

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 FIVE

CONTENTS

- I. Summary of the Synodal Process in Central Asia (CECAC)
- II. Diocese of Almaty
- III. Diocese of Karaganda
- IV. Church in Kyrgyzstan
- V. Apostolic Prefecture of Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
- VI. Church in Tajikistan
- VII. First Regional Meeting on Evangelization--Central Asian Bishops' Conference

Catholic Bishops' Conference of Central Asia [Conferenza Episcopale Cattolica dell'Asia Centrale] (CECAC)

Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia,
Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan



Summary of the Synodal Process in Central Asia

Your Eminence,
Members of the General Secretariat,
Pax Christ!
Greetings from Central Asia!

As coordinator for communication of developments in this process among the members of the Central Asian Bishops' Conference (CECAC), I submit a brief overview of the ongoing synodal process as shared in summaries from various local Churches

(Dioceses, Apostolic Administrations, and *missions sui juris*) within our Conference.

At this phase in reporting, the decision was made to provide separate summaries from some of the individual Churches, rather than attempting to provide a common thread from the work of these local Churches—as was done in the report for the initial phase of the Synod (in 2022). This decision was made in light of the diversity in conditions in various cultures and countries within our Conference, as well as in the variety of forms and the levels of involvement in the process.

I nevertheless highlight here a few aspects that did appear in the reports from several of our members. You will also find most of these points in the selected reports from individual local Churches that I include with this summary.

Recurring experiences common to discussions in at least some of the local Churches depict several relevant points. The three most fundamental of these points are the following:

First, it is again truly heartening to hear of the profound love of people in these different countries for the Catholic Faith. Although this might be presumed, it is worth noting that this devotion is expressed across different cultures, generations, and ethnic groups. Moreover, our Catholics—continually accustomed to being members of a tiny and sometimes misunderstood minority—remain deeply encouraged by being a part of the wider Church.

Secondly, some of these faithful express a sincere gratitude for involvement in this synodal process and, most particularly, for the clear sense of being listened to by others in the Church. The synodal process has truly been a significant and seemingly unique experience of being affirmed for these people both in being heard and in being invited to listen to God in prayer and to others within the community. There is a manner in which these people have felt a deeper and more practical sense of ownership for the Church's good through this process, to that extent to which it has been undertaken with consistency and transparency.

Thirdly, this phase has highlighted the desire for and need to define more explicitly in the mind and heart of each participant and community *the role of the Church*. The guiding question, “*How can we be a synodal Church in mission?*” has served to effectively focus the process. Moreover, this focus has elicited a passionate sense of a true care for the good of the Church, not only as an institution, but in fulfilling its primary role as witness and bearer of good news within and to the cultures where we live.

At the level of the Bishops’ Conference, we discussed the desirability of providing a method that would assist us in making more concrete in our context the guiding question as to how to be a synodal Church on mission. Indeed, on the one hand, most of our communities are simultaneously considered “local” Churches by virtue of their long-term historical presence in this area while also being viewed as mission territory by many in the wider Catholic Church.

In harmony with our discussion at the level of the Central Asian Bishops’ Conference, we chose in some of our territories to organize our conversation regarding the synodal process by attempting to discern and identify more explicitly the *objective*, or end, of a “*synodal Church on mission*” in our own unique cultural context; concretely, what might this Church look like here – in this place, at this time? We provided questions (below) that had been proposed at the Conference meeting as a possible resource in focusing or guiding reflection at the local level. Although not every ecclesial territory in the Conference chose to utilize this method, for some it seemed to offer a more effective method for structuring our prayer, preparation, and conversation about the Church’s role with a practical sense.

In addition to this process, we decided as a Conference to initiate a preliminary discussion/discernment group on evangelization in Central Asia. We understand the inextricable link between the Church’s fulfillment of its mission with reaching others in the place and in the time where we live. Each local Church was encouraged to nominate two or three participants. Our first session, held online (because of perceived complications and costs of organizing an in-person meeting) included some Ordinaries,

priests, sisters, and lay persons. We used these same questions as a starting point in our sharing and in attempt to identify possible next steps in advancing and developing a more conscious “common” approach to “being on mission” and evangelizing in this territory.

Guiding questions about how to live as “Synodal Church on Mission” in the context in which we live:

- How do we understand the task of the Church in our country - especially in light of the changing profile and number of our Catholics, as well as the social and political events taking place in our countries?
- What practices in evangelization have we witnessed that are bearing fruit?
- What do we think will help (or be necessary) in the task of evangelizing? For example, the need to learn local languages and more directly involve local cultures not traditionally “targeted” in our pastoral work?
- What internal and external factors hinder our efforts to evangelize?

Discussions proved to be fruitful and some of us were struck by the level of appreciation among our Catholics for being included in this discernment.

Other aspects that were raised in various places include:

- The critical need to *encourage, empower, and even challenge all baptized* to assume more responsibility and ownership for the mission of the Church. This theme, central to the documents from the Synod and elsewhere (...*The focus will, therefore, be the theme of everyone’s participation, with our varied vocations, charisms and ministries, in the one mission of proclaiming Jesus Christ to the world, envisaged in the Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium, according to which ‘the new evangelization must imply a new protagonism of each of the baptized, we will reflect on the contribution to the mission that comes from the recognizing and promoting the specific gifts of each member of the People of God...’*”).page 2, General

Secretariat of the Synod; “How to be a synodal Church on mission.) resounded strongly with our local Christians.

- Preparation and formation of laity to undertake the tasks involved in evangelization at different levels.
- This having been said, there is a sober realization of severe complications inherent in the task of engaging in evangelization within the cultures where we live. Undeniably, there is a necessity to envision varied approaches to sharing our Faith – and identifying methods for gauging expected results in this endeavor.
- It is unthinkable to engage in authentic evangelization and, indeed, in making accessible the true “mission” of the Church – without a serious commitment to embrace the local language and culture of the majority of people in our countries, in spite of the fact that these peoples have not traditionally been open to Christianity and, in some cases, view the Church’s activity with suspicion. In this area of the world, religion is almost always inextricably associated with ethnicity and language. Moreover, the Soviet heritage of privatizing religious practice, exacerbated by a more modern notion of individualistic approach to religiosity, further complicates this task. Not all in our communities may be comfortable with such a shift toward engaging more assertively the culture and language of the majority. What is *their* voice in such a discernment?
- Correlatively, we must be committed to creating a truly welcoming community to outsiders or visitors. This is, unfortunately, not always the case. Again, this must be seen as the responsibility of all and not just a few.
- The observation was raised in most places of a greater critical need to become much more inserted in social media and in internet presence in general. This forum is now where not only the youth but many others turn to find “community” and inspiration. Why is the Church largely absent from this arena in many places where we live?

- There is a need to better comprehend the significance of the parish community. Too often, this is a place where our people crave comfort and convenience when gathering to pray. Although this desire is not intrinsically bad, it can become an end in itself and, therefore, prohibit an authentically outgoing spirit of sharing Faith.
- Our communities can tend towards inward looking, self-preservation and care for our own needs. We can invest an inordinate amount of time and resources on this inward focus.
- Most fundamentally, we must accept that any authentic attempt to animate a synodal Church on mission is contingent upon continuous “communication” with God, with the community, and with others. The relationship with Jesus Christ, Who alone generates authentic mission, is central to this and all endeavors in the life of the Church—both for individuals as well as for the community.
- Related to this is the concern in some places about focusing too much on qualifiable factors such as numbers of faithful, rather on integrity of living our Christian faith as individuals and as a community.

Concluding Comments:

Of course, there were other salient points raised in different places across the huge and widely diverse territory represented by our Bishops’ Conference. As mentioned at the beginning of this document, we limit our list here to observations expressed with relative frequency. There is clearly an evident resonance both with key documents but, more significantly, with discussion within communities throughout many areas across the universal Church. Certainly, this attests to the activity of the Holy Spirit.

Although it would be an exaggeration to claim that a majority of people in all of our local Churches participated in this stage of the synodal process, the sincerity and interest of those who have engaged in this ongoing (now, presumably, perpetual) process of “being Church,” has been encouraging and edifying.

Please let me know if you have any questions or would desire any clarification about the content of this summary or about the process in the territory of the Central Asian Bishops' Conference.

Rev. Anthony Corcoran

Apostolic Administrator of Catholics in Kyrgyzstan

Final Thoughts on the Second Stage of the "Synod on Synodality"

Diocese of Almaty

There is a vision that this synod can bring something positive to the church in general, and to our country and diocese in particular.

However, there are some ideas about the need to approach the methodology in a different way, taking into account that the time between the submission of questions and the response is not very long. These last few weeks have been weeks of hard work.

Also with regard to the methodology, there are doubts that the opinions sent and expressed represent what the majority thinks, since precisely the majority does not express its opinion.

What matters most in our local church is the need for greater evangelization.

With regard to this evangelization, we see the different circumstances between the towns and the large cities. Different pastoral situations.

In general, the great need for the good formation of the laity is appreciated, because they must be the first witnesses and transmitters of the faith.

Social media is very important, but it is always the personal relationship that has the greatest influence on fidelity despite the difficulties. This requires that pastoral leaders, especially priests, always be very willing to "be with the people".

The idea that in every parish there should be a parish council, and in every diocese a pastoral council where priests, nuns and laity are included, is seen as very positive.

Conclusions of the Diocesan Meeting of priests and religious of the Karaganda Diocese regarding the issue of living Synodality in our local Churches

In May 2024, the priests and religious of the Karaganda Diocese, in unity with the Bishop of Karaganda, Vladyka Adelio Del Oro and his assistant bishop, Vladyka Evgeniy Zinkovsky, gathered together at the Diocesan meeting in order to share with each other the experience lived by each in their local Churches, again and again discovering for ourselves this beautiful reality of belonging to one Universal Church, also the Mystical Body of Christ, in search of the true glory of God, proclaiming the Gospel to all people in the place where Christ Himself sends us for His mission.

Our meeting took place in the city of Karaganda, Maykuduk district, on the territory of the Minor Basilica of St. Joseph. The pastor of the parish, Father Vladimir Dzurenda, cordially greeted everyone who came from different parishes of our Karaganda Diocese, which, as local Catholics say, is the center of the spirituality of Kazakhstan, one of the pieces of land stained with the blood of the martyrs of the last century.

The One who gathers us together is the Lord, this is Jesus, who to this day remains with us in a hidden way in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. He is the instigator and head of His holy work of Salvation, the work of Redemption, in which we all participate as weak instruments in His strong and mighty hands. Who, if not Christ Himself, gives His missionaries the strength to evangelize cultures, to spread God's Word, to convey our faith to others and to increase the faith of the missionaries themselves, as well as all those people with whom each of us meets? Therefore, our Meeting began with participation in the Holy Mass. All of us: both priests and monastics, as well as the laity, are members of one Church, which the Lord founded and the head of which He Himself is through His visible Vicar, the Supreme Shepherd - the Pope of Rome. We partake of the one Body and Blood of Christ, we move forward together to the Heavenly Fatherland, walking with both feet on our land with our eyes fixed on the Heavenly One.

Warm communication in the single spiritual Family that we comprise is so necessary and important for all of us. Before solving the global, universal and pressing issues of our time, our missions, first of all, it is so important to feel like a Family, where we all need each other so much, where the experiences of one member are the experiences of another; where the joys of one are the joys of another; where an inspiring vision of the future one is transmitted and infects the other! A diocese cannot exist on its own, without specific local Churches. Each local Church plays an important role in the life of the entire Diocese, in the life of our entire Church: One, Holy, Ecumenical and Apostolic. During our meetings, we tried to understand the meaning of the beautiful words from the reflection of Piero Coda, April 19, 2024, that the life of the diocese pulsates through the parishes, the reality of consecrated life, the association of the laity, and indeed, we realize that each specific mission, each specific the parish takes part in communication with the Bishop, presenting ways of evangelization, witness, and service. Without joint efforts in evangelization, mission becomes difficult and almost impossible. After all, we are all working for one goal: to give more glory to God and lead all souls to salvation!

In fact, what is important is to find ways to strengthen the dynamics and structure of communication between the Churches. And we tried to discover these ways for ourselves again and again: our pastoral life is built from the relationship between us and God, between God and people, and in these relationships of other people with God, each of the missionaries plays the role of a bridge, or the role of a guide, and even more often just the role of an open window through which people can look at God. It is necessary that this window is open, clear (not foggy) so that others can see something in it. It is necessary to go out to meet people, believers and non-believers, everyone whom God sends on our path. Do not close yourself in your comfortable, cozy homes, but with generosity go beyond your schemes in understanding the work of evangelization, the work of Salvation.

In order to promote fellowship in mission among all Churches on a universal level, it is suggested that we remain faithful in the little that the Lord entrusts to each of us in our specific missions. The

inculturation of the Gospel is necessary, it is called to be creative in different places and contexts and the ever-increasing breadth of the Catholic character, in fidelity to the one Gospel and in the enriching exchange of corresponding gifts between the Churches. In addition, our communication between the Churches is of an ecumenical nature, primarily of a spiritual nature: the Church is not only people living on earth, but it is also saints and souls awaiting their liberation from purgatory. Therefore, praying for each other is so important in order for the communal listening to the Spirit to be realized in reality.

Our Church (which we all are: priests, religious, and laity), in its essence, is missionary, because the Lord Jesus Christ Himself sends it on a mission, the Lord sends each of us on a mission. Therefore, we are all called to fulfill the mission entrusted to us by Christ. One should give preference to what is most effective in proclaiming the Gospel, finding the courage to abandon what is less useful or even hindering. Our missionary endeavor must not be for the Church to look at itself in the mirror and worry about its own balance, but to throw itself out with impulse and love for humanity in responsibility for history and the common home, asking every member of God's people to make their irreplaceable contribution. Cultural, social, economic and political commitments are an integral dimension of the mission of all God's people.

All the baptized are called to participate in mission; mission is both a gift and a duty; it is necessary to actively exercise the *sensus fidei* and the corresponding charisms, in synergy with the exercise of the ministry of power by the Bishops and the Pope.

Indeed, each Church is a community entity in Christ and through the Holy Spirit; the Word of God itself calls it and edifies it with the Sacraments. The people of God live and walk in a specific cultural and social context in which the gift of God takes on flesh: always "grace presupposes culture" (*Evangelii gaudium*, 115). At the same time, each Church is called to share with others the gifts in which it is rich.

We, gathered by God the Father, in Christ Jesus, in the breath of the Holy Spirit, sisters and brothers in faith meet and listen to each

other, each bringing the perspective and contribution of his own calling, his charism, his ministry. Yes, this kind of meeting and listening opens up a space in which the grace of recognizing the voice of the Spirit and responsible acceptance of His call on the paths of mission becomes possible.

The Holy Spirit prompts us that prayer in hearing the Word, conversation in the Spirit and community discernment, as well as the celebration of the Eucharist, in which we become one heart and one soul (Acts 4:32), are the evangelical practices that reveal the true nature of the Church: synodal and missionary. We are called to be united in the mission of the Church to become the “broken bread” of Christ for all. This method is more than a method: it is the Church itself, which is a mission, here and now for everyone.

Indeed, in order to create justice, brotherhood and peace with all, it is important to learn, as missionaries, to live in that “place” where modern women and men live, in a place consisting of many places where, aware of the breath of the Spirit, inculturation of the Gospel and evangelization of cultures, a person grows in the acceptance of the Gospel and is mutually enriched through the exchange of gifts of what the Holy Spirit speaks to many Churches in one Church.

Thanks be to God for His mission, for His Church, for our Diocese, for each specific small Church community in the places designated by the Lord Himself for the salvation of souls!

+ Adelio Del Oro
Bishop of Karaganda

+ Evgeniy Zinkovsky
Auxiliary Bishop

Synthesis: the current phase of the Synodal Process in the Church in Kyrgyzstan

Introductory Observations:

A. Profile of our local Church:

The Catholic Church in Kyrgyzstan comprises a tiny minority (a few hundred Catholics) living amidst a strong majority of Sunni Muslims (comprising 90%+ of the population). The Church, although small, is increasingly a multi-ethnic community. We have clearly and definitively shifted from being associated exclusively with the families of exiles from “Catholic ethnic groups” during the Soviet times.

Our parishioners are generally from poorer families, with some in the capital being middle class. Although we minister almost exclusively in Russian (except to the foreign parishioners), we recognize the need to become more engaged in the language of many of the local Kyrgyz (below).

The economy is strongly influenced by Russia, with a considerable percent of working-age Kyrgyz serving as migrant workers in that country.

Although religious liberty is assured by the Constitution and the Catholic Church has been allowed to function, the society is morphing into a more nationalistic culture which is increasingly influenced by a stronger Islamic identity.

B. What does the Synod mean to our parishioners?

In fact, although we had not heard much regarding the process of the Synod from our parishioners, the invitation to participate in this phase of the conversation was met with interest by some. We made the decision to invite interested parishioners to meet in smaller groups, which seemed to encourage more active participation. We held a pastoral/apostolic meeting with priests, sisters, and our lay colleagues in which the themes discussed by the parishioners were discussed.

We structured our gatherings in four elements:

- Common prayer
- A brief review of the goal of the Synodal process, especially as proposed by Pope Francis;
- A brief overview of the fruits of the session of the Synod in October 2023 and in the ensuing period;
- Discussion on what we find to be a fundamental task of the local Church “on mission.”

The guiding question of how to “be a synodal Church on mission” resounded with our faithful. Although, to be honest, the concept or word “synodal” remains a bit formal, the underlying concepts of listening, praying, discerning, and participation in community are comprehensible and ring as authentic in their own reflection on life in the Church. Most significant is the focus on “mission,” “sharing and spreading the Faith,” encompassed by another (perhaps also overly formal word?), “evangelization.” All seemed interested in sharing their observations about how to make the Church more accessible, more attractive, and more relevant in the lives of the people in this culture.

In harmony with the discernment at the level of the Central Asian Bishops’ Conference, we centered the fourth part of our conversation on the synodal process around the objective of a “synodal Church on mission” in our own unique cultural context. We shared questions (below) that had been proposed at the level of the Bishops’ Conference as a focus for guiding reflection. This seemed to offer a more effective method for praying about the Church’s role in a practical sense. The parishioners appreciated the method offered by the Holy Father to identify certain important issues (10 questions) that would be studied more in depth by assigned and qualified study groups on an international level. Many agreed that this method would facilitate a more focused conversation and avoiding the possible temptation to reduce the conversation into “issue-related” questions.

Consolation from this stage of the process emerged from the following:

- Again, it was clear that Catholics love their Church very much. This came out with clarity as the people gathered and shared;
- As well, our parishioners expressed their own appreciation for being listened to and for feeling that their experience matters to those who make decisions in the Church—as well as among their own community. This synodal process has been experienced as something “different” and welcomed;
- *The truly striking aspect of this phase has been to see how very important the good of the Church and the sincere desire for the Church to grow and to deepen in its “missionary” role is to our faithful.* During all of the sessions, this love and concern for—not only a better functioning of the parishes—but rather the need to share this Faith in Jesus Christ was palpable. This was expressed by our participants while acknowledging the very complex religious, political, and cultural atmosphere of our country and the extreme difficulty of in engaging in open evangelization.

These consoling aspects were visible across generational and ethnic lines. It was notable to us that this appeared to affirm more ownership for the “mission” of the Church by some of our parishioners.

Perhaps one aspect that was disappointing was a sense that, without our explicit invitations to conversation, the entire synodal process might appear very removed from the lives of the average Christian in our country. This is not even to highlight the confusion caused by some local Churches in the west who are portrayed by media as promoting issues that are incomprehensible and/or unacceptable to the traditional society in which we live.

Guiding questions about how to live as “Synodal Church on Mission” in the context in which we live:

- How do we understand the task of the Church in our country - especially in light of the changing profile and number of our

Catholics, as well as the social and political events taking place in our countries?

- What practices in evangelization have we witnessed that are bearing fruit?
- What do we think will help (or be necessary) in the task of evangelizing? For example, the need to learn local languages and more directly involve local culture among non-Russian speaking populations?
- What internal and external factors hinder our efforts to evangelize?

A brief overview of recurring observations and proposals emerging from our conversations:

The following points were stressed in our various conversations, being repeated by several participants and affirmed by others as valid:

- The need to encourage *each parishioner* to feel more responsible for the good of the parish and for sharing/spreading the Faith;
- This need especially relates the youth who are often the ones most likely to invite friends to visit our community;
- A need to form or train parishioners in the task of evangelizing;
- The critical importance of witness through charity – both for others and for the health of our own community;
- The need for our acts of charity to be explicitly and recognizably tied to the “mission” of the church;
- Some pointed to the need for more structured institutions. In other countries, Catholic schools and hospitals are a primary source of witness and evangelization;
- The need to be much more engaged in social media: “this is where the youth are!” and we are largely absent;

- The need to assertively and intentionally embrace the local language and culture. What is our identity? To be for the self-selective group of “Catholics” or for all? Do we welcome? Do local (non-Russian-speaking peoples) feel comfortable appearing in our church?
- The essential conviction that it is Christ’s Church and that we must remain in Him – listening first and always to Him in Scriptures, in the Sacraments, in personal prayer, and by sharing in community.

Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan -- 11 May 2024

Synodality in Mongolia

Minutes of the assembly held in Ulaanbaatar on May 8, 2024

The pastoral week of the Apostolic Prefecture of Mongolia with the theme “Synod, Safeguarding and Interreligious dialogue”, was launched with its opening activity on the Synod. Cardinal Marengo gave the update and invited once again the faithful and the missionaries to meditate on the importance of the message of the synod. In turn, those present were grouped and was asked to discuss and reflect together about additional expectations and experiences about the life of the church and its path towards synodality, starting from the leading question: **“How to be a Synodal Church in Mission?”**.

Two sub-questions were given, to facilitate the sharing process:

- 1) **How do you feel about the topic of Synodality? What is my understanding of it? Bearing in mind my missionary experience in Mongolia, what do I feel I want to share in this regard?**
 - Sharing Christ life
 - Building the church together as one family and not as a divided entity. Each one brings a brick, thus laying the foundation of the church.
 - Helping each other – I should not think that I am the only one who can do things. Doing things together is better.
 - The Catholic Church is the church of everyone. It is not exclusive. Not only for group of friends or for some individuals.
 - Involvement (deeper) of the faithful, they must feel co-responsible. Everyone's participation is very important
 - Encouraging each other instead of putting each other down. We encourage our faithful and we as missionaries should go to them (go to where they are).
 - All voices should be heard. We should walk together.
 - Praying in the family (or as a family).

- We are one body. We are not separate/individual bodies (parts of the body). We should care for each other. We should be showing to others what is a Catholic, who is a Catholic.
- Authority is Jesus Christ and it should not be pyramid where the top is the only one who is deciding.
- It is not a one-man show.
- Synodality is not just a word to be understood but it should be practiced in our church community: How?
 - By being present among the faithful who are in need
 - sacrifice ourselves
 - Sense of belonging the church, community and even ministry
 - Need Christian virtue of life like loving each other as family
 - Bring back the lost sheep
 - Synodality is family spirit based on the Mongolian context. Love each other. Helping each other as a family will lead us to walk together.
 - Synodality can apply for all Human being. Because we walk together is without boundaries
 - In order to walk Together, we need to have Christian virtues: Humility, Hope, sacrifice (selflessness), Help each other (generosity), presence, Loving and caring for each other and patience in the family.
- Family: Free expression of feelings, all members are different but walking together, from different nations but like one family.
- Deciding together what is right
- To be close to humble people, to have a program that has a space and time to listen and meet in the church
- Sharing talents to the life of the church

- Listening to God and listening to the people. Listening to everyone without reservation and listening to each other.
- Understanding each other (the art of listening carefully)/Mutual understanding.

Notably we have recurring words such as **listening, understanding, sharing, caring, family and one body** as our common understanding of what Synod is and how it is aspired and inspired in our catholic community here in Mongolia. The insistence of the **sharing of Christ Life** (expressed in loving and caring for each other) among us Catholics is central in the synodality that the community is looking forward to.

The second question was:

2) What experiences from our missionary experience here in Mongolia can foster the implementation of synodality as a way of being and acting in the Church?

It gears towards the possible steps we can take as Apostolic Prefecture and as individuals to carry out the spirit of synodality. There is an invitation for both the missionaries and the faithful to unite and move together to bring out the synodality in all the strata of the life of the prefecture. Everyone agrees that the life and the future of the Catholic church in Mongolia is in the hand of each one. Therefore, it is important to learn synodality and to understand its implication in our lives as Catholics.

- Parishes, though separate, are in one religion and must be united. Joined activities.
- Encourage families or groups to pray together.
- Missionaries should know how to reprimand the faithful. If something is wrong, they should not be too soft in correcting them. It is to bring the faithful to the right path, it is shepherding the flocks.
- Easy to think but difficult to do. Have to pray by the Holy Spirit. Prayer is important.
- We must think how to explain it to the Catholics

- Share Christ to each other because it will bring us closer. Close to other missionaries and closer to the faithful.
- Learn synodality from the beginning
- We make actions-values our habit, these habits will influence other people.
- We need to understand our roles and responsibilities in the church.
- To have collective strength and unity
- Attract people with interesting modern activities rather than just entertaining them with food and drinking sessions like in the old days.
- Be more active and support the members who have received the holy baptism.
- Religious preachers should move together to correct the understanding of the believers about the church and to guide the infant Catholic community in Mongolia in the right direction.
- Understanding, thinking and listening to the needs of people coming to the church
- Focus on working and listening to the current people, not waiting for the old ones
- We can grow and walk together by making small actions a habit and influencing others gradually.
- Understand the purpose, role and responsibility of the church
- Walking together is not about something too big or too far. It is to strive for faith little by little, together.
- To influence each other's faith life, not just by/from missionaries
- For a Catholic, evangelization means starting from the family, not necessarily the entire community or strangers

Several challenges were also discussed and shared;

- “Masked” Christians can be baptized easily but they disappear easily too.

- It is difficult to come from different families and become God's family
- Who are we? Why are we Catholic? Only after understanding this that we can walk together.
- Boundaries of synodality. Clear demarcation of the extend of synodality because it may create confusion especially about the role of each one.
- Individualism and relativism in relationship to the truth.
- Can't understand each other because of foreign and Mongolian language problems.
- Faith may be confusing for a person who does not understand it
- People who come to church come with different expectations.

(The Synodal Team of the Apostolic Prefecture of Ulaanbaatar)

Tajikistan Synthesis of the diocesan Synodal Path year 2023

The presentation of the Synthesis of this new synodal process carried out in the parishes of our Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction, it seemed better to divide it into the following points:

I. Historical Context of the Church in Tajikistan

The Catholic Church in Tajikistan has existed for about 40 years. However, from 1974 onwards it began to develop and have a more solid structure when the Catholic faithful built the first churches in the city of Dushanbe and in the south, in the city of Kurgan Tubie, about 100 km from the capital.

The first Catholics, mostly of German nationality, came from Russia, Ukraine and Lithuania during the time of the Soviet deportations.

Over the years, the Catholic community grew and became one of the largest in the Soviet Union. After the tragic civil war in 1992-1993, the great exodus began, not only of the Catholic faithful, but also of a large majority of other ethnic groups, who decided to leave the country because of the difficult situation to sustain. Thus, Catholic churches began to be empty, and for some time there were no priests.

The Catholic community was sustained thanks to the efforts of the few faithful who remained and to the valuable spiritual and material assistance provided by the "Missionaries of Charity" sisters, which did not allow the total dispersion of the community. In those years, priests began to come periodically from the Republic of Kazakhstan to attend to the most pressing needs of the faithful. In this way, the Catholic Church, despite the difficult times it had to go through, remained standing.

Today, the Catholic Church in this country represents the minority. The majority of the population is Muslim (about 97%), due to the fact that Tajiks, Uzbeks, Kyrgyzs and Turkmens live here. The inhabitants of the Pamirs also profess Islam.

II. The Community of Catholics Today

Christians in Tajikistan are about 0.3% of the population. Most of them are Orthodox, usually Russians, Ukrainians, and representatives of other European nationalities. Among the Christians there are also Catholics and Protestants. We can say that the Catholics who are in contact with us, there are about 130 faithful more or less, divided into only two parishes.

One of the main challenges for missionaries at this time is the fact that, in recent years, many Catholic families from our parishes are leaving the country in search of a better formation for their children in the schools and universities of Russia, which would unfortunately indicate that the number of faithful is decreasing year after year.

III. Synodal Process

As a local Church, with our faithful, we began this new synodal process in the month of November 2023, making known first of all, to the diocesan synodal team, then to all the faithful; the many theological questions, all related to varying degrees to the synodal renewal of the Church, which were studied at the Synod of Bishops held in Rome from 4 to 29 October, 2023 with the theme “For the Synodal Church, Communion, participation and mission.”

After having weighed all this, we began to study the content of the Synthesis Report in its 10 points, and then to focus on two of them, in order to elaborate a way forward with all the faithful, making every possible effort to reach the poor and the excluded.

Having now completed this second diocesan stage, we are now drawing up this synthesis which aims to bring together in some way the wonderful experiences of the Catholic faithful of Tajikistan, who always feel themselves to be an active part of the Church that walks and questions itself on a theme that is decisive for their life and their particular mission in this world.

We have considered it a gift and a task to walk together, and together to reflect on the path traveled in these years of the Church's presence in this country, learning, from what has been experienced in these years, what are the processes that can help

her to live communion with the Holy Father and with the Church as a whole.

In order to reach as many participants as possible in this stage of the synod, as in the first stage, the leaders of the various parish groups were asked to collaborate in this task in their frequent meetings, thus helping to achieve a greater participation of the faithful in this synodal journey. By the grace of God we have had an absolute participation of the faithful.

What were the specific means used for this purpose?:

- the meetings of the various parish groups: all the necessary information about this second stage of the Synod was provided and the active participation of the faithful was insisted upon;
- the WhatsApp groups made up of the faithful of both parishes in which everything necessary was informed,
- as at the beginning of the first stage, several sermons were dedicated in both parishes insisting on the participation of the faithful, explaining the need and responsibility of being able to respond to the current questions of the Church today, making every effort to reach the poor and the excluded, so that no one will be left out of the beautiful experience.

With all this, we have managed to get 95% of the Catholic faithful to participate in this first phase of the synod.

We have been able to confirm throughout this synodal journey that, despite the simplicity of our faithful, they are truly interested in living the Catholic faith better every day, thus giving a beautiful witness of life in the environment in which they find themselves.

IV. Summary of the topics addressed

For this second stage of the synodal journey in our communities, we have chosen two main themes that were presented to our faithful:

- **“listening to the cry of the poor”**: echoing the words of Our Lord in Bethany: “You have the poor always with you” (Mk 14:7), we thought it very important to reflect together on this theme because

of the cultural and social context that we see in this country of mission.

Our faithful have told us in their reflections that they experience that poverty has various meanings: without a doubt, the most immediate is the lack of sufficient material means, which in some cases leads to misery. And as we can see in our place of mission, it manifests itself in multiple ways and is connected with many painful phenomena: the *lack of the necessary sustenance*, of essential health care, the lack of housing and decent employment, loneliness, not having well-established families, etc. with the serious consequences that all this can bring.

But several of our faithful have expressed their great concern because they are aware that there is also another poverty to which we must pay special attention, and that is *spiritual poverty*, the absence of God and of answers to the essential questions. This poverty directly affects the spirit and causes very serious suffering.

It is thus necessary to confirm the Lord's words in the desert: "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Mt 4:4). In the depths of his heart, the human being asks for meaning and love.

For this reason, our faithful were very committed to the witness of life that Christians in the world must continue to give today, and in particular in this country, so that the Gospel may reach all cultures, just as it was done from the earliest times in the first Christian communities of which the Book of the Acts of the Apostles speaks.

- **"Some theological and canonical questions concerning specific ministerial forms"**: our faithful have expressed their deep concern because of these tendencies to want to alter or change something concerning the Sacrament of Holy Orders as instituted by Our Lord, namely the question that arises in many places of giving women access to the order of the diaconate.

All our faithful are aware that priestly ordination, through which the threefold function entrusted to the Apostles of teaching, sanctifying and governing the faithful is transmitted, has from the

beginning always been entrusted in the Catholic Church *solely and exclusively* to men, as Our Lord has always willed.

On the other hand, the fact that Mary Most Holy, Mother of God and Mother of the Church, did not receive the mission proper to the Apostles or the ministerial priesthood clearly shows that the non-admission of women to priestly ordination cannot mean a lesser dignity or discrimination against them, but the faithful observance of a disposition that must be attributed to the wisdom of the Lord of the universe.

Therefore, in order to remove all doubt on a question of great importance, which concerns the very divine constitution of the Church, we maintain that the Church has no faculty whatsoever to confer diaconal ordination on women, and that this opinion must be regarded as final by all the faithful of the Church of all times.

V. Conclusion

We have been able to feel once again the deep love and gratitude of the faithful to the Catholic Church, to the Holy Father, as they feel themselves members of the true Church founded by Jesus Christ. And firmly convinced that the Church **must** always keep intact her doctrine and mission, as she received it from her Founder, and that no change or reinterpretation is necessary.

It is our duty to convey the ardent desire of all the Catholic faithful of Tajikistan, who, although they are a minority, wish to exhort the whole of Tajikistan. May this synodal journey truly be an opportunity to better deepen all the truths contained in Catholic doctrine, received from Christ, **instead of** trying to introduce changes that could confuse and gravely scandalize the flock that Christ has entrusted to us. In the hands of Mary Most Holy, Mother of the Church, under the title of Our Lady of Luján, we place this desire of the faithful present here for the whole Church.

Dushanbe, 08/05/2024

Fr. Pedro López, IVE

Ecclesiastical Superior of the Missio Sui Iuris in Tajikistan

**First Regional Meeting on Evangelization--
Central Asian Bishops' Conference,
22 May 2024**

During the meeting of the recently-formed Central Asian Bishops' Conference, held in Tashkent, Uzbekistan from April 9-14, a proposal was made to engage in a more focused conversation and discernment regarding the experience and dynamic of evangelization throughout this vast and diverse territory. The decision was made to invite one of the members to act as coordinator for the task of facilitating this ongoing discussion in the Conference.

The group also supported the proposal to gather representatives chosen by the leader of each local Church for an initial meeting. Although there had already been a plan to schedule such a meeting (envisioned as the preliminary gathering suggested by the FABC Office on Evangelization for the Central Asian Region), this conversation further confirmed the desirability of providing such a forum in which persons from each local Church could share their experience and vision regarding our context and the task of evangelizing.

The leaders from the different local Churches also discussed the possibility of providing a method that would assist us in making more concrete in our context the guiding question as *to how to be a Church that is more diligently focused on evangelizing*. Indeed, on the one hand, most of our communities are simultaneously considered "local" Churches by virtue of their long-term historical presence in this area while also being viewed as mission territory by many in the wider Catholic Church.

**Context of "being Church" in Central Asia: challenges as well
as points of consolation**

Profile of Churches in Central Asia

The local communities of Catholics spread throughout this vast geographic territory vary in size and in character. Nevertheless,

there are several traits that are common to most of these. With the exception of Mongolia, these nations were part of the former Soviet Union until they gained their independence in 1991. (Mongolia, though not an official part of the Soviet Union, was influenced by Moscow during the Soviet period). The consequences of decades of Communist rule, with its inherent persecution of religion, strongly impacted the identity of our Catholics. From underground communities, these communities emerged after Stalinist times to function through strong lay engagement and the heroic ministry of those pastors liberated from years in prison. They were comprised almost exclusively of “traditionally” Catholic ethnic groups, such as Poles, Germans, Ukrainians, Koreans, and Lithuanians. The end of the Soviet period found these scattered communities in many cities within Central Asia. However, the ensuing decades saw the mass emigration of these peoples out of the region. Today, there remain a very small percent of descendants, who gather with those local citizens who have converted. The communities are seldom comprised of more than a few hundred people in a given area and, often, are made up of tinier groups of faithful from an increasingly diverse ethnic – and linguistic – background.

The governments in the countries within the territory of the Central Asian Bishops’ Conference permit the practice of religion – with varying degrees and forms of requirements and limits.

Although it would be inappropriate to attempt to make general statements that accurately characterize all of these communities, there are some aspects common to most of these societies:

- In addition to very small numbers of Catholics, who comprise a tiny percent of the populations in which they live, Russian Orthodox and various Protestant churches are present in most of these areas.
- With the exception of Mongolia, all of the countries in our region are predominantly Muslim, which exercises varying degrees of influence within local societies and

governments. Buddhism is the majority religion in Mongolia.

- Some of our countries remain rather closely tied to the Russian economy for a variety of reasons, including the dynamic of migrant labor and remittances sent home from that country.

External influences that result in challenges:

- A shift within the societies regarding the identity of religion; the relationship of religion to government/State; the role of religion in confronting contemporary challenges.
- The widescale and deeply held view that religion is intrinsically linked to ethnic identity.
- A shift in society and, consequently, in politics lead in *some* of these countries to increasing difficulties regarding visas, permissions, and other relevant immigration issues, revealing in some cases an apparent weakening of commitment to freedom of religious practice for minority faiths. This is not true in all of these countries, but religious activity is often regulated.
- As elsewhere, in some of these areas, governments are struggling to cope with the dynamic of an increasing tendency for radicalization among some members of Islam. This struggle to maintain a balance between freedom of religious practice and security tends to result in more regulation of religious practice. In some places, there is an increase of nationalistic policies and attitudes that can result in making more difficult the activity of the Church and highlights tensions within certain sections of the general society.

- In addition to these challenges, our communities are likewise confronted with those challenges faced by Christians in other areas of the world: increased secularism, a youth that appears largely alienated from religion, and various economic pressures experienced by many families across the world.

Internal Challenges within our communities:

- Decreasing numbers of parishioners in some areas, due mostly to emigration.
- Often, a reluctance on the part of Catholic parishioners to evangelize...for a variety of reasons, including the following:
 - Soviet legacy with its apprehension to speak about religion
 - Perceived vulnerability as minority
 - The sheer lack in number of Catholics and the widely dispersed locations of the communities
 - Complacency and a perception among some laypersons that "evangelization" should be the "work" of priests and sisters
 - Linguistic complications
 - Reliance of the local Church in many places on the universal Church for personnel, finances, and other resources.
- Strongly differing concepts of service among clergy and Sisters, accompanied by complacency and fear among some clergy.
- A lack of local clergy and Sisters.
- A sense that the Church, in some places, invests an inordinate amount of energy and resources into

maintaining its structure. Few clergy that is spread throughout huge territories. Few laborers and many tasks.

- Awareness of scandals in the larger Catholic Church and occasional use of this information to highlight suspicion of the intentions of the Church in general.

First Regional Meeting on Evangelization of the Central Asian Bishops' Conference, 22 May 2024.

The participants in this initial meeting represented the local Churches in the following dioceses and apostolic administrations:

Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Ecclesiastical Jurisdictions in Kazakhstan: Atyrau, Karaganda, Astana, Almaty.

Introduction to the goal and format of the meeting:

We understand the inextricable link between the Church's fulfillment of its mission with reaching others in the place and in the time where we live. Each local Church was encouraged to nominate two or three participants. Our first session, held online (because of perceived complications and costs of organizing an in-person meeting) included two Ordinaries, several priests, two religious sisters, and several lay persons. We used the four guiding questions (below) as a starting point in our sharing and in attempt to identify possible next steps in advancing and developing a more intentional "common" approach to "being on mission" and evangelizing in this territory.

Guiding questions about how to live as evangelizers and as "synodal Church on mission" in the context in which we live:

- How do we understand the primary task of the Church in our country - especially in light of the changing profile and number of our Catholics, as well as the social and political events taking place in our countries?

- What practices in evangelization have we witnessed that are bearing fruit?
- What do we think will help (or be necessary) in the task of evangelizing? For example, the need to learn local languages and more directly involve local cultures not traditionally “targeted” in our pastoral work?
- What internal and external factors hinder our efforts to evangelize?

Each participant was encouraged to prepare for this meeting by being ready to provide a brief overview of their observations and insights from their communities related to the themes raised in these guiding questions.

It was clear that this topic coincided closely to the topics related to the ongoing synodal process. Indeed, some of the local communities intentionally united these conversations, as animated by the guiding question in this phase of the synod: “How can we be a synodal Church on mission.” Here, we list those topics that were raised with some frequency in the discussion on the synod and/or in the Regional meeting on Evangelization.

Aspects that were raised in various places include:

- The critical need to *encourage, empower, and even challenge all baptized* to assume more responsibility and ownership for the mission of the Church. This theme, central to the documents from the Synod, resounded strongly with our local Christians.
- Preparation and formation of laity to undertake the tasks involved in evangelization at different levels.
- At the same time, there is a sober realization of severe complications inherent in the task of engaging in evangelization within the cultures where we live. Undeniably, there is a necessity to envision varied approaches to sharing our Faith – and identifying methods

for gauging expected results in this endeavor. How to engage in evangelization with both prudence and courage?

- Witness is always the most effective – and necessary – tool when sharing the Faith with others.
- It is unthinkable to engage in authentic evangelization and, indeed, in making accessible the true “mission” of the Church – without a serious commitment to embrace the local language and culture of the majority of people in our countries, in spite of the fact that these peoples have not traditionally been open to Christianity and, in some cases, view the Church’s activity with suspicion. As stated above, in this area of the world religion is almost always inextricably associated with ethnicity and language. Moreover, the Soviet heritage of privatizing religious practice, exacerbated by a modern tendency to accept a highly individualistic approach to religiosity, further complicates this task.
- Not all in our communities may be comfortable with such a shift toward engaging more assertively the culture and language of the majority. What is *their* voice in such a discernment?
- Correlatively, we must be committed to creating a truly welcoming community to outsiders or visitors. This is, unfortunately, not always the case. Again, this task must be seen as the responsibility of all and not just a few.
- The observation was raised in most places of a greater, critical need to become much more intently inserted in social media and in internet presence in general. This forum is now where not only the youth but many others turn to find “community” and inspiration. Why is the

Church largely absent from this arena in many places where we live?

- There is a need to better comprehend the significance of the parish community. Too often, this is a place where our people crave comfort and convenience when gathering to pray. Although this desire is not intrinsically bad, it can become an end in itself and, therefore, prohibit an authentically outgoing spirit of sharing Faith.
- Our communities can tend towards inward looking, self-preservation and care for our own needs. We can invest an inordinate amount of time and resources on this inward focus and on maintaining the structure necessary to support the institution.
- Most fundamentally, we must accept that any authentic attempt to animate a synodal Church on mission is contingent upon continuous “communication” with God, with the community, and with others. The relationship with Jesus Christ, Who alone generates authentic mission, is central to this and all endeavors in the life of the Church—both for individuals as well as for the community.
- Related to this is the concern in some places about focusing too much on quantitative factors such as numbers of faithful, rather on integrity of living our Christian faith as individuals and as a community.

Conclusions drawn from this initial meeting:

It is reasonable to claim that, in general, we accomplished the rather modest goal for this first meeting: sharing experience and offering proposals based in themes raised by the guiding questions.

Concrete conclusions regarding the group's possible next phase of interaction:

- A concrete proposal was made to focus on encouraging youth from various local Churches to become aware of their irreplaceable role in evangelizing. All were invited to encourage participation in a youth festival that is comprised of young Catholics in communities from a few of our countries. Among other activities, special attention will be directed to the endeavor to form a "community" among young Christians from Central Asia who will be invited to share about this role.
- Participants were charged with the task of reflecting on the question: "What next? Where are we called to as a group?" and invited to contact the moderator individually to offer proposals.
- The meeting's moderator will prepare a summary of the results of our discussion to convey the spirit and content of this first meeting and to solicit proposals from the members of the Bishops' Conference regarding the future direction of this group: Would there be a perceived value in creating a group such as the one that met to act in the role of "advising" or encouraging the Conference in this task of evangelization?

Although we did not set a date for the next conversation, all were asked to consider the possibilities for further developing our group's interaction. We also did not discuss whether it would now be better to gather in person, or again online.

Subsequent feedback from participants has raised the possibility of widening the scope of participants in the group. Moreover, the idea was shared of designing questions for reflection that would focus the overall conversation on a given aspect of evangelization. For example, can we invite people from traditionally "non-

Catholic ethnic groups” to share with us about how they view the Church in their country? How would these people value a greater interaction with their culture?

The Church must understand itself as a community of missionary discipleship who are “permanently in a state of mission.” (Evangelii Gaudium, 26)

Published May 2024

FABC Papers:

179. Synthesis Reports, Synod of Bishops 2021-2023, submitted by the Chinese Regional Bishops' Conference (CRBC), Catholic Bishops' Conference of Thailand (CBCT), Catholic Bishops' Conference of Timor-Leste (CET) compiled by the FABC Central Secretariat, September 2022
180. FABC: The Church in Asia - Evangelization, Vision, Future Directions, Orlando B. Cardinal Quevedo, O.M.I., Archbishop Emeritus, Cotabato, Philippines, FABC 50 General Conference, Baan Phu Waan, Sampran, Bangkok, Thailand, 13 October 2022
181. Which Church? What Kind of a Priest? What Kind of Formation? Reflections on Priestly Formation in an Epochal Change, H. Eminence Cardinal Lazzaro YOU Heung Sik, Prefect of the Dicastery for the Clergy, 17 October 2022
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
187. 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, Bangladesh, Conference of Catholic Bishops of India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Syro Malabar Church, Nepal, May 2024

188. 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 THREE, Indonesia, Cambodia, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Myanmar, May 2024
189. 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 FOUR, Philippines, Thailand, Timor Leste, Vietnam May 2024

FABC Papers is a project of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), published continuously since 1976, designed to bring the thinking of Asian experts to a wider audience and to develop critical analysis of the problems facing the Church in Asia from people on the scene. All of the FABC Papers are freely available online in pdf format on the FABC website: www.fabc.org. To facilitate access and research of all of the FABC Papers, various indexes are available in FABC Papers Nos. 100, 125, 150 and 183. The opinions expressed are those of the author(s) alone and do not necessarily represent official policies of the FABC or its member Episcopal Conferences. Manuscripts are always welcome and may be sent to: fabccentral@yahoo.com