

TOWARDS OCTOBER 2024

**The Asian Response to Deepening Aspects of the
Synthesis Report of the Synod, October 2023**

**Guided by the question:
“HOW can we be a synodal Church in mission?”**

PART TWO

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The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Bangladesh (CBCB)

The deepening, consultations and the Response on
"The Synthesis Report"
of the 16th General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops

INTRODUCTION

The Catholic Church in Bangladesh has joyfully welcomed the outcome, of the "Synthesis report" of the first session of the 16th General Assembly of the Synod of the Bishops". The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Bangladesh (CBCB) took an immediate initiative of translating the Synthesis Report in Bengali, the national Language. It is worth mentioning that although there are several tribal languages spoken in Bangladesh, and the Catholic people belong to almost all these tribes, Bengali language is widely spoken and understood by all. Therefore, it was very significant and effective for the Christians all over the country. The translated documents were widely disseminated among the dioceses by the CBCB, and the dioceses, in turn distributed them to the Christians in all areas. Members of the clergy, religious leaders, laypeople, professionals, community members, and others gathered for a series of study sessions and roundtable discussions. During the diocesan pastoral assemblies, many of the subjects have been adapted from the synthesis report. A series of articles has been published in Catholic journals, as well as interviews with individuals from different levels of society were published in various print and electronic media. The witnesses, thoughts and proposals of the Faithful have been gathered and many discussions at various levels have taken place.

Despite the progress made, it is evident that we still have a long way to go in order to fully comprehend and implement synodality in practice. We have the task of effectively conveying the true essence of the synodal journey to individuals. Oftentimes, individuals perceive themselves as "serving for the Church" without recognizing their role within the Body of Christ. The mindset is certainly to be altered, albeit it will require a significant amount of time and efforts. There is a necessity to implement

formation programs on SYNODAL JOURNEY for Catholics at different levels, and many such programs have already been conducted. The presence of poverty within the local Church poses a significant obstacle to the ongoing synodal journey. The Church in Bangladesh adheres to the principle of preferential options for the poor. Hence, the Church consistently stands in solidarity with individuals who are impoverished, marginalized, oppressed, and vulnerable. The Church is consistently working to improve the financial situation of her children through credit union activities, general education, skill development programs, technical education, and other initiatives. The scenario will inevitably undergo alteration at some point in the future. The Church in Bangladesh is optimistic about witnessing the forthcoming developments.

Enhancing the differentiated co-responsibility at the level of local Church in the mission of all members of the People of God

- Bangladesh is experiencing significant growth in its Christian community. Every year, we observe a decent number of baptisms for both children and adults. We express our gratitude to the Lord for bestowing this remarkable blessing upon the local Church. However, it is an undeniable reality that the absence of proper catechism and guidance for parents and godparents prior to the ceremony of baptism impedes the spiritual development of children as they mature. The operation of Sunday School in the country is limited due to it being a working day. Friday, which is the weekend, is a day filled with several social and extra-curricular activities for youngsters. Therefore, we witness a significant period of gap until individuals partake in the sacraments of communion and confirmation. Unfortunately, we do not currently provide a specialized curriculum or module designed to prepare our youngsters with a mission-oriented mindset. The curriculum in this context exhibits significant variation, both across different dioceses and even between individual parishes. The instructions adhere to traditional methods, which do not effectively foster a sense of belonging to the Body of Christ and instill a dedication to missionary work in children.

We anticipate that the local Church will develop a unified curriculum and module to educate children for the sacraments of initiation, with a stronger focus on Christ and a greater emphasis on fulfilling the mission. It would be advantageous to take into account the current era and move away from traditional teaching methods in favor of a more contemporary approach that is more suited to the age and linked with life. Teachers will need to undergo a comprehensive series of training at various levels in order to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to comprehend and implement the new curriculum. It is advisable for the clergy to actively engage in the religious instruction of children, while also relying on the assistance of sisters and teachers.

- The Church is mission, and we have been actively involved in it. Since the independence of Bangladesh, the number of dioceses has doubled, rising from four to eight and from one ecclesiastical province into two. Still there is potency of erecting new dioceses, mostly among tribal and distant areas to expand the scope of evangelization. Often several new parishes are being established in several dioceses. A significant number of individuals, particularly those belonging to tribal communities, continue to have a strong inclination towards embracing Christianity. All of these are the signs of our local Church's missionary nature. Both the clergy and religious, as well as our lay catechists and teachers, actively engage in spreading the gospel across the country. The laity are also making financial contributions towards the works of evangelization. Here we observe the fundamental nature of synodality. But it is also true that there is still much work to be done within the local church to catechize the laypeople regarding their universal calling to evangelization through baptism. Insufficient instruction is provided to children, adolescents, and adults regarding the Bible, Vatican documents, Catechism of the Catholic Church. Once the children have received confirmation, there is a scarcity of organized catechism lessons for the laity. Periodically, we educate the young people through seminars and training

sessions, but it is challenging to attract laypeople to participate in catechism classes.

We expect the local Church to provide comprehensive catechism education and curriculum encompassing the Bible, Vatican Documents, Catechism of the Catholic Church at all levels. A way to open the door for the laity to take part in mission work is to start missionary movements like missionary in action, prayer groups for missions, and donor groups for missions. Additionally, it would be beneficial to gather interviews and testimonies from those who have recently undergone conversion to Catholicism and also who are actively engaged in missionary endeavors. The dissemination of these through both print and electronic media has the potential to inspire and encourage others.

- The Church in Bangladesh introduced the official ministries of acolytes and lectors of the laity in the year 2023. CBCB coordinated a nationwide training program for the candidates of acolytes and lectors, followed by individual training programs provided by each diocese. Several dioceses have already implemented them, while others are now in the process of doing so. Despite not being a recent development, the local Church was slow to take action due to concerns about the wider community's acceptance of lay ministers. The community's reaction to women ministering in the sanctuary while dressed in liturgical vestments is also worth seeing. Undoubtedly, the risk persists. People seem not ready to accept the services and ministries other than the clerics, be it the distribution of Holy Communion or other ministers. Implementing a synodal process and plan will require numerous modifications, which will also have associated risks.
- **We anticipate that the Church will bravely embrace the challenges derived from instituting lay ministers to ensure the laity's shared responsibility in the Church's mission. It is crucial to educate the laity that the opportunities to become an acolyte or lector are available to all members of the Christian community who demonstrate excellent faith and practice. It is important to understand that the acolytes and**

lectors who are constituted remain laypeople even after their institution, and do not become partially or semi-clerics.

- Women contribute to the vitality of the local Church by actively engaging in liturgical practices, conducting prayer services, and participating in various spiritual activities. However, it is an undeniable reality that there is a scarcity of women in positions of leadership. Women in the mainstream feel at ease participating, although they are hesitant to assume leadership roles. There are several factors contributing to this issue, including the perception of Islam in society, the patriarchal social structure, the absence of theological education, and the influence of tribal culture.

The Church is anticipated to exhibit greater receptiveness towards their continuous formation, appointing women to leadership positions in the curia, commission, ecclesiastical court, pastoral council, in Caritas and other social and charitable organizations, and other relevant roles such as Catechists, pastoral councils' leadership and developing women-friendly space in all aspects of its life. As advanced groups, members of women's religious communities should have the opportunity to get higher theological degrees, enabling them to serve in ecclesiastical organizations and teach in seminaries, among other roles that can be an example to lay women.

- There have been several lay initiatives and associations since the local church first began. These are flourishing, many lay people are actively involved in the mission of the Church through these associations and movements. This is surely a visible charismatic sign. Some of those failed to take off because the ideas and concepts originated in other cultures and eventually became extinct as they were not embraced by the locals. Other factors include financial corruption, leadership conflict, mutual distrust, a lack of chaplaincy and the chaplain's dominion. Both the opportunity and the motive for the emergence of lay leaders could be considered.

Before launching an international association or movement in a country, the Church is required to thoroughly research

and adapt it to local conditions. Providing chaplaincy to lay associations and movements should be a priority service of the Church. It is important to remember that chaplaincy is a shared experience and not an attempt to impose one's own charisma on groups or organizations.

- The clergy and religious vocation are deemed satisfactory in the country. Each year, the local Church have been receiving a substantial number of candidates from the Bengali and tribal populations who are choosing to be ordained or take holy vows. As of now, we have no parishes that are without a priest. Even the quasi-parishes and a significant of the sub-centers have priests. The majority of parishes typically have a minimum of two priests each. We express our gratitude to Lord God for the abundant blessing bestowed upon the local Church. This happens due to the high level of devotion and deep religious reverence among the individuals in this community. Consistent attendance at church by a large number of families and the practice of family prayer play a key role in promoting vocations. But after all, a large portion of our laypeople are unaware of the distinctions between diocesan and religious clergy. Many people are also unaware of the diaconate vocation. These factors hinder the vocation both in priestly and religious life.

Formation of the laity on the nature of diocesan and religious priests, deacons and faith formation of families can mitigate the gap and foster more vocation from the local families. Society and families should exercise caution when excessively criticizing the clergy and religious, as this may impede young people from embracing a priestly or consecrated vocation.

- The Church in Bangladesh aims to establish a pathway for the diaconate vocation. However, individuals require a period of preparation prior to this. Even among the laity, as well as priests and religious, there is still a tendency to refer to permanent deacons as lay deacons or married deacons. It is believed that the diaconate vocation is only seen as required when there is a shortage of priests, making deacons an

alternative to priesthood. These mindsets are undermining the authentic essence of the diaconate vocation. The laity are still not prepared to witness sacraments being performed by married ordained individuals.

The Church in Bangladesh anticipates the establishment of a permanent diaconate. However, the People of God must commence preparations for the diaconate vocation to prevent any disorder when the initial ordination takes place.

Relations between Churches, between groupings of Churches at different levels and with the Bishop of Rome to find “a dynamic balance between the dimension of the Church as a whole and its local roots”

- Evangelization cannot be achieved without taking into account the local language and cultures. Saint Paul exemplified the ideal approach of assimilating into local cultures in order to spread the teachings of the Christian faith. The local church in Bangladesh incorporated some of the traditional celebrations into her religious rituals which enhance synodality, as described below.
- I. **Wangala:** Wangala is also called the festival of "The Hundred Drums", a harvest festival celebrated by the Garo tribe, who live in Greater Mymensingh in Bangladesh. In this post harvest festival, they give thanks to Misi Saljong the sun god, for blessing the people with a rich harvest. Wangala is celebrated in the months from September to December, with different villages setting different dates for the occasion. Following the adoption of Christianity by the Garo tribe, they now organize the festival to express gratitude to Christ the King.
 - II. **Sohorae:** Sohorae is a Santal tribal celebration held to express gratitude to God for his manifestation and for the plenty bestowed by nature, particularly for the new harvests, livestock, and household provisions.
 - III. **Baha:** The Santal and Munda tribal festival is observed throughout the Easter season. The event is a commemoration of the emergence of life, which is conveyed via the elements of the natural world. The resurrection of Jesus signifies a

rejuvenation and renewal of life, aligning with the core significance of the Baha festival.

- IV. **Erok:** The event involves seeking divine blessings from God prior to sowing seeds and engaging in various agricultural endeavors.
- V. **Loban:** The festival is a celebration of gratitude and a request for divine blessings for the just harvested rice crop. Santals refrain from consuming freshly harvested rice until they have participated in the Loban feast.
- VI. **Borosobha:** The prayer meeting is widely attended in the southern region of Bangladesh. People of many denominations take part in Borosobhas. The event lasts throughout the entire night and features biblical sermons and devotional songs known as sevok songeet. Catholics also engage in these devotional practices and deliver sermons based on the teachings of the Bible.

In general the tribal people in Bangladesh shares a fraternal bond among their own clan. For example, among the Mandi people there is a tradition called 'mahali' where all the people of same surname are counted as relatives and they would join in any of the important family events such as marriage, funeral or other celebrations and join their helping hands making it like a reunion of all the relatives far and wide. This gesture would be reciprocated during such similar celebrations of other families as well.

It is anticipated that the local Church would give careful consideration to arranging regular cultural orientation and instruction in the local language for the newly appointed pastoral agents. It is also expected that the Church will continue her excellent approach is to identify the current gospel values within indigenous tribes and initiate evangelizing from that foundation.

- There is a shortage of the Bible, Vatican Documents, the Catechism of the Catholic Church and other religious study books in local languages, including Bengali. It is not feasible to evangelize and provide formation without having these

materials in local languages. Furthermore, it is an era dominated by digital communication. Evangelization and catechism in the local church are not fully utilizing technology yet. The local Church hasn't created any smartphone applications yet. A significant number of dioceses lack an online portal.

It is proposed that the local Church take immediate and efficient action to provide these resources in local languages. If feasible, they should consider designing mobile applications, which would be highly useful in the contemporary era. Each diocese ought to possess its own dedicated website, while parishes should maintain, at the very least, a presence on Facebook.

- The Catholic families in Bangladesh are typically devout. They consistently participate in the Eucharist together and engage in family prayers. During the holidays of Christmas and Easter, it is customary to visit relatives without requiring an invitation. It is important to note that everyone is welcome and no one is considered undesirable. The Catholic families host post-sacrament gatherings where they invite all relatives and neighbours to celebrate. During the religious festival, individuals return to their ancestral homes to reunite with their family members and relatives. These practices have a strong foundation in the society. It is perceived that these as tangible indications that synodality is already present. Regrettably, it has been observed that a significant number of Catholic couples experiencing separation, annulment, divorce, and other similar situations. The Church provides pre-marital preparation for couples and handles their annulment procedures, but it is rare for them to offer comprehensive services to families at risk.

As a mother, it is anticipated that the Church will possess a thorough understanding of the tales of each of her children, providing them with companionship and guidance. It is essential to establish a methodical pastoral strategy and procedure at the level of bishops' conferences, dioceses, and parishes to guarantee the gathering of data on families at risk, and offer counselling services. The aim is to accompany

families on their journey, rather than simply providing catechism and training.

- The state of ecumenical discourse in the local Church is favorable. Previously, there was a prevailing sense of mistrust and rivalry. However, this mentality is gradually eliminating. Currently, on each significant liturgical occasion such as ordination, consecration, and jubilee, pastors from all denominations are invited and they joyfully attend the programs. There has been a significant increase in mutual respect, and everyone is enthusiastic about collaborating to disseminate the good news of salvation. A federation called the "United Forum of Churches of Bangladesh (UFCB)" had been formed in Bangladesh, with the Archbishop of Dhaka serving as its chairperson. It has the ability to effectively represent the entire Christian community to the government and advocate for the Church when needed. Simultaneously, we have noticed a growing trend among our young people who are increasingly drawn to the activities of other denominations, particularly their vibrant choir groups, which are more youthful in nature compared to our traditional choir and adherence to biblical teachings. They frequently encounter challenges about our dogmas from other churches that cite passages from the Bible. Due to the lack of satisfactory responses to their inquiries, a significant number of Catholic young people are becoming disinterested in Catholicism, regarding its doctrines as erroneous.

We anticipate that the local Catholic Church will maintain its Christian unity programs and simultaneously analyze the current trends among the youth. Intensive youth programs are recommended to address the existential inquiries that arise in the minds of young people. They should not just be told that their issue is a matter of faith. Every question should be answered with reference to the Bible and in conformity with the teachings of the Church's magisterium.

- Christians constitute the least populous religious minority in the nation. However, it is providing evidence of its remarkable contributions in various areas, particularly in the domains of

education, health, and social development. The government publicly acknowledges the commendable efforts of the Church. State authorities enthusiastically participate in our social programs, consistently commending and endorsing our commendable efforts. The Catholic Church has been organizing numerous interreligious dialogue programs. Religious tolerance and solidarity among humanity are steadily growing. Christians participate in the social celebrations of many festivals such as Eid, Durgapuja, Deepavali, etc., by visiting friends and neighbours. In turn, they also visit Christian families during the Christmas and other festivities. However, occasionally religious intolerance and tensions are witnessed at some grassroots levels, particularly among ignorant Muslims who are influenced by fundamentalist religious leaders. Tension inevitably arises when a Christian nation engages in aggression against a Muslim nation, and this is true even if Jews are involved in similar actions.

The Church is anticipated to persist in its remarkable interreligious endeavours, fostering robust connections with the local community, which will provide us with protection during times of hardship. In addition to facilitating intellectual dialogue, promoting grassroots engagement will be more successful in mitigating the potential for the emergence of fundamentalism.

- Currently, Bangladesh is revolutionizing in industrialization which is fueling the rise in internal migration. A significant number of our Catholic community members are migrating to urban areas to seek employment in industries such as garment manufacturing, beauty salons, and various other sectors. Typically, they reside in dispersed areas that are distant from the central location of the Church. Typically, they lack sufficient time to participate in Sunday Eucharist.

The Church is likely to launch initiatives aimed at locating its dispersed followers in various urban areas. Forming a bond with them will enable them to experience a sense of belonging and closeness to Christ. The Church has a crucial obligation to

provide sacramental services and catechism education to these domestically displaced believers.

- Bangladesh is a country that is highly susceptible to disasters. It experiences cyclones and floods annually. It is among the countries most susceptible to the impacts of global warming. During each occurrence of a natural disaster, our population is inevitably impacted. The tiny Church in Bangladesh extends its assistance to individuals of all religious beliefs in confronting the difficulties posed by natural calamities. Currently, Bangladesh is experiencing heat waves and an unprecedented increase in temperature that has surpassed all previous records of the past 70 years.

The local Church is anticipated to proactively undertake measures to preserve the environment and contribute to the creation of a more sustainable earth through a tree-planting campaign. The local Church has already implemented an extensive tree plantation campaign in response to the *Laudato Si* and the country's Golden Jubilee of Independence. The program has the potential to be updated and improved in the current context.

- In 2017, the Holy See established a new ecclesiastical province in Bangladesh because to the Church's growth and the presence of developing fruits. The local Church has now two ecclesiastical provinces, with their seats in Dhaka and Chattogram. The newly established province of Chattogram has not been adequately fortified at present.

The episcopal conference and the bishops of the Chattogram province should devise strategies to enhance the newly established ecclesiastical province. The offices of significant episcopal commissions, committees, and organizations have the potential to be relocated to the new province. It will increase the engagement of individuals in assuming leadership roles. The bishops in the same ecclesiastical province may convene periodically to address region-specific matters. It should also strive to identify and establish any shared ministries that exist in the area.

- Our local Church hosts many conferences, meetings, seminars, and training programs. These are providing beneficial effects on the deepening of faith. However, the majority of those are primarily unidirectional. There are limited opportunities for individuals to express their perspectives.

We anticipate that pastors at all levels will regularly convene with their congregants in various age groups, ministry groups, or groups based on specific needs. These listening sessions will genuinely embrace all perspectives and carefully consider every criticism.

- The Diocesan College of Consultors, Finance Council, Pastoral Council, Parish Pastoral Council, Parish Finance Council, etc. has solely consultative status in accordance with the legal and customary practices of the Church. Practically, the pastors conscientiously take into account the proposals of the members, but it is not obligatory. Furthermore, it has been observed in some instances where people's suggestions are disregarded.

The consultative forums are anticipated to possess the power to make decisions while being equipped with the necessary knowledge and understanding to make discernment based on the teachings of the Bible and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

- Several lay associations and movements are actively operating inside the parish. The pastors are actively engaged in their own meetings and initiatives. Ultimately, there is a lack of coordination among all the parish associations and activities.

We anticipate that the local Church will consider organizing regular joint gatherings of association and movement leaders to promote collaboration and shared responsibilities, so fostering a stronger feeling of unity within the Body of Christ.

CONCLUSION

It is needless to say that the Synodal Journey has enhanced new 'joy and hope' among all the faithful of Bangladesh. This is a 'new way of being Church' which traces back to the Early Church modeled after Christ's Body and his members. However, there will always remain challenges in implementing the newness especially in the thought patterns. As synodality is not merely a goal but a

journey of all the Faithful together in hand in hand, it will take time to grasp the full meaning of it. Occasionally, we may have to pause our journey for the 'weak members' who cannot walk with all at the same pace. The Church in Bangladesh expresses its wholehearted desire to walk together with all the Individual Churches throughout the world and adhere to the teachings and guiding of the Universal Church of Rome. We look forward to the upcoming final session of the Synod of Bishops and hope in the spirit that the Synod will be open to what the Churches of the world has said and take necessary measures guided by the Spirit of God.

CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF INDIA

Summary of the Diocesan Responses to the Synthesis Report of the First Session of the XVI General Assembly of the Synod for a Synodal Church

Background, Procedure and Outcome

The Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI) is pleased to present a synopsis of the Diocesan responses to the “Synthesis Report” of the First Session of the XVI General Assembly of the Synod for a Synodal Church. This summary captures insights, reflections and recommendations from 70 dioceses out of 132 in the CCBI. The present summary is compiled from the contributions of the dioceses that consulted about 20 to 30 members each to deliberate on the topics dealt with in the Synthesis Report, discussed as per the Possible Worksheet proposed by the Synod General Secretariat, Rome. The present summary follows the same Worksheet in presenting the compilation of the fruits of the discussion.

The Summary Report is reviewed by a committee of experts in canon law, theologians and representatives from the Episcopal Conference to ensure accuracy, comprehensiveness and fidelity to the diocesan responses. Feedback and revisions are incorporated as needed.

1. What were the steps taken to (a) convey the experience of the October assembly; (b) publicize and work on the Synthesis Report; and (c) disseminate widely the Letter to the People of God.

a. *Conveying the Experience of the October Assembly:* (i) At the XXXV Plenary Assembly of the Episcopal Conference and at the Regional Bishops’ Councils, the participants of the Synod in Rome shared their key takeaways and experiences from the October assembly, and a few went on a ‘synodal tour’ to witness to their experience. (ii) Individual Bishops issued pastoral letters to their dioceses summarizing the assembly and encouraging reflection at the local level. (iii) Priests within dioceses facilitated discussions at the parish level to delve deeper into the assembly’s experience and its implications for the local church community.

b. *Publicizing and Working on the Synthesis Report*: (i) The CCBI published the Synthesis Report as a printed book and translated its summary into 12 regional languages for deliberation at the Regional Bishops' Councils. (ii) Dioceses and parishes formed study groups to analyse the report's contents and propose ways to implement its recommendations ('proposals') within their specific contexts. (iii) A summary of the document was presented to the Bishops at the CCBI XXXV Plenary Assembly. (iv) The key points from the report were circulated through social media platforms. (v) An online seminar was conducted for the Bishops, the Diocesan Contact Persons and the lay volunteers on the content of the report and its significance for the Church in India. (vi) An online workshop was conducted for the Diocesan Contact Persons to assist them to read their Diocesan Report of the First Phase in the light of the Synthesis Report.

c. *Disseminating Widely the Letter to the People of God*: (i) Printed copies of the Letter were distributed to priests, religious and parishioners during church services and through parish offices. (ii) The Letter was published in diocesan, and parish bulletins, as well as church newsletters to ensure a wider reach within the local community. (iii) The Local Churches shared the Letter through their websites and social media channels to reach a broader audience.

2. What can we do locally at parish, diocesan, national, and continental levels to continue learning synodality? Identify 3 priorities from the topics; and 3 initiatives from the proposals.

Three Priorities

a. "A Synodal Approach to Formation." (*Synthesis Report*, #14)

Goal: To create a formation process that fosters understanding of synodality and encourages collaboration, discernment and shared responsibility within the Church.

Actions: (i) Identify images and stories closely associated with synodality. (ii) Design, develop and implement joint onsite formation programs where clergy, religious and lay people learn together to appreciate synodality. (iii) Integrate synodal practices, like spiritual conversation method, active listening, discernment

exercises and respectful dialogue to equip the people with synodal skills.

b. "People in Poverty, Protagonists of the Church's Journey." (*Synthesis Report*, #4)

Goal: To empower those living in poverty to be active participants in the mission.

Actions: (i) Listening to the voices of people living in poverty within the Church, actively seeking their input, insights and experiences in decision-making processes. (ii) Standing in solidarity and with those marginalized by poverty and systemic injustice to promote social justice, economic equity and human rights. (iii) Providing pastoral care, material assistance and spiritual accompaniment to individuals and families affected by poverty, recognizing their holistic needs and aspirations. (iv) Integrating the needs and concerns of people in poverty into homilies, bidding prayers and pastoral reflections, to acknowledge their integral presence in the worshipping community.

c. "Church is Mission." (*Synthesis Report*, #8)

Goal: To proclaim the Gospel message authentically and effectively, reaching out to those on the margins and inviting them into communion with Christ and the Church.

Actions: (i) Develop and implement comprehensive formation programs for clergy, religious and lay leaders focused on evangelization, new evangelization, catechesis and missionary discipleship. (ii) Foster interfaith and ecumenical dialogue and collaboration as integral aspects of mission, promoting mutual respect, understanding and cooperation with members of other religious traditions and Christian denominations. (iii) Prioritize youth and family ministry as key dimensions of the Church's mission, investing in programs and initiatives that engage young people and families in vibrant faith communities, catechetical formation and missionary outreach. (iv) Animate the lay leaders to be effective 'missionary disciples' by providing them with resources, facilities and opportunities.

Three Initiatives

a. "Involving clergy more actively in the synodal process is crucial for fostering a culture of collaboration, dialogue, and discernment within the Church." (*Synthesis Report*, # 1.n.)

(i) *Conviction, formation and training*: Convince the clergy that synodality is the new way of being the Church today; deepen their understanding of synodal principles, methodologies, and pastoral applications. (ii) *Culture of participatory decision-making*: Inspire the clergy to collaborate with laity and religious in pastoral planning, ministry coordination and mission implementation, recognizing their unique gifts, charisms and responsibilities. (iii) *Change comes from oneself*: Inculcate in the clergy synodal attitude or mindset, which offers them a sort of paradigm for looking at their life and ministry.

b. "Publicising the Church's social doctrine." (*Synthesis Report*, # 4.n.)

(i) *Education and formation within the Church*: Provide resources such as catechetical materials, study guides and multimedia presentations that explore key documents and themes of the Church's social teaching. (ii) *Preaching and Homiletics*: Encourage clergy to incorporate reflections on social justice issues and the Church's social doctrine into their preaching and homilies during Mass and other liturgical celebrations. (iii) *Community engagement*: Engage the faithful actively with the affairs of the civil society and make them have a perspective reading from the point of view of Church's social teaching and apply the principles hands on.

c. "Providing opportunities for recognising, forming, and accompanying those already working as digital missionaries, while also facilitating networking amongst them." (*Synthesis Report*, # 17.1.)

(i) *Recognition and acknowledgment*: Highlight success stories and best practices of digital missionaries through publications, social media and dedicated platforms to inspire and motivate others. (ii) *Mentorship and accompaniment*: Facilitate joint and peer-to-peer mentoring on evangelization strategies and digital communication skills; support networks where digital missionaries can share

experiences, seek advice and offer encouragement to one another. (iii) *Integration with traditional ministries*: Explore opportunities for integrating digital missionary efforts with traditional forms of pastoral ministry, such as parish life, catechesis, and outreach to the marginalized communities.

3. What proposals can be made to concretely experiment with the synodal method of conversation in the Spirit in the various meetings and assemblies, and participatory bodies?

At the national level, the CCBI has implemented the synodal method of Conversation in the Spirit for its strategic planning, consulting groups and individuals across the Country, and has found that the method is effective, spirit-filled and fruitful. The success of the method lies in ‘intentional speaking’ and ‘intensive listening’, punctuated by ‘interior silence.’

The method could be further concretely experimented in various meetings (joint, and one-to-one, in religious houses, seminars, workshops), assemblies (community or parish gatherings, pious associations, movements and Basic Ecclesial Communities), and participatory bodies (college of consultors, priests’ council, parish pastoral council, finance council and diocesan pastoral council) by embracing the following constitutive elements:

(i) *Culture of listening and dialogue*: Emphasize the importance of active listening, mutual respect and open dialogue among participants. (ii) *Prayerful discernment*: Incorporate moments of silence and reflection to allow participants to discern the promptings of the Spirit.

(iii) *Facilitation and shared leadership*: Train facilitators in the synodal method of conversation in the Spirit to guide discussions effectively, resolve conflict and build consensus. (iv) *Consensus building*: Seek consensus rather than majority vote in decision-making processes. (v) *Feedback and evaluation*: Solicit feedback from participants after the meeting to assess the effectiveness of the synodal process. (vi) *Integration with spiritual life*: Integrate spiritual practices, such as Scripture reflection, liturgical prayers or Ignatian examen, into the meeting agenda to deepen participants’ spiritual engagement.

4. How can we involve all the baptised more closely in the synod process and how to listen more to those on the periphery?

Involving all the baptised more closely in the synod process

a. *Elderly*: Offer pastoral visits to the elderly in the families, hospitals or care homes, providing opportunities for listening sessions and dialogue on issues relevant to their lives and faith.

b. *Migrants*: Establish multilingual and culturally sensitive channels for consultation and participation, ensuring that migrants can contribute their voices and experiences to the synodal process.

c. *Women*: Promote gender equality and inclusive representation in synodal structures and decision-making bodies, ensuring that women have equal opportunities to participate and contribute.

d. *Young people*: Organize intergenerational events and mentorship programs that facilitate meaningful interaction and exchange between young people and Church leaders.

e. *Children*: Adapt synodal methodologies and language to make them accessible and engaging for children, using age-appropriate activities, storytelling and creative expression to facilitate their participation.

f. *Families*: Encourage families to participate together in synodal discussions and discernment processes, recognizing the importance of the family as a primary locus of faith formation and transmission.

Listening to those in the peripheries

a. *Direct engagement*: Reach out directly to communities and individuals living in the peripheries, including marginalized groups, migrants, refugees, the homeless and those living in poverty.

b. *Culturally sensitive approaches*: Partner with local leaders, community organizations and grassroots movements that have established trust and credibility within marginalized communities.

c. *Listening tours and visits*: Conduct listening tours or pastoral visits to regions and neighbourhoods where those in the peripheries are concentrated – including those who are emancipated on account of their status of life and orientation, providing opportunities for face-to-face interaction and dialogue.

5. From among the “Questions to be addressed” (“matters for consideration”), choose 1 or 2 topics to be explored in relation to local issues and have them drawn up by a commission of theologians, canonists, and pastoral leaders.

a. “The Church too is affected by polarization and distrust in vital matters such as liturgical life and moral, social, and theological reflection.” (*Synthesis Report*, # 5.h.)

(i) *Impact on communion*: Polarization and distrust can erode the sense of communion and unity within the Church, leading to division, conflict and fragmentation among its members. When disagreements arise over social standing, linguistic and caste differences, cultural practices, it can create rifts that undermine the Church’s ability to effectively proclaim the Gospel and witness to the love and mercy of Christ.

(ii) *Challenge to authentic dialogue*: Polarization often hinders authentic dialogue and mutual understanding among members of the Church. When individuals or groups become entrenched in their positions, they may be resistant to engaging in respectful discourse, listening to differing perspectives, or seeking common ground. This lack of dialogue can inhibit growth in faith, hinder pastoral collaboration, and impede the discernment of God’s will for the Church.

(iii) *Obstacle to evangelization*: Distrust and polarization within the Church can present obstacles to its mission of evangelization and outreach. When internal divisions and conflicts become public, they risk alienating those outside the Church and undermining its credibility as a witness to the truth and love of Christ. People may be hesitant to embrace the faith or participate in the life of the Church if they perceive it as divided or lacking in coherence.

(iv) *Call to conversion and reconciliation*: Addressing polarization and distrust within the Church requires a commitment to ongoing

conversion and reconciliation. It calls for humility, openness and a willingness to listen and learn from one another, even amid differences of opinion or interpretation. Recognizing the inherent dignity of every member of the Church and seeking unity in diversity are essential for fostering a culture of encounter, dialogue, and communion.

(v) *Renewal of ecclesial life*: Overcoming polarization and distrust in vital matters such as social standing, linguistic and caste differences, cultural practices requires a concerted effort to renew ecclesial life. This renewal involves fostering a spirit of synodality, where all members of the Church are invited to participate actively in discerning God's will for the community. It also entails promoting a culture of encounter and reconciliation, where differences are respected and reconciled in charity and truth.

(vi) *Dignity of human person*: Ultimately, addressing polarization and distrust within the Church requires recognizing the dignity of human person that is intrinsic, for, only upon realizing this dignity, we may move to talk about the baptismal dignity.

b. "In regions where the faithful of different rites of Catholic Church are present, we need to find models that render visible effective forms of unity in diversity." (*Synthesis Report*, # 6.d.)

(i) *Celebrating diversity with pains*: In India, the Latin Church co-exists with Syro-Malabar Church and Syro-Malankara Church. The co-existence offers an opportunity to celebrate the richness of traditions, cultures and spiritual expressions. However, at times the ritual differences bring forth misunderstanding, trespassing of boundaries and cultural-linguistic imposition on the local people. The Eastern Churches which insist on their rights are silent about their duties. They who claim all-India jurisdiction conveniently interpret the law to suit their needs. For example, the priests of oriental rites, doing service in the Latin dioceses anywhere in the world, celebrate the Latin Holy Mass without any apprehension, taking very well such a 'faculty' for granted. The same priests or other priests and bishops of the same rite are quite apprehensive and even harsh on finding their faithful frequenting the Latin liturgy. A joint commission of Bishops, theologians, historians, canonists, and parish priests could be formed to work on the

guidelines that will empower pastoral leadership to all the faithful without ritual differentiation.

(ii) *Synodal approach*: The conflict between the Eastern Churches and the Latin Church arises because of jealousy, boundaries, superiority complex, infringement of rights and pastoral concerns. Based on need, circumstance and percentage, privileges must be given to the Eastern Churches, not on account of their minority status. It is recommended that we strive to build more on commonalities, not on the differences.

(iii) *Joint commission*: “Establishing a joint commission of Eastern and Latin theologians, historians and canonists to address issues requiring further study and formulate proposals pointing a way forward” (cf. *Synthesis Report*, # 6.j.). This requires sensitivity to cultural differences, a willingness to learn from one another and a commitment to promote inclusivity and solidarity within the Church.

6. Identify and share 2 or 3 local resources and initiatives or good practices of synodality:

a. *Krista Bhaktas*: Krista Bhaktas, also known as Christian Bhaktas (‘devotees’), refers to individuals within Hinduism who have a deep devotion to Jesus Christ while remaining within the Hindu religious framework. For these individuals, devotion to Jesus Christ does not necessarily entail conversion to Christianity but rather enriches their own Hindu faith and spiritual journey. Krista Bhaktas contribute to the broader dialogue on interfaith relations and religious harmony in India, challenging rigid boundaries between religious communities and fostering greater understanding, respect and cooperation among people of different faith traditions.

b. *Interfaith dialogue and ecumenical celebrations*: Given India’s religious diversity, interreligious dialogue and collaboration are essential aspects of synodality in the Indian context. Many local initiatives and organizations, such as interfaith forums, peace committees, interfaith / ecumenical / inter ritual hubs for deeds of compassion and Word-Prayer experience and ecumenical councils, bring together representatives from different religious

communities to promote mutual respect, understanding and cooperation. During the common cultural celebrations, Catholics move beyond their Christian identity to accommodate cultural elements.

c. *Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs)*: BECs serve as vibrant expressions of synodality in India, providing spaces for the active participation and engagement of all members in the life and mission of the Church. These communities embody the principles of communion, participation and shared responsibility through a network of various ministries in certain region, empowering members to discern and respond to the needs of their local contexts through prayerful reflection and collaborative action.

7. How can we deepen the definition and understanding of synodality in our cultural context?

Deepening the definition and understanding of synodality in the cultural context of India requires an approach that is sensitive to the rich diversity of cultures, languages, religions and traditions present within the country. Here are some key considerations for deepening the understanding of synodality in the Indian context:

a. *Cultural sensitivity*: Ground the concept of synodality in indigenous cultural values and traditions that emphasize community, hospitality, inclusivity and consensus-building.

b. *Interreligious dialogue and formation*: Explore common principles of governance, consultation and decision-making found in various religious and philosophical traditions, fostering mutual respect and understanding.

c. *Social justice and solidarity*: Situate synodality within the broader context of social justice and solidarity, addressing the socio-economic inequalities, caste discrimination, gender disparities and other systemic injustices prevalent in Indian society.

d. *Inclusivity and representation*: Empower marginalized communities, including Dalits, Adivasis, women, youth and religious minorities, to participate actively in synodal assemblies, councils and decision-making bodies.

e. *Contextual theology and praxis*: Develop a contextual theology of synodality that integrates insights from Indian spirituality, theology and social analysis, drawing on the wisdom of Indian Christian theologians and thinkers.

f. *Interfaith synodal formation*: Offer educational programs, seminars and workshops on synodality tailored to the Indian context, engaging clergy, religious and lay leaders in theological reflection, dialogue and praxis.

Propose images of synodality that can make sense in the local culture

a. *The circle of Satsang*: In many Indian traditions, Satsang refers to a gathering of individuals for spiritual discourse, prayer and communal singing. The image of a circle of Satsang can represent synodality as a gathering of the faithful in dialogue, prayer and mutual discernment. It emphasizes the equality of all participants and the importance of communal sharing and listening in the journey of faith.

b. *The tree of dharma*: The tree holds deep symbolism in Indian culture, representing life, growth and interconnectedness. In the context of synodality, the image of the Tree of Dharma can symbolize the diversity and unity of the Church, with its branches representing different communities and traditions rooted in a shared commitment to truth, justice and compassion.

c. *The weaver's loom*: Weaving is an ancient craft in India, symbolizing the intricate interplay of threads to create a unified fabric. The image of the weaver's loom can represent synodality as a collaborative process of weaving together the diverse gifts, talents and perspectives of the faithful to create a tapestry of communion and mission.

d. *Snake boat or canoe*: The image of snake boat or canoe symbolizes unity in diversity, collaborative effort directed to a single goal, inclusivity and participation, adaptability and flexibility, celebration and communion.

e. *Joint family (household)*: The joint family, a traditional household structure in India where multiple generations live together under one roof and share resources, responsibilities and experiences, can

be a compelling image of synodality within the local culture, as it paves way for collaborative decision-making, shared responsibility, intergenerational wisdom, support and solidarity.

f. *Harvest dance*: A cultural tradition in many regions of India, is an image that symbolises symphony, harmony, collaboration, gratitude and celebration of the co-workers.

g. *Ramponn* ('fishing and sharing together'): This is an image that reminds us about our 'fraternity and social friendship', collective responsibility for the weak and hard work.

8. How can we implement and deepen the spiritual dimension of synodality at the local level (3k.1.m)?

a. *Scripture reflection*: Facilitate *Lectio Divina* or Ignatian contemplation exercises that allow participants to listen attentively to God's voice speaking through the Scriptures and to discern its relevance to their shared journey.

b. *Liturgical celebration*: Design special liturgies or prayer services dedicated to the synodal process, incorporating symbols, rituals and prayers that express the Church's commitment to discernment and collaboration.

c. *Eucharistic celebration, adoration and benediction*: Foster a spirit of reverence, awe and gratitude in the presence of the Eucharistic Lord, recognizing the centrality of Christ's presence in guiding and nourishing the synodal journey.

d. *Fraternal communion and support*: Foster a sense of fraternal communion and mutual support among participants, nurturing relationships of trust, respect and solidarity that reflect the unity of the Body of Christ.

e. *Prayerful reflection and sharing*: Organize prayer groups or circles within the context of popular devotions, where participants can engage in reflective dialogue, Scripture sharing and communal discernment on synodal topics.

9. Re-read the way synodality is concretely lived (especially the dimension of participation and authority) in the participatory bodies in the light of the Synthesis Report:

a. *Inclusive participation*: Participatory bodies are characterized by diverse representation, including bishops, clergy, religious and lay members, reflecting the rich diversity of the People of God.

b. *Consultative process*: Decision-making processes within participatory bodies are consultative in nature, with decisions informed by dialogue, discernment and consensus-building rather than top-down directives.

c. *Shared authority and co-responsibility*: Decisions are made collaboratively, with an acknowledgment of the complementary gifts, charisms and expertise of each member, fostering a sense of co-responsibility for the Church's mission and pastoral care.

d. *Transparency and accountability*: Participatory bodies operate with transparency and accountability, ensuring that decisions and actions are guided by the common good and the Gospel values of justice, truth and mercy.

e. *Integration with synodal principles*: Synodal principles, as articulated in the Synthesis Report, serve as a guiding framework for the functioning of participatory bodies, shaping their structures, processes and priorities.

f. *Formation and empowerment*: Members of participatory bodies are provided with ongoing formation and pastoral accompaniment to deepen their understanding of synodality and their role within the Church's governance structures.

10. Implement concrete initiatives for formation in synodality within formation centres and theological faculties:

a. *Curriculum integration*: Develop courses, seminars and workshops that explore the theological foundations, historical development and pastoral implications of synodality, drawing on Scripture, tradition and magisterial documents.

b. *Interdisciplinary approach*: Strengthen interdisciplinary dialogue and collaboration among theologians, pastoral ministers, canon

lawyers, sociologists and experts in dialogue and communication to enrich the formation in synodality.

c. *Practical formation*: Provide practical formation experiences that allow students to engage directly with synodal processes and practices, such as participation in diocesan synods, pastoral councils or ecclesial assemblies.

d. *Research and scholarship*: Encourage research and scholarship on synodality within theological faculties, fostering a culture of academic inquiry and theological reflection on the synodal nature of the Church.

e. *Dialogue and encounter*: Facilitate opportunities for dialogue and encounter with practitioners of synodality, including bishops, pastors, lay leaders and members of synodal bodies, who can share their experiences and insights with students.

f. *Continuing education and development*: Offer continuing education programs and professional development opportunities for clergy, on the knowledge, skills and competencies needed to foster synodal communities and initiatives in their respective contexts, building up synodal culture and consensus.

**Feedback Report on Synthesis Report, Synod 2021-2024
TOWARDS OCTOBER 2024
Pakistan Catholic Bishops Conference
How can we be a Synodal Church in mission?**

1. Introduction

In coherence with the guidelines outlined in the comprehensive Synodal journey report, the Synodal Committee of the Catholic Diocese in Pakistan, reflected on the question, "**HOW CAN WE BE A SYNODAL CHURCH IN MISSION?**", drawing insights and feedback from various groups of people of God, and based on the response we received from the various parishes and groups. This synthesis is made in the light the meetings, gatherings and consultations organized by the committee where the committee members reflected and shared their experiences and evaluations on the main themes mentioned underneath. The theme of everyone's participation, with our varied vocations, charisms and ministries, in the one mission of proclaiming Jesus Christ to the world. In light of the Church's missionary transformation, envisaged in the Apostolic Exhortation following are main points considered to get feedback on mentioned question;

- **Consultation process**
 - **Different contexts and circumstances considered**
- 2. Consolidation themes and priorities from groups in Dioceses**

2.1 The Importance of Participation of Laity

The call to co-responsibility is rooted in the baptism of every faithful. It is simultaneously a theological and canonical point of view to promote and support the participation of the lay faithful in the Church in their different context. On the one hand, it is necessary to avoid limiting the participation of the lay faithful to "intra-ecclesial tasks without a real commitment to applying the Gospel to the transformation of society as mentioned in the Apostolic Exhortation of the Holy See. On the other hand, it is necessary to continue the research on the relationships between the different forms of ecclesial ministry. These both go hand in

hand. The formation of the laity to take on important responsibility is a key factor to materialize this aspect. The Gospel values are to be implanted in the individuals to have transformation of society.

2.2 Co-Responsibility in the Church: A Call to Action

Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC) are in dire need to attain the co-responsibility in the mission. The importance of the sector involvement in the pastoral activity of the local church can never be compromised at any cost. In the (BEC) every faithful must be familiar with their missionary call for evangelization.

2.3 Missionary Commitment in the Church Today

To enhance the originality of each baptized person and each Church in the unique mission of proclaiming the Risen Lord and His Gospel to the world today. It is therefore not a question of limiting ourselves to the plan of technical or procedural improvements that make the Church's structures more efficient, but of working on the concrete forms of the missionary commitment to which we are called, in the dynamism between unity and diversity proper to a Synodal Church

2.4 Walking with Christ

The majority felt the following: A call to the faithful to be involved in the Mission of Christ "*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them all that I have commanded you.*" (Mt. 28:19-20). To fulfill this, we need the following:

- ✚ **Emphasis on involvement of Laity:** where we stress the role of the laity in the church, where our laity is able to put faith in action (reading of Sacred Scriptures before we begin our ministry + then go out to perform our ministry + then after winding up we close with the reading of the scriptures).
- ✚ **Laity to grow in the life of the Church:** the laity is called to active and not passive participation but continue moving in their involvement in Church ministries and enrich other groups with the gifts we have received (from

altar servers, Ushers, to lector's, to cantors, to Eucharistic Ministers, to Pastoral workers to Catechists etc.).

2.5 Authentic listening

Authentic listening is a call to be open to the realities of life we tend to ignore. Our authentic listening should move us to active listening where after listening we are able to do something for them (e.g. After listening to the story of a poor, we should be able to help them.)

2.6 Concern for Women

Although women have, an important role in the Church but a greater role and responsibility may be granted to them with an official. Although it is thought and taught that men and women are of equal dignity. It has been witnessed that women are more dedicated and eager to serve in the pastoral care of the local churches. However, more emphasis must be given to the formation of women, to enable them to participate more effectively in the mission of the church, even though sometimes this gets in conflict with our socio-cultural criticism.

2.7 The Role of permanent Deacons

Keeping in mind the local Church, the role of Catechists is playing a similar role of deacons. We cannot negate the importance of Catechists here in the local Church where they evangelize living out the Gospel within the people. We should by no means negate this role of the permanent diaconate but also accept the ministry and role the Catechists play in the local Church.

2.8 Small Christian Communities

It is quite a challenge of coming together, since our people are working day and night to make ends meet but still we are called to strive to bring our people together around the Word of God.

3. Key points of Consultations and meetings of transversal perspective

3.1 Empowering Laity in Mission

- ✚ **Encourage and promote active involvement:** Emphasize the role of the laity as baptized missionaries, empowering them to live out their faith actively in the Church and society.
- ✚ **Strengthening the initiatives of formation for Laity:** to provide comprehensive training and formation programs to equip laity with the skills and knowledge necessary for leadership roles within the Church. This includes preparing them for active participation in various parish ministries and outreach programs.

3.2 Community Engagement and Solidarity

- ✚ **Foster communion and collaboration:** Cultivate a spirit of unity and cooperation among clergy, religious, and laity within the Church community. Encourage mutual support and collaboration in addressing social challenges.
- ✚ **Address social issues through initiatives:** Engage in community-based projects and partnerships to tackle prevalent issues like poverty, education, healthcare, and other social concerns affecting the faithful especially the most vulnerable groups in the Dioceses.

3.3 Youth and Family Ministry

- ✚ **Prioritize comprehensive faith formation:** Develop and implement specialized programs that cater to the specific needs of youth and families, providing them with holistic faith formation and pastoral support.
- ✚ **Empower families as centers of faith:** Equip families to be active centers of faith formation by emphasizing

Christian values and fostering spiritual growth within the family unit.

3.4 Interfaith Dialogue and Social Harmony

- ✚ **Promote dialogue and understanding:** Initiate and facilitate dialogue with members of other religious communities to promote mutual understanding, respect, and cooperation.
- ✚ **Advocate for peace and tolerance:** we need to address issues related to religious extremism by advocating for peace, tolerance, and social harmony within the broader community.

3.5 Stewardship

Educate and encourage faithful/parishioners to actively contribute towards the Church's mission through responsible use of local resources and support for sustainable development.

3.6 Catechesis and Evangelization

- ✚ **Strengthen catechetical programs:** Develop robust catechetical programs to deepen parishioners' understanding of Catholic teachings, especially targeting young adults and families.
- ✚ **Promote effective evangelization:** Engage in evangelization efforts that are relevant to current challenges and circumstances, spreading the message of the Gospel with a focus on love, mercy, and social justice.

4. Conclusion

4.1 Building a Vibrant and Synodal Church

Our priorities reflect this vision of empowering the laity, strengthening community engagement, nurturing youth and family ministries, fostering interfaith dialogue, promoting responsible stewardship, and enhancing catechesis and evangelization. Through these initiatives, we aspire to embody

synodality in our diocesan life, enriching our faith communities and extending the love of Christ to all.

4.2 Empowering the Laity and Strengthening Communities

We must seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit to transform our local Church into a beacon of communion, active participation, and mission. May the Holy Spirit continue to inspire and guide us on this journey, as we strive to deepen our communion with God and one another, engage more fully in our Church's mission, and bear witness to the Gospel in our diverse and dynamic World. Together with the whole world, we too are waiting for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit through the Holy Father Pope Francis together with the Synod Fathers that the Church in these modern times will become a Synodal Church enabling us to continue our journey towards "Communion, Participation and Mission".

4.3 Faith Formation and Outreach towards a Synodal Church

We can benefit and learn from the pastoral experiences of each other. Different programmes and seminars on pastoral point of view can be conducted at international level; where participants from various local churches can engage and share their socio-cultural values with each other.

We can learn and enrich ourselves from the cultural, traditional, contextual and ground realities of the other local churches.

SUMMARY REPORT OF
THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF SRI LANKA
FOR THE 2ND SESSION OF THE SYNOD ON SYNODALITY
2024

The National Secretariat headed by Rt. Rev. Dr. J. D. Anthony, Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Colombo, includes Rt. Rev. Dr. Raymond Wickremasinghe, Bishop of Galle, the participant at the Synod, representing CBCSL, and the 12 Diocesan Coordinators. We have the privilege of having Rev. Fr. Vimal Tirimanna CSsR, the theologian-consultant at the Synod in our group.

As the national local Church, we decided to pay attention to nos. 1, 14 and 18 of the Synthesis Report, namely,

1. Synodality: Experience and Understanding
14. A Synodal Approach to Formation
18. Structures for Participation

Few dioceses went further to discuss the following as well:

4. People in Poverty, Protagonists of the Church's Journey
8. Church is Mission

Herewith we present the summary of the reports received.

The 'Conversation in the Spirit' is not a strange reality.

1. Synodality: Experience and Understanding

- Everyone who took part was of the opinion that the Synodal Way of Being Church is necessary in our context. The word 'synodality' is not strange, yet we need to make the dream come true, through our way of being. Synodality is a need of the time as all, priests, religious and laity want to be listened to and express themselves, even in decision-making. It is another proof that the Holy Mother the Church is a Communion of Faithful and

always wishes to listen to the voice of Her children from far and wide.

- The Lay Faithful were glad that their contribution during the Synodal consultation was not in vain. The views they expressed by all irrespective of nationalities and age limit in the process of consultation have been respected and as a result now once again consulted in connection with the convergences emerged.
- It was one of the explicit and important exercise which depicted the Oneness and Universality of the Catholic Church, which is a proof of the powerful presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit. It has manifested the openness of the Holy Mother the Church to all her children.
- During the round table discussions, the participants shared their lack of awareness about the Synodal process, especially about the level of the continental stages. Further, the participants expressed that some people in the parishes are unaware of this synodal discussion in the Diocese and the vision of Pope Francis since they have never heard of their Parish Priest talking about this important event during the Sunday liturgy.
- A change in attitude is called for: whether we are priests, religious or laity, all of us as baptized are temples of the Holy Spirit. We are far from accepting, in reality, that God speaks to us through all, especially the laity. A mentality not only found among priests and religious but also in the laity. The laity should be convinced that God speaks through them as well.
- The change must begin from the highest level to the grassroots. The pastoral leadership needs to make an effort to live synodality.
- For the synodal culture to be a dream come true, the active participation of the clergy is fundamental. At present in our pastoral structure, nothing moves unless the priest is convinced. Involvement and conviction of priests and religious will make the synodal way of being Church a reality. It is very sad to observe that only a handful of

priests are interested in the explanation and the implementation of the synodal proposals.

- Lay Faithful expressed their views that the opportunities given are insufficient for a better understanding of the synodal process. Somehow, it may take a longer period of time for the realization of this dream of journeying together as brothers and sisters.
- A few notable barriers for Synodality were identified during the discussion, namely, Clericalism, mediocre attitude of the clergy towards the Synod on Synodality, failure to form a proper lay leadership which takes Synodality Seriously.
- Coming together in prayer, reflection and in a bond of fraternity of love, the family needs to experience the manifestation of the mission of the Church in the family setting. A new impetus and a model of faith experience should be framed to suit the families, who are now distanced very much by global and social media trends.
- The 'neighbourhood church' which is a communion of families as formulated as 'Small Christian Communities' is an expression of the synodality of the Church in its very grass root levels. Therefore, steps need to be taken to offer models of synodality through Small Christian Communities.
- Diocesan level on going formation programmes should be carried out to improve the spirit of listening among lay leaders, religious and priests in common and NOT separately for laity, religious and priests, as *walking together* is a mark of Synodality. Awareness programmes should be provided for the People of God to follow the '*Synodal way of doing*' things in their baptismal vocation.
- National Office should facilitate and provide audio visual guide to make listening a priority in Church life.
- Practical difficulties were shared in implementing the Synodal Process. Some examples which hinder smooth sailing for the synodal process are cited below:
 - a) Non availability of Pastors to whom people can open up.
 - b) Slowness or slackness in reaching out to the lost sheep.

- c) The Sermons or breaking the Word misused to reprimand people publicly.
- d) Family feuds and past wounds becoming a hindrance.

14. A Synodal Approach to Formation

- There are lot of things to do in this regard. Since we are used to the hierarchical structure, it will take time to get into the synodal way of being Church. Most of our programmes have the laity as our object. We have not yet considered, especially the laity as co-responsible subject of formation. Our culture is such that we concentrate more on our weaknesses than the God given gifts. Common programmes for all - priests, religious and laity - would bring about the change.
- Lay leadership and acceptance of it among the laity need to be emphasized. As clergy our acceptance of lay leaders as partners in mission has to be underlined.
- Involvement of laity, especially women and family in priestly formation programmes need to be explored.
- In order to make priestly formation programme fruitful, the seminarians need to know the reality of the world. The setup of formation has to be rethought of. The suffering of the people should go hand in hand with their studies. So various possibilities like pastoral or discernment years could be thought of. To make the synodal way of being Church, a well-balanced formation program needs to be thought of, taking into consideration the Sri Lankan realities and spirituality.
 - Suitable forms of lay ministries should be explored.
 - The post baptismal catechism. The catechesis on Scripture, Sacraments and Social doctrine are very much limited to a certain age group during their schooling age. It is the understanding of the participants that we need a catechetical formation for youth, adults and elders. Mystogogical and sacramental formation is a basic requirement at the moment that could foster the meaning of the Synodal Church as well.
 - Our survey responses indicate that the lay leaders are willing to undergo training programmes on Synodality in

order to be actively involved and participated in the baptismal vocation fully as agents of building communities.

- Involving clergy in synodal formation: “There is a need to find ways to involve the clergy (deacons, priests, bishops and religious) more actively in the synodal process”. Other than meetings and talks, there need to be programmes of synodal formation at every level: for the seminarians in the Propaedeutic level and in the philosophical and theological faculties with practical applications. Programmes should be placed at diaconal formation level, on-going formation level and presbyterium level. “This distortion of the priestly vocation needs to be challenged from the earliest stages of formation by ensuring close contact with the people of God and through concrete service-learning experiences among those most in need”. The success of the implementation process will largely depend on this aspect.

18. Structures for Participation

- The concept of synodality has contributed in a big way in the structures of participation. The Parish Pastoral Councils, Youth movements, etc., are formed according to the synodal way. Lay participation and especially the participation of women and young people are given significant consideration in the pastoral administration in parishes and in the dioceses.
- The Dream of the Vatican II is a Participatory Church. Yet we have failed to realize the dream of the council to a certain extent due to the mediocre attitude of both clergy and laity towards the mission of the Church in the present socio-political context.
- People have some positive remarks about being involved in active participation in the parish activities. Less rigidity on the part of the Parish Priest is expected by the people. It is encouraging to learn from the responses we have received

that there is a notable growth of Co-responsibility for the mission is emerging on the part of the lay leaders.

- It was identified by the participants that there remains a deficiency of a proper discernment in prayer and reflection specially in the decision making within the Community. Rules, rubrics and legalities take prominence over the spirit of prayer, commitment to love and service. This deprives the participation of many in the life of the church and weakens the synodal way of being the Church.
- The obligatory nature of Parish Pastoral Councils in the dioceses, it is expected that Synodality will continue to grow as People of God can participate in the process of decision - making.
- Pastoral structures well suited for a synodal communion is very much present in the church: the functioning of parish pastoral councils in every parish for decades complement the synodal participation; the Apostolates carried out by mostly lay faithful with one priest director and deanery coordinators is a vibrant example of structures in place; the diocesan commissions and Diocesan Pastoral Councils with the participation of bishops, priests, religious and lay faithful give ample opportunity for dialogue and decision making. However, we need to approach all of these structures with a synodal mindset. "There is a need to overcome the 'delegation' mindset found in so many areas of pastoral ministry". There need to be space for more involvement of the lay faithful in the decision-making process for pastoral initiatives.
- As Christians we are not only a faithful community but also need to be a Witnessing Community, which needs to be promoted with regular programs at Parish level. In order to achieve this, we need to strengthen/renew and establish the Small Christian Communities in all the Parishes.
- Another positive point is, that we have families that still prays together. This structure has to be strengthened and supported to reach our dream of Synodal Church. When

the participation begins in the family the Synodal Church will become a reality very soon.

- Our parish structure is God-given. From consulting the laity on various matters, we need to move towards a synodal way of making decisions. We need to form ourselves for this new way of being Church.
- Even in the clerical and religious circles the involvement of each member in discernment and decision making should be dreamed of.
- We have enough and more structures for participation. What is lacking is the synodal methodology. It is a matter of restructuring the mode of participation. Our structures function mostly at a human, organizational and administrative level. It should move towards spiritual and pastoral level based on Revelation.
- The Sunday Liturgy is a very valid structure where people desire to participate. Inculturation of the Liturgy could be the very first form of active participation of the People of God.
- Since, drug addiction, youth unrest, unemployment, political instability, economic crisis, etc., are on the rise that contribute to a social crisis, the parochial structure must be more an open and accommodative place of aggregation for various stress releasing and aesthetic experience for Youth.

4. People in Poverty, Protagonists of the Church's Journey

- Poverty is a theme very near and dear to our context in the dioceses. Even though the majority of our people are affected by many forms of poverty, they continue to be the protagonists of the Church's Journey. Asked whether amidst many forms of poverty in their life struggle, they experience respect and love in parish, zonal and SCC gatherings,

they have responded quite positively, i.e., community acceptance and love surface all pains of poverty.

- Consultation responses clearly show that they above all look for recognition and respect as Co sharers in the mission of the Church.
- More than ever before, the listening to the suffering people is becomingly diminishing in our pastoral concerns resulting in misunderstanding and pain among our faithful.
- Then through proper education and motivation, the laity will join hands in the above task towards those who are materially poor, downtrodden and marginalized in any society.

8. Church is Mission

- A need emerged from among the participants for an ongoing integral awareness on the relationship between the Christological, Pneumatological, Ecclesiological and missiological perspectives of the Synod and Synodality.
- Various success stories related to the proclamation of the Gospel in the modern digital culture were exchanged during the discussion. Yet it was also noted that there remains a large untrodden space or a Missionary landscape in this regard.
- Some discussion groups identified that there is an unwarranted fear among the clergy to recognize and empower the charisms and ministries of the lay people. This hinders the co-responsibility of people of God blurring the vision and the dream of the Synodal Church.
- The mission should flow in all the areas and in the ordinary situations of every day. We cannot separate our faith from everyday life.
- If catechesis, adult formation and liturgy are delivered with love and care and competently, then this will aid parishioners as missionary disciples. It does help to understand the faith and apply it in our daily life.
- Every one of us is a mission on earth. The general call to be a missionary always pinpoints that every one of us is a mission on earth. This mandate 'to go forth' and 'encounter

each other' throughout our daily lives, whether we are consecrated or lay missionaries, is always kept before us. Far from being irrelevant, mission is indeed more vital than ever. We look forward with faith, renewed in our commitment to build a Church for everyone, by everyone, recognizing that we all have our part to play.

NOTE:

Herewith we attach the Synodal Experience Report of the Diocese of Kurunegala.

**"HOW CAN WE BE A SYNODAL CHURCH IN MISSION?"
The Diocesan Consultation Report**

INTRODUCTION

The Catholic Diocese of Kurunegala presents this report in response to the question, "How can we become a Synodal Church in mission?" with the aim of deepening the contents of the synthesis Report of the XVI of the Ordinary General Assembly of the Bishops, based on the experiences, structures and opinions of the people of the diocese, attempting to journey together as a synodal Church for the last 36 years.

PARTICIPATORY CHURCH COMPRISED OF SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES (Synthesis Report chap. 18, let. e)

As a new path of the Synodal Process of the Asian Church, the "Small Christian Community Model" called "Community of Communities" was introduced and promoted by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences in 1990. This model was adapted to suit the Synodal and Pastoral Road map of the diocese of Kurunegala and all Evangelization and Missionary activities are gradually being developed and launched accordingly in a synodal and pastoral way. (Evangelii Gaudium no. 27)

As explained in the Exhortation of Pope Francis, No. 28 of Evangelii Gaudium, the Parish Community is the most suitable structure to bring about a clear change in the journey of the Church. The parish is the primary organ through which each member of the Church can contribute to a Synodal Church

according to their baptismal call (1 Cor. 12:12 - 27). Further it is possible to create a Church that experiences the Risen Lord by entering into a Synodal experience of the first Christian community (Acts 2:42 - 47).

There are 37 parishes with 107 mission station churches inclusive of 654 small Christian Community cells. These families formed into small groups in their own neighborhood environment. They meet once or twice a month as a Christian community and share the Word of God based on the Sacred Scriptures and attempt to experience the presence of the Risen Lord. (Synthesis Report chap. 18, lett. e) They have committed to serve the needs of each other in their own environment with brotherly love. These Communities together with the priests share the responsibility to prepare well, the celebration of Sunday liturgy meaningfully by sharing the Word of God and the Eucharist. The Holy Eucharist reinforces their spiritual bond of baptismal synodality weekly. (1 Cor. 10: 16 - 17). Through the Eucharistic Adoration and devotional practices of taking the statue of Blessed Virgin Mary and the Holy Cross from house to house in the month of May and the season of Lent respectively and other liturgical traditions, strengthen the community bond and the spiritual life. (Report chap. 03, lett. m)

The effectivity of the smooth functioning of the Small Christian Communities depends on the active participation of the lay leaders. Each community leadership team is selected from among them representing the figure of a father, mother, son and daughter in order to organize different activities. This opens the lay people to have wider opportunities to take part in decision making, (1Peter 5: 1- 4) and especially for women to do so freely. (Synthesis Report chap. 09)

The letter of St. Paul's to the Romans (12: 4 - 8), emphasizes the need to participate in the mission to build up the mystical Body of Christ, which is the Church, according to the gifts of the Holy Spirit given to each one of us. It would be a difficult task for a Small Christian Community to engage in the missionary activities by itself only. It is a journey together, walking hand in hand. Therefore, the diocese of Kurunegala, implements a pastoral plan based on the Small Christian concept at the grass root level

establishing the parish pastoral councils, whose representation forms the Diocesan Pastoral Council of which majority are laity and thus builds up one community of communities, bringing all of them under one tent. All the activities of the parish along with pastoral and moral responsibilities are shared and implemented among the leaders. Decisions are made by the leaders through dialogue and listening and discernment process. The external representatives who influence the community, who do not represent God's people and not accountable to the community are not appointed to the pastoral council. (Synthesis Report chap. 08, lett. f)

The pastoral council is responsible for all the missionary services related to the parish, but it alone cannot execute all the pastoral activities. Therefore, the diocese has selected and recognized eight different areas of apostolates which are fundamental to implement the missionary activities. The programs are carried out by these committees set up for that purpose. The eight mission committees are: Family, Youth, Education and Catechetics, Justice and Social Development, Small Christian Community Development, Social Communication, Liturgy and Temporal Affairs. (Synthesis Report chap. 08, lett. i)

Every member of the parish pastoral council is included in one or more of the eight committees of apostolates and engage in pastoral activities by sharing responsibilities. In addition to that, the others related to the church community with different charisms and gifts of the Holy Spirit have also the opportunity to join these committees and use theirs in the pastoral mission of the Church. In this way, every person of the parish community is able to participate in a particular mission and share the responsibilities. (Synthesis Report chap. 08, lett. m) While the parish priest heads the liturgical and temporal affairs committees, the other six are by lay men and women. Thus, in a special way the responsibilities are shared equally and commit themselves deeply in the mission. (Synthesis Report chap. 08, lett. n, o, h)

A MISSIONARY SYNODAL CHURCH IN THE DIOCESE

All the pastoral and missionary programs and activities of the diocese are worked out in a synodal way with the participation of

everyone, not limiting only at the parish level. The diocesan committees of different apostolates are established by the respective members of parish pastoral councils. These diocesan committees are guided by each coordinating priest appointed by the Bishop. In this way, the parish and the diocesan committees are bound together and share responsibilities in the work of evangelization in a synodal way. In this process the laity has much opportunities to participate deeply in the mission as the "Church is Mission". (Synthesis Report chap. 18, lett. a)

According to the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, the Bishops are specially called to build a Synodal Church. In order to realize this, the Diocesan Pastoral Council is established. (Synthesis Report chap. 12, lett. a, b, c) This structure is composed of all the secretaries of the parish pastoral councils, representatives of the diocesan apostolates with their coordinating priests and the representatives of the religious serving in the diocese. The meetings are held four times a year with the Bishop. The participatory environment is set up to reflect, listen, evaluate the missionary endeavours, and find new pathways to evangelize in the present context by sharing the responsibilities as one diocesan Community in order to build the Kingdom of God. (Synthesis Report chap. 12, lett. j, k)

Synodality grows when each member is involved in the process of decision making for the mission of the Church. In this sense, we are encouraged by means SCC communities who live closeness of day to day, around the Word of God and Eucharist.(synthesis ch.18-e)

CONSULTATION

Everyone in the diocese is aware of the participatory pastoral structure and plan that operate within the diocese and is pleased in general. Due to the insufficient knowledge and experience of the concept of "Synodal Church" the active participation and contribution is not up to our expectations. Scholars are also of the opinion, the need to clarify synodality or the synodal journey, theologically, pastorally and canonically. (Synthesis Report chap. 01 lett. f, j)

Synthesis Report of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops,

First Session October 2023

RESPONSE OF THE SYRO-MALABAR CHURCH

Introduction

The Synthesis Report of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, First Session October 2023, Rome, was subjected to a thorough study in the Syro-Malabar Church. The synthesizing committee (Prof. Dr P.C. Aniyankunju, Prof. Dr Kochurani Joseph, Fr. Dr Bilju Vazhappilly, Fr. Dr Thomas Vadakkal, Fr. Dr Francis Pittappillil and Fr. Dr Sebastian Chalakkal), under the guidance of Mar Sebastian Vaniyapurackal, the Curia bishop, gathered together on 23rd April, 2024 in the Major Archiepiscopal Curia at Mount St Thomas, Kakkanad, for the codification of the primary reports of the subcommittees in the previous two sittings (on 9th March and 5th April, 2024). The synthesizing committee discussed the details of the Synthesis Report and prepared the response. In preparing the response, we have addressed the main themes (altogether 20 themes) of the Synthesis Report of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, First Session October 2023 and responded to them from the view point of the Syro-Malabar Church.

PART I

The Face of the Synodal Church

1. Synodality: Experience and Understanding

Synodality existed in the Syro-Malabar Church from the first century onwards. The best example of the early model of the Church being Synodal can be seen in the structure of the *Palliyogam* where the representatives of laity under the leadership of parish priest took decisions regarding the matters of the parish and its administration. The synodal way of sitting the people around the table for discussion is being reflected in almost all realms of the Church.

The understanding of the term 'synodality' has caused confusion in certain circles: to jeopardize the hierarchical structure

of the Church or to get some ideological attention. The universal Church needs to breathe with the Church in the Greek East, Church in the Latin West and the Church in the Syriac Orient. To implement the ways and manner of Synodality in the local church, we put forward the following proposals: Conduct Eparchial, Archeparchial and Major-Archiepiscopal levels of discussions, explain the patristic and magisterial teachings related to Synodality to the common faithful through different organs of the Church, like pious associations, Basic Christian Communities, etc. It is also proposed to convene a meeting of canonists and theologians in the Major Archiepiscopal level, to revise the Particular Law of the Syro-Malabar Church concerning synodality, if necessary, and to conduct a preliminary study forum regarding the revision of the Oriental Canon Law in the Canon Law Institutes of the *sui iuris* Churches, and reinstate the order of permanent diaconate in the Syro-Malabar Church.

2. Gathered and Sent by the Trinity

Conversation helps one to have conversion. So Inter-religious dialogues and process of spiritual renewal of the Christian communities are to be promoted. To foster Synodality, the criteria of ecclesial discernment, especially the contribution of *Lectio Divina* and different spiritual traditions are to be revised, well explained and implemented in an appropriate manner. However, following the biblical and patristic traditions of the Church, the Syro-Malabar Church does not support the idea of women priesthood.

3. Entering the Community of Faith: Christian Initiation

The Sacraments of Initiation given together to the baptismal candidate help the faithful to receive the gift of Holy Spirit and the body and blood of Jesus from the baptism onwards and thereby lead him/her into ecclesial communion. So, the catechumenal journey is very important for the ecclesial experience. Eucharist, the sacrament of unity will help us to shape the structure of the Synodality. Therefore, as per the decision of the Syro-Malabar Church, the Sacraments of Initiation should be administered together in all the Syro-Malabar eparchies. In this regard, liturgical celebrations and para-liturgical services, popular devotions play

vital role in fostering synodal culture and unity in the Syro-Malabar Church. Necessary steps are to be taken to translate the liturgical texts into different languages respecting their culture and to widen the scope of Basic Christian Communities.

4. People in Poverty

The Church always stands for the preferential option for the poor and this is not only on the basis of Christology but also Ecclesiology. Different forms of poverty like material and spiritual exist in our society. The Church has to address the new forms of poverty created by war, terrorism etc. In this regard, the Church may provide the benefits of education, health care and social welfare to all without discrimination. By means of preparing a handbook of the social teachings of the Church and its application in the Synodal way and explaining them to the people through homilies, leaflets and other digital ways the Church needs to show her face of preferential option for the poor and for the earth.

5. A Church 'out of every tribe, tongue, people and nation'

The culture of the local churches and their liturgies are to be respected. Inter-religious dialogue is to be promoted to build communion among the people. Therefore, it is the need of the time to find out different ways of evangelization suitable to various cultures and nations and to foster dialogue and collaboration with religions. This is to be facilitated by teaching the students clearly about the Church documents and magisterial teachings as well as by taking necessary steps to eradicate the racial injustice.

6. The Eastern Churches and Latin Church Traditions

Mutual understanding and dialogue between the members of the Eastern Churches and Latin Church, pastoral care to the Eastern faithful in diaspora to preserve their liturgical identity and establishment of oriental hierarchies in the migrant nations are necessary for the Catholic Church to be Synodal. In this regard, the idea of Permanent Council of Patriarchs and Major Archbishops of the Eastern Catholic Churches is good. Other main proposals are: to acknowledge the major contributions of the Eastern Catholic Churches in the field of Synodal practices and ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue, to insert the quotations of the East Syrian

Fathers in the papal encyclicals and other magisterial teachings, to extend the jurisdiction of the Patriarchs outside the patriarchal territory and to convene special synod of the Eastern Churches to listen to their notion of Synodality.

7. On the Road towards Christian Unity

All Christians are in an ecumenical *kairos*. One Lord, one Faith and one Baptism unite us. Baptism is the basis of ecumenism. It is also the basic principle of Synodality. Sincere collaboration of all Christian communities is essential to face the pastoral challenges of the time. We propose to make a survey to understand the functioning of Synodality in other ecclesial communities. In this regard, a common commemoration of the Council of Nicaea is to be conducted in the regional and national level. In the synodal process of the Catholic Church, we have to ensure the presence and involvement of the fraternal delegates from other Churches.

Part II

All Disciples, All Missionaries

8. Church is Mission

The 'being' of the Church should be authentic and genuine in witnessing Jesus and attracting people for whom Gospel is new and also for those who resist. Still, it is the real challenge. Each Christian should cherish the sacramental foundation of equal Christian dignity and should be co-responsible in evangelizing. But at the grassroots people hardly experience and cherish this equal dignity as such and the sense of ownership and the joy of evangelizing. Therefore, the following matters are to be taken into consideration: reinstatement of the family-focused pastoral path through responsible parenthood, the exclusive role of the laity in the sanctification of the temporal world, catechism to all the faithful in acquiring the conscience to check the gospel value in their public presence, and competence building of the laity in their ministries within the Christian communities. The complementarity of the clergy and the laity in the ministries within the Church is to be respected and promoted. In the mission *ad gentes* the whole Church should sustain a feeling of oneness in mission as well as in ecumenical fields by promoting each other

and by creating bonds of knowledge and exchange of gifts. Identifying charisms and promoting related ministries, recognising the charisms of the differently abled people, facilitating an attitudinal change from the part of both the pastors and the laity, and catechising on the complementary and the co-responsible nature of the 'People of God' are very pertinent in the synodal process. Besides, the concept of all the Christians as missionaries is to be deepened in Eucharistic spirituality. In this regard, Basic Christian Communities (*Kudumba Koottayma*) / Small Ecclesial Communities may be used as the training ground.

9. Women in the life and mission of the Church

The dignity and vocation of women have been of constant concern and priority in Syro-Malabar Church. God has raised the dignity of women by entrusting life in the womb of a mother. Realizing this distinctive and unique nature, forums like Legion of Mary, *Mathruvedi* (association of mothers) etc. give proper guidance and catechism to our mothers. The social service department of our eparchies concentrate on implementing income generating projects for women. Syro Malabar Church recognizes the contribution of women in pastoral leadership as catechism teachers, office bearers of family units etc. In our families, women especially mothers are the first teachers of the faith. Syro Malabar Church is blessed with consecrated women, as we have many congregations for women religious. Some women theologians teach in seminaries and are engaged in pastoral formation in parishes. However, the present gloomy picture of unrest, increasing number suicides among women, crimes against women, rapes, molestation, dowry, the low emotional quotient, emerging trends to opt for a single life, the diminishing number of female children etc. demand our ecclesial concern and pastoral care. Besides, more awareness campaigns are required to bring more women to the forefront of leadership. Women religious need more recognition in the decision - making forums of the Church.

10. Consecrated Life and Lay Associations and Movements - Charismatic Sign

The charismatic dimension is manifested in manifold ways in Syro Malabar Church from parishes to eparchies. We have many

retreat centres with focus on charismatic gifts and charisms. We are blessed with religious congregations with varied forms of Consecrated life and imparting services globally according to the need of the mother Church and the universal Church. We are also blessed with many lay associations and ecclesial movements like *Cherupushpa Mission League* (Missionary Movement for the Children), Christian Life Communities (CLC), Syro Malabar Youth Movement (SMYM) and Catholic Congress. The variety of charisms through consecrated life, lay associations, ecclesial movements, and new communities need to be properly acknowledged, guided for better growth of the Church and society through constant and consistent pastoral orientations and by proper and judicious blending of the hierarchical and charismatic gifts. Empowerment of ecclesial commissions and advisory bodies, collaboration of Regional Bishops' Councils and other religious forums, periodical meetings of the regional, national and continental inter-ritual bishops' Councils, and collaboration of lay associations need to be strengthened to meet the growing needs of the Church and society and to foster enduring relationships.

11. Deacons and Priests in a Synodal Church

Syro Malabar Church is blessed to have 10729 priests, both diocesan and religious. We always joyfully cherish valuable service given by our priests, deacons and religious. They engage in evangelization, healthcare, educational apostolate and social service. We ensure ongoing formation to them to strengthen and enrich the call and co-responsibility. A culture of transparency, accountability, and loyalty to authority in all matters is to be maintained among priests, deacons and religious. A deep understanding is required for the permanent diaconate in different ecclesial contexts.

12. The Bishop in Ecclesial Communion

The office of the bishop is well understood and experienced only in the vibe of relations. He is the father figure in the eparchy. In the Syro-Malabar Church, in the aforesaid vibe the bishop is addressed as *Pithav* which means 'father' with special reverence in the vernacular. The bishop has to be an icon of the synodal lifestyle of the Church which will be expressed in the Episcopal ministry

by means of an attitudinal change in their approachability, skills for listening and discerning, in direct consultation and execution of the pastoral programmes, in the sacramental and the familial significance of the episcopate than that of a juridical status or approach. In the Eastern tradition, the bishop is considered the spiritual head supported by many efficient offices led by priests and religious. The expertise of lay persons also needs to be utilised to ensure more fraternity in the eparchy and in the Church as a whole. Culture of obedience, accountability at all levels, and transparency in matters of finance and decision making have to become the life breath of the Church. In so doing, the eparchial coordination of various service centres/departments/ministries should be model to the secular world and to the faithful in the eparchy. Bishops must be daring in matters of faith and morals. Besides, structures and procedures are to be initiated to ensure that the selection to the office of the bishop is basically a spiritual exercise, an exercise of the Church which is the People of God. The spirit of collegiality and cooperation has to spill over to the whole metropolitan province and to the Synodal levels. We also acknowledge that the institution of the *Palliyogam*, though not reinstated in its full spirit and style, gave the image of a 'Church Republic' in the history of the Syro-Malabar Church.

13. The Bishop of Rome in the College of Bishops

The primacy of the Petrine See presupposes the exercise of synodality and collegiality in the life of the early Church. In the context of emerging challenges to Christianity, Church has to be more ecumenical and has to identify common platforms for ministries. The reforms in the Roman Curia are promising steps towards synodality. The updating of the CIC and the CCEO presented as a point of consideration to further accommodate the synodal dynamics is quite hopeful. Syro-Malabar Church also proposes that briefing the preparation and sharing the experience of the *ad limina* visit to the pastoral bodies in the eparchy and to the faithful to the extent possible, will be greatly appreciated. This would serve as a performance appraisal of the Pontifical Representatives that enhances their accountability both to the Holy See and to the local churches.

PART III

Weaving Bonds, Building Communities

14. A Synodal Approach to Formation

Ecclesial formation is the need of the time which facilitates the formation of all the baptized emerging from the Church's synodal journey. This formation must aim at deepening the kerygma, enhancing the Catechetical logic, and enabling each person to participate actively in the Church's mission according to his or her own charisms and vocation.

It is good to provide programs designed and intended for the joint formation of the entire People of God (laity, consecrated and ordained ministers) in the diocesan level as well as in the ecclesial level. Formation of the ordained ministers should be well taken care of. It should be assisted by the representatives from the People of God and the involvement of women is to be welcomed in those programs.

15. Ecclesial Discernment and Open Questions

Creating a context that enables careful consideration of matters that are controversial within the Church, that provides an opportunity for a dialogue involving the human and social sciences, as well as philosophical and theological reflection is the need of time. In this regard, Jesus' actions, assimilated in prayer and conversion of heart, must be the way forward.

Encourage initiatives enabling shared discernment on debated doctrinal, pastoral and ethical issues should be developed, in the light of the Word of God, Church teachings and theological reflections. This can be accomplished through in-depth discussions among the experts with diverse skills and backgrounds.

16. Towards a Listening and Accompanying Church

The Church must be convinced of listening as a deeply human reality. Special attention and sensitivity must be shown to the voice of the voiceless, the marginalized and the needy: each one may find a place within the ordinary pastoral planning and operational structuring of Christian communities at different levels; integrate the works of charitable institutions like *Caritas* in

view of carrying out the valuable work of listening and accompaniment as a form of ecclesial action, not that of individuals, and promote the ministry of listening and accompaniment in the Church in order to ensure the involvement of the community.

17. Mission in the Digital Environment

It is noteworthy that today social media offer tremendous opportunity to proclaim and disseminate the Good News. In particular, the younger generation is growing up in a world conditioned by the social media. We need to make use of every possible public domain, whether online or offline, to address and attract people with the message of Jesus.

The Church has to engage the young people offering them formation and catechesis through the online space. It is important to explore the possibility of establishing a coordinating body at the eparchial level to form and accompany those who are working as digital missionaries. At the synodal level it is good to have a facilitating networking of the different digital initiatives in the Church. It is important to create collaborative networks of people of other ecclesial communities and different religions and others to collaborate on common causes to promote human dignity, justice, and care for our common home.

18. Structures for Participation

As members of the People of God, all the baptised are co-responsible for mission, each according to his or her vocation, competence and experience. The proper recognition of the laity for the mission in the world is all the more important today. The co-responsibility of all must be the criterion in the mission.

The Syro-Malabar Church has its own ancient Synodal structures and ecclesial processes like *Prathinidhiyogam*, *Palliyogam* and *Desayogam*, which express the Synodal nature of the Church at the local, regional and universal level. They try to discover collaborative exercise of the pastoral ministries to move forward by listening to the Holy Spirit. It is important to empower the existing Synodal structures in the Syro-Malabar Church. It would

also be desirable to strengthen the bodies of participation, with a proper presence of the laity.

19. Groupings of Churches within the Communion of the Whole Church

It is good to stress the need for synodality and collegiality at the continental level. Before creating new ecclesial structures, we need to strengthen and revitalize those that exist. It is good to study how ancient institutions can be recovered in the current canonical order, and harmonising them with newly created ones, such as Episcopal Conferences.

In countries where the Latin Rite is prominent, we recommend including Eastern Bishops in their national Episcopal Conferences, leaving intact their governmental autonomy established by their own discipline.

20. The Synod of Bishops and Ecclesial Assemblies

In the whole synodal process it is important to maintain the intrinsic link between the synodal dimension of the life of the Church (the participation of all), the collegial dimension (the care of the bishops for the whole Church), and the primatial dimension (the service of the Bishop of Rome, guarantor of communion).

The presence of members other than bishops as witnesses to the synodal journey is appreciated. The synodal processes at all levels of the Church should be evaluated. The outcome of the First Session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops is to be evaluated.

Conclusion

As a Church *sui iuris*, the modalities of the Synodality are maintained well in the Syro-Malabar Church. The Synthesis Report has helped us to reflect, evaluate and discern the synodal process in our Church. We are grateful that we have become a part of the synodal journey of the universal Church. Reflections on Synodal process have to continue at various levels until the Church becomes truly synodal. More than orientations and teachings, actions are to be initiated. The Syro-Malabar Church *sui iuris* in communion with the Major Archbishop, its Father and Head, all archbishops, bishops, priests, religious and the laity join with the

Holy Father and the entire People of God in prayer for the discernment in the Church on her path of Synodality for the sanctification of souls, evangelization of the world and the glorification of the Holy Trinity.

Towards October 2024: Apostolic Vicariate of Nepal

Introduction

From the outset, the Synodal Process in the Apostolic Vicariate of Nepal was entrusted to the Vicariate Synodal Team, and it was from this team that the Synodal Working Group was established. The Bishop was present and engaged throughout, but the leadership of the process was synodal. We went to great lengths in 2022-23 to involve as many people as possible in the listening process. As well as having gatherings and focus groups with lay people who are actively involved in the life of the Church, and with clergy and religious, we made a particular point of engaging with people who, in one way or another, might be perceived to be on the margins. Listening with respect was very much a part of each gathering. There was significant energy and enthusiasm for the consultation process among most of those who took part with many people expressing their delight at being asked to take part in the synodal process. Most gatherings had a much higher percentage of women present. All participants were welcomed and made feel that their presence and contribution were very important to the process. We invested in facilitation training for priests, religious and faithful, mostly lay women, to support the synodal process and the development of a more synodal approach in the mission of the Vicariate.

In response to the invitation by the General Secretariat of the Synod to Towards October 2024, deepen our reflection on the Synthesis Report (A Synodal Church in Mission), the Apostolic Vicariate of Nepal organized A two-day seminar on Synod on Synodality in the context of Nepal was held at the Assumption Church, Kathmandu, May 13-14. About 50 participants consisting of pastors, religious and lay leaders from the Vicariate attended the event.

The Catholic Church in the Himalayan nation of Nepal is a minority community with over 8500 Catholics in a population of 33 million. Majority of its people are Hindus and Buddhists. The missionary personnel in the Vicariate consists of a small number of local priests and religious, and several missionaries from India

and other countries. They include members of some twenty religious congregations and apostolic institutes.

The seminar included an overview of the synodal journey so far, the main principles of synodality as a new way of living communion, fostering participation and witnessing to the mission of Christ in the context of the country. Through input sessions and group sharing, the participants deepened their awareness of the richness of synodality which emphasises listening, servant leadership, inclusiveness and openness to the socio-cultural realities of the people, focusing on family, youth and the dignity of the baptized.

We reflected on these two questions:

1. How can we be a synodal Church in mission and help all the baptized to respond to the call to proclaim the Gospel and to live as a community of love and mercy in Christ?
2. How does our mission and ministry of accompaniment inform the Synodal journey?

To make the guiding question more accessible and to address the issue of enhancing differentiated co-responsibility we conducted the group workshop, inviting people to imagine the life of the Church in Nepal where people are co-responsible for the Church's mission in different ways. It is fair to say that in engaging with this question people struggled to understand the concept of co-responsibility and also struggled to imagine how the Church in Nepal might embrace its mission in a co-responsible way. Having said that, the contributions were dominated by a clear sense of the significance and meaning of synodal mission in the life of the faith community.

The participants discussed and identified some of the major challenges for the Church in Nepal and its missionary personnel and resolved to form study teams and strengthen various commissions. Particular emphasis was placed on the pastoral care of the families, faith formation of children and youth, fostering of vocations, climate change, reaching out to the peripheries and rural areas of the country. It must also be said, however, that there were some traces of apathy, hesitation, and fear of the process.

People still struggle with the language of synodality. There is a strong recognition of the need for change. Furthermore, there is a sense that the change advocated would see the Church of the future as a synodal Church and that this reflects the vision of the Second Vatican Council.

Proposals:

The Report makes several important proposals on the issues discussed by the assembly. We will not attempt to refer to all of them but simply highlight those that struck us as particularly significant. They are true to the voices of those who contributed, while presenting faithfully that which has been communicated. A subgroup of the National Team of the Apostolic Vicariate of Nepal Synodal Pathway reviewed all the contributions in a spirit of prayer and discernment. The Groups presented these emerging themes to representatives of the Vicariate Synodal Team at the end of the seminar.

Faith Formation:

Catholic Church of Nepal being one of the youngest Churches in Asia, ongoing faith formation for mission resounds throughout the contributions. The elements of formation, including religious education, catechesis, theological study, prayerful discernment, and adult faith formation were named as essential for nurturing individuals' spiritual lives and fostering a deeper relationship with God. The faith formation should be accessible to everyone, regardless of their background, educational level, gender, or ecclesial status. There were calls for formation and training programmes to encompass a deep understanding of the Gospel message, the Church's mission in the world and Catholic Social Teaching, as well as formal catechesis to equip people with the skills necessary for pastoral accompaniment, evangelization, social justice work, and the commissioned ministries of Catechist, Acolyte, and Lector.

Formation in prayer was emphasised as central to any, and all, activities. Ongoing formation in conversations in the Spirit, prayerful dialogue, and listening skills were deemed essential for seeking God's will and guidance, but also for developing decision-making skills, consensus-building approaches, and fostering a

culture of shared leadership and responsibility for the Church's mission. The daily prayers, Holy Eucharist and other liturgical celebrations really influence the life and mission of the community. This has created good and God-fearing families and communities. These practices help in facing the challenges and difficulties of daily life, while also helping to take important decisions in life. The community prayer and liturgy create a positive attitude in the life and the mission of the community. The Small Christian Communities (SCCs) are also another medium to reflect on the Word of God and carry out work inspired by the Word. This has transformed parish communities over the years. Besides this, there is also great devotion to Our Lady and the Rosary. An active Charismatic Movement also exists.

In the discussion about the steps that can be taken to make all faithful take active part in liturgy it was felt that the Faith formation of all Christ's faithful is fundamental in getting the best out of them. Allotting responsibilities to all according to their abilities will make everyone active rather than only a few doing everything, and others reduced to being mere spectators. To educate all the Christ's faithful in detail about the liturgy is necessary for their active participation. Otherwise, it will become just a customary ritual. However, faith formation is an ongoing process because when the old generation passes away the new generation takes its place, and the cycle starts again.

Investment in training and formation programmes must be prioritized in order to enable clergy, lay men and women, religious men and women, institutions, and groups (Vicariate and Parish Pastoral Councils, Clergy Councils, Seminaries, etc.) to actively engage in the various roles and ministries in the Church, whilst also cultivating a culture of openness towards synodality and co-responsible leadership.

Liturgical Celebration

Praying together in a community, sharing the Word of God and especially celebrating the Holy Eucharist has a great bearing on the way we live and witness to Christ when it is done with utmost devotion, honesty and commitment. Sometimes it becomes just a routine exercise which brings negative impact on

our life and community mission. Celebration of the Holy Eucharist is at the center of community's life. The faithful take active part, singing the hymns, listening to the Word of God and homilies, and in spontaneous prayers of the faithful.

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Evangelization and Mission Work:

Being a young Church, evangelization is our main work. The effort of uncountable missionaries (Priests, Religious and Lay Faithful) over the years is visible in the local Church. The work of evangelization continues in the Vicariate. Priests, Religious and Catechists are actively involved in this work. They are well supported by lay faithful who contribute in the best way they can, but above all in accompanying the families into the Church. However, constant catechesis (Biblical and Theological) remains a herculean task. There is a lack of consistency and

regularity. This has resulted in the dilution and syncretism of the faith. A serious thought needs regarding this area. Some women religious who had taken part in the Synodal process felt that there was a lack of evangelizing spirit among them owing to various factors.

In the other aspect of evangelization, the contribution and outreach of the Catholic community in the larger society is immense. The faithful take active part not only in common celebrations, but also the first and prominent to reach out to the needy, in the fight for justice regardless of caste and creed.

Though a delicate task sharing of the faith and the Gospel values is done in respect to the other faiths, cultures and opinions existing in around us. This is a very difficult task in the prevailing social environment. However, living an honest life based on the teachings of Christ and Biblical values, supported by the communion of the Church this can be achieved. The Church continues to grow and the faithful realize the Church's mission is to evangelize.

Clergy:

The increased engagement by clergy in this phase of the Universal Synod enriched the contributions. There is deep appreciation for clergy and the work they are doing across their various forms of ministry: the role of the priest does inspire. However, many, including clergy themselves, expressed a concern for their welfare and wellbeing not just from heavy workloads but also in some cases, due to feelings of loneliness and isolation. Depending on circumstances and the person himself, diocesan priesthood today (for both priests and bishops) can, for some, lead to isolationism. There was a strong expression of empathy...for the situation of the priests. There was a sense that their situation needs to be considered in pastoral planning. It is not reasonable to expect them to be carrying greater responsibility as they get older and fewer. Consideration also needs to be shown to the younger cohort, who face decades of ministry in very changing circumstances.

As more governance is required, priests can feel overwhelmed with their administrative workload in particular. Many stated

that help is needed in this area to move from being 'totally responsible' to being 'co-responsible.' Priests are still considered *the cornerstone of each parish* and, in order to facilitate this movement, they require guidance and support.

While priests remain committed to their ministry, there is a sense of frustration among them that needs to be acknowledged. Many priests feel drained trying to maintain the older model of church and are unsure how the responsibility for mission can be shared more effectively with the baptized faithful. Priests need training in how to work more collaboratively, but also desire that the lay faithful will have adequate formation in the variety of ministries that are now required. While priests express the desire to share greater responsibility with the lay faithful in their parishes, there is a strong feeling that this transition to a different model of church is proving a challenge, both for priests and for people.

However, there still a form of clericalism. And it is visible in decision making in the Church. The decisions that are made by the authorities in the Church has an impact on the life of the community, hence it is important that the decisions are taken wisely and in consultation. The Church authorities take decisions that pertain to the good and proper administration of the Church. Generally, matters are discussed in meetings and decisions are arrived at by common consensus. But in some cases, Parish Priest takes the decision by consulting few members or heads of the Parish associations.

The Pastoral Councils and other Lay associations are not the main decision-making bodies in our Parishes. They are actually consultative bodies. There is greater consultation with regards to SCCs, but the most important administrative decisions are taken by the Clergy. A lot needs to be done the area of decision making which is still in the domain of the Clergy and Church authority.

Lay participation in the Church

Under **Lay participation in the Church**, the Report proposes that the responsibilities assigned to the existing ministry of Laity be expanded to become 'a fuller ministry of the Word of God, which, in appropriate contexts, could also include preaching in para-liturgical celebrations.' The Report also envisages the creation of

a new lay ministry of accompaniment and listening, and ‘a ministry for married couples committed to supporting family life and accompanying people preparing for the sacrament of marriage’.

Women

The theme of women’s inclusion and participation in the life and mission of the Church is deeply intertwined with the concept of co-responsibility in the contributions. There was an emphasis on acknowledging and affirming the unique gifts, talents, and perspectives that women bring. This included their roles as educators, caregivers, spiritual leaders, and advocates for social justice, but there was a clear call for the empowerment of women within the Church, including their increased involvement in decision-making processes, ministries, and leadership roles, stressing the importance of formally recognizing rather than simply acknowledging women’s contributions. Some women feel very empowered in the Church today and valued for the role they hold, but it was clear in the contributions that if women’s voices are not heard at higher levels, nothing will change. While there was a growing recognition of the valuable contributions that women are making, significant challenges were named: the need for canonical and institutional reform, practices that are perceived as discriminatory, lack of representation in leadership roles, and traditional norms that limit women’s participation in the Church. The Reports notes that Pope Francis has significantly increased the number of women in positions of responsibility in the Roman Curia. The same should happen at other levels of the life of the Local Church, that will enable women to hold positions of leadership within the Church.

Young People

Engagement with young people emerged as a universal theme and a tangible sense of anxiety was expressed in relation to the absence of young people from faith communities. With a few exceptions, the voices of young people were missing from the listening process. One contribution stated that the Church had *lost connection with a generation*. One of the reasons is that the Church has not been reaching out to those who are not connected with the Church, or

those who are discouraged or disillusioned. They often feel unheard, misinterpreted, and overlooked by the wider Church. Young people feel that their gifts and contributions need to be actively sought out and valued rather than being treated in a patronizing or dismissive way.

For some young people the synodal process lacks clarity and is perceived as irrelevant to their daily lives, yet for others it presents a welcome opportunity for change. The role of young people in parishes should be seen as the same as others and that young people are not merely the future but are part of the today and now of the Church. The question of how the Church might gather young people and explore...where they believed they were being called to Christian action is an important one moving forward.

The young people active in the Church are clear on and grounded in her mission. Many of them have devoted years of their life in service to the Church. They understand that sharing the Gospel, being joyful, loving, invitational and intentional witnesses to Christ is central to the call on their life by the Lord -whatever their vocation or state in life - to participate in the mission of the Church to spread the Gospel. They actively live as missionaries to their peers.

It is evident that the Church in Nepal faces significant challenges to successfully connect with young people today. Many of our youth migrate to other countries for the better pasture. The Church of Nepal should provide young people with opportunities to take up leadership roles helping young people to participate fully in Church life as joyful and courageous co-responsible members which is an urgent component of our synodal mission that must be prioritized.

Ecology

God has entrusted this world to us in stewardship. So, we have the responsibility to take care of the world. It involves respecting and safeguarding the environment, promoting sustainable practices, and combating ecological degradation and climate change. The Covid19 has taught the lesson and the important of the ecology. The universe may survive without humans, but the

humans cannot survive without the environment. We included a question on Ecology because it is one issue that is very important for us in the Vicariate. We live in an ecologically vulnerable zone. We depend on nature following its normal cycle for most important resource: WATER. The dependency on natural springs and water bodies for drinking and other purposes is enormous. Hence, rains at regular interval is essential. The tourism on which this Himalayan region depends also requires maintenance of its natural beauty. With rampant development taking place there has been number of challenges. The first being deforestation. Among other challenges are indiscriminate construction of airports, highways, hydro plants, construction of buildings and the problem of waste management. The contribution of the Catholic Church just has been limited to holding tree plantation during monsoons. The Church in this region needs to do more to save the mother earth. Lack of awareness, accountability coupled with irresponsible behavior and greed is the right recipe for disaster. Walking with our fellow brothers and sisters requires our delicate walk with the mother earth and recognizing the well-being of all creation and acknowledging our responsibility as stewards of God's creation.

Building Relationships and Dialogue

Fostering Interfaith and Interreligious Dialogue plays a crucial role in building relationships and promoting peace within a Vicariate. Recognizing the value of diverse religious traditions and their contributions to the common good, the Vicariate can actively encourage dialogue among different faith communities, especially with Hinduism and Buddhism. By fostering interfaith and interreligious dialogue, we create opportunities for understanding, respect, and collaboration, fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose.

To effectively foster interfaith and interreligious dialogue, we consider the following strategies:

- Cultivating a culture of dialogue: Create a supportive environment within the vicariate that values dialogue, respect, and mutual understanding. Encourage open and honest conversations

that allow individuals from different faith traditions to share their beliefs, practices, and concerns.

- Engaging religious leaders: Reach out to leaders of other religious communities within the Vicariate to initiate dialogue and collaboration. Facilitate meetings, events, and initiatives that bring together religious leaders to discuss shared values, common challenges, and opportunities for joint action.
- Interreligious prayer and worship: Arrange opportunities for joint prayer services, interreligious worship or shared religious celebrations. These gatherings provide occasions for people from different faith backgrounds to come together in prayer and spiritual reflection, fostering a sense of unity and commonality.
- Collaboration on social issues: Identify social challenges and issues that require collective action, such as poverty alleviation, environmental stewardship, or promoting human rights. Collaborate with representatives from various religious communities to develop joint initiatives and advocate for positive change.
- Dialogue in times of crisis: Actively engage in interfaith dialogue during times of conflict or tension. Foster conversations that promote understanding, address misunderstandings, and seek peaceful resolutions, building bridges of trust and solidarity.
- Fostering interfaith and interreligious dialogue encourages a spirit of inclusivity, mutual respect, and cooperation among diverse religious communities. By nurturing these relationships, the Vicariate can contribute to a more harmonious and peaceful Church, where people of different faiths come together to work towards shared goals of justice, reconciliation, and compassion.

Way Forward:

The dream is that the Church in the coming days grow in faith and prayer. May the Church be united in the love of Christ and guided by the Word of God; a Church that is self-reliant, laity-centric, decentralized and less institutional; a Church which respects and values everyone and is the home of all regardless of their caste, color, creed and class. We expect a loving and caring Church, where all are listened to, shepherded unto the

heart of Christ. May the Church grow uniting all the Children of God in the loving hands of Christ. May the love and unity in the church bring back all the faithful who have left the church and gone astray.

To create this kind of Church we expect that every member be spiritually nourished with the Word of God and the Sacraments, living a worthy life according to the teachings of the Church. We also believe that in keeping with the social teachings of the Church, every member strives to be productive and make Our Church self-reliant, thereby we continue to be contributive member of the society. We expect that every member feels to be a proud Catholic.

Key Points:

- Faith Formation for the laity.
- Empowerment of laity and women and enhance their role in the Church.
- Addressing clericalism and hierarchical Church.
- The Church needs to be humble and servant Church.
- A Church that is inclusive, accountable and transparent.
- A Church actively listens the Spirit and makes discernment.
- There is a need that the Church to step out of comfort zones and “Meeting people where they are”
- The Church should have a deep concern for and desire to accompany young people.
- A caring Church, where all are listened to, shepherded into the heart of Christ.
- A Church united in the love of Christ and guided by the Word of God.
- The Church needs to make every effort on the mandate of Christ to proclaim the Good News to all.

Conclusion

Priests, religious and laity of the Apostolic Vicariate of Nepal, appreciate the invitation to Pope Francis to participate in deeper

reflection on the Synthesis Report. The Vicariate was asked to reflect on the question, “How can we be a synodal Church in mission?” and to provide some concrete actions that enable individuals and groups to make their unique contribution to the Church’s Mission. We thank all who have participated throughout the session and look forward to continuing the process. The Vicariate expresses sincere gratitude to the Vicariate Synod Team. The Vicariate of Nepal will continuously strive towards a Synodal Church in the true spirit of Communion, Participation and Mission, so that the Pope Francis’ goal to make the entire Church synodal be achieved.

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FABC Papers:

182. Federation Of Asian Bishops' Conferences Office of Education and Faith Formation (FABC-OEFF) Final Statement and Proceedings of the Consultation Meeting on *Antiquum Ministerium*, May 2023
183. FABC Papers Periodic Index, Papers 151-175 (2017-2022) by James H. Kroeger, M.M., July 2023
184. Encountering the Emerging Trends and Contexts of South Asia, Robin S. Seelan SJ, December 2023
185. Hoping Together - Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to Mongolia, 31 August - 4 September 2023, December 2023
186. TOWARDS OCTOBER 2024, The Asian Response to Deepening Aspects of the Synthesis Report of the Synod, October 2023. Guided by the question: "HOW can we be a synodal Church in mission?" PART ONE, FABC Response, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, May 2024

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