us
And the poor will proclaim your praises,
our young your mission will embrace
And creation's groaning will now be heard
Holy peace to all will be served
Holy peace to all will be served

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

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

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







INAUGURATION



PRESS NOTE

Inauguration of the 50th Anniversary of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences - Day 1

August 22, 2022 – Shrine of Blessed Nicholas Bunkerd Kitbamrung, Thailand

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

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

Charles Cardinal Bo also highlighted key contributions of the

Church of Asia to the Universal Church as it sought to be the face of Christ to the people of Asia. "With creativity, FABC fortified the Asian threefold dialogue with cultures, religions and the poor of Asia. FABC envisaged a co-ordinating structure, with empowering commissions. Grace has led us so far".

Emphasizing the challenging times that the Church encounters as the world stands at the crossroads of history, Charles Cardinal Bo encouraged all gathered to reflect on how Asian Churches can become prophets of peace in an increasingly anxious world. "The third millennium brings great challenges. Pope Francis has always encouraged to look at every challenge as an opportunity. As we inaugurate the 50-year celebrations, we are reminded that the Biblical perspective of Jubilee mandates a comprehensive change and robust renewal. The Church under the present Pope has proactively initiating changes."

“The theme chosen for the General Conference is FABC 50: Journeying together as peoples of Asia - “...and they went a different way.” (Mt. 2:12).”

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

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

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

"The story of the Magi invites the Asian Church to see, to recognize, and to respond to the interventions of God. In this context, we may ask ourselves: when and where do we experience interventions of God? God speaks to us through the various events of our daily life.

So, what is God's message in and through the global experience of the coronavirus pandemic? What is God's instruction as the Church is called to make a synodal journey? What is God's dream when FABC celebrates its golden jubilee? The pandemic, more than ever before, reminds us of our inter-connectedness and interdependence as members of the human family. Pope Francis, by convoking the Synod on Synodality, invites us to be a listening Church, to make a radical shift in our mindset so that we become more attentive, more inclusive, and journey together. The Jubilee year of FABC offers a golden opportunity for us to enter into a process of renewal."



"Lastly, how do we understand v. 12b - "And they went by another way"? In the light of the above analysis, it is reasonable to say that the Asian Church is challenged to explore new pathways for its journey forward."

"God calls the Church to continual renewal. Are we called to become more contemplative and interdependent, more synodal and inclusive? A more ascetic and prophetic Church? God invites us to become fully and truly an Asian Church by listening to Asian realities and embracing Asian spiritualities. We are called to journey together as peoples of Asia into the unknown, at the service of God's mission of

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

announcing the gospel of Jesus Christ, guided by the Holy Spirit”.

Oswald Cardinal Gracias in his address focused on the future direction of the FABC.

“To begin with, FABC will affirm and celebrate our journey thus far. The FABC was founded in response to the particular needs and challenges of the Asian

Church of fifty years ago. We wanted a Church of the poor, of the young, and of dialogue: a Church for the poor, for the young and for dialogue. This goal remains relevant even today. But there have been so many big changes, so many new challenges. Hopefully, we have just exited the COVID-19 pandemic; we have new socio-political and economic tensions; a deepening migrant and climate crisis, and so on. The first few days of FABC 50 will be spent in getting to know about the situation in different countries and deliberating on the emerging realities. These challenges and realities may well disturb us. But they will not surprise us. We live with them!”



“Our responses to the challenges today must be well-discerned, grounded in Scripture, tradition, magisterial teaching, and pastoral practice that promotes unity and sustainability in order to transform our realities in the power of the Holy Spirit (Lumen Gentium, 5). We have, therefore, dedicated the next few days of FABC 50 to workshops and plenary sessions on Church documents and characteristics of the Church in Asia so that we become and remain a prophetic, relevant and responsive Church. We discern the role of the Church for a better Asia.”

The song of Asia composed by Fr Carlos Marcelo was then played.

This was followed by the message of the Holy Father, Pope Francis, which was read by the Apostolic Nuncio to Thailand, Archbishop Paul Tachang In-Nam.

His Holiness Pope Francis wrote:

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



“With these sentiments, I invoke upon the forthcoming assembly a rich outpouring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Commending you, your Brother Bishops and all those entrusted to your pastoral care to the prayers of Mary, Mother of the Church, I cordially send my blessing as a pledge of wisdom, grace and peace in the Lord” - From the Vatican, 5 June 2022
Francis

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



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

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





Inaugural Speech by H.E. Charles Cardinal Maung Bo A Journey of Grace and Gratefulness

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

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

“Fifty years ago, the Asian Bishops came together with a great Pentecostal moment provided by the Second Vatican Council, to establish the Federation of Asian Bishops Conference (FABC). It set upon to respond to the creative apostolic impulses provoked by the council set the world on fire for renewal.”

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

The Asian Church celebrates this juncture of Grace and Gratefulness. All praises to God the Almighty God who has guided this church through all these years. Asia is the cradle of

many religions. In his great journey to the Asian Church Saint Pope John Paul II extolled the vital role of Asia in the Salvation History. In his Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* the Pope said:

“The Church in Asia sings the praises of the “God of salvation” (Ps 68:20) for choosing to initiate his saving plan on Asian soil, through men and women of that continent. It was in fact in Asia that God revealed and fulfilled his saving purpose from the beginning. He guided the patriarchs (cf. Gen 12) and called Moses to lead his people to freedom (cf. Ex 3:10). He spoke to his chosen people through many prophets, judges, kings and valiant women of faith. In “the 2 fullness of time” (Gal 4:4), he sent his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ the Saviour, who took flesh as an Asian! Exulting in the goodness of the continent’s peoples, cultures, and religious vitality, and conscious at the same time of the unique gift of faith which she has received for the good of all, the Church in Asia cannot cease to proclaim: “Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, for his love endures forever” (Ps 118:1). (No.1. EA)”

Yes. All Glory to God who chose this continent for that sanctified Salvation History.

The Sainly Pope left a mandate to the Asian Church to continue that live up vibrantly that reality.

Inspired by the Sainly Pope’s wisdom, the Federation of Asian Bishops Conference coordinated the missionary endeavours of the Asian Church. It has been a long and challenging journey.

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

Now the Asian Church and the FABC stands at the cross roads of a very challenging epoch. Much has been achieved. We are grateful to all those who shepherded that process. We are grateful to the theologians and others who provided the intellectual identity to FABC. Asia is a virtual mosaic of cultures; the church reflected that diversity. The incorporation of

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

the cultural and the religious is what theologians refer to as inculturation. Asian Christianity is in the midst of this process in shedding its alien baggage and becoming truly indigenous to the region.

Today, the Church and the world stand at the crossroads of history.

We gather amidst suffocating clouds of conflict and displacements, collapse of the economy, frightening climate change, pandemic and starvation of millions. Secularism is on the ascendency in the traditional Christian world. Authoritarian leadership is becoming norm in 3 many countries.

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

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

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

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

Pope has called for a life built on right relationships. His three documents have given to Asian church and the world a road map in right relationships: *Evangelium Gaudium* guided us in our relationship with God, *Laudato Si* charted a course in our relationship with the God's creation

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

and Fratelli Tutti enlighten us on the relationship with one another.

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



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

With Christianity playing important role in Asian nations, education, health and human development, countries are becoming economically and politically more confident. Church is vibrant in Asia

“We can look to our preparation for the FABC 50 General Conference as the work of the Holy Spirit. I commend the all the dioceses for their preparations. The diocesan and conference phase of the synodal process ended last August 15.”

and Africa with increasing vocations. This is a great opportunity and challenge. With prayer and planning and commitment, this century can become the Asian Christian Century, proclaiming the Good news and fostering peace with justice in the world. The FABC conference will address many

of these concerns.

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

The theme chosen for the conference is:

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

“Asia is the biggest continent with 60 percent of the population, comprising 48 countries need both unity and diversity.”

It might look slightly contradictory. The Early church journeyed together in Christ's mission but the diverse gifts of the early church helped them to reach various cultures and nations. Asia is the biggest continent with 60 percent of the population, comprising 48 countries need both unity and diversity.

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

God bless all our efforts





H.E. Oswald Cardinal Gracias' address on FABC 50

Your Eminences, my dear brother Bishops, my dear Fathers and Sisters, and my dearest people of Asia.

Very warm greetings to you on this auspicious day, the feast of the Queenship of Mary.

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

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

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

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

Then we turn once again to God and search for the face of Jesus in Asia. We will seek out the Jesus that is among each of us, despite our diversity. Strengthened by our encounter with Jesus, FABC 50 will try to

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

trace a new vision for the Church in Asia. As Church, we do not exist for ourselves, but are at the service of all the peoples of Asia as we continue to build up the Kingdom of God.

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

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

With this we come to the theme of FABC 50: journeying together as peoples of Asia, through the Synodal path, we seek out new pathways of service and more appropriate and effective structures. At FABC 50, we will do this in Synodality – in communion with the people of Asia, with the participation of 250 bishops, priests, religious and lay persons, and with

the mission of a renewed and shared evangelical outreach. Thanks to your participation at the several consultations in preparation for the General Conference these past couple of years, we already have some initial salient points for consideration such as expansion of the triple dialogue of the FABC, better support for the Bishops and indeed all Church leaders to be - as Pope Francis stated - "Apostles of listening", partnerships, better communication and organisational structure, and so on. This we will discuss the last week of the Conference.

My dear people, it is our desire that through FABC 50 we will revitalise ourselves in service to the people of Asia, both at the General Conference and beyond. We will seek a renewed FABC for a more vibrant Church at the service of the people of Asia. FABC 50 will be a stepping stone to help us as the Church in Asia rethink our commitment in relation to mission, worship and pastoral strategies.



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

Pope Francis' Message for FABC 50



To My Venerable Brother Cardinal Charles Maung Bo Archbishop of Yangon

President of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences

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

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

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

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

From the Vatican, 5 June 2022.

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

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



PRESS NOTE

Oct 12, 2022

An Introduction to the FABC General Conference

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

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

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

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

From the 17th to 22nd of October, the General Conference will reflect on these realities, in dialogue with recent Papal documents. The

FABC Guide Document and subsequent consultations have already highlighted some of them - the pandemic, globalization, socio-economic and political challenges - and the issues of gender; indigenous people, yearnings of the youth, and the transformation of the Church. The FABC will connect these realities with reflections on the documents of Pope Francis, especially *Evangelii Gaudium*, *Fratelli Tutti*, *Laudato Si'*, *Amoris Laetitia*, and *Predicate Evangelium*, and will focus on the lessons the Church in Asia needs to learn in order to respond to them.

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

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

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

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

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

Please find below the program for the FABC 20220 General Conference:

October 12

16:30 :Opening Eucharist (St. Michael Hall [SMH])

18:00 :Opening Ceremonies (St John Paul II Hall)

Both of these will be streamed on the FABC YouTube Channel URL:
https://youtu.be/_o7KKD1ofik

October 13-15

Visiting Asia: This event is closed to the press to enable the Bishops to speak freely about their country and the concerns. A press statement after these three days will follow.

October 16

09:00 :Eucharist (SMH)

11:00 :Talk Show with Asia

This too will be live-streamed on the YouTube channel of the FABC 2020

October 17-22

Emerging Realities and the Church in Asia

October 19

17:00 Bishops' Meeting with the Focolare

October 22

15:00 Recollection

October 23

09:00 :World Mission Sunday Eucharist (SMH)

11:00 :Virtual Visits to Parishes in Asia

October 24-25

Discerning New Pathways for the Church in Asia. Once again this part of the program will not be open to the press.

October 26

Pilgrimage to Ayutthaya (A summary video will be provided)

October 27-29

Final Message and schema of Final Document

October 30

09:00 Closing Eucharist and Ceremonies (Cathedral)

Every day we will provide a brief summary of what has happened during the day, a link to the photographs, and short videos. Link to Press Resources Folder:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1CoEEayqFsRN3rh7eimmHtYg7A8k8R0q6?usp=sharing>

Message from Pope Francis for FABC 50 General Conference



Dear brothers,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Inaugural Welcome Address of H.E. Charles Cardinal Bo, President, FABC



HISTORY BECKONS; THE SPIRIT MOVES - WELCOME TO THE JUBILEE OF HOPE TO ASIAN CHURCH!

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

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

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

These are moments of Grace and Gratitude. First of all, gratitude to

our graceful host Cardinal FRANCIS XAVIER KRIENGSACK KOVITHAVANIJ and the Thai Church. Let showers of blessings be upon all those who spent days and nights planning and preparing for this event. We feel so blessed to be here.

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

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

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

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

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

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

We have much to be thankful for: the Asian theological reflections,

the three-fold dialogue with cultures, religions and poor, our attention to women and youth concerns, our collaboration during great challenges, our support to persecuted brothers and sisters, our contribution to health and education in many Asian countries and our ongoing collaboration across the cultures, all that made FABC a robust organization. We are grateful for the people of God in Asia, their steadfastness amidst threats, their generosity amidst challenges, their enthusiasm despite their tiny size in many Asian Countries. They are the light, seed and the yeast of the Asian Church.

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

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

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

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

Our task is reflected in the theme of the Jubilee FABC 50: Journeying together as peoples of Asia "...and they went a different way." (Mt 2:12) which aims to reflect on the

“...let the star of star of hope guide in different ways, but the same destination: the dream of Jesus in establishing a humanity liberated from the grip of evil and man-made disasters.”

“re-emerging and emerging realities and challenges of the Church in Asia.”

Like those wise men from the East, we have come here to encounter Jesus, to be inspired by the mystery of incarnation. Like those men, let the star of hope guide in different ways, but the same destination: the dream of Jesus in establishing a humanity liberated from the grip of evil and man-made disasters. Let Mary, the star of Evangelization, the mother of Magnificat, bless every moment of our presence and deliberations. May her intercession make us sing with her at the end of these celebrations: The Lord Has Done Marvels for us.

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

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



Inaugural Welcome Address of H.E. Oswald Cardinal Gracias



Your Eminence Cardinal Bo, President of the Federation of the Asian Bishops Conferences,

Your Eminence Cardinal Kriengsak, Archbishop of Bangkok, our gracious host,

My dear brother Cardinals, my dear brother Archbishops, Bishops, respected officials from the Government of Thailand, members of this assembly: distinguished guests, delegates and representatives from Asia and beyond, Reverend Fathers and Sisters, ancillary staff and everyone joining us here, both in person and virtually.

Warm greetings and hearty welcome to each one of you. I want to specially greet those following us online. A special welcome to you. Thank you for joining us.

Today marks a momentous step in the journey of the federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, a landmark for the FABC. We come together

in the spirit of Synodality to conduct our first ever General Conference. We have had several Plenary Assemblies - 11 of them. We met every few years. Every participant cherishes memories of those enriching meetings, most recently at Colombo. Before that, in Vietnam, and earlier in Manila, in South Korea, and in the year 2000 in this very place, Baan Phu Waan, Samphran in Bangkok.

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

All Participants at recent global ecclesial events will have noticed how Bishops in South America have invariably been referring to Puebla, Medellin, and now Aparecida in their reflections. Today rare is a Church document emerging from South America that does not refer to Aparecida. These names refer to the all-important decennial Conferences organised by CELAM, the Federation of Latin American Episcopal Conferences - the Latin American equivalent of the FABC. Pope Francis, then Cardinal Bergoglio of Buenos Aires, was the main architect of the Aparecida final document. How much that document has influenced the Pope is seen in the many references to Aparecida in *Evangelii Gaudium*. Speaking at one of our meetings, the Holy father stated that *Evangelii Gaudium*, among the first documents issued by him, outlines the pastoral priorities he wishes to set for the Church of today. The question, therefore, arises: isn't it time for the FABC to have something similar in Asia? What helped South America can surely help Asia. Would such a Conference not help our Churches in Asia to renew and revitalize our pastoral thrust so that the Church could become and what the Lord calls her to be? A vibrant Church working for a better Asia.

After discussing this with the past presidents of CELAM, especially the much remembered, and recently departed to the Lord, Cardinal Claudio Hummes, we collected suggestions of how to organize such a Conference. Since it was an International Conference, it was necessary to get the Holy See's approval. I shared this proposal with Pope Francis who enthusiastically gave wholehearted support and encouragement

and invited us to go ahead with the planned General Conference for Asia. The idea was formally presented at our Central Committee Meeting and was unanimously approved. Details had now to be worked out and so we began discussing the material requirements, refining the concept, and planning the logistics.

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

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

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

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

The COVID 19 pandemic hit us badly and many lives were lost. We also lost several of our confreres - brother bishops. We acknowledge the grief the pain. the loss, the suffering. and the isolation that we all went through but from which we hopefully

emerged spiritually stronger.

We adapted in response to the new circumstances. Though we were compelled to postpone FABC 50 more than once, our planning continued online. From 2020 till as recently as last week, the core group, now evolved into an expanded Organizing Committee has met digitally two to three times each month, usually on Mondays. Fr. William LaRousse, the Assistant Secretary General of the FABC kept detailed notes both before and after the meeting and thus our documentation is complete.

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

We had the Inauguration of FABC 50 on the Feast of the Queenship of Mary, confident in her intercession for the FABC. A campaign of prayer was started, praying for the success of the General Conference, specially at Sunday Masses.

From today October 12th up to 30th of the month, the process intensifies. In particular, the Bishop Members of this Assembly will undertake, with great responsibility, the monumental purpose of FABC 50 - of reaffirming, renewing and revitalising the Church in Asia, a Church living and working for a better Asia.

Our first three days will be spent in “visiting Asia”. All the twenty-nine countries belonging to the FABC have been invited to present an exposition of the present situation in their countries: political, social, economic, religious and any other special challenges for the Catholic Church. While these are not being livestreamed as they are aimed to the participants of the Conference, do look forward to our online interactions during the Talk Show on Sundays. Details will be available on the FABC 50 website. Sunday, October 16, will be the link between our “visiting Asia” and the next week when we will have a six day in depth study of the special challenges in Asia. On Sunday we will interact with several people

in the field and those directly affected by new realities in Asia.

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

“**We will not just have talks on these realities but focus on the lessons we need to learn in order for us, as Church in Asia, to respond to them.**”

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

Sunday, October 23rd, the shepherds of Asia will be making virtual visits to parishes in different Asian countries to galvanise ourselves with the “smell of the sheep,” to guarantee that our deliberations do not remain just theoretical, and deviating from our duty of building up the Kingdom through loving service.

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

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

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

“We need the guidance of the Holy Spirit to go ahead with courage and perseverance: with wisdom and vision, identifying the priorities of the Church in Asia and restructuring the FABC as needed.”

“Next year, we will further commit ourselves to reflect on the new pathways and directions that will emerge at this General Conference both during the annual FABC Central Committee Meeting and at the Asian Continental Synod, which will take place in March 2023.”

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

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

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



PRESS NOTE
12TH OCTOBER

Opening Eucharist and Ceremonies

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

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

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

H.E. Francis Xavier Cardinal Kriengsak Kovithavanij, Archbishop of Bangkok and President of the FABC, welcomed all the attendees, emphasising the importance of being in communion with each other, and the message of witnessing God through love for each other.

Bishop Joseph Chusak Sirisut, President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Thailand, reflected on the theme, putting a spotlight on the

importance of walking side by side, and the unique opportunity to renew and revitalise the Church in Asia.

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

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

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

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





ORIENTATION AND
VISITING ASIA

PRESS NOTE

13TH OCTOBER 2022

The first day of the FABC General Conference, 13th October 2022, began with a celebration of the Eucharist by H.E. Orlando Cardinal Quevedo.

At St Michael's Hall, H.E. Charles Cardinal Bo led the representatives in the Adsumus, and the Morning Prayer, hosted by the country of Philippines, was conducted by the Daughters of St Paul.



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

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

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

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

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



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

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





Visiting Asia - Day 2

PRESS NOTE

14TH OCTOBER 2022

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

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

The morning prayer, each day culturally unique to its host country, was conducted by the Daughters of St Paul, from the Pauline Province in India.

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

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

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







Visiting Asia - Day 3

PRESS NOTE

15TH OCTOBER 2022

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

At St Michael's Hall, H.E. Francis Xavier Cardinal Kriengsak Kovithavanij, Archbishop of Bangkok and President for the day's sessions, led the representatives in the Adsumus. Reflecting on Cardinal Coutt's homily, Cardinal Kriengsak emphasised the importance of evangelising through both word and deed, and bringing the Gospel into daily life. Reassuring his listeners that Jesus was among them, he welcomed all to the third day.

The morning prayer, hosted by the country of Pakistan, was conducted by the Daughters of St Paul, who led the representatives in song and reflection, through video.



The Conference continued with the segment 'Visiting Asia', with reports on the emerging realities from the countries of Japan, Taiwan, Vietnam, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Myanmar and Hong Kong. The representatives of each country added context to the history, successes and challenges their people faced, seeking understanding and providing listening ears. The delegates reformed their groups for the workshop discussions, at the end of which they collated data for collection.



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

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

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

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

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





Holy Eucharist and Talk Show with Asia Day 4

PRESS NOTE

16TH OCTOBER 2022

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

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

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

In his introduction to the show, Bishop Allwyn D'silva asked his audience to consider, 'who can I be a neighbour to', requesting them to listen with an open ear. The panelists left their audience with valuable insights and potent messages of hope. In his message thanking the panelists, H.E. Oswald Cardinal Gracias said, 'our hearts beat with you'.







**EMERGING
REALITIES**

**DAY 1
OCTOBER 17, 2022**

PRESS NOTE

17TH OCTOBER 2022

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

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

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

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

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

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

H.E. Lazzaro Cardinal You Heung-sik, the Prefect of the Dicastery for the Clergy, put forward his "Reflections on Priestly Formation in an Epochal Change'. Asking 'which Church, what kind of Priest, what kind of formation?' is needed, Cardinal You expressed that everything goes back to one book - the Bible, one law - that of mutual love, and one master - God. In a time of change, Cardinal You added that the Church needs to become Synodal, a home and school of communion, that the priests needed are those who are true disciples, called to service, who work as a family, and that formation needs to happen at both home and seminary. He concluded by emphasizing the importance of the Word of God as part of everyday life.

The sessions were followed with representatives forming new workshop groups for discussion and reflection on how the values and teachings presented could be incorporated going forward. The evening prayer, which included a hindi bhajan, was led by H.E. Cardinal Bo.



Address by Cardinal Lazzaro You Heung-sik (tbt)

May I now invite His Eminence Cardinal Lazzaro Yam Hang-Sick, the Archbishop Emeritus of Dejeon and Prefect of the Dicastery for the Clergy. He was the fourth Korean Cardinal and headed the peace committee of the Korean Bishops' Conference, visiting North Korea four times. He had the courage to do so, made right, Your Eminence?

To address good afternoon, everybody. Pope Francis wrote a letter six days ago on the 11th of October. He told me, "If I left Rome, you go to Bangkok. You give my best regards to everybody, all and each of you. Also, my blessing." And I brought the best regards from Pope, or his blessing for you. I prepared this circumference in Italian, my friend translating in English. My English is very poor, and this was prepared this morning by the Secretariat. And I've already given the USB file to Father William.

“When I think about priest formation, what immediately comes to my mind is my personal journey towards the Priestly Ministry...”

What kind of priest, what kind of formation, one book, one law, one master. When I think about priest formation, what immediately comes to my mind is my personal journey towards the Priestly Ministry, in which everything goes back to what is essential: one book, one law,

one master. A single book of the Gospel to be put into practice faithfully, or to the letter, in everyday life. Only one law, the Commandment of mutual love. The teacher is interested first to these apostles, one master who makes himself present where we live together as children of one father and as a family of brothers and sisters. These three best ways have left a deep imprint in my life forever, and they serve as the light and the guide for me even to this day.

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

“In fact, our formation is never a process that ends; on the contrary, we need a daily conversion, so that our way of living, speaking, and acting is more and more rooted in the Gospel.”

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

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

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

Of course, there are also many positive examples, but the question remains. So what can we do to help priests become joyful and happy? It

“It is urgent that we keep asking ourselves as to what kind of priestly formation is needed, not only about initial formation but also and in a special way regarding ongoing formation.”

is my work, joyful and happy priests and seminarians. It is urgent that we keep asking ourselves as to what kind of priestly formation is needed, not only about initial formation but also and in a special way regarding ongoing formation. Every priest must feel welcomed and listened to, accompanied and supported along the path of his life. You have identified this as a priority for the coming years. However, we cannot

address this question directly without raising fundamental questions even more forcefully: which Church and, therefore, what kind of a priest for this Church? And consequently, what kind of formation? On this triple question, I would like to offer you a few reflections which will certainly require a greater study.

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

This image captures the whole ecclesial communion of the Second Vatican Council, which is three dimensions: mystery, communion, and

mission. Mystery, the Church is the task of making God present, indeed, making him seen. Thus, her life must be permeated with God, deeply rooted in him, constantly nourished by the sacrament and formed by her Word, living the Gospel. It is the universal call to holiness that Vatican II calls us to and which Pope Francis has reminded us of in his Apostolic Exhortation on holiness in everyday life. This requires not only an intense life of prayer but also continuous re-evangelization of the whole day of being so that people can see Jesus in us.

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

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

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

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Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.





Laudato Si' - A Call for Responsible Stewardship Bishop Allwyn D'Silva

N.B.: This version is a combination of the transcription of the recording and the text in the original presentation; text in red was only displayed but not read out

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

“We are all living in a common home, and Saint Francis of Assisi wants us to be brothers and sisters to all the trees, and to all the animals, and to all the insects.”

common home, and Saint Francis of Assisi wants us to be brothers and sisters to all the trees, and to all the animals, and to all the insects. So: We pray once more in the great cathedral of creation and revel in the “grandiose cosmic choir” made up of countless creatures all singing the praises of God”.¹ Let us join of Saint Francis of Assisi in singing: “Praise be

1. Prayer - Contemplation

And so, I would invite you to, of course we cannot go out, but imagine that you are out in the garden amidst the trees, and the flies, and the butterflies, and the insects, and just imagine that we are all living in a common home. We are all living in a

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

to you, my Lord, for all your creatures".²

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

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

2. Creation - Sin - Mandate

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

But we all know that there is sin in the world. And this sin is a rupture in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, our neighbour, and earth (cf. *LS* 66). The same wretchedness which leads us to mistreat an animal will not be long in showing itself in our relationships with other people (*LS* 92). I remember an incident where a human being kicked a dog that came his way, and later on I heard that there's domestic violence in his house; because the same treatment that he gave the animal, he gives it to his wife also. So: sin is manifest in all its

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

³ The song *My Cathedral* as performed by Jim Reeves (link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ks-oiO-NqrZ0>) was screened for contemplation

destructive power in wars, the various forms of violence and abuse, the abandonment of the most vulnerable, and attacks on nature (LS 66).

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

3. What We Need

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

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

4. Catholic Social Teaching - Reflection⁶

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

⁴ LS 160

⁵ Ibid.

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

our common home. There's an "urgent challenge" (LS 13) because of the "rapidification of changes" (LS 18). There's a "serious disrepair" (LS 61), and "cracks in the planet we inhabit" (LS 163).

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

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

And it's not only Pope Francis who has spoken about the care of creation; he is in continuity with the Magisterium. It goes back to our Catholic tradition and to the other Popes, Saint Francis of Assisi, Paul VI, John Paul II, Benedict XVI and the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, and many others also have spoken. And what do they invite us to: "Changes in lifestyles, models of production and consumption"⁷ – there has to be a change – "and the established structures of power"⁸. We have to seriously think about the structures of power, because if we are in this structure of power, then naturally we'll dominate or we'll have dominion over creation. To commit a crime against the natural world is a sin against ourselves and a sin against God.⁹ Who turned the wonder world of the seas into underwater cemeteries bereft of colour and life?¹⁰

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

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

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ LS 8 quoting Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew

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

universal right to clean water¹¹ (i.e., common good), the rights of workers¹² (i.e., participation), and the right of the poor to own land¹³ (i.e., preferential option for the poor). We can ask ourselves: Where is our human dignity when we are breathing in toxic air that impairs lung function?¹⁴ What happens to our human dignity? Where is our human dignity and right to life when we don't know whether we are consuming food or chemicals?¹⁵ Where is our human dignity when we are all quenching our thirst with water laden with micropollutants that have serious health implications?¹⁶

Another aspect of the social teachings of the Church is common good and solidarity. The Earth is a shared inheritance whose fruits are meant to benefit everyone (LS 93) and both politics and economics should be at the service of the common good¹⁷ (i.e., subsidiarity). And the common good extends to future generations¹⁸ (i.e., intergenerational solidarity). Interdependence obliges us to think of one world with a common plan (LS 164). The principle of the common good immediately

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

becomes, logically and inevitably, a summons to solidarity and a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters (LS 158). Is there any common good on a polluted planet - our rivers are spewing foam, oceans churn up oil and garbage, our soil is eroding, extreme weather and temperature changes abound, and new diseases are emerging as we further unravel and decimate ecological balances?¹⁹ We have put a price on the Lord's oxygen, on water, on food, on land - yet we cannot be assured of the goodness, adequacy and quality of the natural resources we are commoditising.²⁰

Another aspect is the preferential aspect for the poor in the

11 cf. LS 30

12 cf. LS 128

13 cf. LS 94

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

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 cf. LS 189

18 LS 159

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

20 Ibid.

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

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

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

So: Where is our solidarity and subsidiarity when we persist in undermining our interconnectedness? What option can we offer to those in need when we can’t even assure them a liveable world? How can we even presume that everything will be fine as we do not stand with the indigenous custodians of the earth and let their voices go unheard? These are questions I think we have to seriously ask ourselves. Now: How can we ensure ecological justice through participatory actions and bottom-up, collective decision-making that safeguard the rights of the poor, the vulnerable, the indigenous and the marginalised? What dignity of labour (i.e., participation) can we hope to achieve as we hurtle into mechanisation, digitalisation and automation on a planet that we are systematically killing? What good will an economy narrowly focused on growth and GDP do then?²¹

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

5. Dreams - Way Forward

The theme of this conference is to go a different way. So let us dream, but don’t go to sleep! We dream of an Asia that upholds the rights of the poor, the original peoples and the least of our brothers

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

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

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

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



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

24 A rendition of *Laudato Si'* - The Song (link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k9NESayggyU>) released by the Archdiocesan Office for Environment, Mumbai in collaboration with the FABC Office of Human Development and Climate Change Desk and the Commission for Ecology of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India was screened to conclude



The Climate Crisis - Risks & Responses

Ms Ridhima Pandey

May I now introduce to you the second speaker on the same subject, Miss Ridhima Pandey from India. She is an environmentalist and environmental activist. She was also invited by the Holy Father, Pope Francis, for an environmental meeting that is featured in the documentary “The Letter.” Miss Pandey will speak for 20 minutes.

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

“Witnessing such devastation affected me deeply, and I started having nightmares about floods and losing everything.”

My state has been impacted by cloudbursts, landslides, and flash floods. These reasons are why I became an activist. I was five years old when the Kedarnath flash

flood occurred in my hometown of Uttarakhand. I watched the destruction on television, saw kids crying because they lost their parents and homes. Witnessing such devastation affected me deeply, and I started having nightmares about floods and losing everything.

After being impacted by these flash floods for a while, I decided that I wanted to do something because I didn't want to die. I asked my parents what I could do to stop the flash floods. That's when I learned about climate change and global warming. I realized that due to human emissions, the climate of the entire Earth is changing, and India, like Asia, is one of the most impacted places by climate change. But what makes me even more anxious is that the ones most impacted by this crisis are not the ones responsible for it.

“the ones most impacted by this crisis are not the ones responsible for it.”

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

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

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

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

“We must shift our focus from gain maximization for a few to risk minimization for all.”

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

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

“...we all have to come together to protect our common home, to protect this planet.”

We hope that this film will help you bring the message of Laudato Si to different communities in your country so that they will be able to join Pope Francis in his fight to protect Mother Earth for the coming generations.

Now, at the very end, me and the Laudato Si movement would like to invite you all for the special screening of the letter from Pope Francis to you, today at 7:30 PM. Now let's watch the trailer of the film that we will see this evening. Thank you, thank you so much.

Heat waves are causing an unknown amount of death among corals. I want all the global leaders to do something to stop climate change because if it's not going to be stopped, it's going to harm our future. That society is.

As individuals with very different stories, but we all shared a dream. Miss Pandey, young as you are, you have addressed the very important question of climate change. You have had the courage to ask the right questions from the older generation. You have been questioning the inactivity of the older generation. We pray that you may grow up as a climate change activist. You are the blessings of the Holy Father Pope Francis, and you have also the blessing of all of us. Thank you. God bless you. May invite Miss Pandey to come up on the stage, please.

Let us now pray in silence for two minutes. Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.





The Climate Crisis - Risks & Responses Attorney Antonio La Vina

We would like to focus our attention on this topic, which is the climate crisis and the extent of its impact on Asia. Let me introduce the speaker, Attorney Antonio Gabriel Maestrado Laviña. He is a Filipino lawyer, educator, and environmental policy expert. Until 2019, he was the chairman of the Partnership for the Environmental Management of East Asia. Attorney Lavina will speak for 20 minutes. May I call Anthony Laviña, Attorney Laviña, to the podium? Thank you.

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

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

world.

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

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

South Asia, including Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan, has already experienced extreme heatwaves and increased humidity, affecting workability. By 2050, these countries are projected to face extreme precipitation events and rising temperatures. Northeast Asia, including

“The severity of these impacts calls for urgent action.”

Japan and China, will also face typhoons, extreme precipitation, and droughts. Even Australia and New Zealand are not immune, experiencing droughts, floods, and forest fires.

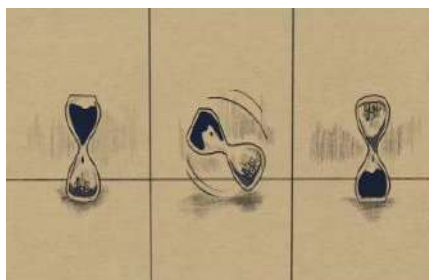
The severity of these impacts calls for urgent action. We must strive for a low-carbon economy, prioritize nature-based solutions, and ensure the protection of human rights. Every country needs to mitigate climate change and transition to sustainable development. It is crucial to avoid maladaptation,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

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

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

“The Church has an essential role to play in promoting resilience, stewardship, education, and leadership.”

Thank you, Attorney Laviña, for your insightful analysis and hopeful message. You have emphasized the urgency of addressing climate change and called us to play our part in stewardship and leadership. Let us now take two minutes in silence to pray. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.





A Post-Pandemic Church & the Body of Christ **Bishop Gerald Matthias &** **Fr Nguyen Hai Tinh SJ**

I invite you to reflect on the theology of the body of Christ, considering how it has suffered and how it can heal itself. Today, we welcome Father New and Sister La to speak to us for 20 minutes. Later, we will also welcome Bishop Matthias to the podium, along with foreign Cardinals, Bishops, and brothers and sisters.

In our previous discussions, we explored the positive and negative aspects of the pandemic. Now, let us examine the church from the perspective of faith. I would like to acknowledge that this presentation is a collaborative effort, drawing inspiration from the OTC papers, specifically ABC papers 168 and 169. Many of the ideas presented here come from Bishop Gerald and Sister La, as well as my conversations with all of you, both inside and outside this conference room.

In this part of our presentation, we aim to describe the post-pandemic church in Asia from a theological standpoint. We question what the impact of the pandemic means for the church in Asia, particularly in its relationship with God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. As we always emphasize,

the people of Asia are God's people. Therefore, we seek to describe the church from the perspective of those who have suffered alongside the people of Asia throughout the pandemic, acknowledging their sinfulness while maintaining faith in the wisdom and goodness of God, the God of History.

Drawing inspiration from the letter to the Hebrews, specifically chapter 10, we understand the body of Christ as a mode of accidents, a vulnerable entity that took on human form through the act of incarnation. Following this model, we can unveil a portrait of the Church in Asia that not only illuminates who we are and where we stand, but also calls us to repentance and the pursuit of authentic expression and realization. This is especially pertinent as we celebrate our 50th Jubilee and look ahead to the future.

“As we always emphasize, the people of Asia are God's people.”

According to the letter to the Hebrews, Christ fulfills God's Will and saves us through incarnation, specifically by taking on a body that can be offered as a sacrifice of obedience. This body is vulnerable to pain, suffering, and death, with the ultimate culmination being on the cross. Understanding the significance of the body of Christ, we aim to present a portrait of the post-pandemic church in Asia through three overarching themes: vulnerability or vulnerable bodiliness, Passover, and sonship modality.

Firstly, we explore the concept of vulnerable bodiliness, highlighting that, like Christ, the church is a mystical Body of Christ existing in this world. The church possesses its own bodiliness that is susceptible to historical changes, pain, suffering, death, and even sinfulness. This

“...we aim to present a portrait of the post-pandemic church in Asia through three overarching themes: vulnerability or vulnerable bodiliness, Passover, and sonship modality.”

bodily vulnerability was vividly manifested during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The bodiliness of the church can be understood in different ways: institutional, personal, and moral. Institutionally, it refers to

the tangible, visible elements of the church that were heavily impacted by the pandemic. Personally, it relates to individuals who are poor and endure the most suffering during and after the pandemic. Rather than viewing the poor as a faceless multitude, we are reminded to see them as individuals with real faces and names, humanizing their experiences. Lastly, in a moral sense, the bodiliness of the church encompasses its embrace of members who, like us, are sinners and have contributed to the devastating effects of the pandemic.

Indeed, the pandemic is not merely a natural disaster causing suffering; it is also a result of our excessive exploitation of nature and exacerbated by human greed, fear, indifference, egoistic individualism, and opportunism. As we suffer alongside the people of Asia, the church recognizes its own bodiliness and experiences it in three significant ways:

Firstly, the church in Asia is aware that her visible elements are prone to be affected by historical changes and need to be adapted accordingly. This is crucial for the church to remain true to itself and to effectively serve the people who are in need of the church in new and different ways.

“It is a call for self-examination and a reminder of the constant need for personal and collective transformation.”

Considering that Asian cultures often emphasize communal expressions of life, the pandemic has dealt a severe blow to the church in Asia when its external activities were restricted. However, it has also provided an opportunity for the church to revitalize its communal expressions.

Secondly, the church recognizes that within its embrace, the poor of God are the ones most profoundly affected by the pandemic. They, the poor and the suffering, represent the true body of Christ and best exemplify the essence of the church. They belong at the core of the church's identity and essence.

Given that Asia is home to a significant proportion of the world's poorest populations, the pandemic presents an occasion for the church

in Asia to intimately experience the pain of the poor as its own and to become even more vividly aware of its role as the Church of the poor.

Lastly, the church acknowledges that the shortcomings of its members contribute to the exacerbation of the pandemic. Even in Asia, where countries are notorious for opportunistic corruption and exploitation of the poor, especially during the pandemic, the members of the church in Asia must recognize themselves as sinners in need of forgiveness, repentance, and conversion.

As ministers of the church, we must reflect on how many times we have not only frustrated the faithful but also deeply hurt them, pushing them away from the mother Church. It is a call for self-examination and a reminder of the constant need for personal and collective transformation.

There has always been a virus in our minds and hearts, embedded in our social conventions and structures. COVID-19 has merely acted as a catalyst, allowing it to rage on. Therefore, the church in Asia, after the pandemic, relying on the infinite forgiving mercy of God received by its members, becomes not only a church of repentance and conversion but also a church that takes preventive measures to ensure that another pandemic of the mind and heart will not occur.

Secondly, there is a transition from suffering to healing—a church of the Paschal mystery. As John said, Christ’s incarnation is not an end in itself

but intimately related to and anticipating the fulfillment of the Paschal mystery. Similarly, the vulnerability and suffering of the church in Asia find their true meaning and value in the mystery of the Cross of Christ and His resurrection. To make sense of the pandemic, the church does not simply view it as one catastrophe among many in history but lives through it in the light of the Paschal mystery.

“To make sense of the pandemic, the church does not simply view it as one catastrophe among many in history but lives through it in the light of the Paschal mystery.”

The church’s vulnerable bodiliness provides a genuine opportunity

to participate in the Paschal mystery of its head. The experience of the pandemic takes on the characteristics of Christ's experience of the Cross and resurrection. In fact, the Paschal mystery has been heroically lived during the pandemic by the poor, the church, and its members. This mystery must also leave an indelible mark on the post-pandemic church.

Notably, many suffering servants, particularly the poor, have silently endured without raising their voices to blame alleged perpetrators. This same situation continues even after the pandemic, especially when considering the war in Ukraine. People worldwide, not only in Ukraine,

“This experience of unjust and senseless suffering would be meaningless and in vain if we don't embrace it under the banner of the Cross of Christ.”

are silently suffering and dying due to a senseless war stemming from one person's egoistic decision.

This experience of unjust and senseless suffering would be meaningless and in vain if we don't embrace it under the banner of the Cross of Christ. The church's role for the people and the world is to suffer with them and bring light and meaning to the dark picture of a suffering world. The church is and should be the Church of the Paschal mystery. Only Christ, who suffered silently and unjustly out of love for the Father and others, can bring us the light of meaning, hope, and new life. Therefore, gazing upon Christ on the cross, the post-pandemic church not only acknowledges suffering and sinfulness but also willingly embraces its wounded bodiliness with obedience and love.

The interior attitude of faith, focused on the cause of Christ, is the decisive and first step towards healing and salvation. This emphasis on the Paschal mystery is relevant, particularly considering the devoutness of the faithful in many Asian countries towards Holy Week celebrations and the spirituality of the cross. Moreover, many Asians have a history of living the Paschal mystery through brutal persecution and suppression, and the Paschal spirit is already ingrained in their very being.

Furthermore, as explored in the first part of this paper, the pandemic has offered for moments of grace alongside the suffering. It

has not only presented challenges but also broken and strengthened individuals physically, socially, and in their faith. The reality of the Resurrection has been manifested during and after the pandemic through heroic acts of self-sacrifice, care for others, solidarity, and transformation in personal and social life. The post-pandemic church emerges under the banner of the Risen Lord, and the spirits of resurrection must continue to be alive and active in its life.

The third point to be discussed is the Church of the Pentecost. Through Christ's presence, both physically and spiritually, we experience this form of his presence in the Pentecost, which remains relevant today. Three characteristics of the Pentecost that can be applied to synodality are presence, other-orientation, and urgency. Synodality means feeling at home with others, listening to and enjoying one another's companionship, and this should characterize not only the church's mission or administration but also its very being.

Just as the disciples received the Holy Spirit in the upper room and then went out to meet and engage with people, synodality implies orienting ourselves towards others and being present with them. Synodality can be emphasized at the grassroots level, starting with the family. The church should be seen as a true community of persons, formed

“The Church should be seen as a true community of persons, formed through domestic church and not merely as a collection of individuals.”

through domestic church and not merely as a collection of individuals. The care for the youth, whose future has been greatly affected and changed by the pandemic, is also vital in creating a synodal church in Asia.

Synodality extends to relationships with people of different religions and cultures, as well as our relationship with nature and the cosmos. The family, youth, interreligious dialogue, and care for nature are all areas where synodality can be applied. Particularly in Asia, with its

unique relationship with nature and the significant impact of its destruction, synodality in harmony with nature is urgent for the post-pandemic church.

This concludes the excerpt from the paper, highlighting the significance of synodality in the post-pandemic church in Asia.

The third characteristic of synodality is urgency. We often discuss the “new normal” and our desire to return to pre-pandemic life, but is that truly normal? Urgency is a key aspect of synodality, as seen in the disciples’ mindset during the events of Pentecost. Upon receiving the Holy Spirit, they immediately began to speak in tongues, driven by a sense of urgency and enabled by the Spirit. Their missionary activities also displayed a similar urgency. Similarly, our practice of synodality should not be complacent; it should also be marked by a sense of urgency.

“The bodiliness of the Church is not a hindrance but a strength, as it allows us to live the mystery of the incarnation and the Paschal mystery and work with humanity towards the ultimate source and goal of all things.”

This urgency can manifest in various ways, such as deep conviction, strong determination to spread the Gospel truth and values, and heroic and self-denying sacrifice. Asia, known for its abundance and witness to urgency,

exemplifies these qualities along with gentleness and harmony inherent in its people. The urgency displayed by foreign and local missionaries in bringing the Gospel to Asia should now inspire Asian Catholics to keep the Gospel and its liberating force alive for their own people and others.

In conclusion, we begin with the symbol of the body of Christ, received from the Father upon His incarnation, and discover a portrait of a post-pandemic Church in Asia. This Church is closely associated with the mystery of Christ and the Holy Spirit. The bodiliness of the Church is not a hindrance but a strength, as it allows us to live the mystery of the incarnation and the Paschal mystery and work with humanity towards the ultimate source and goal of all things.

We express our gratitude for providing not only theological insights but also spiritual insights. As a teacher of dogmatic theology at the

Catholic Institute of Vietnam and a member of the Office for Theological Concerns of the FABC, your contributions are highly appreciated.

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

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

Secondly, pastoral accompaniment, dialogue, and family counseling are crucial for wounded and broken

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

“A crisis moment can serve as an opportune time to create something new, different, and more life-giving.”

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

Fourthly, promoting a pro-life program is essential. Respect for life from conception to natural death should be cultivated and promoted, emphasizing that children are gifts from God. Efforts to remove anti-life mentalities and foster a culture of love and life must be intensified globally.

The fifth pathway involves strengthening the Church in cyberspace. The internet world has entered our lives in an encompassing way, and I believe it will only continue to grow. Despite not being systematically evaluated, online liturgies, church activities, meetings, seminars, and

“The pandemic has made us acutely aware of our deep global connectedness as one humanity, one global family.”

even social action will persist, including hybrid formats. The online Church will become part of the local Church and even the wider global Church.

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

We should trust our young people to lead in digital evangelization. The digital media offers ample opportunities for evangelism. A post-pandemic Church will also strengthen its presence in the world at large. The pandemic has made us acutely aware of our deep global connectedness as one humanity, one global family. Our mission is to serve the entire world, not just our own countries. We are connected to the entire world, and as we realize the zoonotic origin of the virus and the impact of our relationship with nature, we understand the need to live together in a more integral way.

Being a Church means being integrally connected to the world

and its people, especially the poorest and marginalized. We are connected to the cosmos, the environment, ecology, and the wisdom of different disciplines. We are connected to the deepest joys, sorrows, and pains of humanity. There is a need for ecological conversion as the ecological crisis calls us to profound interior convergences.

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

The pandemic has reminded us to be Good Samaritans, reaching out to the needy, sick, and hungry. As the body of Christ, the Church must imitate the Good Samaritan and show compassion in the face of pain and suffering. We should strive to be Good Samaritans, avoiding indifference or neglect. Our mission should go beyond mere proclamation and preaching; it should be marked by prophetic living and witnessing. Our

“Being a Church means being integrally connected to the world and its people, especially the poorest and marginalized.”

actions on behalf of justice should be integral to proclaiming the Gospel. Building bridges, fostering communal harmony, social justice, and peace are crucial in today's polarized and divided society.

A post-pandemic Church should also strengthen the parish. Liturgies need to be renewed and deeply connected to the struggles of people, especially the poorest. The sacraments should foster a sense of involvement and connection, allowing people to relate what they

celebrate on Sundays to their daily lives. Ministries should be strengthened and integrated, including youth ministry, care for the elderly, addressing environmental issues, supporting vulnerable children, and providing family counseling. Grassroots leadership should be empowered, and collaboration with NGOs and government units should be sought. Consultation with different disciplines and pastoral planning are essential.

Synodal leadership should emerge from grassroots levels, empowering the laity, women, and youth. Clericalism should be shunned, and work should be delegated to religious and laity, empowering them to contribute. Synodality should be a way of life, with a focus on listening, discerning together, and making decisions collectively at every level

“Synodality should be a way of life, with a focus on listening, discerning together, and making decisions collectively at every level of the Church.”

of the Church. Bishop Gerald Matthias’s insights provide a pathway for pastoral work and call for a transformation in the Church’s approach.

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







EMERGING REALITIES

DAY 2
OCTOBER 18, 2022

PRESS NOTE

18TH OCTOBER 2022

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

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

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

H.E. Cardinal Gracias invited two of the youth representatives present to speak; Mr Anthony Judy and Ms Ashita Jimmy. Their messages were an imploration to listen; how five years on from the Youth Synod, it was time to take stock and consider if the Church had progressed. They stressed the need to show the youth trust and genuine interest, and to converse and journey along with them.

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

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

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

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

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

Ms. Christine Nathan, President of the International Catholic Migrant Commission (ICMC), explaining how migration is a big business touching over a million lives, spoke about the many socio-economic struggles, attached problems of human trafficking, unsafe jobs, slave labour and discrimination migrants face. Ms. Nathan also provided

avenues through which the Church could help; by campaigning for better contracts, human rights, safer working conditions, more clarity about jobs and countries, creating decent work opportunities, and making migration a choice, and not a necessity.

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

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

Fr. Fabio Bagio CS, from the Dicastery of Promoting Integral Human Development, explained the scope and purpose of the Dicastery, its involvement in social missions, and offered assistance when needed for the duration of the Conference.

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

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



The Role of Women for the Church in Asia Dr Stephanie Puen

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

Good morning! My name is Stephanie Boone, and my contribution to this panel on women focuses on caring justice as an important concept in Gothic social thought and theology. It's crucial to discuss women's contexts, especially how COVID-19 has affected many women. I'd like to highlight the concept of caring justice, which my colleague Dr. Rachel Sanchez and I are working on. We believe it is an important path forward for the church and society in addressing women's needs in the future. It is also a significant contribution that the Catholic Church can and should foster to address women's needs.

A just society would recognize women's work in the home and in the workplace as a valuable contribution to the common good. It would promote women's well-being and flourishing as individuals. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought longstanding injustices against working women to the forefront and has exacerbated these tensions

of balancing women's needs versus the survival of businesses and the economy.

Women have been heavily affected by the pandemic, with statistics showing that most of those who lost work were women. Globally, women have been hit harder by the pandemic, leading to greater gender inequality. The pandemic has not only lowered women's labor supply but also their wages, worsening the existing gender wage gap.

Data from the UN and other sources reveal the gendered impact of the pandemic on women's work. Sectors dominated by women, particularly those in care industries, are more vulnerable to the negative impacts of the pandemic. Women's employment is at a higher risk compared to men, and a significant percentage of health and social care workers are women.

In the Philippine context, similar patterns of unequal gender division negatively affect women's work. The pandemic has adversely affected working Filipino women, threatening the progress made in achieving gender equality. Women have had to take on expanded duties at home and at work, compromising their mental and physical health.

Women's work during the pandemic has been affected by the double burden of having to take care of domestic duties while building their careers. The increase in domestic violence has further worsened the situation. The pandemic has also highlighted the role of religion and the Christian response needed for working women during this crisis.

Even Philippine parishes have had to adapt their rituals for people to participate, which has fallen heavily on the shoulders of women running the daily activities. The work of women in parishes, often described as the backbone, has become more difficult due to limited resources.

“ Women’s work during the pandemic has been affected by the double burden of having to take care of domestic duties while building their careers.”

In response to the gendered impact of COVID-19, the UN has identified key recommendations. These include investments in gender-responsive social protection systems, expanded access to affordable

quality childcare services, and the reversal of long-standing inequalities.

Part of the problem in responding to women's needs and implementing these recommendations is the undervaluing of care. Care has primarily been associated with women, leading to the undervaluing of women's labor and contributions to society. To address this, we propose caring justice as an important consideration. Caring justice involves caring for and taking responsibility, care receiving and responsiveness, and caring with solidarity.

“Caring justice involves caring for and taking responsibility, care receiving and responsiveness, and caring with solidarity.”

Caring for or taking care of the one cared about entails recognizing responsibility and finding ways to address unmet

needs. It is based on interconnected social relationships and Catholic Social thought's notion of fraternity. The culture of caring extends beyond one's kin or nation and includes everyone, especially the vulnerable.

The acknowledgment of reception is also vital in the process of caring. Responsiveness and mutuality are crucial for the moral quality of care. The person giving care must observe and be sensitive to the responses and needs of the object of care.

To conclude, caring justice is a concept that we believe is important for women moving forward in the church. It aligns with the history, theology, and mission of Catholicism, which emphasizes caring for others and promoting the common good. Injustice often affects vulnerable groups, including women, who carry numerous burdens and may not receive the care and love they deserve. Thank you for your time, and I am excited about our conversation today.



The Role of Women for the Church in Asia **Dr Mary Yuen**

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

Your Eminence and other participants of FABC, thank you for inviting me to share with you in this panel on the role of women for the church in Asia. I am honored to be here and would like to begin by sharing my personal experiences and the challenges faced by women in society and the church. I will also provide examples of pastoral responses and the need for empowerment.

To start, I would like to share an experience from over 20 years ago when I was a young Church worker at the Justice and Peace Commission in Hong Kong. I had the chance to participate in a Villa on women in

Pattaya, along with representatives from various Asian countries. This experience involved visiting marginalized groups, such as sex workers, women laborers, and those in distress. Accompanying them and listening to their stories was a profound experience for me.

During the workshop, we had the opportunity to hear from committed women leaders at the grassroots level. We also engaged in discussions and theological reflections. This experience highlighted the transformative power of learning from grassroots women and integrating their perspectives into our own understanding.

“This experience highlighted the transformative power of learning from grassroots women and integrating their perspectives into our own understanding.”

Upon returning to Hong Kong, we formed a small working group at the Justice and Peace Commission. Our focus was on producing Bible sharing materials for parishes and an educational kit on gender issues for Catholic schools. Additionally, I attended feminist theology courses and studied theology in the evenings, further expanding my understanding of gender issues in society and the church.

In my subsequent studies, I delved deeper into the topic and took courses that utilized the method of the pastoral cycle or praxis approach. I found this method to be invaluable in theological reflection and pastoral planning. It continues to guide my work to this day.



Through my experiences, it is evident that FABC has long been concerned with women's issues. The recent FABC 50 documents include a paragraph on women, reflecting the bishops' attention to the stories of women facing discrimination, violence, and oppression. Building on this foundation, I would like to share some research-based points that highlight the challenges faced by women, including domestic workers, migrant women, low-income cleaning workers, and abused women.

For example, let's consider female foreign domestic helpers in Hong Kong. During the pandemic, many of them have been forced to stay in home quarantine with their employers, leading to unexpected terminations, making it difficult for them to return home or disclose their whereabouts. They also face increased workloads due to heightened cleaning and sanitation needs. Some employers impose unreasonable hygiene requirements, and helpers are often denied permission to go out during their days off due to fears of infection and spreading it to their families.

“In the face of these vulnerabilities, it is important to explore how we can respond and empower these women.”

Another group facing challenges is migrant women in China. Many of them migrate from rural areas to urban cities, seeking autonomy and liberation from various forms of authority and limited opportunities in their hometowns. However, they encounter new problems upon arrival, such as temporary, physically exhausting, and low-status jobs with limited security and welfare benefits. They are also at risk of facing sexual harassment and abuse.

Furthermore, in Hong Kong, many women work as street cleaning workers, facing low income and heavy workloads, particularly exacerbated during the pandemic. They lack sufficient protection and are at a higher risk of infection. These women need to assert their voices and advocate for their needs.

Apart from these examples, we also see challenges faced by working women in East Asia, where they must balance work and family

responsibilities. The pandemic has further intensified the pressures on single mothers, as their children have to study from home, leading to an increase in domestic violence incidents.

In the face of these vulnerabilities, it is important to explore how we can respond and empower these women. While acknowledging their difficulties, we must recognize their potential for transformation and agency. They can regain their capability for change and become agents of empowerment and solidarity.

There are also other challenges faced by women, especially in East Asia where many women are working women who have to balance work and family responsibilities. Single mothers face additional difficulties, particularly during the pandemic when children have to study from home, leading to an increase in domestic violence incidents. NGOs have conducted surveys showing a significant rise in calls for help, and statistics indicate a surge in domestic violence cases during lockdowns. In the face of these vulnerabilities, it is essential to explore how we can respond to women's needs and affirm their capability for empowerment and solidarity actions.



Based on the notion of social friendship and political charity found in Catholic social teachings, partial care should be provided to disadvantaged women. Women as objects and subjects of liberation, as affirmed in Mary's magnificat, should be recognized as agents of change and history. Solidarity should empower women's capabilities, upholding their dignity and moral agency while redefining differences and making connections. Supporting women's self-help groups, advocating for social transformation, and fostering the virtue of Charity within church

communities are essential aspects of strengthening women's power. Now, I would like to share a few examples of partial care for disadvantaged women. For instance, many migrant domestic helpers face numerous challenges, including the risk of losing their jobs and being unable to find shelter. In response, church workers and volunteers form teams to seek temporary shelter for these workers and provide them with basic necessities. Counseling services and rights advocacy are also extended to migrant workers, along with temporary shelter during job transitions or court cases.

In Hong Kong, there is a partial center for Filipinos and Indonesians that provides material support and care, extending solidarity through counseling services. Workshops and gatherings for Indonesian migrant workers offer opportunities for skills development, education, empowerment, and the affirmation of their subjectivity.

The Catholic Labor Commission and labor centers in Hong Kong organize monthly gatherings and self-help groups for low-income workers, fostering their confidence, expression of needs, and lobbying for policy changes. These groups share their stories through interviews with the media, workshops, and church gatherings.

“Solidarity should empower women’s capabilities, upholding their dignity and moral agency while redefining differences and making connections.”

Additionally, for families facing crises, the Church, through social welfare agencies, operates Family Crisis Support Centers, offering counseling services and support to prevent

family crises and address domestic violence cases. During the pandemic, these centers have seen an increase in requests for assistance and have been providing various services to prevent suicide and support those facing domestic violence.

Turning to women in the Church, we observe both positive and negative signs. Positive signs include the presence of more women theologians and ministers who gather to theologize and discuss pastoral concerns. Local churches in Asia see an increasing number of women

actively participating in church affairs, attending theological courses, and taking up roles in ministries and leadership positions.

However, negative signs persist in certain Asian countries influenced by traditional culture, such as Confucianism, which does not affirm gender equality. Local churches may adopt hierarchical and patriarchal practices, leading to curtailment of women's roles. Cultural and patriarchal traditions restrict women from playing leading roles in the Church, despite their active participation.

In conclusion, all human beings are created in the image of God, possessing inherent dignity and value. Women should share equal dignity and equality in the Church based on their baptismal call as followers of Christ. Church teachings promote equality, yet a significant gap remains between theory and reality, with women being underrepresented in decision-making processes. The notion of gender complementarity, as taught by the Church, can sometimes exclude women from leadership positions.

Therefore, church leaders should actively listen to women's voices, include them in decision-making processes, and provide opportunities for their greater involvement in ministries and evangelization. Key words for effective engagement with women include listening, accompanying, empathy, and solidarity.

Lastly, I would like to mention a few recommendations from the Villa on Women in FABC.





Migration, Labour, and Human Trafficking **Ms Christine Nathan**

Ms Christine Nathan, President of the International Catholic Migrant Commission (ICMC), explaining how migration is a big business touching over a million lives, spoke about the many socio-economic struggles, attached problems of human trafficking, unsafe jobs, slave labour and discrimination migrants face. Ms Nathan also provided avenues through which the Church could help; by campaigning for better contracts, human rights, safer working conditions, more clarity about jobs and countries, creating decent work opportunities, and making migration a choice, and not a necessity.

Chester, today's discussion revolves around various topics, including migrants, labor, and human trafficking. We are privileged to have Christine Nathan, the president of ICMC, present here. Christine Nathan is from Asia, specifically India, and is also from my Parish in the cathedral, making us proud to have her in person. We will also hear from Radio Sister Abby and Cardinal Nichols, who heads the Santa Martha group, a group dedicated to combating trafficking. This group was named Santa Martha after an initiative by Pope Francis, who had discussions with Cardinal

Nichols and was highly supportive. Cardinal Beau is also a member of this group, which began at Santa Marta. We will watch a seven-minute video and then proceed with the discussion. Later in the evening, we may also have a representative from the Vatican.

Now, let's move on to the main topic of this afternoon: the impact of migration, labor, and human trafficking on Asian society. Our first speaker is Christine Nathan from India, the president of the International Catholic Migration Commission. Miss Nathan will speak for 20 minutes. I suggest you speak from the top area so that you are more visible to everyone and have their support.

Good afternoon, Your Eminences, Excellencies, delegates, sisters, and brothers. I would like to express my gratitude for the introduction and take this opportunity to introduce myself in my new role. My name is Christine Nathan, and I am the newly elected president of ICMC, which stands for the International Migration Catholic Migration Commission. On behalf of ICMC, I bring warm greetings to all of you.

First and foremost, I would like to thank FABC for organizing this conference and inviting ICMC to address the attendees. It is truly an honor

“I am honored to speak before you today on the topic of migration, labor, and human trafficking, with a particular focus on the situation in Asia.”

and a pleasure to be part of this 50-year FABC General Conference, where we, as people of Asia, journey together. I am particularly delighted to be back in Bangkok, which was my home for

12 years during my work with the United Nations International Labor Organization (ILO) as a regional specialist for workers' education. In this role, I covered 32 countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

For those who may be less familiar with the ILO, it is a tripartite organization where the government, employers, and trade unions work together as equal partners. Unlike other UN agencies that primarily work with governments, the ILO engages all three stakeholders. Throughout my career, both at the ILO and now with ICMC, I have had the privilege

of working closely on migration, labor, and human trafficking issues at the local, national, regional, and international levels. I have also worked extensively with South Asian countries such as India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Afghanistan, and Maldives, as well as ASEAN countries including Thailand, Myanmar, Philippines, Malaysia, Laos, Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Singapore, and Vietnam. Additionally, I have worked with countries in the Pacific Islands. This diverse experience is significant because many countries in South Asia and ASEAN serve as both sending and receiving countries for migrants.

Furthermore, I have had the opportunity to address migrant issues in collaboration with international financial institutions such as the World Bank, IMF, and ADB. Additionally, for the past two years, I have been a member of the Labor and Migration Commission of the Archdiocese of Mumbai, India. It is a pleasure to see Cardinal Oswal gracious and Bishop Alvin present here as part of the planning and organizing team for this conference.

Given this background, I am honored to speak before you today on the topic of migration, labor, and human trafficking, with a particular focus on the situation in Asia.

As we all know, the Church, particularly Pope Francis, has taken a firm stance on migration, labor, human trafficking, and the plight of refugees.

Pope Francis collaborated closely with the International Labor Organization (ILO) as both organizations strongly believe in social justice.

In 2018, Pope Francis organized a global consultative meeting in Rome, bringing together trade unionists from around the world. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss

their roles, responsibilities, and the challenges they face in organizing workers into trade unions. Recognizing the need for balance, Pope Francis

“**The ICMC was founded in 1951 and was mandated by Pope Pius XII to unite and organize existing Catholic associations and committees, as well as promote, reinforce, and coordinate projects and activities on behalf of migrants and refugees.**”

subsequently organized a consultative meeting with employers to address their roles, responsibilities, and how they can become model employers in the contemporary business world.

Uniapac, a Christian-based organization of employers, advises the Vatican on business developments. I mention this because the Holy Father, at the international level, understands the significance of these partnerships in addressing labor, migration, and trafficking issues and ultimately eliminating the problem of human trafficking.

While much has been said about the role of migrant workers and governments, we often overlook the role of employers. Pope Francis has taken the initiative to address this gap.

In this regard, the mission of the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) is to protect and serve uprooted people, including refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced people, victims of human trafficking, and migrants, regardless of their faith, ethnicity, or nationality. This is the vision and work of the ICMC, aimed at restoring dignity and inspiring change within the migrant community.

The ICMC was founded in 1951 and was mandated by Pope Pius XII to unite and organize existing Catholic associations and committees, as well as promote, reinforce, and coordinate projects and activities on behalf of migrants and refugees. Since its inception, the ICMC has faithfully strived to protect and serve uprooted people, including refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced people, victims of human trafficking, and migrants. The Pope takes a keen interest in the work of migrants and refugees.

The ICMC conducts its activities in accordance with humanitarian principles and the highest professional standards, guided by Catholic values and teachings. It is firmly committed to upholding the rights and dignity of people who are forced to leave their homes due to conflict, persecution, violence, the impact of disaster or climate change, the loss of livelihoods, and an escape from abject poverty.

Currently, the ICMC is on the ground in Ukraine, providing assistance to citizens by offering food, shelter, medicine, and seeking safe pathways for their passage to secure areas. With this brief background on the ICMC, let me now address some salient issues and concerns of migrant workers.

The World Bank estimates that by 2050, there will be over 400 million migrants. Human mobility is an inevitable aspect that we can no longer ignore when considering our economies, societies, and cultures. Migration is a significant issue in the Asia and Pacific region, impacting millions of people, particularly those living in rural areas and villages. According to the Asian Development Bank, there are over 50 million international migrants in the Asia and Pacific region, including those working in the Gulf countries. For instance, Malaysia has approximately 3.2 million migrant workers, including 1.2 million undocumented workers.

“The feminization of migration has brought new challenges to migration governance.”

India has over 18 million people working and living overseas, with 8.1 million in the Gulf countries alone.

The International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates that over 10 million Bangladeshi workers are overseas, primarily employed as low-skilled laborers in the Gulf countries. Research has also highlighted the increasing number of women who migrate as heads of families, seeking better job opportunities for themselves and their families.

The feminization of migration has brought new challenges to migration governance. It is crucial to understand the vulnerabilities and consider the well-being of migrant women and girls throughout all phases of migration, including before they migrate, during their migration, and upon their return home. For instance, a study reveals that out of the 6 billion Philippine workers, 54 percent are women.

Women workers in destination countries often face greater discrimination, harassment, and abuse, both physically and verbally. Migrant women, in particular, earn significantly less on average compared to nationals in destination countries. This is because migrants often take up jobs that are less attractive to nationals, and women are among the

least protected and lowest paid.

Asia is witnessing a booming migration industry, operating both legally and illegally, providing cheap labor to some of the wealthiest and most dynamic economies at a high human cost. While migration contributes to productive labor and serves as an economic lifeline for millions, the vulnerable conditions experienced by female migrant workers have become an increasing source of public concern, as evidence of abuses continues to emerge. Protection from sending countries is often limited.

Many countries hastily send their workers abroad, leading to disrupted family life, multiple sex partners when one spouse is away, children dropping out of school, and young children turning to drugs and alcohol. The social fabric is gradually being destroyed. Efforts by trade unions, civil society organizations, and non-governmental organizations to campaign for job creation and decent work often fall on deaf ears, as governments find it easier to send workers abroad rather than address employment issues domestically. Unemployment levels are high in several countries within the region due to the lack of employment policies.

Migration is considered the backbone of several countries in the region. For instance, countries like the Philippines, Bangladesh, and Nepal are known as remittance economies, where high foreign reserves and GDP growth are attributed to remittances from migrant workers. However, the exploitation and poor working conditions faced by these workers cannot be ignored. Last week, I attended a national conference on migrant workers in Delhi, where the Ministry of External Affairs mentioned that India received \$87 billion in remittances last year. India aspires to be known as the skill capital of the world, but it sends its workers abroad hastily.

“Women workers in destination countries often face greater discrimination, harassment, and abuse, both physically and verbally.”

Migration is also a lucrative business for sending countries. In the case of Bangladesh, migrant workers contribute around \$15 billion

to the country's economy. However, the remittance business comprises only a small percentage, as most businesses keep their money in overseas tax havens. The country provides significant bank loans for starting businesses, but little investment is made in migrant workers, who often have to sell their land or jewelry or borrow from loan sharks. Nonetheless, their remittances form a major part of the GDP.

Another significant issue is human trafficking, particularly of women and girls. It is estimated that between 600,000 to 800,000 cases of trafficking occur every year in the Asia and Pacific region. This poses a major problem in the region following migration. Push factors such as poverty, lack of employment opportunities, high education costs, and related issues drive people to migrate or seek jobs overseas. Low-skilled women find it easier to seek domestic or low-paid jobs.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) adopted a convention on domestic workers in 2010, and almost all countries in the world agreed to its adoption. It was the first time a convention specifically for workers in the informal economy was adopted. I witnessed the adoption of this convention, and during the three-week discussion, the employer group walked out of the meeting several times, opposing the convention and being against any laws or rights for domestic workers, including national wages.

Labor migration in Asia and the Pacific region largely occurs under temporary migration programs, and most migrants engage in manual labor and low-skilled work. Migrant workers often fill jobs that are unattractive to nationals, and certain occupations are highly segregated by gender. Unfortunately, many countries in the region see cases of workers living and working under slave-like conditions, with no fixed contracts, their passports taken away by employers, uncertainty in wages and payment, and various forms of exploitation.

Debt is a common issue, particularly in South Asian countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal, where workers often die on the job due to accidents, safety issues, or occupational health complications. In many cases, there is little or no compensation for these incidents, and families face difficulties in repatriating the bodies of their deceased loved ones.

Additionally, trafficking of body parts for organ sale is a distressing reality, leaving families with only the shell of the deceased.

To improve the situation for migrant workers, several issues need to be addressed. These include the recruitment process, excessive fees charged by middlemen, contract clarity, knowledge about the destination country's labor laws, and clarity on working conditions, wages, working hours, accommodation, safety, and health. Many workers have limited knowledge about these conditions until their arrival in the destination country. Passports being confiscated and heavy borrowing to fund the migration process further trap workers in exploitative situations.

Furthermore, there is a lack of governance in both sending and receiving countries. Recruitment agencies charging fees, lack of opportunities for workers, and inadequate laws to protect migrant workers are prevailing

issues. Except for Japan and Korea, most countries do not allow workers to organize themselves into unions and carry out collective bargaining.

Ratifying core conventions of the ILO and the UN, such as freedom of association and collective bargaining, is crucial to ensure the rights and protections of migrant workers.

“The church, along with like-minded NGOs and trade unions, can work towards pushing governments to adopt proper laws, ratify UN and ILO conventions on migration, and grant migrant workers the right to unionize and engage in collective bargaining.”

Positive developments have been achieved through trade union cooperation between origin and destination countries. Bilateral agreements for the protection of migrant workers have been signed between trade unions in Nepal and Sri Lanka with counterparts in Bahrain and Kuwait. Similar agreements have been made between trade unions in Korea, Malaysia, and other countries. Such arrangements assist low-skilled migrant workers in filing labor complaints and accessing redress procedures, preventing recruitment malpractices, and raising awareness of their legal rights.

The church, along with like-minded NGOs and trade unions, can work towards pushing governments to adopt proper laws, ratify UN and ILO conventions on migration, and grant migrant workers the right to unionize and engage in collective bargaining. Attention should also be given to occupational safety and health, particularly for domestic workers, by encouraging the ratification of the Domestic Workers Convention. Collaboration between sending and receiving countries is crucial to ensure the protection of migrant workers throughout their journey.

We should work together to implement the UN-based Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which recognize the importance of decent work both locally and internationally. SDG 8, for example, aims to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, as well as full and decent work opportunities. It is crucial to protect labor rights and provide a safe and secure working environment for all workers, including migrant workers, especially women migrants and those in precarious employment.

SDG 10 aims to reduce inequalities within and among countries and facilitate orderly, safe, regular, and responsible migration and mobility of people. This involves implementing planned and well-managed migration policies. To achieve these goals, we need to campaign for making migration a choice rather than a necessity by creating decent work opportunities in our countries. Respecting human rights, including labor rights, of all migrants is essential, as is ensuring fair recruitment and equal treatment of migrant workers to prevent exploitation and provide a level playing field with nationals.

“ **It is crucial to protect labor rights and provide a safe and secure working environment for all workers, including migrant workers, especially women migrants and those in precarious employment.** ”

We should strive to formulate fair migration schemes and promote bilateral and multilateral agreements that regulate migration. Countering unacceptable situations through the promotion of fundamental principles and rights at work is crucial. Promoting dialogue involving ministers of labor and employers' organizations in policy-making regarding migration

is also important. Additionally, we need to strengthen the rights-based approach to migration and focus on effective labor laws and mechanisms to address exploitation and seek redress.

Working together, we can apply pressure on our governments and employers to ensure that effective labor laws are in place and mechanisms

“Promoting dialogue involving ministers of labor and employers’ organizations in policy-making regarding migration is also important.”

are established to combat exploitation. Collaboration and advocacy efforts are vital to protect the rights and dignity of all migrant workers.

I would like to thank the FABC once again for giving me the opportunity to address this conference of journeying together as people of Asia. Thank you very much.

Dear Bishops, now is the time for us to pose questions to Miss Nathan. She has presented very well in this challenging area of our pastoral service, migration, labor, and human trafficking. Migrants and refugees are vulnerable to human trafficking, as she explained. The volume of the challenge, such as the 400 million migrants worldwide, is significant. In Asian countries, we are also facing this problem. The lack of international funds reaching migrant workers for their protection is a concern that everyone must take into account. The issue of slave labor conditions, contractors not respecting the rights of workers, and the unequal rights of migrant workers compared to national workers were mentioned. Only Japan and Korea have given the right to form trade unions for migrant workers. These problems provide a large area in which the Church can enter and help migrant workers have their rights recognized in the countries where they are and play the role of the Good Samaritan. Miss Nathan has presented this well. Now, it is time for us to ask questions or seek clarifications from her as she is a very knowledgeable person in the field and the President of the International Catholic Migrant Commission (ICMC).

Yes, Madam Nathan, thank you very much for the wonderful exposure. I have also been interested in this migrants commission. I have

worked a little in Sri Lanka, and I myself did a bit of study in Rome. My question to you today is regarding child labor. Does it come under the purview of the commission, or do you have a major study on child labor? Yeah, you can answer or ask all the questions, then you answer all. Thank you.

Thank you for the question. I am also on the platform of the ILO and UNICEF on issues of child labor. It is shocking to see that our region, particularly India, has the highest number of child laborers and the highest number of girl children trafficked. In cases of national migration, like what happened in India during the pandemic, the whole family migrates, including the parents and the children. The children end up working as well while the parents are working. Child labor is heavily growing in these countries. In India, for example, we have child labor in most sectors, including construction, agriculture, and mines. Children are found in hazardous areas of work, where they should not be employed. Although we have conventions against child labor, such as Convention 182 and Convention 138, poverty leads parents to overlook these conventions, and the government does not prioritize these issues. Interestingly, labor inspections are supposed to be conducted in our country to check for child labor in workplaces. However, the government of India has created a new system where labor inspectors no longer visit workplaces for inspection.

They've told the employers, "You have to self-inspect and fill the form yourself." Now, which employer is going to say, "I have 20 children or 25 children" when filling the self-inspection form? These are some of the things we continuously address and fight against. Hence, child labor is hidden, and children are working in very hazardous conditions. Children often beg on the streets, but many of them are there as a result of accidents at the workplace. We may stop our car and tell the child to go to school, but the child is unable to do so because of workplace-related challenges or severe injuries, such as missing limbs.



Child labor is a significant part of the migrant issue, particularly in South Asia. Now, Colonel Gracious has a question.

Thank you, Christine, for the insightful report. I have two questions. First, we used to hear about many deaths when people were being smuggled, etc., and it shocked the world. But of late, we have not been hearing about these incidents. Is the media suppressing this information? That's one thing. Second, what advice can you give to the dioceses in Asia? How can we help in this situation? Migration seems to be viewed as a right now. What can we, as bishops, do? We don't want to prevent migration. How can we assist them? Could you advise us?

Thank you. Migration today is driven by necessity, not choice. If migration were a choice, the conditions of work overseas would be different. However, migration is happening due to high levels of unemployment and poverty, with migrants not seeing any future job prospects in their own countries. In South Asia and ASEAN countries, the lack of job policies and opportunities exacerbates the situation. What can we do? One of our responsibilities is to join hands with organizations that are pressurizing governments to create jobs and implement policies that prioritize job creation. Currently, there is a lack of policies and job opportunities, as it is easier for governments to send people abroad without assuming responsibility. They are happy to receive remittances but neglect the well-being of migrant workers.

There are three more bishops who would like to ask questions. Are you prepared to answer them as well? Okay, let's proceed with the next question.

“ Migration today is driven by necessity, not choice. If migration were a choice, the conditions of work overseas would be different. ”

Archbishop, please go ahead.

Thank you for mentioning the most important issues that migrants are facing. I want to share another significant issue that is not mentioned here, which is the personal care of Catholic migrants. We have a considerable number of migrants in different parts of the world. While

some places provide proper care and provisions for them, a significant number of our migrants are not receiving adequate pastoral care.

For example, in our church, the authorities, our hierarchy or the head of the church, are not free to provide personal care, guidance, and formation for the migrants. This problem has not been properly addressed for a long time, and it is a significant issue. When migrants leave their countries and go abroad, they often lack pastoral care and support. Our authorities are not free to provide them with priests or pastoral care, especially when they go to other countries.

Regarding pre-departure training, in India and the region, migrants are trained on their contracts and the laws that will apply to them. One suggestion is to include a module or chapter on Christian values and issues during pre-departure training. For example, when migrants from the Philippines go to different countries, it would be helpful to have pamphlets or notices that provide contact information for churches in those countries. The Catholic Church is often sought out by migrants for support and solace, so having information about churches in receiving countries can assist migrants in maintaining their religious and cultural practices.

Thank you, Christine, for sharing these insightful facts and figures about migration. I have a question regarding religious migration. We often hear about many priests and nuns from Asia and Africa going to Europe

“**The Catholic Church is often sought out by migrants for support and solace, so having information about churches in receiving countries can assist migrants in maintaining their religious and cultural practices.**”

and America. These religious workers often find themselves doing menial jobs, such as taking care of the sick or working in homes. Do you have any figures or facts about this? And have you considered this aspect in your commission's work?

Thank you for your interesting and inspiring presentation,

President Christine. It has been enlightening and educational. I would like to comment on the fact that our migrants are spreading and practicing the Catholic faith in receiving countries. We can now consider migrants as our missionaries, especially in Europe. They are builders of infrastructure in the Middle East and have contributed to the establishment of churches in Europe. Therefore, ensuring their protection, promoting their rights, and preserving their national customs should be a priority. Your talk calls for action in this regard.

Thank you, President Christine, for your informative presentation. I would like to highlight the importance of considering both internal and external migration. When it comes to internal migration, such as from one state to another within a country, migrants should be treated on par with the local workers. However, often, the Interstate Migrant Act in India treats these migrants as foreigners within their own country. Additionally, for international migration, migrants contribute significantly to the economies of both the destination and sending countries. Unfortunately, their rights are often disregarded, especially in countries with monarchies where discussions about rights and regulations are discouraged. Trade unions from receiving countries have established connections with sending countries to provide assistance through labor attaches. These efforts are crucial to support migrant workers.

Thank you, Miss Nathan, for sharing your insights. It was a valuable interaction between you and the bishops. Now, Cardinal Oswald Gracious would like to present you with a memento.





Youth: A Voice for the Church

Fr Akira Takayama

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

Sorry for the cropped message. From Russo to crab, hello everyone, it's so great to see you all. I am Akira Takayama, a Japanese priest and belong to the Diocese of Takamatsu. I really appreciate this precious opportunity. I'll be happy to hear you in comments and share your own experiences.

This is the offline of today's presentation. One topic of this presentation, two perspective as password, three background. Catholic Church in Japan pastoral cared for the use, foreign body reflection on the

voice of the youth and priests, conclusion. So let's get started.

Today, I was given this topic: if ABC used a voice for the church, the situation of the use in the church in Asia and why it must be a concern for the future. But this topic is too broad to talk about, so I'm going to focus on the case in Japan.

The goal of this presentation is reporting the situation of pastoral care for the youth in Japan, syncing together about the future of the Catholic Church in the region of Asia. So this is the thesis statement: trees should have to put our minds to listening to the voices of the youth. Priests should be re-evangelized. Priests should have to do all of these things for the future of the Catholic Church, foreign.

But we should keep on appreciating the essential message of the Gospel. This is a kind of re-evangelization, my perspective as a pastor. This is my perspective as a passer, passage in the text of the Gospel, Luke 24:13-35. Jesus had kept on walking to pass to emails together with two disciples until they noticed Jesus' presence. Jesus said the Jews are totally inspirational to us. Henry, no one on the text of the book of his work creative Ministry. Fritz or challenge to be Servants of Life who can listen to the voices of nature, people, and God. No one's message is quite important too. In order to carry out these tasks, priests should really be re-evangelized.

“... put our minds to listening to the voices of the youth. Priests should be re-evangelized.”

Here, I'm going to show the background information for today's topic briefly. That is to say about Japanese society and the Catholic Church in Japan. First, geography and demographics. Japan has five main islands, with a total estimated area of 380,000 square kilometers. Japan's territory is vertically long and is almost as big as Vietnam. The population is 124 million 750,000 people, and the number of people in their 20s is 12 million 490,000. Statistics of the chaotic security in Japan.

Now, I am going to give you some information about the Catholic Church in Japan. The number of Catholics in Japan is 400,100 people. The percent of Catholic people out of the population is 0.3 percent.

Yes, Catholics in Japan are a minority. And the Catholic Church in Japan consists of 16 dioceses, but actually, many foreigners are not officially counted. Recently, a lot of young people from Asian countries come to Japan as technical interns. These young Catholics, like the youth from Vietnam, Myanmar, etc., are enhancing the models of the Catholic Church in Japan. This is a short summary of information about the Catholic Church in Japan.

Next, I'm going to talk about pastoral care for the Catholic youth in Japan. The Bishop's Conference in Japan does not have an official committee for the ministry of youth. This is one of the characteristics of the Catholic Church in Japan. So there is a voluntary Association of the Catholic Church youth, which is acknowledged by the Bishops and promotes communication between the youth of various dioceses. This Association mainly consists of chastity cues supported by some Bishops and Priests, and usually, each diocese has its own activities.

A network meeting, which is named Network meeting, has been held in various places overwhelmed Japan, supported by this voluntary Association. This is popular amongst the youth in Japan. At this event, many chastity cues from various parts of Japan can get to know each other and share their faith. A network meeting was held in Takamatsu diocese in 2016. Over 130 young people from various places in Japan gathered on that day.

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

In order to prepare for this presentation, some Priests of various dioceses gathered around Zoom and discussed the bathroom here for the youth, and we reached a finding for some specific reality and challenges. First, the differences between the youth who were baptized as infants and the youth who were baptized at the age of adults. The youth who were baptized as infants tend to think of the Catholic Church as a place to hang out with friends. On the contrary, the youth who were baptized at the age

of adults tend to prefer praying and learning at the church to hanging out there. Almost all the priests in Japan are considering this and always trying very hard to unite the youth.

Second, in the number of priests, all the priests have to be in charge of parishes, pastoral care for the youth, and some other responsibilities at the same time. So the priests are working so hard to find time for the youth because the youth are our future.

“Catholics are a minority in Japan. If some young people come to the church, older people are so happy to see them.”

Plus, just like other countries, the Catholic Church in Japan has to deal with the influence of COVID-19. The number of attendances at every Mass has declined, and some youth have left the Catholic Church. Still, some activities on the internet have studied. Priests and lay people aren't working together in order to overcome the difficulties under this pandemic.

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

To be worried too much about the generation gap, we do not want the priest to crawl and degrade each other in front of us, young people. I did not think the priests are always acting like this, but still, we should be thoughtful. It is quite natural that we notice a generation gap, but the youth don't want the priest to be worried about the gap. We did not want the other parishioners to just consider us to be industrious and ideal workers for the church activities. I guess this might be one of the characteristics in Japan. As I already mentioned, Catholics are a minority in Japan. If some young people come to the church, older people are

so happy to see them. Besides, all the people tend to ask the youth to help with church activities, and then the youth are told to do some tasks every Sunday, and they feel exhausted. So, the youth think we help the older people at the parish will track our growth with kindness. I think the spiritual communities should not try to set the youth group under too much control. Needless to say, we should not spoil them by giving in to their demands. We should think a great deal of their voluntary activities. Actually, they said we're communicating on the internet even between different dioceses, and they said we want to hear sermons which can offer spiritual insights. This is really important. Priests should become not only dear friends but also their life guides.

They said the church is the third place, which is different from home, school, and working place. The third place is a kind of pedagogical or sociological

return. Generally speaking, human life is somehow based on a person's place. Home is the first place, and school or working place is the second place. The church is the third place, which can encourage them to rebuild different relations. One young person in the Gathering strongly insisted on the need to make the church the third place. He had the experience of temporarily leaving school because of personal problems, and he is supporting kids who have the same situation as him.

“ **This is really important. Priests should become not only dear friends but also their life guides.** ”

After listening to these voices, the priests reflected on them and had time to share ideas. We should not be worried too much about generational gaps. Young people just hope that priests will become spiritual companions, wisdom, and the church itself will become the third place. We should just support young people with voluntary activities. Sometimes we feel like making comments or advising them, but we should sometimes wait for their own decision making, and we should encourage them, not judging the results.

We should not cooperate with each other beyond the bounds of the diocese. Just like the youth, we should cooperate with each other beyond the bounds of the diocese. We should try to do our best to make the church the third place for the youth. Yes, we should care about the older traditions of the church, but also we have to work with the youth people,

and we should notice our error. We should reflect on the fact that the church in Japan has been directing the youth to the traditional way of the church. We should care about the tradition and adjust them to the present situation. At the same time, we should accompany and answer the questions of the youth with patience in order to help them to deserve their own lives.

“We should just support young people with voluntary activities. Sometimes we feel like making comments or advising them, but we should sometimes wait for their own decision making, and we should encourage them, not judging the results.”

The international youth want to overcome language barriers. In my diocese, youth gatherings are held in order to achieve these goals. We should be re-evangelized. This is our main response for the voices.

In conclusion, I'm going to show some words: listen, offering a place, cooperation, free evangelization. As priests, we should have to go companies youth and put our mind to their voices. As priests, we should be there to encourage them to sink and act potently by offering the Catholic Church as a third place.

We must be re-evangelized and cooperate with each other in order to practice these goals. As priests, we must sincerely reflect on the reality and challenges shown before us. Otherwise, the Catholic Church in Japan will be in decline. But we should not think about the future too negatively or at the same time too optimistically.

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



Message from Vincent Cardinal Nichols on Human Trafficking

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

Hello, it is a great privilege for me to address you all as you celebrate this anniversary Gathering of the Federation of Asian Bishops conferences. I thank Cardinal Beau for his invitation just to say a few words to you as you begin your Gathering.

I want to salute you as brother Bishops and say how I have a little understanding of some of the many challenges that you face across the vast regions which your Bishops conference has cover. And I just want to assure you of my prayers, of my sense of solidarity with you in your Episcopal Ministry. Ministry that we share, even though our circumstances might be different, our faith is solidly shared and common.

I have this opportunity simply because I'm the president of the Santa Marta group. This is a group established by Pope Francis to galvanize, to act as a catalyst for the church's work against human trafficking and

modern-day slavery. And I really must salute his Eminence Cardinal Beau for the leadership that he gives in these matters, both when I was able to come and be with him in Myanmar a few years ago, and on every occasion when we've had Santa Marta Zoom meetings across the world and in different places in the world. He is a great champion of this work, and I do want to thank him, and I know he will want to explain and lead the time that you have joined this conference for this matter of our work against modern-day slavery and human trafficking.

Very simply, this is a battle that is being lost. The dramatic movement of people across the world, a terrible drama of migration, especially when motivated by fear, terror, persecution, and conflict. This drama is playing into the hands of the traffickers, and it's almost as if we see an endless supply of potential victims for human traffickers. Our efforts, and the efforts of many people, I'm afraid, are not making great progress.

There are many who stand up against the evil of human trafficking, which Pope Francis calls a wound in the body of humanity and therefore a wound in the body of Christ. There are many different dimensions to the fight against human trafficking, from trying to chase the profits and bring punishment for the perpetrators, but also help for the victims, to looking at the root causes which are poverty and the fragility of people's lives in desperate parts of the world. Criminal routes that are used, all sorts of different efforts are made.

“...this is a battle that is being lost. The dramatic movement of people across the world, a terrible drama of migration, especially when motivated by fear, terror, persecution, and conflict.”

work of Santa Marta. Not simply to raise awareness, but also to find ways of partnership with those who see this as a crime and are dedicated to intervening in that criminal activity and rescuing people.

But the Santa Marta group has a quite specific objective, and that is to bring the resources of the Catholic Church to this battle, and in particular, in cooperation with the forces of law enforcement. This isn't an obvious partnership, but it is an important part of the

That might be a focus for your discussions during this anniversary Gathering. The other, of course, is what can we do for the victims of human trafficking? How can they be helped, supported, and moved from being victims to witnesses against this crime in a court of law? These are great challenges, but the resources of the Catholic Church, often in the religious women, those that have a presence closer to vulnerable people, can play a significant role.

“ There are many different dimensions to the fight against human trafficking, from trying to chase the profits and bring punishment for the perpetrators, but also help for the victims, to looking at the root causes which are poverty and the fragility of people’s lives in desperate parts of the world.”

Cardinal Beau always takes time to emphasize one of the most dreadful parts of the human trafficking drama, and that is the trafficking in human organs and body parts. He calls this a modern cannibalism, and I know that helps to focus very sharply the indignation that we can feel at the exploitation of people who are seen not as brothers and sisters, not as subjects of the inner dignity that God gives us, but as commodities to be trafficked and manipulated.

I wish you well in this anniversary Gathering. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your Episcopal leadership, and I hope that you will have time to dedicate to this topic of human trafficking. The Santa Marta group, with a growing global reach, is here to help you if that is what you would wish. May God bless you, may God bless your efforts. Be sure of my prayers, and please keep me and the work of the Santa Marta group in your prayers too. Thank you.



The Role of Women for the Church in Asia Sr Rasika Pieris

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

Good morning to all those who are part of the efforts of making the Church in Asia as Church of Asia. I would like to extend my sincere gratitude for the invitation extended.

My presentation consists of the context in which I am making the proposals for the Church in Asia to be Church of Asia, based on the following concerns. And finally, reiterating on Asian practices as the locus of theologizing and Christian living.

Socio-political and religious-cultural traditions of a particular region can have a strong and enduring impact on the lives of people, as it does in Asia where women have made remarkable progress in recent

years, and transformation is possible.

Asian women, who comprise more than a quarter of the world's population, are not a monolithic group of people. Yet, oppression of women is a major form of oppression in Asia. Suffering, though a common reality, is closely connected with sexism, classism, racism, militarism, and colonialism that are interlinked.

But women of Asia suffer more than men. Lest we forget, the tradition of the Church deprived God's call of being women to exercise the call of God for the Church and society, including pastoral ministry and church leadership.

The poor has two key elements. First, the poor are the victims of oppressive and unjust social structures. And secondly, the poor are the agents of change if they are equipped with skills and hope to create new horizons.

Similarly, the poorest of the poor, the women of Asia, are not mere victims of an oppressive system but are the social agents with the authority to transform unjust social and religious structures through resisting and becoming resilient. To remain victims of traditions and rituals that prevent them from being the agents of social transformation is a notion that women of Asia have adopted in order to experience liberation.

They are the agency of representation, being the persons that they are called to be. The struggle for an equal society where they shall live with freedom and dignity, instead of awaiting the religious promise of freedom after death.

The first point is theology from the perspective of women. Being the majority in the Church of Asia, women face marginalization through the power structures, inclusive of the church, due to misogyny within the Christian tradition and notions of purity and taboos in Asian religious traditions. For a woman to reject what the dominating structures dictate is a staple in the Asian context. What we have in many countries in Asia is a culture of suffering within a culture of domination.

In the church, there is extensive disagreement on women's status under various historical conditions due to the social and religious construction of gender. Problematizing traditional gender roles is considered feminist. Hence, argued feminism is a production of modern cultures which is contrary to biblical values. A woman's non-conformist approach to the social status quo could be painted as unwomanly or deprived of women qualities because the struggle for women's liberation has been criticized by the patriarchal system as both Western and virtuous, for neither is applicable nor desirable in the context of Asia.

Essentializing theology from the perspective of women is also the patriarchalization of theologizing in Asia. Any theology from Asia that does not touch the multi-layered oppression of Asian women is limited in scope and cannot liberate any person in Asia. Because unless oppressed women are liberated, no one can be liberated. No one possesses the truth; truth poses the truth. Theology has to emerge from the historical reality of the people in a context. By claiming the power of naming, Asian women transform male stream theologies.

Hopefully, this process of producing a new way of doing theology seeks to current and complete the one-dimensional tunnel vision of society and the organized religion of Asia. It generates a new way of

“**... the women of Asia, are not mere victims of an oppressive system but are the social agents with the authority to transform unjust social and religious structures through resisting and becoming resilient.**”

thinking about faith, starting from reality and experience. This demands that the Church listen to the alternative stories women offer in the struggle for liberation. The Church also needs to find new ways of doing theology together with men and women, priests, laypeople, and religious in different social contexts.

The second point is theology as Asian women. For the elocious spirits, theology is not a rational explanation of faith, but something emerging within a context of people, a dynamic involvement of a faith community. It hardly offers liberating alternatives to the situations of

the oppressed. Traditional theology does not recognize the struggle for freedom as a part of salvation. It is not correlated with the present experience. The absence of the social or structural dimension of sinfulness within the interpretation of sin in the institutional Christian understanding of salvation scarcely recognizes political liberation as an essential element for salvation. This understanding of sociology paves the way for perceiving human beings, especially women who are the most oppressed in Asian society, as passive recipients of the results of unjust systems. Alternative society building is a dream for many women, where no hierarchical structures prevail. Therefore, forming alternative societal structures like the Christian Women Grassroots Movement becomes essential.

In the Church of Asia, there is a need to listen to women's experiences, and women need to feel that they have been heard and have made a contribution to the life of the Church. When lived practice becomes the access for theologizing, the lived experiences of women cannot be excluded. The struggle of women to resist oppressive structures opens new avenues for reconstructing the existing theologies in Asia. The experience of the poorest of the poor is an influential and essential source of deconstructing the theologies that have long been sustained by a conception of men's power over women.

“ **Any theology from Asia that does not touch the multi-layered oppression of Asian women is limited in scope and cannot liberate any person in Asia.** ”

The third point is rethinking the image of God that gives life to women. The maleness attributed to God or Christ is a stumbling block for an inclusive paradigm of the Church. In the veneration of God as male, the God symbol is monopolized, and man becomes the norm of full humanity. The action of making the symbol of the male God synonymous with power and authority gives rise to a hierarchical male Church in which men define course, and women are relegated to passive consumers. The concept of the contingency of particularity as a trajectory of the Incarnation, in their struggle for liberation, many women found new names and places for God who empowers them to resist suffering. This is contrary to the traditional teachings that emphasize masculine attributes to God.

If women are to see themselves as creatures made in the Divine image, their primary identity as the image of God, the language used to speak of God must reflect more than male symbolism. This is because

“In the Church of Asia, there is a need to listen to women’s experiences, and women need to feel that they have been heard and have made a contribution to the life of the Church.”

language is not politically neutral but rather serves as a tool of either oppression or liberation.

One key aspect is developing a new consciousness in women and in the Church. Reading texts such as the Bible, prayers of

the Church, and liturgical calendars from an androcentric perspective does not affirm the equal dignity of women. Another significant factor hindering the affirmation of women’s dignity and mission in the Church is the internalization of patriarchy by women themselves. This system affects all aspects of women’s lives and undermines their personhood in subtle ways. Women may accept language that uses terms like “mankind,” “sons of God,” and “he/him” as being inclusive of both genders. However, these portrayals relegate women to shadows of men.

Raising awareness of the dignity and role of women in the Church challenges the status quo and calls for a clear theology and sociology. Awakening to the equal dignity of women and men includes acknowledging their God-given creation and baptismal dignity as bearers of the image of God. Both women and men must become conscious of the fact that equality among believers should translate into shared and equal participation of women and men in all aspects of church life, in accordance with God’s will.

Drawing inspiration and support from reclaiming the stories of their foremothers and sisters in the Bible, whose voices have often been muted or silenced, women can engage in a hermeneutics of suspicion. This can lead to a reevaluation of patriarchal structures in both the church and society and pave the way for transformation.

Consciousness raising and conversion require exposing the overt

and subtle ways in which men and women are entangled in the sin of patriarchy. Both women and men share the dream of a new humanity in Christ, and this can be achieved through dialogue with women.

The fifth point emphasizes women as full decision-making citizens. Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza defines the Ecclesia of women as a democratic congress of full decision-making citizens, highlighting the importance of democratic equality, citizenship, and decision-making power as essential elements of the notion of Ecclesia.

The vision of the Ecclesia of women is to struggle for change and liberation, embodying God's life-giving and transforming power within a structural scene of exploitation and dehumanization by the powers of the dominant patriarchal system. It proposes an alternative magisterium where Ecclesia women are seen as the locus or place of divine revelation, beyond the Bible or the tradition of the patriarchal Church. This vision challenges Christian theology to prioritize the preferential option for the poor, particularly poor women, as the norm.

Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza further develops the concept of the Ecclesia of women as a discipleship of equals, drawing inspiration from the experience of the early Christian community that lived in solidarity from below. In this discipleship of equals, all are learners and there are no masters. Each person learns from one another, forming a new paradigm for the alternative magisterium and the norm for Christian theology. In the context of religious pluralism, learning from other religions becomes crucial. Each religion is seen as a unique language and idiom through which the human mind expresses its yearning for and experience of integral liberation. Fidelity to what is unique to Christian faith and fairness towards the distinctive otherness of every other religion are emphasized. The ultimate goal of every religion is seen as the liberation of every human person, emphasizing the holistic liberation of all individuals.

Within the religiously pluralistic context of Asia, feminist theologians have found their own heritage as a new style of presenting rich and multi-layered theological voices through symbols, images, songs, dances, and stories. This aims at the full liberation of all individuals. The multiplicity of religious heritages within and among Asians provides

resources for a paradigm shift in the struggle for liberation.

Engaging in inter-religious and inter-ethnic gatherings, dialogues, sharing, and worship expands solidarity between men and women, fostering collaboration towards the common goal of working together for liberation.

Coming to the understanding that men of quality are not threatened by women's call for equality, it becomes essential to realize that the liberation of women is integral to the liberation of all humanity. The fear and resistance towards equality stem from the fear of losing status and the uncertainty of patriarchal structures evolving. Overcoming male domination is a challenge in Asia, as patriarchy extends beyond male supremacy and is deeply embedded in socio-political and religio-cultural systems of control and domination.

In the process of affirming the full humanity of women, it is not enough to recognize how a woman's specific context shapes her experience of oppression. It requires alternative means of resistance against elements that support patriarchy and the need for a transformation of the stereotyped ancient social landscape.

In conclusion, the Church of Asia must distance itself from colonial rules and representations and undergo a paradigm shift from Eurocentrism to Asian centrism. Asian centrism embraces the core values of interdependence and interrelatedness, which differ from Eurocentric ideas. Embracing Asian praxis as hermeneutical lenses, the Church of Asia should move towards ecumenism and inclusivity rather than cultural separatism.

The Church of Asia should adopt a horizontal structure that ensures the participation of people from all walks of life, departing from the vertical model of leadership. Choosing the preferential option for women is aligned with God's preference for the oppressed. This shift towards inclusivity and equality is crucial for the Church of Asia to fulfill its mission effectively. Thank you very much.



HOMILY OF HIS EMINENCE JOSE FUERTE CARDINAL ADVINCULA, ARCHBISHOP OF MANILA

18 October 2022

Your Eminences, Your Excellencies, Reverend Monsignori and Fathers, Dearest Brothers in Sisters in Christ,

It is with great joy that I celebrate this Eucharist with you on the Feast of Saint Luke, disciple of our Lord and evangelist, in the context of our FABC 50 General Conference. Saint Luke provides us with an account of the first “synod”. Confronted with a difficult pastoral issue, our forefathers in the faith instinctively gathered to discern and fulfill the will of God. Peter, Paul, Barnabas, James and the rest brought with them not only their own experiences but also the sensitivities and wisdom of their flock. Diverse they were, but united in Christ. Significant indeed is the way they express the conclusions of their council: “It is the decision of the Holy Spirit and of us...” or in another translation, “it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us...”

“**Confronted with a difficult pastoral issue, our forefathers in the faith instinctively gathered to discern and fulfill the will of God... Diverse they were, but united in Christ.**”

The Gospel injunction to pray for laborers for the harvest brings to mind one of the lessons we learned in the diocesan phase of the

“Prayerfulness and discernment, communion and compassion, honesty and transparency like charity begin at home. For us, the family is not only the seedbed of all vocations, the family is also the school of synodality.”

Synod on Synodality. The family is not only the seedbed of vocations to the priesthood and to the consecrated life, but also to the lay ministries. This is important for my country, the Philippines, where the shortage of priests is complemented by the immense contributions of

our basic ecclesial community (BEC) leaders and lay apostles in family life, education, industry, business and commerce, politics, peace building and care for our common home.

Moreover, if we seek to advance synodality as a constitutive dimension of the Church, we should also recognize that the values, perspectives, and skills necessary for a synodal Church are nurtured and learned in the family. Prayerfulness and discernment, communion and compassion, honesty and transparency - like charity - begin at home. For us, the family is not only the seedbed of all vocations, the family is also the school of synodality.

Saint Luke is considered a companion and co-worker of the great Apostle to the Gentiles. He accompanied him on many missionary travels. What is most poignant is how Saint Paul recognized Saint Luke's loyalty. He says in his letter, "Luke is the only one with me". This continues to be our experience. During natural calamities and disasters, the Church is usually one of the first to arrive and the last to leave. In the face of personal failure and community strife, may the disciples of Christ be always the last to despair and the first to love. Amen.



Migration, Labour, and Human Trafficking

Sr Abby Avelino MM

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

Good afternoon. Thank you for inviting us and the opportunity to present to you our work. Today's topic is migration, labor and human trafficking, the plight of Asia. I am presenting the Teleteku. Teleteku is an international network against trafficking. Teleteku is international network of consecrated life against trafficking in persons. Teleteku is part of the UISG and coordinates the anti -trafficking efforts of religious sisters facilitating networking, communication and formation according to the strategic planning of the International Union of the United States. It isthesocial teaching of the Catholic Church. Our vision is the expression of

the Gospel of Mark.

This expression defines the network's identity and mission by referring to the transformative power of hope, compassion and mercy. The members of the Teleteku living in the United States are respected and show respect for the members of the different religious traditions and for non-believers. The Teleteku is an umbrella network of sister-led networks with more than 6,000 members on five continents in 92 countries.

The members of the Teleteku is an inter-congregation of sister-led networks committed against trafficking in person. Organized primarily at the national level involving religious men and all people of goodwill who share the vision of religious people regarding anti-trafficking.

It is grass-root level oriented in dialogue with the national conference or association of major sub-peers. Our mission, the Teleteku mission is to end human trafficking and exploitation through collaborative initiative focused on main areas of actions at the grass-root level which are

“Our mission, the Teleteku mission is to end human trafficking and exploitation through collaborative initiative focused on main areas of actions at the grass-root level which are prevention, care for victims, access to justice, networking and advocacy.”

prevention, care for victims, access to justice, networking and advocacy.

Promoting action that affects the systemic causes. Our realities. In our realities at grass-root levels, we observe an increase of cases of human trafficking and situation of vulnerabilities

exploited by traffickers all over the world. And yet with a decrease in governmental resources for assisting victims and survivors.

In our 2021 annual report, Teleteku networks noted a sharp increase in injustices suffered by migrants people who are even more vulnerable to trafficking to different forms of exploitation including in the sex industry, in the workplace, in forced marriages and in having to for money. What do we do?

We are strong in prevention and shooting hope by raising awareness. This is some words of sisters from the Teletekum in the Philippines. Teletekum chooses to stand by those who are deep in darkness of social vulnerability, oppression and exploitation providing spiritual sustenance of a new dignified life.

We empowering women and girls as well as their families and communities. We call for a guaranteed equal labor rights for women. This is a scene from the Teletekum Bangladesh awareness and child and forced marriage. We care for victims. Teletekum Thailand very strong in protection and for program for survivors especially for children and women.

“We are strong in prevention and shooting hope by raising awareness.”

Our call to action to promote effective and legal migration pathways. Teletekum calls in a particular global governance stakeholders for mission. In doing so, Teletekum supports Pope Francis invitation to welcome, protect, promote and integrated migrants, refugees and inter-ethnicity place people in order to prevent them in failing into the hands of human traffickers. Teletekum advocates for the rights and dignities of migrants and refugees and undocumented migrants. Teletekum provides counseling and legal consultation for labor exploitation cases of migrants workers.

One of the cases that we heard mostly from our from the refugees that we encountered every day. This is a sample. My life was threatened in my own country. I trusted the recruited and planned to Japan but I was deceived. Now I feel miserable. No jobs. I cannot support my family and family.

This is astory of this refugee from Cameroon. This story is that we heard the sisters of every day in this field. Teletekum is strong in networking and collaboration with NGOs, NPOs, government agencies, Catholic organization and other faith based groups.

Teletekum in the Philippines has strong networking without

different organizations. Last year, we launched the Teletekum call to action. This is endorsed by the U.S.G. Call to action is aimed at the U.S.G. and the U.S.G. global governance stakeholders including states, international organizations, non-state actors such as civil society groups, private sectors organizations and an academic institution. And all those who have a role to play in the tireless effort to eradicate human trafficking and exploitation. Call to action hope to bring the grassroot voices to the global stage. I'd like to show our video when we launch this.

I hope you hear it. Teletekum is a network of Catholic sisters working in 90 countries to end human trafficking.

An estimated 50,000 people are victims of trafficking each year, mostly women and children. In 2020, the Teletekum network reached over 185,000 people but more is needed. To end trafficking once and for all,

Teletekum has launched a new call to action to governments, to civil society and to you. We want access to justice for victims and survivors. We want empower women and girls. We want to create safe and legal migration pathways. We want to build an economy of care and solidarity. Join Teletekum. Let's work together to end human trafficking and exploitation.

“Call to action objectives is to care, to heal, to empower and to restore.”

So to go back to the Teletekum call to action in the area of advocacy, this documents, we promote an economy without exploitation, empowering women and girls, as well as their families and communities. We advocate in supporting safe and legal migration pathways, including the cases of forced displacement. We call on governments to implement migration policy and voters controls that rent human trafficking and protect safety, dignity and human rights and fundamental freedoms of all migrants, regardless of their migrant status. Call to action objectives is to care, to heal, to empower and to restore.

To care for victims of human trafficking and exploitation and for people at risk. Throughout the world, the sister networks of Teletekum

stand as a sign of hope, liberation for people that are afraid in or recovering from human trafficking.

For Teletekum, it's a person and community centered approach. We create a good relationship, build a safe and trusting relationship. To heal physically, psychosocial and spiritual wounds. We're rescuing women, technical interns, victims of exploitation by preventing shelter for protection.

This is a witness in Japan. To empower the victims and survivors, as well as individuals at risk by implying their voices. In Thailand and Cambodia, they

have a program, a sustainability program, a sufficiency economy and some activities and workshops for the children, victims of and survivors of trafficking.

“For Teletekum, it's a person and community centered approach. We create a good relationship, build a safe and trusting relationship. To heal physically, psychosocial and spiritual wounds.”

Teletekum to Pakistan, sisters visited Islam's areato work to rehabilitate them back into the normal life. Teletekum call to action calls to restore human dignity by preventing access to justice.

Last year, 2021, Teletekum Asia reached a total number of 35 ,824. In the prevention, networking, training, capacity building, access to justice, care for victims and survivors.

We have 61 Catholic organizations, 56 NGOs, 42 government and intergovernmental agencies. Teletekum Asia, members of 205 religious congregations. And active members of 3 ,521. We are in 20 countries in 18 established national networks.

As you see, the representation of growing networks in Teletekum Asia, including the Middle East, in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. What are the initiatives of Teletekum Asia?

The Teletekum ambassador against trafficking, we launched it last year. We are in the second year this time. We are in the process of the training for the almost 30 young people in Asia. Since the beginning

of the pandemic, we started the monthly webinar. So we are in the 20th session or webinar this month.

We have a fourth regional conference that happened not too long ago. We were in Thailand in last August. We do have online formation as we continue to deepen our understanding about human trafficking and our sharing of best practices. We are strong in networking among sending and receiving countries. From our own networking, we share our best practices, especially the programs that we done by the Teletekum Thailand as well as the Indonesia. So when it comes to the first international conference, we have a monthly webinar. We are doing a series of webinars and we are trying to make sure that we are able to inter-paid collaboration and networking. So these are our young ambassadors last year, the Teletekum youth ambassadors against trafficking and they are growing in numbers. They are doing a good job in awareness campaigns through online or through onsite. So social media platform is strong with this campaign. So we try to involve young people as protagonists in the prevention campaigns. I'd like to quote the process, human trafficking is an open wound on the body and contemporary society escorts upon the body of Christ.

We know that only by working in collaboration and solidarity, weaving a web in love, we will be able to confront the structural issue that caused and perpetuate human trafficking. As members of global Catholic Church, we affirm the pastoral orientation and human trafficking that will be incorporated into each direction into the work.

We are also working on the development of the human trafficking network. We invite everyone to join us in prayer for successful implementation of this important work to end human trafficking. Together, we will create future filled with prophetic hope by working together, forming a network of compassion and grace.

“We know that only by working in collaboration and solidarity, weaving a web in love, we will be able to confront the structural issue that caused and perpetuate human trafficking.”

Again, the expression Teletekum is an invitation to all call out the system that sustain human trafficking through our voice, our actions, and our daily choices. We commit ourselves to denouncing the arrogance and violence of economic and financial power when it acts against the dignity of person.

I'd like to conclude this presentation by this proverb from Utopian, when spider webs unite, they can tie up a lion. Now I invite you that we work together as participating in this conference that we can work together through collaboration and networking. So in this, I thank you and I hope that our sisters joining at this conference will give you some information about our work and especially the call to action document.

So I invite you to support our sisters at the grassroot levels, especially the bishop at our your diocese or the priests that we're able to allow them to conduct awareness campaigns in your own parishes. So thank you so much for listening and have a good day.





Youth: A Voice for the Church **Mr Gregory Pravin**

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

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

Since 2009, I have been employed by The Architects of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, to serve as a lay pastoral worker in the office for young people. I wear a variety of hats on the job, but ultimately my responsibility is to be present and provide pastoral accompaniment to young people.

Given the task this morning to share with you all, I want to focus on the current and emerging situations of young people in the Church in Asia and why it must be a concern for the future.

I would like to strongly point out that I'm very concerned because accompaniment, or the lack of it, with young people who are the now of God, who shape communities and societies of the future. Allow me to further explain myself. If I, as a young person, am being bullied, now, your company, your accompaniment of those around me, will nurture me and help me to grow into either someone who continues to be bullied—a victim—or maybe I could become a survivor. But even then, what kind of survivor would I be? A survivor who bullies others, or would I be a survivor who defends those who are being bullied?

Or, very sadly but not uncommon today, I might not even live to grow older. Suicide, as we know today, is a very real option for young people. My emphasis being that whatever situation a young person may be going through, it will have an effect in shaping our tomorrows. How will marriages and procreation fare in the future? Would our young people even want to get married and have children? What type of nurturing and parenting styles will emerge? Will we even have vocations to the priesthood, religious life, or even to lay people working in the Church? Would they even be bothered or attracted to the service of the Church and its mission?

What type of public office leaders would we have? Would our young people want to become teachers, doctors, police officers, and even politicians to lead the country? As I continue, I would like to narrow my points to the post-effects of having to limit our encounters and engagement on virtual platforms, especially within our churches, and especially among the urban and more privileged settings.

“**My emphasis being that whatever situation a young person may be going through, it will have an effect in shaping our tomorrows.**”

The past couple of years, we have altered our habits, which have led to new behaviors and, as a result, formed within us new characteristics

and personalities. These are very subtle alterations. For example, before attending Mass would mean a call to holiness. I wake up on Sunday, I get ready, I read beforehand the readings, you know, I prepare my mind for receiving the Lord. I receive the sacraments. At the end, I hear the mandate, "Go, go and be a witness."

“The manner in which we used to celebrate the variety of devotions and popular piety has shifted from a community experience to an individual experience.”

But the effects of the pandemic, what happens to my Sunday mornings? I wake up, I take out my phone. Alright, let's watch Mass for which country today. You know, maybe I understand what's going on. Was I assisting at Mass in the celebration? Was I attending? Was I present? I'm not too sure. So what happens now? I'll just wait for next Sunday. It just becomes the routine. It becomes a habit.

The manner in which we used to celebrate the variety of devotions and popular piety has shifted from a community experience to an individual experience. Now, why this sudden shift? During the challenging times of the lockdown, we had turned to the aid of technology to keep us alive, hopefully long enough to survive and overcome the crisis, which was COVID-19.

Unfortunately, it took just too long. Digital platforms, which we had begun to use as tools to cope with our isolation, eventually became digital environments in which we began to live. A migration from actual to virtual has had a profound impact on our self-understanding, our understanding of others, our ability to communicate, and to form relationships with others.

Well, we, young people, we were studying, we were working, we were dating, we were gaming—we were doing almost everything on the screen. Church-wise, faith-wise, we were no longer making pilgrimages to the Lord. Rather, now we had begun to summon spiritual personalities, celebrities in the name of the Lord. The knowledge that when two or three are gathered in the Lord's name, He is present has been overthrown by the

new experience. When I Google in the Lord's name, there He is present.

Now we have minimal need for bonding, now we have a minimal need for communion, a minimal need for fraternity. We have learned to become self-sufficient. We are no longer longing or yearning for the Lord because we found a way to satisfy our hunger in the Lord.

Now, just imagine this, just imagine a world without hunger, a world without hunger for Jesus Christ. If I can say to myself that I am self-sufficient in my relationship with Jesus, what else would I say I can become self-sufficient of? What else would I need? Who else would I need? Me, myself, and I are enough.

Now, don't get me wrong. I'm not referring to a segment of people who are rejecting the Lord or saying, "Jesus is just too much for me, please don't give me the Cross, Church, no, not my community." But I am referring to people who have been satisfied and self-sufficient on their own in their intimacy with the Lord. They do not need any more the sacraments to be nourished. They do not need any more the community to grow. I don't even know if they need Jesus to be with Jesus. It's so self-reliant, self-sufficient.

For us pastors and formators who were actively serving in front of the camera, we may have had a more encouraging and uplifting experience. Well, that's simply because for us, technology was a tool. But for the rest who were in front of the screens most of the time, they were living in it. It was their life.

Let me further elaborate. For those of us who were facilitating and preparing for online masses, we were called to rise above our comfort zone, above the call that we were asked to do. It was a great risk and sacrifice, it was like a mission. And then we would attend Mass, and we would prepare what was needed, and we would receive the sacrament, and then we would return again next Sunday because we have been mandated to. But the rest of everyone, sitting relaxed at home, viewing the screen day in, day out, week in, after weekend, they were not asked to rise above the challenge. They were asked to take a step back, to fall into their comfort zone.

Community had become spiritual community, communion had become spiritual communion, connection had become spiritual connection. I believe you understand why I'm going with this. All this eventually became a spirituality, it became how I live out my faith, by myself.

I'm not playing the blame game here, nor am I pointing fingers at bad pastoral guidelines during the lockdowns. None of us knew what to do and what it would do to us. Nevertheless, what I'm trying to emphasize is that, knowingly or unknowingly, there is a new virus among us. I have no name for it, for I do not want to give it that glory. But if we do not recognize this virus among us, among the young people, we might mistakenly medicate the symptoms rather than the root cause.

“... the greatest struggle of the Good Shepherd was that he had to stop himself. He had to stop being a shepherd and become something else. He had to become a tracker, he had to become a seeker. He had to get lost in order to find the lost. And then, having found the lost, he took it as his own burden, his weight to carry.”

Today, it seems the world is making a ruckus that young people are not returning to church, not for the sacraments, not for mission. Surely, they have found new sacraments and new missions since now they are self-sufficient. We are in no place to argue or defend. The fullness of the truth is in the Catholic Church.

It would do no good. We must embody this truth and show this truth to them in hope that their eyes will be open and they will see this truth. For every time someone in church is saying, “Young people are not here,” just think about this instead: Where are the young people? Are we able to truly manifest the Good Shepherd in our lives? To be radical, to be courageous enough to leave behind the 99 and to run after the one? Are we able to shift the narrative from “The young people are absent” to “I am absent among the young people”? Or do we continue to give excuses for ourselves?

It certainly would be much easier to play the role of the father in the parable of the prodigal son, just to wait around until the son returns. Have you ever wondered, what if the son does not return? Then what are you going to do? I've always reflected personally that the greatest struggle of the Good Shepherd was that he had to stop himself. He had to stop being a shepherd and become something else. He had to become a tracker, he had to become a seeker. He had to get lost in order to find the lost. And then, having found the lost, he took it as his own burden, his weight to carry. A famous lyric from a famous song comes to mind: "He ain't heavy, he's my brother." I'll be singing that same song.

Dear Bishops, if we want young people to change, then we need to change as well. We have to stop thinking as if the way forward is to improve what we are already doing,

“We have to stop thinking as if the way forward is to improve what we are already doing, to refine existing systems, to work with existing structures. No need to reinvent the wheel.”

to refine existing systems, to work with existing structures. No need to reinvent the wheel. But then, is it correct to put new wine into old wine skins? If our tools and methods were efficient to begin with, then why are we having this discussion? I have no guarantees what would work, but certainly, it's clear what does not work.

That being said, do not go out looking for others to be the new wine skins. We all have the capacity to become new wine skins. If not, we won't be here today. If not the Good Shepherd, then maybe the Good Samaritan. He too had to stop being who he was and become a nurse to the injured person. The rest who passed by, I imagine, were too distracted with who they were, their identity, and did not allow themselves to reach out. But the Good Samaritan was able to break free from the narrative.

Who am I? For whom am I? Though the events may have inconvenienced the Samaritan, but just maybe his actions may have blessed the injured person with the opportunity for conversion. Something to ponder on. Is our goal to provide convenience or conversion?

In my own experience attending similar gatherings like this, there's always a recommendation for our Bishops to first become friends to young people. Friendship before stewardship, I've heard before. Examples of Bishops wearing jeans for the very first time in their life so that they could be relatable to young people, of Bishops dancing and drinking and playing sports, talking about sex, even. So on and so forth. I think that these are wonderful, these are great moments of encounter. But I also think now is the time to elevate this friendship.

Can our Bishops cultivate an environment where young people can challenge the Bishop in dialogue, can argue with passion, can disagree? Can the Bishops place themselves in a vulnerable position among young people? Are we able to foster a friendship that is not utilitarian? A friendship that, in spite of our differences, holds firm? Can our Bishops and young people really, really be equal co-workers in the community, in the Church? As pastors of the community, whether we are clergy, religious, or laity, there's always the temptation to desire a return in some sort from the people we are accompanying and invested in. Could they take on leadership roles for us? Can they be a more visible sign in the Church? Well, yes and no. I believe we must trust in the workings of the

Holy Spirit and the discernment of the young people themselves.

“...there's always a recommendation for our Bishops to first become friends to young people. Friendship before stewardship...”

Through my own personal encounters and shared encounters of my fellow lay pastoral workers, there are young people who deliberately choose to become

nobody so that they are free to be available and present to others. They say to me that if I am nobody, then I just might be able to be that needed somebody for anybody. They see the roles and responsibilities in church and in other areas as limiting themselves for the mission. In respect to the Church, this may be something we need to reflect on deeply. If our roles and responsibilities in church are keeping us from becoming like the Good Samaritan to others.

In my conclusion, I would like to say something a little bit scandalous. The Eucharist is not the source and summit of our faith, and

it will never be, unless we are on a journey to the summit. Even before the events of the pandemic, many young people have fallen off the path to the summit and found alternatives. The recent events of the pandemic and lockdown have changed the landscape so much that, for some, it is unrecognizable, and they have found themselves other alternatives. We need to navigate new paths to the summit. Along the way, some parts would lead us to dead ends, but surely, we will find some new paths that will lead us right to the summit together.

We have to reinstall human dignity with more love and responsibility. We have to re-emphasize the common good with a more meaningful relationship. To replace solitude with solidarity and to reaffirm confidence in our young people through subsidiarity. Dear Bishops and friends present today, just in case my point was not made clear, the situation our young people are facing today, in church, in their workplace, in life, is having to figure out everything on their own, by themselves, and face alone the consequences of their actions. I think Mother Teresa said it best: “The most terrible poverty is loneliness and the feeling of being unloved.” I cannot prescribe any other solution other than genuine accompaniment.

“**The Eucharist is not the source and summit of our faith, and it will never be, unless we are on a journey to the summit.**”

Do not clutter the lives of our young people with gimmicks and programs and interactions if it is not in hope to build authentic relationships and genuine pastoral accompaniment. I am hopeful that through accompaniment, our young people will grow roots firm in the faith, and tomorrow, they will become genuine companions themselves to the new generation of young people.

With that, thank you.



Youth Representatives from India Mr and Ms Ashita Jimmy

H.E. Cardinal Gracias invited two of the youth representatives present to speak; Mr Anthony Judy and Ms Ashita Jimmy. Their messages were an imploration to listen; how five years on from the Youth Synod, it was time to take stock and consider if the Church had progressed. They stressed the need to show the youth trust and genuine interest, and to converse and journey along with them.

Before the next video, we make a little change in the program. We've got two youth representatives here, Ashita, Jimmy, and Anthony Judy. I thought maybe they could give a very brief intervention if they want, from the youth. I think we're going to the mic for that.

Your Eminence, Your Excellency, dear fathers and sisters, my dear friends, thank you for giving us this opportunity. Actually, we are discussing the youth and youth ministries in Asia, representing India. We are the national leaders of the youth movement and student movement. In youth ministry, sometimes there is a lack of support at the diocesan and parish levels. In 2018, the Holy See hosted the youth Synod, and now, in the fifth year after that synod, it's time to re-check whether youth are

listened to or heard in the church. Sometimes, we feel that the hierarchies are not giving time to listen to the youth.

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

We have discussed this in our group as well. Now, we have seen the presentation from Japan, and after COVID, youth are further away from the church. It's time to listen again, and it's a continuous process. It's not for a certain time or purpose; it's a continuous process to listen to the youth.

“It’s time to listen again, and it’s a continuous process. It’s not for a certain time or purpose; it’s a continuous process to listen to the youth.”

If we are not listening to the youth, we can't say that the youth are the future and the present. If we start from today, it will help the church to grow and bring the youth together with us. It is crucial to concentrate on the youth.

I am happy that in the initial process of this meeting, we got at least 13 minutes to discuss the concerns and the role of youth in the church. I hope all have discussed the matter and given more importance to youth ministry in Asia. Thank you, Anthony and Ashita. Do you want to say something?

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

I represent the students from India, and I want to emphasize that if we think about it, we can actually make a difference in the church through the youth. Pope Francis also says that youth are the present and the future, but it is crucial to focus on the present and think about the future later. By

focusing on the youth right now and providing them with opportunities, they can show what they can do for the church.

“**Trusting us youth and engaging in more frequent and meaningful conversations with us can mean a lot. It shows that we are being heard.**”

Trusting us youth and engaging in more frequent and meaningful conversations with us can mean a lot. It shows that we are being heard. Currently, we feel that many people don't know what we do or

what is happening. We just want the youth to be heard. We also want to change the present scenario of the church. We want more youths to be active like we are. We are making great efforts towards that goal.

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

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







EMERGING REALITIES

DAY 3
OCTOBER 19, 2022

PRESS NOTE

19TH OCTOBER 2022

19th October 2022 of the FABC General Conference continued with the segment on Emerging Realities. The Holy Eucharist was celebrated by H.E. Anthony Cardinal Poola, Archbishop of Hyderabad. The president of the day, H.E. Francis Xavier Cardinal Kriengsak Kovithavanij, led the gathered representatives in the Adsumus. The morning prayer, hosted by the country of Taiwan, was led by the video prepared by Fr Otfried Chan.

The first session was titled 'Finding new pathways for formation, worship, and digital ministry in the post-pandemic era'.

The first speaker of the day, Prof. Pablito Baybado Jr, theology professor at University of Santo Tomas, Manila, and Executive Secretary of the FABC Office on Education and Faith Formation, expressed the need for constructing a reality which includes faith-rich encounters. Using the 'stop, pray, and go' analogy of the motorcyclists who passed by his local Church on their way to work , and anecdotes from his family life, Prof. Bayado stressed the importance of formation that values family integrity, and the need for formators who are gardeners, engineers and builders, who are sensitive to current realities and capable of accompanying the people.

**'You are the influencers.
You can provide real
answers, not promises.'**

Next, Mr Alexander Lopez, Special Projects Manager of the Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN), explained how using technology has become the norm, and questioned whether the Church was subject to censorship, manipulation, and big tech companies controlling the narrative. Advocating for the need to build and operate secure platforms for the Church, Mr Lopez addressed the gathered representatives, saying, 'You are the influencers. You can provide real answers, not promises.'

Mr Brinston Carvalho, a full-time member of the Media Ministry in the Archdiocese of Bombay, working at the AMCF Catholic Communication

Centre, emphasized the effective use of Creative Catechesis in digital ministry - to help spread the mandate of the Gospel and the love of Christ. Stressing the importance of pastoral training in social communications and digital media, along with the explicit need for the clergy to be part of the online social network, Mr Carvalho mentioned, 'the 'sheep' are on social media, the shepherds ought to be, too.'

“the 'sheep' are on social media, the shepherds ought to be, too.”

Bishop Sebastian Francis, President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei, voicing how there must be a paradigm shift in worship and formation, to one that is creative, inclusive and bridge-building, emphasized the need for clergy, religious and laity who are disciples, and the value of engaging in a dialogue of joy, mercy and hope, with all.

The next session was focused on 'the challenges of the family today, and how the Church in Asia can respond creatively for the pastoral care of families'.

Mr & Mrs Daniel and Shelley Ee, members of the Worldwide Marriage Encounter Leadership Team and the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life, speaking about the values of family life, its challenges, and the married couple as the heart of the family, proposed steps to improve the pastoral care of families; including enhancing formation and training, structural changes that allow couples to serve together, and activities that celebrate and enhance family life.

Mr Michael Phichit and Mrs Lucia Achara Sukeewat, National Presidents of Christian Family Movement in Thailand, speaking about the many challenges families face, the social biases, the degradation of relationships between generations, and the myriad challenges of financial insecurity, stressed the importance of the Church recognising the interconnect between these challenges, and added 'as a Church and family, we have to admit that we need healing, before we can improve'.

The focus of the next topic was, 'The opportunities that Amoris Laetitia offers the Church in Asia for effective ministry'.

The first speaker, Bishop John Baptist Lee Keh-mien of Hsinchu, President of the Chinese Regional Bishops' Conference, led a reflection on the encyclical 'Amoris Laetitia: A Call to Love'. Underlining the real and ever-changing challenges to marriage, Bishop Lee, emphasized the importance of pre-marital formation and the goals of Amoris Laetitia, adding context through the encyclical.

Fr Vimal Tirimanna CSsR (Sri Lanka), professor at the Accademia Alfonsiana in Rome and member of the Theological Commission of the General Secretariat for the Synod 2021-2023, speaking about how family and marriage have been a great preoccupation of the Church, highlighted the aspects and differences of Amoris Laetitia. Emphasizing the importance of pastoral care for married couples, Fr Tirimanna also illustrated diverse cases of marriage and family as opportunities for witness and formation.

Each session ended with question-and-answer sessions with the speakers, and group discussions and reflections on the insight gained.

In the evening, the Bishop Friends of the Focolare Movement, explaining its origin and purpose, described its focus on family, unity, communion and dialogue. The representatives were invited to an online meeting of the Bishop Friends, and a few members of the Movement introduced its many operations to the gathered audience.

The day closed with H.E. Cardinal Kriengsak leading the representatives in the angelus.





Revitalizing the Life of the Church - Worship Bishop Sebastian Francis

Bishop Sebastian Francis, President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei, voicing how there must be a paradigm shift in worship and formation, to one that is creative, inclusive and bridge-building, emphasized the need for clergy, religious and laity who are disciples, and the value of engaging in a dialogue of joy, mercy and hope, with all.

Our next speaker, the last speaker before our break, is Bishop Sebastian Francis of Penang. He is the president of the Catholic Business Conference of Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei. Please be attentive, dear brothers and sisters.

Allow me to confine myself to some reflections and a paradigm for worship and formation, based on all that has been expressed here in the last eight days. It is the same spirit, whether we are in Lex or Randy, from worship to formation or in Lex vivendi in life. It is the same spirit that is moving gently among us.

Everything that has been expressed, from our hopes to our

disappointments, failures to our aspirations and uncertainties, simply means that you have brought the experiences of your people.

Let's now move on to worship and see if there is pressure on us as we address the people of Asia and the people of our churches. We need to give them a direction. As the Archbishop of Manila said, are we able to speak with authority, like how Peter spoke? We, along with the Holy Spirit, have decided that this is the direction for the Church in Asia. Can we have that kind of confidence to regain our role as successors of the Apostles?

Now, let's move to the first slide, which is about worship. It is in the context of an encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. When I listen to this text, I can't help but feel that we experienced this more intensely during the pandemic when there was no more public worship. Jesus told her, "Yet a time is coming and has now come," and He said this two thousand years ago. True worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and His worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.

The narrative on worship was not about the morality of the Samaritan woman, who had several men in her life. The narrative of worship was not about religion, either. It was not about which mountain to worship on, whether it's Mount Jerusalem, Mount Zion, Jerusalem, or elsewhere.

The narrative on worship was not even about gender, with Jesus being male and the Samaritan woman female. It was not about race and ethnicity, with him being a Jew and she being a Samaritan. Instead, it was about worshipping God in spirit and in truth.

“
A single day without the Eucharist is a dangerous day in the life of a bishop or priest.”

Many of us embarked on an interior journey during the pandemic, clinging to the obligation to continue worshipping God in spirit and in truth when external worship was no longer possible. We carried our people in our souls when we stood before the altar to celebrate the Eucharist. Saint

Faustina said, "A single day without the Eucharist is a dangerous day in the life of a bishop or priest." And what about the people? Many of us were tempted not to celebrate the Eucharist because there was no audience, no congregation. However, it still remains that we celebrate the Eucharist vicariously. Regardless of whether there is an audience or not, we carry every single person entrusted to our care to the Eucharistic table so that nobody is left out.

I wish to plead again that the Eucharist, coming from Asia, should focus not only on being a reward for practicing and baptized Catholics but also as nourishment for the wounded, the sick, both physically and spiritually, and for sinners. These are some thoughts about the Eucharist.

... the Church in Asia must be creative, inclusive, and bridge-building because the Father is creative and the Son is inclusive.

Almost everything that has been said here for the last eight days is pointing towards a message from the spirit to the Church in Asia. While we read the signs and face the magnitude of issues, crises, conflicts, and problems, we also need to ask what the spirit is saying to the Church in Asia. Three words stand out: the Church in Asia must be creative, inclusive, and bridge-building because the Father is creative and the Son is inclusive. If the sacrifice on the cross was exclusive, it would mean nothing to us. He died to save creation and humanity.

Thus, everything that has been expressed here points towards being a creative, inclusive, and bridge-building Church. A paradigm shift, or rather, a paradigm for worship and formation is needed. It should even be reflected in the language we use in Asia, in our worship and information. It must be creative, inclusive, and bridge-building. As we were told in Bandung, it should be a new way of being the Church, not just putting new wine in old wineskins, or it will burst. It should be a new way of being the Church.

In Chiang Mai, during the Asian Mission Congress, we were told that as Asians, we are storytellers. We like to share the story of Jesus, and Mongolia took it further by suggesting that we whisper the gospel to everyone in Asia. We are not here in Asia to boast or dominate.

So, I propose a paradigm for formation. In the past, we have taken pride, and rightfully so, in being a Church of clergy, religious, and laity. But I suggest that we go back to our roots, our scriptural roots, and recognize that we are a Church of Apostles. I am aware that I am primarily speaking to the successors of the Apostles gathered here. As successors of the Apostles, we must hold the primacy of love and truth. As Saint Edith Stein said, love and truth, one without the other, is destructive. We must also hold the primacy of unity and continuity, a unity based on the continuation of the mission entrusted by the Father and the Son primarily to the Holy Spirit and through the Holy Spirit to all of us.

As a substitute for self-absorption, self-indulgence, or self-preservation, we must embrace the way of kenosis. We are primarily a Church of disciples, and the primary sacrament is not the priesthood or

“We are primarily a Church of disciples, and the primary sacrament is not the priesthood or marriage, but discipleship.”

marriage, but discipleship. We need clergy who are disciples, consecrated men and women who are disciples, and laity who are disciples. The primary mission of disciples, especially our lay brothers and sisters, is

in the world. While ministry within the Church is necessary, the primary mission of all the baptized is to be witnesses in the world, in society, even on the way to work, as the House Speaker mentioned.

Lastly, we must be a Church of the people of God, what Pope Francis calls “Fratelli tutti” (All Brothers and Sisters). I would like to conclude with two further considerations: that we move from membership to discipleship, and that the unity we speak of is based on the continuity of the mission entrusted to the Apostles and disciples, under the lordship of the Holy Spirit.

But let’s not forget that this mission is primarily entrusted by the Father and the Son to the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the Holy Spirit will succeed in the mission entrusted to Him by the Father and the Son. Pope Francis and all of us are called to cooperate with the Holy Spirit. At this point, as we are midway through our conference, I ask that we remain faithful to the

Holy Spirit by remaining faithful to the process that has been chartered for us by Cardinal Charles Beau and his entire team. Let us be faithful to the process and, by being faithful to the process, be faithful to the Holy Spirit.

Maybe in Asia, we need to move from a narrow focus on Christology and the christological debates of the first five centuries. Christ, Jesus Christ, did not bring us to Himself and stop there. Beyond Himself, He led us into the mystery of the Trinity. Therefore, we must gently move from Christology to the fullness of God as a community of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Finally, I suggest that Bandung gave us a triple dialogue: a dialogue with the poor, a dialogue with religions, and a dialogue with

“**... we must gently move from Christology to the fullness of God as a community of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.**”

culture. In addition to these dialogues, especially in Asia, we need to ignite a dialogue of joy, the joy of the Gospel as Pope Francis calls it. We also need a dialogue of mercy, the mercy of the Father and Jesus Christ. And we need a dialogue of hope, a hope generated by the Spirit. In 2025, the Jubilee year of Hope is approaching.

As we look to the future, there may be various crises awaiting us. It could be a financial crisis, a man-made tragedy, a natural disaster, or another lurking virus. Whatever it may be, let us play our role and provide the leadership that Asia and the people of Asia, as well as our churches in Asia, are looking for from us.

Thank you, and God bless.

Thank you, Bishop, for your presentation and your proposal for the new paradigm of the Church that should be creative, inclusive, and bridge-building. Thank you very much.

Let us now take two minutes of silence for prayer.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end.

I say to Bishop Francis that the right of tiring and resting is in heaven. Now is still the time for questions and answers. We have around 10 minutes remaining, so please feel free to intervene, express comments, or ask questions regarding the dialogue of joy and the dialogue of hope that Bishop from Penang mentioned before.

I think this is a main role that we can offer to the world because Jesus, as he preached the Gospel, brought good news to the people. Thank you for mentioning this aspect of our faith. I want to underline the joy of the Gospel and the dialogue of joy and hope that we bring. Thank you.

I just wanted to share the need for catechesis, especially through digital means, which was emphasized by our young friend from Mumbai. Integrating digital ways of communicating the message of Christ and His love to our children and youth is one of the main tasks for bishops and priests in the future. It requires working with them in character formation, discussing with them, and adopting their ways of communication for catechesis. This is an important field that our young friend is calling us to engage in. Thank you very much.

I really want to appreciate the various inputs, especially what Bishop Sebastian said about the ecclesiology of discipleship. The terminology of clergy, religious, and laity somehow separates us, but the ecclesiology of discipleship, where all of us are disciples who are baptized and sent with different functions in the Church, is something I truly appreciate. Thank you, bishops.

All the talks this morning were enlightening, helpful, and thought-provoking. We need to enter the digital world more and more in order

“ **Integrating digital ways of communicating the message of Christ and His love to our children and youth is one of the main tasks for bishops and priests in the future. It requires working with them in character formation, discussing with them, and adopting their ways of communication for catechesis.** ”

to make ourselves present in Asia and influence it. The worship in spirit and truth, though an old idea from the Gospel, can be a powerful means to engage in inter-religious dialogue in Asia. We can go beyond our traditional ways and bring worship, joy, and hope to Asia. Thank you very much.

I am from the Philippines, Bishop Colin from the Diocese of Kidapawan in Mindanao. My point is not a question, but rather a comment regarding the future of the Church in terms of its evangelization.

Really, we have to admit and seriously consider entering the digital world for evangelization. In America and many parts of the world, it has proven to be very effective. Here in Asia, we have Radio Veritas Asia. My point is, can we come up with a resolution or agreement to develop a Radio Veritas Asia that is as effective and aggressive as EWTN? I

“Really, we have to admit and seriously consider entering the digital world for evangelization.”

learned that Bishop Raymond from Sri Lanka will become the next head of Radio Veritas, and I believe he will need all our support. Let's make a commitment and resolution to support and endorse Radio Veritas Asia in their endeavor to spread the word of God all over Asia through digital means.

Thank you, thank you. Now, before we move on to the break, let's hear the final two comments.

Thank you for giving me the chance to speak. From the last presentation, His Excellency presented many good points. One important point for me is the dialogue of cultures. He mentioned the people of God and how many times in the church, we use castes and different vocabularies that create divisions. I would like to abolish these words and use the term "people of God" instead. This will help us dignify people and bring them to the same dignity. It is especially useful in Asian countries like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan. I strongly propose abolishing these terminologies and vocabularies and using "people of God" instead.

Thank you. Thank you, please, Cardinal.

I don't want to take too long, but I want to support Bishop Sebastian. All the presentations this morning have been summarized with the big challenge that he highlighted. Going back to the Gospel, we have theological jargon and trivial talks, but if Asia wants to make a specific contribution, we need a paradigm shift. Emphasizing missionary discipleship and walking with the people of God are the parameters for us to truly follow the Gospel of Jesus. Thank you.

So, once again, on behalf of all of us here, I want to thank all our speakers this morning. We appreciate your enriching and precious presentations, your thoughts, and your insights. Let's give them a big round of applause.

Thank you, thank you. Now, we will proceed to the break.





The Family: The Foundation for the Church in Asia Mr & Mrs Daniel and Shelley Ee

Mr & Mrs Daniel and Shelley Ee, members of the Worldwide Marriage Encounter Leadership Team and the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life, speaking about the values of family life, its challenges, and the married couple as the heart of the family, proposed steps to improve the pastoral care of families; including enhancing formation and training, structural changes that allow couples to serve together, and activities that celebrate and enhance family life.

Now we will move to the next topic: the focus of the next topic will be about the family, the challenges of the family today, and how the church in Asia can respond creatively for the pastoral care of families. Our office speakers would be Mr. and Mrs. Daniel and Sally, members of the worldwide Marriage Encounter Leadership Team and members of the Discovery for Lady Family and Life. They will speak for around 20 minutes. Please, good afternoon Cardinals, bishops, priests, religious brothers and sisters in Christ. Thank you for inviting us to speak on the family, the foundation of the church, the challenges of the family today, and how can the church in Asia respond creatively for the pastoral care of families.

We should make it clear that we are speaking in our own capacity as a married couple and not formally on behalf of the Dicastery for Laity, Family, and Life. First, let us do a shared screen. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the family is the original cell of social life. It is the natural society in which husband and wife are called to give themselves in love and in the gift of life. The family is the community in which from childhood one can learn moral values, begin to honor God, and make good use of freedom. Family life is an initiation into life in society.

Each of us belongs to a family where parents, siblings, grandparents, and extended family are present. In our family, we are either in relationship or out of relationship with each other. And we believe that for couples to guide and mature their children, they first need to be growing in their own spousal and spiritual life. In the family, we learn to share, to be compassionate, generous, to love the other even when he or she is not lovable. This call to love is just like how we are abundantly loved by God even when we do not deserve His love, when we stray, when we forget Him, when we sin.

Parents are the principal and first educators of their children. In this sense, the fundamental tasks of marriage and family are to be at the service of life, and the home is the first school

of Christian Life and a school for human enrichment. Here in the family, one learns endurance, the joy of work, fraternal love, generosity, even repeated forgiveness, and above all, Divine Worship in prayer and the offering of one's life.

“The family is the community in which from childhood one can learn moral values, begin to honor God, and make good use of freedom. Family life is an initiation into life in society.”

When the family, comprising parents, children, and grandparents, is functioning well, all will be in relationship. Love flows through this relationship, and the family will invariably share themselves with others, serving others in need. I know of this man who was fostered to a Muslim family soon after he was born. His mom had nine other children before him, and she was too ill after giving birth to him to care for him. He was baptized but not raised a Catholic.

At 30 plus years old, he met a Catholic lady who was 13 years his junior, and they got married. Before marriage, she wanted proof that he was not a Muslim, so she asked him to eat a plate of rice noodles with eggs and pork lard. His wife was baptized at 15 years with her mother and grandmother, and they received home catechism given by missionary priests. The man and the lady were married in a nice chapel, and he agreed to go to church with her weekly.

Now they had their fair share of ups and downs. They faced poverty; he was unemployed for some years and took up drinking in the early years of marriage.

Later, he got into debts gambling, but his wife's faith in God and Mother Mary's intervention gave her strength to persevere the hardships, and together they raised five children on his small income, which meant later that she had to go and work as a house help. Slowly, he became more prayerful, and towards the last years of his life when he was too big to go to church, he prayed the rosary with her daily, and a neighbor brought Holy Communion to him. He died at 88 years old after 55 years of marriage. Yes, that is the man. He is my father, and the lady is my mom. And the story of faith and love, of giving to each other, has benefited all of us, their children and grandchildren.

So, like Daniel said, when a family functions well, love will flow through the ups and downs of life. On the other hand, when families are dysfunctional, relationships get fractured, and it becomes very difficult for such families to reach out to others to serve. So, it is vital to help families be in a relationship. At the heart of the family is the married couple. We will suggest later about ways that, as a church, we can help to form, enhance, and strengthen the marital relationship. Those whose relationships are troubled will also need to be helped.

So, what are the challenges of the family today? We know that Asia is not a homogeneous continent. There is a diversity of cultures, religions, languages, cuisines. But a big positive is that Asian societies are centered on the family, where generally the interests of the family, community, and society are placed above the interest of each individual, and that is a strength that must be preserved and strengthened. So, we

are some leaders in our community, and they cited some observations and challenges of families in their countries today.

They spoke about financial security, poverty, wars and conflicts, natural disasters, decline in family values, migration where families live apart long distances, addictions, loneliness, work-life balance, mental health issues, and academic stress. Even more worrying is the creeping in of individualism, especially through mass media and social media, the “what’s in it for me” attitude. Over time, this attitude, aggravated by the other challenges, will break up families and lead to the loss of precious life-giving relationships.

So, how can the church in Asia respond creatively for the pastoral care of families? We would suggest three categories of actions. One is formation and training. Enhance the formation of clergy, religious, and lay volunteers in answering the pastoral needs of the people. Provide training programs for them to acquire the skills of listening, to have empathy, skills of dialogue, so as to be better able to serve families. Priests, religious, and lay volunteers are formed in their family homes. They need to have good spiritual and psychological well-being, and some may have come from dysfunctional homes and need healing during their seminary, religious formation, and lay volunteer training.

For pre-marriage formation, have well-developed programs that will help the young couples to understand themselves and each other and prepare themselves for the realities of family life. Form them to place God at the center and use experienced and well-functioning married couples to present programs to them. We already have programs like Catholic Engaged Encounter, Marriage Preparation Course, Couple Mentorship Journey, and the key is to ensure that the programs are effective and relevant to society. Recently, the Dicastery for Laity, Family, and Life has just issued guidelines to the local churches for the introduction of a catechumenate for married life.

Strengthen marriages through experiential programs to enhance intimacy, learning to communicate effectively, learning to forgive, and practice acceptance. These programs have to be Christ-centered to be effective. We ourselves benefited immensely from attending the Marriage

Encounter weekend in our early years of marriage and have been serving as presenters since 1990.

The church will also need to support and journey with couples in troubled marriages. There are programs that are designed specifically to address such needs. There are already pre-marriage and post-marriage programs available in various countries in Asia. We suggest there could be a sharing of resources among the countries, and FABC could act as a platform to share resources and programs. Have a database of the programs offered, what their focus areas are, which countries they are presented in, and who are the leadership couples, priests, and religious. Provide their contact details and the languages that they are used. Such a platform and database can help to speed up the work of strengthening marriages and families across Asia.

We could use technology to strengthen relationships, creating chat groups, email groups to ensure constant, sustained, and meaningful connections and communications among small groups of married couples who might have journeyed in the same program together. Encourage and train more laborers for the vineyard, lay and clergy, in the pastoral care of the vulnerable, especially the poor and marginalized.

“ Encourage and train more laborers for the vineyard, lay and clergy, in the pastoral care of the vulnerable, especially the poor and marginalized. ”

the vulnerable, especially the poor and marginalized. Helping them not only in their physical needs but also to help enhance spousal and family relationships. The church can work with like-minded NGOs to develop sustainable livelihood programs for the poor. When

their basic physical needs are met, it will be easier for them to think of strengthening their spousal, family, and spiritual life. Focus on sustaining family connections for the spouses who live apart in different countries because of employment reasons. Activities, retreats, formations can be organized in churches that will help these spouses to sustain their spousal and family relationships.

Deepen spiritual life through retreats for individuals, for couples, for families, for seniors. This needs to continue and be made relevant to the needs of the people. For example, in Singapore, many Catholics

and non-Catholics have attended the Conversion Experience Retreat, a group-based retreat conducted by Archbishop Cardinal William Goh. At the same time, many people have gone to the Seven Fountains in Chiang Mai, Thailand, for silent retreats. Two different modes of retreat with the same spiritual aim of connecting with God. The key is to feed the people spiritually through ways that will speak to them at a particular stage of their lives.

The next body of actions is structural changes. So couples, not as two separate individuals. Currently, most Church organizations do not provide for this, and what they have is they are expected to serve as two separate people, and in some situations, they are given that there's a men's wing and a women's wing, so they serve separately. When we say that couples should serve as a couple, the two of them will have only one vote so that they will be on the same level as individuals serving on their own. This will be a very powerful signal to the parish of what we mean when we say marriage is a sacrament. They are no longer two but become one. They will love and serve each other and other people as how God loves. What a powerful testimony of God's love in action. Couples become walking, talking sacraments.

There are movements that already have this in practice, like Catholic Engaged Encounter and Retrouvaille. In fact, these movements have gone a step further by having married couples and priests serve together as a unit in leadership. The priest is not a spiritual director only but a partner in the three-person relationship and leadership, called aptly the ecclesial team. The priest living the sacrament of holy orders and the couple the sacrament of holy matrimony become complementary and core responsible for the movement. The three become partners and close friends over time, sharing meals, dialoguing with one another regularly. We ourselves continue to dialogue with the Filipino priest in Dumaguete whom we had served and worked with as an ecclesial team from 2011 to 2019.

“**The priest living the sacrament of holy orders and the couple the sacrament of holy matrimony become complementary and core responsible for the movement.**”

In March 2014, Pope Francis emphasized that marriage and holy orders constitute two great paths by which Christians can make their life a gift of love after the example of Saint Paul and his friends Aquila and Priscilla and thus cooperate in the building up of the church. A retired bishop in the U.S., Bishop Bill Skilstadt, who was once the former president of the USCCB and served in the North American ecclesial team of Marriage Encounter, used to say that this way of the two sacraments working together is exactly how the church should be functioning. It encourages the laity to serve with passion and automatically encourages much female participation as men.

It breaks down clericalism, which Pope Francis has spoken out against throughout his papacy. Make Masses family-friendly, especially for children and teens. Have uplifting hymns and homilies. Create rooms to accommodate babies, but don't call it a cry room, as it gives a negative connotation. Involve the youth in parish activities. Train and involve young electors, teenagers, and young adults in leadership roles. Keep the ministry of altar service alive and strong among young children and teens.

Renew family traditions, cultures, and values. Prepare for Sunday, Easter, and Christmas with family projects. Reclaim the dinner table without smartphones for engaged conversations. Seek forgiveness in front of children as a teaching moment. Provide interesting activities to strengthen family traditions, such as movie nights, parents and children afternoon bonding sessions, and celebrating milestone wedding anniversaries in Sunday Masses. Pair seniors with young people to tap into wisdom and knowledge sharing. Be innovative in evangelizing, starting small but dreaming big.

Accompany and inspire small cells through concrete acts of love. Encourage parents to be educators of the young on matters like marriage and vocation. Conduct remote preparation for young children by sharing wedding photographs and conversations about the beauty of marriage. Dioceses and parishes have the opportunity to conduct programs and

provide activities to renew and strengthen couple and family life. Be creative and answer the needs of the people.

In conclusion, the presentation hopes to deepen and widen the discussion and consideration by dioceses in Asia regarding marriage and family life. With increasing challenges, marriage and family life are existential issues for both the church and society. Devoting efforts to pastoral care in these areas will lead to a fully alive and vibrant church. The presentation ends with the Pope's mandate to all families at the World Meeting of Families to be the seat of a more fraternal world, welcoming faces of the church, and always praying. Thank you for your kind attention.

Thank you very much, Mr. and Mrs. Danielle and Sally, for your interesting presentation and for reminding us of the importance of the family as the cell of social life and the foundation of the church. We appreciate your insights into the challenges that families are facing today and your detailed proposals and suggestions for possible responses for the pastoral care of families. Thank you once again.

“Be creative and answer the needs of the people.”

Now, I would like to invite our next speakers, Michael and Lucia Ahara Sukawa. They are the National Presidents of the Christian Family Movement in Thailand, and they will also speak for around 20 minutes. But before that, I apologize, let us take two minutes of silent prayer.

Glory to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. Amen.





Revitalizing the Life of the Church - Digital Ministry Mr Alexander Lopez

Mr Alexander Lopez, Regional Manager of the Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN), explained how using technology has become the norm, and questioned whether the Church was subject to censorship, manipulation, and big tech companies controlling the narrative. Advocating for the need to build and operate secure platforms for the Church, Mr Lopez addressed the gathered representatives, saying, 'You are the influencers. You can provide real answers, not promises.'

Our second speaker will be Mr. Alexander Lopez, the regional manager of the external World Television Network (EWTN). He will speak for 10 to 13 minutes.

Please, Mr. Alexander, hello and good morning Reverend fathers, your Excellency, your eminences, and everyone participating in this morning session. Thank you for allowing me to be a part of FABC 50 celebration and, of course, congratulations to everyone.

I'm delighted to share some inputs on revitalizing the life of the church, especially on the aspect of digital ministry. As we all know, the

church has been pushed to go digital, to use online platforms brought about by the pandemic. Schools, churches, offices had to adopt and be familiar with online technology.

With these digital services available during this time, we were able to continue operating and reaching out to our fellow brothers and sisters. Online streaming, online masses, online rosary, online adoration, and devotion became a big part of our lives nowadays. And with 2.2 billion online users in Asia alone and 91% on mobile devices, the church was able to continue reaching out to people despite the pandemic challenges.

And I think it would continue to use digital technology given we are also now facing an economic situation. We all know that streaming and posting content on platforms have become normal. We have what we call the big tech companies. Social media has become a normal thing that we use in our daily lives - Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, YouTube - and we have those influencers.

And we all know that these platforms, owned by these big tech companies, are, of course, driven by advertising. It is their business model. And, of course, since they own it, they also set the rules. In technical terms, it's called an algorithm. But, you know, in layman's terms, it's like a house. I own my house; I set my rules. And when I come into a country, they have certain laws. In the platforms, they have what they call algorithms - rules that users should follow.

Now, I cannot help but wonder, of course, sometimes I ask, being also in the development industry, since these big tech platforms own and operate their platforms and they set their rules and algorithms, do they share the same values as ours? Do they have the same values as the Catholic Church and the teachings of the Catholic Church? Are they pro-God, pro-life, pro-family, pro-marriage?

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These are the questions that I always try to ask people who run these big tech platforms. Definitely, they can say, “This is right, this is

wrong, this is my rules," because they control everything - algorithms, what they call artificial intelligence, machine learning that runs that they have placed in it because, understandably, they own it.

But I cannot help but wonder also, if they don't have the same values as the Catholic Church, can they suspend your account? Can they censor your content? Can they limit your reach? Can they manipulate the likes, the dislikes, the sad, the angry emojis?

I mean, can they cancel? Cancel culture is being used daily now. And, of course, can they control the narrative to fit their agenda? Let's say I'm pro-life and I have a pro-life page on Facebook. Can they put my content on pro-choice pages, and so, therefore, I would receive dislikes, angry emojis? They can control the narrative.

And so, since they can manipulate, they can produce fake news, create trolls and bots, and use it to their advantage. I think this is the scary part as well of the big tech companies if they don't share the same values that we have in the Catholic Church.

“I think this is the scary part as well of the big tech companies if they don't share the same values that we have in the Catholic Church.”

So, what is the remedy? There is always a solution. We can build and operate our own platforms. For me personally and my team, we are tasked in EWTN Asia Pacific to build platforms from the ground up so that we can set the algorithms, so we can control at least what is happening in there. We have, let's say, Netflix. We now have EWTN Flix available also. We're using the virtual environment platform where we can freely express our Catholic views without being restricted or censored by anyone. And we can agree to disagree without canceling each other. I think it is important.

We believe that dialogue is important, right? I mean, the Catholic Church is rich in talents and resources, especially in building platforms, especially in content. Your Eminence, your Excellencies, reverent fathers, you are the influencers. You have followers. But really, more importantly, the Catholic Church provides answers, not promises. You bring answers, not promises. The Catholic Church provides answers, not promises.

You know when a person is faced with personal issues like addiction, alcoholism, abortion, unwanted pregnancy, people are looking for real answers. I remember when I was 20 years ago, I had cancer, my wife was pregnant. I was looking for real answers. I actually promised God that if you keep me alive, I will serve the church. I found answers in the church, found answers in the Eucharist, in the adoration, in the rosary. The church provides real answers, and these answers should not be suppressed, censored, limited, canceled by a simple platform based on their algorithm. But of course, it is still important.

“The church provides real answers, and these answers should not be suppressed, censored, limited, canceled by a simple platform based on their algorithm.”

Now, aside from having our own platforms, we also need to produce compelling content or compelling stories because, in the digital age, the story is the strategy. The story is the strategy. Compelling stories can stretch the fast-decreasing attention span. I think it's only now three seconds. You know, because when you browse into Facebook or you can easily just go from one content to another content if it is not compelling to you.

And so, it is still important that we develop compelling stories so that we can cut through the noise surrounding today's digital environment. And with that, I think the next speaker would talk about content creation for the church.

Again, thank you so much, and I hope I was able to share some of my insights, some of my recommendations, and solutions for the digital ministry of the Catholic Church. Thank you again, and God bless.



Revitalizing the Life of the Church - Formation

Prof. Pablito Baybado Jr

I belong to the Mother of Mercy Quasi Parish in the town of Marilao, the Diocese of Malolos, Bulacan. The parish is situated along the way to Meycuayan, an industrial city with industrial plants and factories. Everyday, this road is teeming with hundreds of motorcycle riders, both male and female, on their way to work. It's a very busy road. That is why it is important that I go earlier for 15 minutes than usual. Because traffic gets congested in front of the church. Not because of anything, but due primarily to all the motorcycles stopping to pray at the Our Lady of the Mother of Mercy. After few moments of prayer, then off they go. It is inspiring to witness these throng of riders doing the STOP, PRAY and GO. The same thing happens again when they come home in the afternoon. Fr. Edward Pecson, our parish priest, intimated that, so far, this practice has been one of the best devotional practices that has formed and deepened the faith of his parishioners.

From the point of view of constructivism, the leading and most influential theory of education today, it can be said that the STOP, PRAY & GO dynamics is the very structure that facilitates the construction of

a deeper meaning of the Christian faith. Constructivism is an important learning theory, which is based on the idea that people actively construct or make their own knowledge, and that reality is determined by your experience as a learner. In short, it is a theory that places so much value to human experience and encounter as a way of constructing meaning, forming good values, and moral conviction. In my view, the significance of constructivism is allowing the learner, and in this case, the faithful for that matter, to discover meaning through the interaction within the given landscape. Here, the landscape provides the learner the actual experience of interaction, trial and error, and other forms of experiences to arrive at a particular meaningful understanding of reality.

This resonates, what Pope Francis in a number of occasions, would call the culture of encounter. In his morning meditation in the Chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae, Pope Francis invites us to work for “the culture of encounter”, in a simple way, “as Jesus did”: not just by seeing; not just hearing, but listening; not just passing people by, but stopping with them; not just saying “what a shame, poor people,” but allowing yourself to be moved with compassion’ “and then to draw near, to touch and to say: ‘do not weep’ and give at least a drop of life.” (Pope Francis, For a Culture of Encounter, Sept 13, 2016)

The Stop, Pray and Go dynamics is the experience at the corner of the Church in front of Our Lady of the Mother of Mercy that indicates the relation of the Church, the factory (work) and home that gives life to the motorcycle driver. It is at this juncture that the home and the work are weaved into a moment of prayer. What needs to be emphasized here, in my view, is the importance of creating a landscape where the Church, in a sense our Christian faith, become the uniting factor of the many aspects of our daily endeavors. The landscape that combines the work, Home, and Road, which gravitates towards the Church during the Stop, Pray and Go, forms the person to deepen his love for his family by working harder and more diligently.

Formation as landscape/Garden: Seeds just don't grow well anywhere. They need a good soil and other elements to bloom into a hundred flowers and bear fruits. Faith formation, then, is the challenge of designing and redesigning existing structures and programs to facilitate

the encounter, create an experience, for which the seed of faith gradually but steadily grows into maturity.

I have four kids, and due to the demand of work, they together with my wife would consider me as an absentee father. It is not that I wanted to be an absentee, but we live in an economic and social structure that force both parents to leave home before sunrise and return when kids are already sleeping soundly. In all honesty, the pandemic has been somehow a blessing because we are able to recover what we lost for the longest time: eating together, praying together, watching and playing together, and enjoying the company of one another.

Thus, if there is any lesson that we can learn from the pandemic, it is precisely the value of the family, with parents having quality time with their children as the best approach to faith formation.

I think that our work on faith formation demands the Church to challenge these social, cultural, political, and economic structures that irritates and destroys relation within families. The Church should advocate, at various levels, for a new social structure that places the integral unity of the family as the highest value.

Moreover, it is also important for me that we rethink the family-parish relation as we return to our pre-pandemic mobility. We may want

“the pandemic has been somehow a blessing because we are able to recover what we lost for the longest time: eating together, praying together, watching and playing together, and enjoying the company of one another.”

to open and redesign our parishes and institutional spaces for families to come for a STOP PRAY and GO experience in the form of picnics, sports, or other forms of cultural encounters, especially for the poor and the marginalized. Redesigning parish as a venue for family encounters is a must to

counter the increasing mall-culture and secularism that continues to disrupt family relations.

Gardener/Landscaper/Architect - Faith formation seen this way requires formators more like gardeners, designers and engineers. There should be a shift in the attitude of faith formation from knowledge building towards building-relationship. In the words of Abp Julian Leow Beng Kim, Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur Malaysia, the most important aspect of faith formation is building relationship that will go for the next 10, 20, 30 years, or simply a life time friendship in various forms. It is inspiring to note, for example that the youth group that he has started 20 years ago remain his friends until today. Such friendship continues to nurture each one to grow in holiness, while it bears fruits in their respective works and ministries. A formator who can be the parish priest, the bishop, the father, the mother, the teacher, the catechist, the manager must be equipped with that strong sense of sensitivity to the situation and present realities, and with the given resources he has in a particular situation and context, creatively design the parish, the diocese, the home, the working environment into a landscape where everyone is both welcome, and that through its elements and their interconnectivity, provides an experience of growing in holiness.

Other oriented - Micco, my second child, has been the most exploratory among my kids. He went to three schools to finish his junior high school. I am not sure whether he is a typical boy, but his world was beyond imagination during his highschool days that practically made me and my wife regular visitors at the principal's office. At a certain point, I said it is enough. Emie, my wife, however, never gave up. She has persistently embraced micco, and even literally, run after him in those days. Without her motherly care, an almost irrational and unbelievable care to an erring wild child, Micco could not have finished his degree and may not be the person he is today.

“Faith formation should have the character of a mother.”

Faith formation should have the character of a mother. Loving the child at all cost is what is most important, even defying gravity. But such love is every day translated to creatively thinking what else can she do, what more can she do, where else can he bring Micco to change his ways, and all sorts of wanderings and problems. And in all this, her prayers must have been her greatest companion more than me in those trying

moments.

Bishop Antonius Subianto Bunjamin, OSC, Bishop Chair of OEFF, reminded me that accompaniment is an essential element in faith formation. Accompaniment is not the construction of a subject but a construction of a social condition for subjects to shine and discover their God-given talents. The art of accompaniment as a form of faith formation, is therefore allowing ourselves to become instruments of God, as a Church in various levels and degrees, for the transformation of individuals and families as image and likeness of God to become light to others and at the service of a multi-cultural and multi-religious societies.

In closing, STOP, Pray and Go emphasizes the primacy of experience over rationality as the very landscape of designing our faith formation.

Thank you very much.

I heard His Eminence Cardinal Goh last Sunday saying in his homily, "change does not happen overnight." A faith formation that attempts to transform individuals overnight will do more harm than good.

Faith formation is the art of accompaniment.

The pandemic has forced us to be together at home and when knowledge and appreciation of the faith is acquired through the culture of encounter, then it matures into a Christian conviction. This means that we need to transform our homes, our parishes, small Christian communities in landscape that facilitates encounter between and among the members, and has the capacity to welcome those from the outside. One of the things that I have been thinking and dreaming about as a lay person is to transform our parishes as picnic grounds, rest and recreation of families.

Formators as Gardeners:

In a way, the challenge of faith formation is the need of landscapes for the faithful to experience and discover the joy and love of Christ. In this landscape, we need a landscaper, a gardener. This means that pastors and lay leaders, including parents must continually and creatively



Amoris Laetitia - A Call to Love Bishop John Baptist Lee

Dear eminences, your excellencies, reverend fathers, sisters, and brothers, good afternoon. Before I begin, I would like to express my gratitude to Mrs. Claire for preparing this paper and for sharing a story about myself in this FABC. It was my first sharing in FABC, and after that, a bishop approached me, saying, "John, what you said, I cannot understand, but I read it, it's okay." That's why I will display the text on the screen so that you can read along. Let me begin.

"Amoris Laetitia," the exhortation on the joy of love and the beauty of family life, was promulgated in 2016. Since then, Pope Francis has been favoring and promoting a new pastoral approach to the family situation through various occasions, particularly during the Year of Amoris Laetitia and the recent 10th World Meeting of Families in Rome, which I personally attended. I want to take this opportunity to share with you the experience and insights on how this new pastoral approach to family may be firmly established and sustained.

It is particularly important to address the contemporary family situation in Taiwan and many Asian countries. We are witnessing a

declining population with low fertility rates and moral values under formation, facing challenges, including the values upheld by Christian marriage. Additionally, there are challenges such as separation and great suffering among families brought upon by the recent pandemic.

Despite these weaknesses, the family can become a light in the darkness of the world. The ultimate goals of “Amoris Laetitia,” as the teacher and defender of the liberty of the family and life, are rightly stated as five goals of celebrating the Year of Amoris Laetitia. Based on my pastoral experience, I will reference and evaluate them in three categories as follows:

First, we need to increase the exposure of “Amoris Laetitia” to bring more people to read and be touched by its teachings. Only families that discover and experience both the joy of having a gift and of being a gift for the Church and society can become a light in the darkness of the world. This light is especially needed in Asia today.

Second, pastors need to work with families, and families must be joined together and cultivate a strong sense of co-responsibility among the different vocations in the Church.

Third, the Church needs to provide resources to enable families to become active agents of the family apostolate, making efforts

“Only families that discover and experience both the joy of having a gift and of being a gift for the Church and society can become a light in the darkness of the world.”

at evangelization and catechesis inside the family. This effort needs to include married couples, children, young people, the elderly, and all situations of family fecundity.

Amidst the contemporary challenges faced by families, especially those experiencing marital breakdowns and other chaotic and challenging situations in an ever-changing society, the discovery of the laity, family, and life has crafted a way of working with families.

To join and work with families inspired by “Amoris Laetitia,” it is essential not to be random. I will share pastoral insights observed from

particular implementations in Taiwan. What I want to highlight is how we may build and sustain the companion community that Pope Francis wants to see in our Church. This community includes all stages of the sacramental journey: the time of preparation for marriage, its celebration, and the years that follow, especially during moments of crisis and discouragement for spouses.

To achieve this, we may wonder who belongs to the companion community. Inspired by the theme of the 10th World Meeting of Families, the domestic Church and city can and must be brought into the presence of the companion community. To uphold the community of communities, we, the bishops, together with parish priests and many couples, should actively participate in the marriage program.

It is important for parish priests to have a retreat and appoint themselves, especially in comforting the contemporary challenges and providing care for the youth, marriage, and the family. The help of marriage couples participating in such programs will effectively show real family accompaniment.

The need for a good premarital handbook is of paramount importance, akin to a vaccine that significantly reduces the risk of marriage breakdown. The program should enable engaged couples to cope with modern challenges, develop good communication skills, manage finances, prepare for children, have a common spiritual life, etc. Frequent programs involving diverse groups of couples are necessary to serve this purpose.

Furthermore, we must not overlook the positive feedback loop created here. Those who attend primary programs are appropriate candidates to become future components or benefactors.

Listening is a cultural element of accompaniment, especially in our busy times and during the current pandemic. Listening should be creative, as demonstrated in the Archdiocese of Taiwan, which utilizes volunteer operators in the Family Hotline to counsel those in need through phone calls or other social networking platforms.

Accompanying families is not only a pastoral urgency but also a profound spiritual experience. Pope Francis reminds us that the Church's task is like a field hospital, reaching out to everyone without frontiers to help each person find their proper way of participating in the ecclesial community, experiencing unconditional love and mercy.

Complementing our loved ones with the eyes of God and seeing Christ in them is a journey we must all take. Families must constantly strive for something greater and never lose heart due to their limitations, seeking the fullness of love and communion with God that lies before us.

The challenge of Christian marriage is real and ever-changing. Satan, sin, and adversity continually invite us to respond. Parish pastors and families need to join and grow together. Premarital programs should be taken with utmost seriousness, laying a strong foundation. The way forward for laity, family, and life is a response to Pope Francis' desire for a new path in the preparation for the sacrament of marriage, as published in the handbook titled "Coming, I tell us for marriage life." It encompasses all stages of the sacramental journey, from preparation to celebration and the years that follow.

This journey will be a welcoming path when there is permanent accompaniment, recognizing that the journey of marriage and family is ongoing, not confined to the wedding day but continually renewed with a Christian identity. This applies to priests and religious, and they too require accompaniment.

As we move forward, we must respond to Pope Francis' call for a new path in preparing for marriage. Let us work along the path of families and be true companions to them. Thank you, everybody.

Thank you very much, Bishop John, for your presentation about "Amoris Laetitia," and for sharing your pastoral insights based on your observations in Taiwan. Please come again to the stage to receive the memento.

Let us now take two minutes of silent prayer. Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, so now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.



The Family and the Church in Asia **Mr Michael Phichit and Mrs Lucia Achara Sukeewat**

Mr. Michael Phichit and Mrs Lucia Achara Sukeewat, National Presidents of Christian Family Movement in Thailand, speaking about the many challenges families face, the social biases, the degradation of relationships between generations, and the myriad challenges of financial insecurity, stressed the importance of the Church recognising the interconnect between these challenges, and added 'as a Church and family, we have to admit that we need healing, before we can improve'.

I am Michael, and this is the best part of me, Lucia, my wife. We are part of CFM - President and Vice President of CFM Asia Continental in Thailand.

When it comes to family challenges, decision-making is a crucial aspect. For the simple and ordinary decisions, my wife takes care of them, while I handle the more significant and vital ones, like matters related to currency exchange rates or global issues.

Over the past 20 years, we have encountered numerous challenges while working for families. One concerning issue we've noticed is the increasing exposure of young people to harmful content online, such as the disturbing trend of girls selling their virginity. We wonder why such

behaviors arise and believe it is essential to educate and guide the youth.

In our region, there are two types of families - those in rural areas with access to land and those who move to cities for work. However, the urban families, especially those from lower-income backgrounds, face numerous struggles. They often lack access to quality education, leading to limited job opportunities and financial hardships.

The gap between parents and children grows wider, as economic constraints force parents to work long hours, leaving kids with grandparents. The lack of quality education and guidance leaves children vulnerable to the negative influences of the media, leading some into substance abuse, violence, and other destructive behaviors.

As a Catholic family movement, we strive to address these challenges. We encourage parents to work from home when possible and support supplemental occupations, like raising cattle or growing crops, to foster stronger family bonds. Love and genuine care from parents are irreplaceable, and it is crucial to nurture healthier family environments.

“Love and genuine care from parents are irreplaceable, and it is crucial to nurture healthier family environments.”

We acknowledge that no family is perfect, and the family structure in Asia needs healing and development. Financial difficulties often hinder families from fully embracing their faith, as they struggle to make ends meet. As CFM, we are honored to share our experiences and call for prayers and support to strengthen families in Asia.

Let us remember the families in Asia in our prayers, asking for God's grace and blessings. Thank you for listening.

Now, Cardinal Green Shark will offer his response, and let us take a moment of silent prayer.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

Amen.



Amoris Laetitia - A Call to Love Fr Vimal Tirimana

Fr Vimal Tirimanna CSsR (Sri Lanka), professor at the Accademia Alfonsiana in Rome and member of the Theological Commission of the General Secretariat for the Synod 2021-2023, speaking about how family and marriage have been a great preoccupation of the Church, highlighted the aspects and differences of Amoris Laetitia. Emphasizing the importance of pastoral care for married couples, Fr Tirimanna also illustrated diverse cases of marriage and family as opportunities for witness and formation.

Now I would like to invite Father Female from Sri Lanka as our second speaker. Father Female teaches at the Academia Alphonsiana in Rome and is also a member of the Theological Commission of the General Secretary for the Synod. Father Tirimana, please. Good afternoon, dear bishops and other participants. We heard just now a sort of a succinct presentation of what Amoris Laetitia amounts to. I have been asked by the organizers to give a presentation on some opportunities which the document Amoris Laetitia presents to pastors in the Church. So, I will try to do justice and I am given around 20 minutes to do that. This is the theme

assigned to me: Amoris Laetitia - To Love. But I will concentrate, being at the FABC meeting, more on theory.

How the opportunities unfold in this document? Of course, the document consists of 325 articles. I don't know how I'm going to manage in 20 minutes, but we should, because more important is reflection. And I have tried to order this very short presentation in two main parts, rather three, but the main two parts are: what are the differences that Amoris Laetitia unfolds, especially in its method, and then how these differences present opportunities. In the second part, I will address specific controversial issues like homosexual unions, divorce, and remarriage, etc. I don't need to prolong the introduction because it can be too cumbersome and it should not be longer than the talk.

So, I begin here, dear brothers and sisters. For nearly seven decades, that's nearly 70 years, issues related to both family and marriage have been a great preoccupation for the official Church. It's enough to remember people like Romano Guardini in the 1940s and 50s expressing concern. Then the Second Vatican Council under God made space for one of the things that concerns the modern-day issues, which is marriage and family. Then Saint John Paul II and now Francis speaking about them. Soon after his election in 2013, the Pope, as Bishop Lee said, launched this unprecedented process. We are into synodality at the moment, but I think the process of synodality began with the process for Amoris Laetitia, a two-year process. If we want, we can discuss that during the discussion. And as the peritos for the FABC Bishops, some of you remember how some of the nitty-gritties took place at both the synods. I too remember.

“Amoris Laetitia is different, very different from earlier teachings in the sense that it directly confronts the marital and family problems.”

The climax of that process was, in fact, the document. Now I want to say something which concerns bishops and other pastors like priests, namely, when Pope started that unprecedented process, there were concerns expressed in the secular media. Sometimes, more than the church's official media, secular media tries to say what the church should

say or what the church is saying in their own way. So, there were concerns expressed that this is a ploy, this is a trick by Pope Francis to change the Church's teaching on divorce and remarriage, especially reception of sacraments, or it's a ploy to recognize the so-called homosexual unions. But none of them happened if you open *Amoris Laetitia*. Nowhere is it mentioned.

In fact, indissolubility of marriage is reconfirmed, confirmed, and reconfirmed. The Catholic understanding of marriage as a heterosexual marriage is reconfirmed, and explicitly Pope denies that the church can never recognize so-called homosexual marriages. So, some of the fears were unfounded, unnecessary. Nevertheless, they were there, and that spoiled the final outcome of *Amoris Laetitia* because people were wearing, as I am wearing these glasses, they were wearing glasses of prejudice and reading, in fact,

permit me with all due respect to our Bishops here, at least a couple of bishops

“...it takes the bull by the horns, not of imaginary people, but of real people living out there in the world.”

from Asia, not from Siberia, from Asia, have told me openly during the past years, “Vimal, what is happening? What is happening to our Holy Father? He has changed.” I said, “Have you read the document?” “No, I don't read such documents.” Now, this has happened to me. So, I think we have to be practical at a conference like this. So, I hope I will present some of the important points. *Amoris Laetitia* is different, very different from earlier teachings in the sense that it directly confronts the marital and family problems. As we say in English, it takes the bull by the horns, not of imaginary people, but of real people living out there in the world. We are coming from families, all of us, including the Holy Father. We have our families, we know our families, and our nephews, nieces, and others. What things they go through? It is to address them that *Amoris Laetitia* is written, rather than from an ideal point of view. In doing so, it offers the balm of Mercy. Pope John XXIII, Saint John XXIII, spoke about the balm of Mercy to shattered families and broken marriages. I want to quote here Cardinal Blase Cupich of Chicago in one of his talks in my hearing. I remember him saying, “There has been no change in doctrine in *Amoris Laetitia*,” and I reconfirm it here. If you want, we can discuss during the discussions what is new and revolutionary. Is the way the Church is Church now, dear friends,

this is the line I want to underline. If there is a difference, the difference is ecclesiology. What is the Church now? What do we understand by Church? That's the issue. So, I'm still in the quotation of Cardinal Cupich. The way the Church acts, the way the Church ministers to the people now, the Church is indeed a field hospital, says Cardinal Cupich. Here I notice so many opportunities. In sharp contrast to earlier teachings, *Amoris Laetitia* has stopped lamenting. Many of our earlier teachings, rightly so, they were confined to condemning what was going on in the world, what was going on in the Church. Rightly so, they limited themselves to lamenting. You read most of the earlier official teachings, they are all so upset, and Pope Francis is also very upset, as we see in the second chapter when he talks. But he does not limit himself to condemning, lamenting, but he goes beyond. Neither is satisfied merely by repeating Church's doctrine. Dear friends, I put that Latin phrase repeating ad nauseam, just repeating doctrine. Pope says in number 36, "By repeating our Church doctrine, it

“**What can the Church do in the face of the complicated, complex questions regarding family and marriage today?**”

means nothing." Of course, from the teaching point of view, it's a way of conscientizing, a way of forming consciences, no doubt. But it won't solve the problems. We have to do something. So, I have underlined the idea, participants. The question

asked by *Amoris Laetitia* is, "What can the Church do in the face of the complicated, complex questions regarding family and marriage today?" It reminds that the role of the Church, now here I am a Redemptorist, I'm a son of Saint Alphonsus Maria de Ligouri, the official patron of Catholic patron of moral theology. His point was, he's still the official patron. His point was, the Church's role is to form the consciences of the people. Pope Francis simply repeats that. He has made a methodological change, I think. We have to take this, although we don't have time, be patient, as they say in Italian, "Let's dwell a little bit," because very often, I am a priest now for 35 years, how many times in my preaching, in my ministering, during our Redemptorist missions, I have tried to replace the conscience of the people. I am trying to tell them what they should be. That's not our role. Of course, forming, telling them is part of it, but it doesn't stop there. It's the conscience of the person who should ultimately act. Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, number 16.

Then Pope John Paul II in *Veritatis Splendor* repeats all this. Let's go faster before Father Clarence gives me a sign that time is up. Is it up already? Noted. There is time. Pastoral care, in his very introduction to *Amoris Laetitia*, the Pope says that the pastors of the Church would be interested in Chapter 6. Because, I don't know, it may be the Latin American way, the present Pope's documents are very, very long, even for someone who teaches theology. They are very long. So he says, read chapter by chapter. In the introduction, he says, "Chapter 6 interests pastors, while Chapter 8 challenges everybody," says the Pope. More than half of Chapter 6 is dedicated to the crucial, but indispensable, role of a pastor to accompany couples. Now, this we need to hear well. This is an opportunity. Rather than sitting in our armchair and telling, "This is the doctrine," we need to accompany them. This is a purely Franciscan characteristic, Franciscan in the sense of Pope Francis' characteristics. Before marriage, during marriage, and after marriage, I think Father Clarence may remember, he was also the executive secretary of the OTC just after me. We issued two documents already on marriage, not to even more, but in that, we always spoke about this point. It cannot be limited only to marriage preparation meetings. It has to be before, during, and after. So, if FABC has jumped the gun, so to say, someone was interviewing me the other day, asking, "Did the FABC contribute anything to the Universal Church?" Here is one point where we have been taking the lead and saying much before Pope Bergoglio was elected. Here is another important point to be kept in mind. It's not easy, says the Pope, to give fixed pastoral recipes that fit every situation. He quotes Thomas Aquinas and Pope Paul VI, Saint Paul VI, and so he calls for particular contextual pastoral solutions that suit diverse contexts. Dear Bishops and others, this is important. As a parish priest, as a pastor, I would love to have a book of recipes. "Ah, here's a marriage case. What does the law say? It will fit in here. Oh, there's another case. This will be the recipe." We can't do that. This is simple moral theology. We have to take into account circumstances, context, intentions. That's the Church's cherished fundamental moral theology. So, this is an important point we need to take into account. The rule of thumb given by *Amoris Laetitia* is to accompany, discern, and integrate. Of course, this basic rule has to be

“The rule of thumb given by *Amoris Laetitia* is to accompany, discern, and integrate.”

tempered. Bishop Lee said about it already. He used the word “compassion.” Pope uses it regularly. It has to be tempered by Mercy. And another point is, it has to be a personal and pastoral discernment. We can’t, as pastors, responsible pastors, we can’t say, “Ah, you go and decide what you want. This couple can go and decide what they want. That remarried person, no, personal decision, yes, conscience, yes, but personal and pastoral. The pastor has to accompany the persons. That’s why it is put that way. However, in each and every particular pastoral context, serious and conscientious discernment is called for, rather than applying rules arbitrarily. So, it’s a matter of forming consciences of people. It’s a matter of accompanying persons by their pastors. Now, here, please note, most of the participants here are bishops. I dare say, as someone who loves the Church, do our priests know what the Church teaches? Sometimes, with all due respect to you, do the bishops know the latest teaching? Of course, bishops are so occupied. But how can we dare say we know? So, seminarians need to be trained properly with regard to what the Church teaches, not what this theologian or that theologian teaches, what the official Church teaches. I have found, most of my story, I am teaching for 28 years now, both in Sri Lanka, Rome, and elsewhere, I have found ordained priests who know nothing about the Church’s doctrine. They go by a pre-Vatican II book or something. So, we need to stress well-trained and knowledgeable priests. Otherwise, how can you accompany people? Thus, the document insists that laws cannot be simply applied, and this Pope is known for his very rhetorical way of talking. He says, “Laws cannot be used as stones to throw at people.”

But we need to begin with the persons involved. So, the question is, as Jesus used to say, what is more important, the laws or the persons? Laws are necessary. If anyone

says Church’s laws are not important, I think he is not a Catholic. But laws are only a means to an end, persons. Such pastoral care, especially with regard to complex cases, demands skills, etc. Therefore, such care cannot be given by sitting at their desk. By the way, *Amoris Laetitia* was originally written in Italian. So, we need to consider the Church as a field hospital, and we need to feel the smell of the Sheep. And couples or families cannot

Thus, the document insists that laws cannot be simply applied, and this Pope is known for his very rhetorical way of talking. He says, “Laws cannot be used as stones to throw at people.”

be pigeonholed, the Pope's words, not my words, as regular and irregular. Let's take a certain pastoral case. I take my canon law code and say, "Ah, this is regular, this is not regular." They are necessary. I do that very often when people come for counseling to me, both in Sri Lanka and elsewhere. However, that's not enough. We need to accompany them and see how, in this situation, that person will fit in. A person will be affected by the values that cover the laws. After all, now here is another important point, dear friends, the grace of God. This Pope repeats this even with regard to synodality. When we were at Frascatti, some of the responses we saw, how much room do we pastors, preachially, and bishops give to the grace of God to act? We are enclosed very often with our own legal frameworks. Is there any space for God's grace to act? And I quoted deliberately, Pope doesn't do that, but I quoted one of my favorite phrases from the Johannine Gospel, chapter 3, verse 8. Jesus tells Nicodemus, "The Spirit blows where he wills. None of us, no priest, no bishop, not even the Pope, can control the Holy Spirit. That we should know. Some may not like me saying this, but we have to say the truth. That's why I was called for. So, let the Spirit be the Spirit, Holy Spirit. That's an opportunity. The Pope wants pastors to avoid the cold bureaucratic morality that is performed sitting at their official desk. If you want, you can get them from Father Clarence or the organizers later. The entire thing is available. Of the various pastoral issues dealt with in Chapter 6, the issue of interfaith marriages, here again, Father Clarence and others who were in the OTC may remember how we dealt with it. Listen, didn't we, Father Clarence? In two FABC papers, we're written on this, interfaith marriages, both disparity of cult marriages and mixed communion marriages, how they provide. And the Pope says now, but we said it already a few years ago in our FABC papers. I have them here. We said a mixed marriage is an opportunity. We talk about triple dialogue in Asia. A mixed marriage is an opportunity. Take Thailand, take Sri Lanka, and inter-religious marriage. Let's look at the positive side, just as we look at the negative side. How many of us do that? And the Pope invites us to use them as opportunities. In FABC papers, we already discussed in those numbers the special pastoral care needed for those in civil marriages or those who are simply living together. Here, the Pope uses what Pope John Paul II taught us so beautifully, the law of gradualness. We can't expect suddenly a married couple to just fit into what the Church teaches. And I want to draw, with your permission, dear pastors here, both priests and bishops, how patient are we with ourselves? How patient are

we with priesthood when they don't fit into the idea? We allow them gradualness. Why not the same be applied to married people, to family people? That's the issue. Pope John Paul II taught it long ago. Also, the care needed for those who are separated, divorced, or unjustly abandoned. Number 242 speaks. Then single parents, elders, etc. But I want to address

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homosexual persons. This was the issue. I know so many bishops who were present at the two synods. You remember how people, bishops, and others were worried about this particular point because they thought Pope is going to allow

hereafter homosexual marriages. So, the constant teaching of the Church from 1975, *Persona Humana*, was, is, rather, there is a distinction made for the first time. 1975, CDF made the distinction: homosexual persons, homosexual activities. Homosexual persons are accepted by the Church. In 1975, CDF said, homosexual acts are condemned as intrinsically evil. And the Pope repeats it and says this is official to the official teaching of the Church. So, no way of accepting those homosexual unions as marriages. Marriage is limited only to heterosexual marriages. At the same time, this I faced personally, dear friends, not recently, about three years ago, a certain family suddenly discovered that their son was homosexual. And the family was shattered. A very pious family. Are we going to condemn them?

The Pope says, “Please try to understand the feeling sentiments of a family like that. How many of us do that? So, here I am about to finish the pastoral care of the divorce and the remarried, which was another thorny issue with regard to them. The Pope does not provide any new doctrine but simply develops, I underline the word, in fact right now I am doing a course in Rome both at Urbana and at Alfonsiano. Development of moral doctrine, moral doctrine doesn't remain static, understanding differs, moral doctrine develops, and the best example if you want during the discussion, we can do that. Pope John Paul II was the first to say all the divorced and remarried are not in the state of sin at the same degree. They are in a state of sin, ma unjustly abandoned, others are having their own difficulties, so different degrees of culpability. So we can't condemn all of

them as same, not only with regard to divorce and remarriage, with regard to other matters we'll discuss if you want. So Benedict XVI developed the same thing in *Sacramentum Caritatis* in 2007 and said we cannot condemn all the remarried people as living in sin at the same level, *samma innocent, unjustly abandoned*. Traditional moral theology in such cases, can't we consider discerning whether they are worthy of receiving the sacraments, that's the issue. That is all, such yeah I have said it already, using traditional fundamental moral theological principles as given in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, teach us that in those cases, we are such a personal and personal discernment reveals no serious state of sin, such couples could even approach the sacraments, including the Eucharist, footnotes 336 and 351. It's not a blanket statement allowing everybody to receive, that's utter irresponsibility, that's not the issue. And if you remember, this is nothing new, some of the seniors, especially Bishops and Priests, here I am quite senior now, ordained for 35 years, but much before me, there was a thing, some of the senior Bishops will remember and Priests, there was the accepted thing called internal Forum solution, we tell certain people don't receive in this church, go to another church and receive after discerning, it was there, approved by the Holy See anyway. The last point, the document does not negate the immorality of those who deviate from the ideal of the church. Let's say a couple has got divorced and remarried, that's not the ideal for the church. It's come to justify it, not at all, it's a state of imperfection. But what can we do with regard to those people in that state of imperfection? In the spirit of Jesus of Nazareth, in the spirit of Chapter 8 of John's Gospel, the woman caught in the very act of adultery, so Ales on the lookout for pastoral opportunities to do what we can. Here I want

“Development of moral doctrine, moral doctrine doesn't remain static, understanding differs, moral doctrine develops...”

to repeat what good Pope John the 23rd used to say: the church is not only a very sure teacher, her doctrine is very sure, but also a tender mother, foreign, that's very

important, we forget the *madrebat*. Last but not least, this dear friends, is the novelty of *Amoris Laetitia*, and it is in this sense that it is really good news, not any news, good news, probably not for us pastors, some of us who have strict conditions, it is good news for persons in families and marriages that are in crisis, and it does provide so many opportunities in the pastoral field, making it really a field hospital. Thank you for your patient

attention. [Applause] Thank you very much for the Fematiramana for your clear presentation, especially also because you highlight some important novelties that give opportunities in Amoris Laetitia. Please come back to the states, Father. [Applause] Let us now go to the two minutes of silent prayer. Glory be to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Now, dear participants, we have around 30 minutes to have a plenary conversation, so question and answer. I will give for the first session three questions or comments, and then I will give time to the speakers to give their reaction or their comments also. So for the first session, three questions. Cardinal, please. Thanks to Bishop Lee and thanks to Father Vimal, whom I know for a long time. Thanks because they have clarified the confusion that has been going on and it still goes on on issues that they have tackled or it is tackled in Amoris Laetitia. Really, Father Vimal, you have clearly said the position of the Holy Father. Sometimes in the church, I feel the pastoral approach to the people has been too much dogmatized or through the pastoral approach, some of the dogmatic conclusions are being questioned. I always felt there are three dogmatic constitutions of the Vatican II, and there is one also Gaudium et Spes. And I see the Holy Father, Pope Francis, is trying to be a pastor, but that does not take away preaching the truth of the doctrine of the church. And thank you for confirming that position and telling us very clearly that we are to be pastors to the families without questioning our doctrinal positions. Thank you. Thank you. The second one, please. Thanks very much for Vimal, as you are a professor. You did it as a professor and be followed as students.

“...**accompaniment should be person-to-person, country-to-country, church to church, inside a situation. We know that commonly we can give some guidelines, but I would like to get some tips on how we can truly accompany modern families.**”

We often hear about accompaniment from the Seminary days. Here, accompaniment refers to the Rector and the animators that accompany the seminarians. Similarly, when it comes to families, the Bishops and the pastors and others must accompany the families. But in concrete cases, accompaniment should be person-to-person, country-to-country, church to church, inside a situation. We know that commonly

we can give some guidelines, but I would like to get some tips on how we can truly accompany modern families. When the members of the families, husbands and wives,

are very busy with their own lives and careers, and when families are scattered, it becomes challenging to reach them and provide guidance. Simply giving doctrine and ideas that don't do any good is not sufficient. Therefore, can you propose some concrete strategies to accompany families in these circumstances? Thank you.

“Simply giving doctrine and ideas that don't do any good is not sufficient.”

Bishop Emmanuel Rosario from Bangladesh expressed his gratitude towards Father Bimal and Bishop John Lee for their presentations. He highlighted the importance of considering the context of each family and their problems in order to find suitable solutions. In the post-modern era, there is a rapid decline of values, customs, and practices that were the main heritage of Asian families. Realities such as migration, separation between spouses, and children have posed challenges. Bishop Rosario raised the question of how pastors can effectively accompany families in these concrete contexts. The family is the domestic church, and the church is a family of families, where every member is a part of the body of Christ. Therefore, any problem affecting one member of the family affects the entire body, and healing is necessary. However, the challenge lies in finding effective ways to address these situations. Thank you.

The next part will include the speakers' comments on the first three questions.

In the year 2015, I was in Rome and I made a couple. She married an Indian man, so she converted to Hinduism and couldn't receive Holy Communion. She met a pastor who informed her about this restriction, but she expressed her desire to receive Holy Communion. The pastor decided to accompany her through the process, and eventually, her husband was even baptized. Inspired by this experience, she organized an association to help similar families.

From my perspective, when I returned to Taiwan, I shared this story with others. Our priest advised us that previously, if someone divorced and

remarried, they were not allowed to receive Holy Communion. However, this perspective has changed. It is not the end but rather the starting point of a conversation. We should engage with these individuals who long to reconnect with us.

Another important aspect is that even when people realize they cannot receive Holy Communion, they can still participate in Holy Mass. In my group in Taiwan, I shared this idea, and more people started attending Mass. Although they couldn't receive Holy Communion, they sought the blessings. This shows that many people desire to experience God's love but face challenges in their lives. It highlights the need for more manpower to support them.

I must admit that I don't have all the answers to the questions raised, but I want to comment on some of the other remarks, particularly the first one made by Cardinal Rosario. It is unfortunate that even pastoral teachings in the Church can become rigid and dogmatic. As a moral theology professor in Rome, I have faced this problem.

The current Holy Father openly emphasizes the need for a pastoral approach, following *Gaudium et Spes*. However, it is disheartening to see how few of my students in Rome are willing to adopt this pastoral mindset. I want to share a personal anecdote. When I was a young seminarian in the 1980s, I was greatly inspired by the emphasis on pastoral care.

During that time, there was a focus on Liberation Theology and justice issues. We were filled with excitement, and I used to challenge my professors of moral theology, causing them to defend the Church. However, things have changed now. I find myself trying to provoke my students to ask questions, and they are the ones defending the early doctrines.

To illustrate this point, it is true that practical questions raised by the other two individuals matter in a gathering like this. I acknowledge what the Cardinal said about accompaniment. The bishop who spoke made a valid point about the varying situations. He mentioned the example of scattered parishes, even in Sri Lanka, where some dioceses, like Bishop Raymond's and Bishop Harold's, are geographically spread

out and difficult to reach.

However, there are also dioceses where the situation is different, and it can be done. So, my initial reaction is to question whether we should negate the challenging aspects. These practical difficulties exist in some places but not in all places. Not all areas are rural, scattered, and unreachable. Shouldn't we address the reachable places at least? That's the issue. We can't bring in exceptions to negate the overall approach.

In considering what can be done, I want to quote Pope Francis. The crucial question to ask is whether we are supporting a maintenance Church, maintaining the present structures and complacency, or if we are seeking new ways through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. I jotted down

“After all, the pastoral ministry of family and marriage should predominantly be carried out by laypeople because they are married and can involve a priest where necessary.”

some ideas while the two bishops were speaking.

One suggestion is visiting families. How many of us actually do that? How many of us accompany them? As a Redemptorist, during parish

missions, we visit families and identify situations where a family is not married in the Church or has been unjustly abandoned. We follow up with these families and provide support. We can have special teams at the parish or diocesan level dedicated to this. After all, as ABC said long ago, the Church is the family of families, and the health of the Church depends on the health of individual families. We can't ignore that.

Another suggestion, which Bishop Harold would be familiar with, is the role of the Basic Christian Community (BCCs). They can play a significant role in attending to these matters. Additionally, training lay leaders is crucial. As a Catholic priest, I understand the difficulties faced by my fellow priests in parish ministry. They are human beings too. But training lay leaders to accompany these families, as Cardinal Farrell has emphasized, is important. After all, the pastoral ministry of family and marriage should predominantly be carried out by laypeople because they are married and can involve a priest where necessary.

Lastly, in the formation of our seminarians, I don't know if this is applicable to everyone, but as someone involved in teaching ministry, I believe it is important to emphasize the formation of seminarians.

In my 29 years of teaching, I have taught in various places, including the seminary in Kandy and other academic programs. However, most of these programs were focused on academic aspects rather than pastoral care.

Another aspect to consider is ongoing formation. In Sri Lanka, almost all dioceses and congregations provide inputs for ongoing formation. However, many priests attend these programs just for the sake of attending, lacking genuine motivation.

These are simple things that can be done, but there may be other aspects that the bishops themselves can address. Thank you.

Now, moving on to the next three questions. The first question is from a sister in Pakistan who raises an additional issue. She mentions that in Islam, multiple marriages are common, and some Christians have adopted this practice due to the influence of Islam. The church does not accept such practices, but the challenge lies in how to accompany these individuals as a church, especially when societal norms differ from church teachings. It is difficult to explain the church's stance in such situations, where the desire for children may drive individuals to seek additional spouses. The question is how to provide pastoral care and guidance in these circumstances.

“The participant emphasizes the need for the church to discern and reflect on doctrine in light of Jesus, the compassionate pastor.”

Thank you, sister, for raising this important issue.

Next, we have a participant expressing concern about the church's approach to LGBTQ people. While acknowledging their right to be cared for pastorally, there is a belief that their actions are deemed intrinsically evil. The participant questions how people can commit acts that are

considered intrinsically evil and suggests that the church needs to reflect on its doctrine and align it with the pastoral care exemplified by Jesus, characterized by compassion, mercy, and tenderness. The participant emphasizes the need for the church to discern and reflect on doctrine in light of Jesus, the compassionate pastor.

Thank you for sharing your thoughts on this matter.

Lastly, a question is raised regarding seminary formation. The speaker highlights the importance of not starting with doctrines, but rather journeying as the people of God following Jesus, the pastor. They express concern about the church's position on LGBTQ people, stating that doctrines should be examined and discerned in the context of Jesus, the compassionate pastor, and living in equal discipleship.

Thank you, Bishop Lee and Father Vemma, for your contributions to the discussion on seminary formation.

I've always wondered how ready we are in the accompaniment. So my question for Father Vimal is: do you think the present curriculum in the seminaries prepares us for accompaniment? Do you think the way our seminaries are structured is responsive to the present realities? What adjustments do you think we need so that we can also adjust because accompaniment is an art? If you have not experienced accompaniment, it will be very difficult for us to accompany families. If the curriculum in the seminary rarely speaks about the family, how can we accompany families? So the question is, being a professor and a formator, what do you think are the adjustments needed in the formation of our seminaries and of our religious communities? Thank you, thank you.

Please, one more question, and then I'll give time to the speakers. I am Philip Neriferon from India. It's not a question; I only wanted to compliment what Father Vimal was saying. This accompaniment is a very serious responsibility, and I know many of our pastors are overburdened. Parishes are sometimes big. Besides the things Father Vimal said about visiting families, I think we can make use of our parish family cells. He was speaking about the involvement of lay faithful married couples accompanying people, families, and difficulties. I think the formation of

parish family cells could be very helpful. Secondly, we have many family movements, and the members of the family movements are very zealous. We had one couple that spoke to us, and I think they are very ready to accompany families. Thirdly, the parish council members in many of our parishes are more busy with administrative tasks. They could be entrusted to function in a team spirit with our pastors to accompany our families, especially those who experience failures and crises in their life. Thank you. Okay, okay, the last one. Bishop Nazarin from India, thanks a lot for the presentation, especially to Father Trimana because he has highlighted and focused on the pastoral aspect of our priestly life. My question goes: could you throw more light on the personal and pastoral discernment that is needed today? You rightly said we need not have a guidebook or a handbook to apply in a particular situation or crisis the family encounters. I too accept, having been both a teacher of theology and later in a parish, I also have such experiences of people encountering very difficult situations in their families. My question is: could you throw more light on this? Because personal and pastoral discernment, what do you actually try to tell us? The personal and pastoral discernment, all the more, has to be well catered and fostered, and it's not trained in the seminary, as you rightly said. So if only you could throw more light on the text. Thank you, Bishop.

Before we have our break, I try to find the English but I cannot. The 2015 before the bishop conference, the pope gave, because I'm kind of a lawyer, they made this, "You take Domino's, we say, 'The Jesus is compassion judge, judge.'" That's why I mention this, because the tribunal

“God gives us time to discern, to prepare ourselves, and to be company with them.”

is all before, is working a very long period. Sometimes two years for a case. But because the pope reduced that motto, "We are pastors, but they give

each diocese bishop responsibility: We take care of our sheep, so we don't need to go to the second-level tribunal. The first one will pass a positive, the case is okay, then go to the bishop, then the bishop makes a judgment. Then the case is finished, closed. I can you understand what I try to say? So our response is each country has its own problem. Our pastors or bishops should take responsibility. Like Taiwan, we face the same married couple, and they come to church and they are Christian,

they are Catholics. And how we face them and how we treat them if they challenge us? If they can divorce and remarry, people know they cannot receive Holy Communion, but they still want to be in church. That's easy to take care of them. But the homosexual movement, they want to challenge us. They want to do so. This is our big task in Taiwan. But at the moment, they are not really touching us yet. So God gives us time to discern, to prepare ourselves, and to be company with them. But we won't change our stand. It's not to say, "I will give him Holy Communion." No, it cannot. But we will dialogue with them and talk with them and try to find a way if they can join us or we can take them. I think it takes time. This is a long way to go to challenge all of us. But the responsibility is given to us, and we believe the Holy Spirit will guide us. That's what we believe.

Thank you for the response. I think quite a few questions were raised, but I don't think there's time to respond to each one meticulously. However, I have jotted down a few points that would cover what I would say. They would serve as responses.

First of all, this formation for marriage, although that was not a particular issue, but that was underlying there, is taken for granted by most of us. That's why I referred to Cardinal Farrell. Are we, the priests and bishops, the best persons to form people for marriage? That's a question we have to face squarely. Of course, with our theology and training, we should give our part. But as Cardinal Farrell and Pope John Paul II said long ago, and Pope Benedict XVI when he was Cardinal Ratzinger said, the real

formators of would-be married couples and those who are already married should be the lay people, married people. Of course, we priests and bishops didn't fall from Heaven. We are coming from

families, definitely. But it should be mostly by lay people. So the present, I have a feeling, and I tell my students, and I want to say the same here,



dear friends, often we think within our present structures. Not that I am against structures, but they need to be widened. The parameters have to go beyond. That's one thing.

Then with regard to the development of doctrine, which was Cardinal Newman's main point, and Pope Benedict XVI had been saying again and again in his writings, and Vatican II said, and Pope John Paul II in *Veritatis Splendor* speaks about the development of doctrine in numbers 4, 27, and 28. Development of doctrine, not change of doctrine. Development. If you say doctrine changes, I don't want to leave any doubt about this. Even if it takes time, if someone says the Church's doctrine is something today and tomorrow another one, it's pure relativism. That's not the issue. That's why Cardinal Newman, now I think he's Saint Newman, isn't he? Said Newman, Cardinal Ratzinger, who is now Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, development. All of us. Now, when I was six years old, I was Vimal Tiriman. When I was a seminarian, I was Vimal Tiriman. Today, I am Vimal Tiriman. I am the same, but I have changed also. At least I had beautiful curly hair earlier. When Cardinal Rosario saw me for the first time, those days.

“The Church exists to teach and develop revelation, the revelation made to the apostles and to their descendants today.”

So we change, but development means it's change as well as certain stable factors, which John Paul II has explained very well in *Veritatis Splendor*. And I want to make a remark in view of what was mentioned there by our sister. The Church exists to teach and develop revelation, the revelation made to the apostles and to their descendants today. If you read, what is the document? I'm getting a blank. The Vatican document on Revelation. I'm ashamed I forgot it. They were boom numbers 8 to 10. It says doctrine develops. But what I want to say here is, without the Church, there is no formation along the teachings of Jesus. So doctrine is necessary. I will be a heretic if I say doctrine is not necessary. But doctrine is only, as John Paul II said very clearly, a means to an end. That should not be forgotten. In fact, I was pleasantly surprised, and I get a little kick by saying that, John Paul II, Saint John Paul II, said even the Church exists not for herself, by herself. The Church is useless. Say sim, in 1991, in his

document on mission, he said the Church exists for the kingdom. So it's a means to an end, which is true. Even fabc by itself, there is no sanctity in a famous. It exists for pastoral ministry. So that should be kept in mind. And also, we have a prophetic role. Here, I am very categorical when I teach my students also, because in the secular world, there are so many liberal tendencies today: homosexual marriages, this one, that one. The Church stands straight and dignified with her doctrine. So if I say doctrine is not necessary, that's not Vimal. Doctrine is necessary, but it's not an end in itself. Doctrine is playing a prophetic role. And two other comments: I can't remember who asked about the curriculum in the seminary. Is it directed towards the formation of pastors? I hope I won't offend anybody. Since you asked, dear Bishop, I have to give an answer. I won't be diplomatic. Most of the seminary curricula are not geared towards forming pastors. If you want a straight answer, I am surprised. I remember it was, I think, was it most of the bishops' apparel was there, and Cardinal Rosario, and I can see only those persons. You all were present when in Vietnam we had that the plenary, was it 2012, when we had that? I, together with the Bishop of Kandy, Bishop Viani Fernando, Emeritus Bishop now, when I said that, he supported me. I said we should pass a resolution saying that churches in Asia should implement at least as part of the karakila in the

“Because in the last analysis, it is the conscience of the person which works.”

seminary fabc teachings. And it was, “No, if ABC is all pastoral teaching, how much of it I have edited?” And you have that document and so many other things I have written on fabc. Who cares? Who cares? Do you think

fabc plenary statements are being read in the seminaries? How many seminaries read pastoral documents? How many bishops' conferences have made it compulsory? Asian Bishops' Conference, we are Asians. How many of us, even when Urban Yana allows Professor Sukar, who is in charge of Maruti Ali, he tells me, “Vimal, why is that in Asian seminaries, including Sri Lanka, why are you not including some of your own fabc teachings in the questions for the BTH? Have a course.” So, the answer to your question, dear Bishop, is we are still in that dogmatic, pre-Vatican II mentality in the seminaries. Last but not least, I also have a question to ask you, just to provoke. That's my style of teaching also. Someone, I think it was, was it Cardinal Philippinera? I don't know. Someone said, “We have so many parish organizations.” Who said it? I think, uh, parish organizations,

parish structures. I think no other organization in the world has such well-organized things as the Roman Catholic Church. Are we using that? But how are we using it? How many of those organizations are injected with *Amoris Laetitia*? Bishop Lee complemented me by coming here and saying just before me now, he spoke about canonical sites. There's a thing called external forum, internal forum. Pope Francis has changed so many things. What is that called in canon law? Um, *proprio*? So many have been made to accommodate in the external forum, to accommodate difficult cases. But where there is no evidence that can be proved in the external forum, then the internal forum works. Because in the last analysis, it is the conscience of the person which works. On the last day, this is what I tell my students, when we stand before God, as Matthew chapter 25 verses 31 to 46 say, when we stand before God, God will not ask, "Did you feed that person because the Church said?" God will ask, "Did you do this? Did you, Vimal, did I do this or not? Did you, did it or not?" That is extremely important. But here I come to Bishop's question. I don't know your name, Bishop. About personal and pastoral discernment. That's the question you raised. All right, personal and pastoral discernment. It has to do with internal forum solutions. Dear Bishop, if we leave persons to decide, as many of us parish priests do very often, "Oh, you go and act according to your conscience," that's sheer nonsense, relativism, subjectivism. When a pastor accompanies the person, it is the pastor's pastoral side. When you say personal and pastoral, pastoral, I, a pastor, accompany this person in difficult marriage or family, forming him or her, her conscience, according to the Church's doctrine. But, but a big but, the final decision depends on the person's personal conscience. John Paul II, Benedict XVI, Pope Francis, Vatican II, all have a family. That is what was called internal forum solution. If we want, we can discuss later. I see we have exceeded time. Thank you. Thank you for the applause.









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