

FABC Papers

No. 201

**FORMATION FOR MISSIONARY
DISCIPLES IN THE ASIAN SYNODAL
CHURCH**

by
FABC Office of Theological Concerns (OTC)

FORMATION FOR MISSIONARY DISCIPLES IN THE ASIAN SYNODAL CHURCH

by FABC-OTC¹

Introduction

In the light of implementing Synodality and promoting it as a way of life (*modus vivendi et operandi*), the FABC Office for Theological Concerns (OTC) wishes to offer to all church groups - Parish Councils, BECs, Youth, Clergy, Religious, Lay Ministers, etc. – a formation module instead of its usual theological paper.

Objectives and Flow:

- 1) Become aware of the contexts and challenges to synodality in our communities;
- 2) Provide a theological foundation for synodality, putting together insights mainly from the Synod *Final Document* (FD), the FABC 50 *Bangkok Document* (BD), the *Asian Continental Assembly on Synodality* (ACAS), “The Asian Face of Synodality” found in FABC Papers No. 191 (191), *Ecclesia in Asia* (EA), and *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG);
- 3) Highlight Asian values and cultural gifts in dialogue with the Synodal call to communion, participation and mission;
- 4) Facilitate encounter with the living Word of God leading to synodal conversion;
- 5) Engage the participants towards synodal living through action planning in their groups, with the help of the Conversation in the Spirit;

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- 6) Show the best practices for synodal programs from the FABC Offices which they could take part in or adapt to their own needs and contexts.

To respond to the above objectives, OTC designed the module in two parts - Part I: Amidst Tensions and Challenges in Asia and Part II: Asian and Synodal Values, Teachings and Reflections. Part II has three topics: A) Harmony and Communion; B) Bridge-being and Participation; and C) Mother-Whispering Hope and Mission. Each topic would have 4 sections: context and cultural value; Synod teachings and Bible reflection; Conversation in the Spirit and action planning; best practices. Questions for reflection and sharing have been designed in all areas to encourage communal learning and action.

Formation for Missionary Disciples in the Asian Synodal Church		
Part I: Journeying Together Amid Asian Realities: Context, Challenges and Tensions		
Part II: Asian and Synodal Values: Teachings and Reflections		
A) HARMONY AND COMMUNION	B) BRIDGE-BEING AND PARTICIPATION	C) MOTHER-WHISPERING HOPE AND MISSION
1) Reflection on Context and Cultural Value 2) Theological (FD, BD, 191, EA, EG) and Biblical Reflection 3) Conversation in the Spirit towards Planning 4) Best Practices from FABC Offices		

Formation Process:

Formation, as we know, is a process. It requires time, personal and communal reflection, discernment and decision-making towards mission. Most probably, it is the action implementation at the end of the sessions that will really form us as missionary disciples. We hope that each group takes time for each part; we suggest once a week or once a month for Parts A and B. Every topic 1) Harmony and Communion, 2) Bridge-being and Participation, 3) Church of the Poor

and Mission has FOUR parts. We also hope that EACH part or small sections could be facilitated once a week or once a month so that the process of conversion and growth will be natural and not forced. In following a natural formation process, learning towards action and mission then becomes part of the daily life of your communities.

Facilitators:

The parts are designed as a participatory process of learning and growing as a community hence we have provided questions for reflection. We hope there will be facilitators so the sharing can be enriching – each one participating and no one dominating. We provided many questions for reflection and sharing at the end of each section to engage participants in collaborative learning. The questions are NOT meant to be answered one by one or one after another. We trust that the facilitating team will choose what or how many questions to answer, or even design your own questions for a more effective synodal formation process.

We encourage small group sharing so each person can have a voice, then plenary sharing so that learning could be deepened. We also hope that the groups using this module can design a roadmap or a programmatic plan and even a monitoring system so that synodality can affect our spirituality and structures and create a more synodal culture and lifestyle in our communities.

Since we encourage the use of the Conversation in the Spirit or even other discernment tools, we hope that each group also has trained facilitators for these tools.

Best Practices:

In Part 4, we also shared best practices for synodal programs from FABC Offices. If you are interested in these and other FABC programs, you can go directly to the FABC website (www.fabc.org). We hope this will also encourage you to search your own churches, dioceses, and church groups for more contextualized synodal programs.

PART I

JOURNEYING TOGETHER AMID ASIANS' REALITIES:

CONTEXTS, CHALLENGES, AND TENSIONS

Asia is full of different cultures, languages, and religions. This makes the Church's mission both hopeful and difficult. Across the continent, new synodal efforts are starting. Small Christian groups are growing, showing communion through prayer and mutual support. Lay people, women, and young people are more involved in councils and decisions, making sure many voices are heard. Mission work is being renewed in creative ways — caring for the environment, building friendships across religions, and standing with migrants (BD 6–22; ACAS 36–39).

After the celebration of the Synod of Synodality, many local churches have begun putting synodality into practice in concrete ways. Pathways of implementation are being developed at diocesan and parish levels, helping communities live out communion, participation, and mission in daily life. The conversation of synodality is being used as a key tool for discernment, allowing people to listen deeply to one another and to the Holy Spirit. Diocesan assemblies are actively engaged in the synodal journey, creating spaces where clergy, religious, and lay faithful walk together. Mutual relationships among the different rites have improved, showing greater respect and unity. Teamwork, transparency, common decision-making, and collaboration are also growing stronger. Implementation teams at different levels — in parishes and dioceses — are working hard to carry forward the Synod's vision. These steps show that synodality is not just an idea but a lived reality, already shaping the Church in Asia with hope, creativity, and shared responsibility (ACAS 36–39).

Still, this journey is not without its struggles. Deep challenges and tensions continue to shape every part of life. They come not only from the realities of the societies we live in, but also from within the Church itself. The ongoing war situations involving Russia and Ukraine, the United States, Iran, and Israel are already affecting millions of people

in Asia, creating instability, economic strain, and new waves of migration.

Migration changes societies, as millions are forced to move because of poverty, conflict, or persecution. Contract workers often suffer exploitation and separation, while undocumented migrants live in fear without basic rights (BD 31–35). Families, the heart of Asian life, are weakened by migration, city living, and tragedies. The elderly, once respected as wisdom keepers, now face loneliness and exclusion from digital society. Interfaith marriages, though difficult, can become seeds of dialogue and respect (BD 36–39; ACAS 88–91).

Women show courage in challenging unfair systems, yet their leadership continues to be undervalued. Gender inequality remains a source of both struggle and resistance, with LGBTQI+ communities facing persistent stigma and repression (BD 40–44; ACAS 95–97). Young people, full of energy and vision, drive movements for justice and ecological renewal, but many are constrained by unemployment, addiction, and exclusion (BD 45–48; ACAS 98–102).

Digital technology changes life, offering connection but also spreading fake news, addiction, and leaving the poor behind. Economies grow but remain unfair, favoring elites while many are left out (BD 49–56; ACAS 100–108). The climate crisis threatens Asia's future with floods, displacement, and ecological damage, calling for care of creation (BD 57–61; ACAS 5).

Interreligious dialogue and ecumenism are urgent. Asia, home to great religions, calls Christians to witness through friendship, not rivalry. Collaboration among Christians is vital, as they seek unity in service and peace. In places marked by war and violence, the Church must be a creative minority, helping reconciliation and healing through dialogue and service (BD 62–64; ACAS 116–120).

Cultural changes and secularization also reshape identity. Globalization and consumerism weaken traditional values and community, while relativism erodes moral foundations. The Church must find ways to share the Gospel in societies where faith is often pushed aside (BD 14; ACAS 42).

But the challenges do not only come from society. The Church itself faces struggles within its own structures. Reports from the synodal process in Asia point to wounds and tensions that demand healing.

There have been abuses connected to finance, authority, conscience, and sexual misconduct, which have damaged credibility and led some to leave the Church. A lack of transparency and accountability in governance has created a crisis of trust. At times, decision-making has been marked by exclusion rather than shared responsibility, leaving many feeling unheard. Some faithful worry that voices from minority communities or traditional Christian groups may not carry equal weight in synodal processes. Others note that listening itself can be difficult, as honest comments are sometimes dismissed or seen as antagonistic.

The problem of clericalism also remains a serious tension. When authority is exercised in a way that distances clergy from the people, it weakens communion and participation. This attitude can foster inequality, discourage lay involvement, and create barriers to genuine dialogue. There are also challenges in priestly vocations. Excessive criticism of clergy, scandals, and unhealthy attitudes have contributed to a decline in vocations, even as the need for priests remains urgent to sustain faith and evangelization. At the same time, the influence of secular and materialist culture on clergy and lay leaders undermines authentic Gospel witness, making it harder for the Church to carry out its mission with credibility and integrity.

These internal challenges show that synodality is not only about engaging society but also about renewing the Church from within — through greater transparency, accountability, and genuine participation of all the baptized (ACAS 95–97; BD 40–42).

Questions for Reflection and Sharing:

In light of the manifold challenges and tensions evident both in the wider world and within the Church itself, we are invited to pause and ask: Which of these challenges and tensions most significantly shape our own context?

We are likewise invited to inquire: Which additional contexts — such as family life, local community, cultural identity, or personal spirituality — may generate distinct challenges and tensions not yet articulated here?

PART II

ASIAN AND SYNODAL VALUES: TEACHINGS AND REFLECTION

A. COMMUNION - REVERENCE AND HARMONY

1. WEAVING COMMUNION

If Asia were likened to a tapestry, it would beautifully reflect a rich diversity of interconnected images woven together in harmony. It also portrays shades representing the endless struggle to navigate conflicts emerging from different countries; the spots of poverty that afflict the majority of migrant families; the splash of red that depicts the martyrdom of believers who suffered in the name of faith; and the crooked lines portraying division due to ideological, racial and religious differences. Nevertheless, it also carries brilliant colours of aspiration for change and the well-being of all, the light behind the dark tones pushing for equity and justice, lines connecting for solidarity and strands of hope gathered in one masterpiece of God's plan for harmony.

Weaving is a living art form all across Asia that carries cultural heritage, spiritual bonds and community identity. The Indonesian Ikat and Songket, the Philippine abaca weaving, the Chinese Kesi, Japanese Nishijin-ori, Thai silk tapestry, and the Indian woven fabrics that make the sari are just some examples. In Southeast Asia, skilled weavers are spiritual craftsmen who convey motifs of balance and protection like the Naga in Laos. Weavers also serve to tie and bind the village as some are involved in gathering the strands, dying or colouring them and then the actual painstaking devotion of putting the strands together. In India, weaving traces its origins to the ancient Indus Valley Civilisation and later became a powerful symbol of the nation's struggle for independence. Today, it continues to support the livelihoods of millions of weavers across the country. In every motion of integrating each thread, there is respect of the material, in every needle punctured, a humble acceptance and the creative mixing of the various colored threads, the art of weaving is also the art of weaving harmony.

In some countries, weavers are considered soul weavers and dream weavers. They handle the materials with gentleness and respect as if handling the mysteries of life itself in all its myriad cultural forms and indigenous shapes. Weaving because of the process of time it takes to produce it develops reverence and patience for the unfolding of the design. In the same way, Asian people are marked by these traits of reverence for the variation and the passion for crafting harmony.

On a deeper level then one can say then that weaving in the Asian context it also conveys maintaining a connectivity of relationship. It is thus a reverential action in maintaining harmony or co-existence and cementing existing relationships. It is in these Asian values that we find the ecclesiological resonance of the theological concept of communion. Weaving becomes reverencing and harmonising with the divine, with fellow human beings, and the entire creation. This then becomes a collective sacred trait common as Asians in varied faith traditions. No wonder Asia is known as the land of spirituality and religiosity. Reverence and harmony then are not only benefits brought about by communion but, anthropologically speaking, are also indications of the aspiration and, at the same time, predispositions for establishing communion.

Questions for Reflection and Sharing:

How do you describe your community embodying diversity and reverence, just as a woven fabric features a variety of patterns and colours?

In your community, what do the dark colours represent in terms of struggles, and what do the bright colours represent in terms of graces and why?

2. THEOLOGICAL AND BIBLICAL REFLECTIONS

In Ecclesia in Asia, rediscovering the Asian soil as the roots of the Incarnation is a source of ecclesiological awakening for many in terms of appreciation and deepening (EA 5). The Savior was born on Asian soil, immersed in its specific cultural values and practices. It would not be an overstatement to articulate that Jesus who called for *Ut unum sint* (may all be one), did this with deep reverence and a profound desire for harmony. Mission and communion building is

marked therefore with respect and sensitivity (EA 25). The richness of diversity of the peoples of Asia is marked with the yearning for peace and fulness of life pursued with the intention of harmony of cultures and people (EA 50). Journeying together is an invitation that resonates strongly in symphony with the Asian soul. It starts with a simple act of reverence and the heart open to weave harmony.

Reverence is a profound, awe-filled respect or veneration often tinged with love, typically directed toward sacred, superior, or revered entities. Harmony is the pleasing combination, agreement, or arrangement of different parts, sounds, or ideas. It represents a state of peaceful coexistence, balance, and consistency, often used to describe social unity.

We could say that reverence and harmony are intimately connected. They are usually based on love and are necessary human prerequisites for communion, which is the work of the Holy Spirit, the One unifying the Father and the Son in communion and making God's Love present in the world. Both are also necessary human values for living Synodality.

The Asian understanding of Synodality is deeply rooted in the continent's enduring sense of harmony and reverence, values that are woven into the rich diversity of Asian cultures.

"Though the systems of beliefs, values, and symbols vary from place to place, the interconnectedness of the human community draws the Asian peoples together. The Asian value of being relational (with God, self, other human beings, and the cosmos) brings with it the unity of the human family and the unity of the peoples of Asia" ACAS 2 (Also cf. BD 3, 122-123; 191, p. 55).

"The family occupies a very important place in Asian cultures...(hence) family values like filial respect, love and care for the aged and the sick, love of children and harmony are held in high esteem in all Asian cultures and religious traditions" (EA 46; also cf. BD 78, 95).

Harmony and reverence are also Christian values, deeply rooted in the Trinitarian Mystery, the source of our faith. "The unity of this diversity is realised by Christ, the cornerstone, and the Holy Spirit, the source of all harmony" (FD 38).

The Church is then trying to build relationships that lead to peace and harmony among all, both inside and outside the Church, including the entirety of creation, so that the Kingdom of God may be present in this world. “In collaboration with our brothers and sisters of Christian traditions and neighbour religions, we will help promote a culture of peace and harmony, the economics of inclusive growth” (BD 161).

“A synodal process is incomplete without meeting brothers and sisters from other confessions, sharing and dialogue with them, and engaging in common actions” (191, p. 50-51; cf. also ACAS 75; FD 42).

“The ultimate meaning of Synodality is the witness that the Church is called to give to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the harmony of love that pours Himself out, to give Himself to the world. We can live the communion that saves by walking in a synodal way, in the intertwining of our vocations, charisms and ministries, by going forth to meet everyone in order to bring the joy of the Gospel: communion with God, with the entire humanity and all of creation” (FD 154).

a) Trinitarian Foundation

The contemporary ecclesiological discourse in Asia, as articulated through the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) and recent Synodal documents, centers on the concept of "Communion" (*communio*) as the foundational essence of the Church. It explores the multi-dimensional nature of communion – Trinitarian, Eucharistic, and missionary – within the specific cultural and social landscapes of Asia. It emphasizes that Synodality is not merely a structural reform but a “*modus vivendi et operandi*” (way of living and operating) that reflects the very nature of the Church as the People of God journeying together (FD 31). Within the cultural context of Asia, this transformation is carried out through mutual complementarity rooted in reverence, accompanied by practices that foster harmony.

The root of Synodality and communion is anchored in the relational model of the Triune God. The Church is understood as a reflection of the "trinitarian communion of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit" (191, p. 25). This divine communion is extended to humanity through the Incarnation, where Jesus "pitched His tent among us" (John 1.14; cf. ACAS 38). In this framework, communion is the antithesis of exclusivity. It is rooted in the "common baptism" which grants every

member equal dignity, regardless of their hierarchical role (cf. BD 17). The Asian context further defines this as a "communion of communities," where the local Churches' unique rich cultures and indigenous identities are nurtured through dialogue (cf. ACAS 57).

b. Eucharistic Centricity and Sacramentality

The Eucharist serves as the "source and summit" of Synodality (cf. 191, p. 49). It is through the Eucharistic synaxis that the "vertical Synodality with Christ establishes the horizontal Synodality of believers" (cf. 191, p. 64-66). The breaking of the bread is viewed as a transformative encounter that shifts the heart from "separation and alienation to communion and community" (cf. 191, p. 8).

Furthermore, it proposes a "sacrament of Synodality," where the lived experience of journeying together mediates the Divine presence through both words and deeds (cf. 191, p. 49). This is particularly resonant in Asia, where "storytelling" is recognized as a vital methodology for living the life of the Church, fostering "true-to-life conversations" that strengthen communal bonds (cf. BD 155).

c. Communion of God's Mercy

The Asian face of Synodality is characterized by a "culture of encounter" rooted in the Eucharist and expressed through dialogue and storytelling. It envisions a Church that is a "welcoming home" – a sacrament of encounter and salvation for all (cf. FD 115). By embracing the "dynamics of communion and participation," the Church in Asia seeks to fulfill its calling to be the "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world," sharing the "superabundant banquet" of God's mercy with all of humanity (cf. FD 153; BD 157).

If God's mercy is essential to communion, then the ecumenical movement is a vital element in shaping the Body of Christ – formed by the Holy Eucharist – into a deeper communion.

d. The Path of Dialogue and Inclusivity

The FABC identifies a "threefold dialogue" – with cultures, religions, and the poor – as the primary expression of Synodality in Asia (cf. BD 150). This dialogue aims to "transcend the otherness" of the partner, transforming them into a "neighbour and partner in communion" (cf. BD 150).

Synodality also demands a widening of the "tent" to include those often neglected, such as indigenous communities and the marginalized (cf. ACAS 57; BD 22). It emphasizes that the "*sensus fidei*" (the instinct for the truth of the Gospel) resides in the whole People of God, requiring leaders to listen to the "promptings of the Holy Spirit as expressed in the lives of all" (cf. ACAS 161; BD 22).

e. Synodal Conversion: From "Cold Hearts" to "Hearts on Fire"

A recurring motif is the "Emmaus narrative," representing a pilgrimage of the heart from confusion to revelation (cf. 191, p. 8). The synodal process calls for a personal and collective "metanoia" (conversion) – moving away from "self-referentiality" and "ontological pride" toward an openness to the "Other" (cf. BD 57; 191, p. 60).

In Asia, this conversion is described as a transition from "cold hearts" to "hearts on fire" (cf. 191, p. 60). It challenges the "modern-day sickness of auto-definition" and encourages a "spirituality of hospitality," which is a hallmark of Asian cultures (cf. 191, p. 60). This hospitality is not merely social but a "sacred synodal encounter" that recognizes the value of every person in the community (cf. 191, p. 64-66).

Reflection and Sharing:

What struck you the most? What resonates with you from the teachings of the Church and why?

What is the most important insight that you feel is needed in your community at present?

Biblical Reflection: 1 Cor 12:4-27 – Church as the Body of Christ

Saint Paul writes to the Christians at Corinth and addresses one of the pastoral concerns of the community, namely, the disharmony and conflicts arising from different roles or functions within the community.

Saint Paul uses the metaphor of the church as a body. All believers are presented as parts of the same body of Christ. The brain, eye, hand, and foot are all distinct but interdependent and interconnected.

The metaphor emphasises mutual interdependence within the Christian community: like a body with many parts, each member contributes uniquely regardless of role. Each part of the body is unique, and this uniqueness enriches and completes the others. Paul reminds them that gifts and functions (including leadership and mission) are not meant for personal privilege but are given by the Spirit for the benefit of the entire community. Its true mark is shared solidarity—suffering with one another and rejoicing together. As parts of the one body, together, we will weave the well-being of all, and radiate the joy, reverence, and the breath of the Spirit in communion and harmony.

For Reflection and Sharing

Read the text.

Read the text for the second time individually and in silence. Become aware of a word or a short phrase that calls out to you.

After two minutes of silent reflection, proceed to community meditation by mentioning this word or short phrase 3 times. After one person, another person follows with a few seconds of silence in between.

You may want to proceed into small group sharing by sharing what does the Spirit want to communicate with you through this word or phrase? Perhaps it resonates with a recent experience of weaving harmony in the Body of Christ.

3. CONVERSATION IN THE SPIRIT

Read the Bible text again.

What does the Spirit communicate to me personally through this metaphor?

What is the Spirit communicating to us (as a group) through this metaphor?

What conversions or changes needed to be made to foster communion?

What steps can be made to sustain this personal and communal conversion?

Action Planning

How can we become more attentive to weaving a fraternal relationship with one another?

How can we ensure our community stays inclusive, open, and welcoming to others?

How do we create a climate of trust where everyone can express and be themselves without fear? How do we create spaces for living and working together harmoniously?

4. BEST PRACTICE FROM FABC: LISTENING TO INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

The FABC-OE has a seminar on Gospel and Indigenous Living Tradition in Nov. 2026. Its intention is to listen to the wisdom and experiences of the Indigenous Peoples of Asia. It wants to learn about the indigenous worldview on patriarchy, equity, dignity, capitalism, development, sustainability, spirituality, worship and mysticism, youth and the digital world. Participating in the dialogue are: theologians and experts, church workers involved in Commissions on Indigenous Peoples from different Asian countries, as well as indigenous communities themselves. The Office of Evangelization of the FABC also worked with other FABC Offices in getting this project underway – the Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs and the Office for Theological Concerns.

Communion is the goal of a Synodal Church. Synodality starts with listening, to all, but especially to people who do not have a voice or are marginalized, even those who are actively participating in church activities but we rarely hear their voice. Indigenous peoples are one of these unheard voices, and maybe a marginalized voice too perhaps for a lot of countries. Known for their deep love and care for the common home, spiritual traditions that energize their daily simple living – it is hoped that our indigenous communities will share their wisdom and practice and influence us towards a more sustainable culture energized by our spiritual life.

Perhaps when we think of an action step towards synodal communion, we can also think of unheard voice/s in our own groups/places and decide to do reach out to and learn from them.

B. BRIDGE-BEING LEADERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION

1. BRIDGES AND BRIDGE-BEING

The geographical terrain of Asia is as diverse as its religious and cultural landscape. In many places, roads are made possible only because of bridges. Without bridges, it would be impossible to build roads that function well. Bridges are so important that, without them, people living on the two sides of a river may develop different accents or even different languages.

In Asia, however, bridges are essential, not only for roads, but also for connecting histories, memories, and peoples. Many Asian societies face dictatorship, authoritarianism, patriarchy, and passivity, yet they also carry deep aspirations for equality, justice, peace, and participation (cf. EA 6, 8). They love leaders who sacrifice themselves for the poor, the oppressed, and the excluded, becoming bridges into fuller social participation. Their traditions of sharing, hospitality, respect for inherited traditions, and leaving behind inheritance for family and community can become important resources for a synodal Church. In this sense, Asians may be understood not only as bridge-builders, but as “bridge-beings,” shaped by life among immense diversity of cultures, religions, languages, generations, and social groups.

Early Church leaders such as Peter, Paul, and Barnabas, who were also Asians, became prominent precisely when they acted as self-sacrificing mediators (cf. Acts 15). They took side with the minorities, outsiders, and those considered failures or unacceptable. The Church in Asia nowadays likewise recognizes her mission to promote peace and reconciliation amid religious tension, political division, poverty, migration, and cultural fragmentation (cf. ACAS 153; 154). She is therefore called to be a bridge between religions and peoples, rich and poor, tradition and renewal, and the wounds of the past and hopes for the future.

Asian contexts require converted Asian leadership and participation. In this section, we will put emphasis on the value of bridge-building, or bridge-being as an Asian way of living out synodal participation.

a. 'Bridge-Being' Leadership and Participation

The Church, as the People of God, needs to be ever reformed, based on the guidance of the Holy Spirit emerging through the signs of the times. Initially, the 'God of salvation' (Ps 68:20) initiated his saving plan on Asian soil. "It was in fact in Asia that God revealed and fulfilled his saving purpose from the beginning. He guided the patriarchs (cf. *Gen* 12) and called Moses to lead his people to freedom (cf. *Ex* 3:10)" (EA 1). The present vocation of the Asian Church to be missionary and synodal in Asia has the unique privilege to reveal to the whole Church how she has to be synodal in her *modus vivendi et operandi*.

As a sequel to all those former developments, the same Saviour expects, "in the Third Christian Millennium *a great harvest of faith* (that) will be reaped in this vast and vital continent" (EA 1). As the world is growingly diverse and plural in all aspects of human life, the Asian model of religious tolerance (cf. BD 114) and social harmony, albeit, tensions and conflicts in some pockets, can serve as practical guidelines for a much-needed synodal way of life in the whole Church.

In the diverse religious, cultural and social contexts of contemporary Asia, 'Synodality' and 'Bridge-being' have become core values for the Church in fulfilling her missionary mandate (cf. BD 106, 110). In 'bridge-being', in its metaphorical sense, beyond building a bridge, one becomes a bridge itself for others for the success of all. This mode of becoming is seen in the self-sacrificing and servant leadership of Jesus.

b. One becomes a 'Bridge-being'

Jesus calls himself 'the way' and 'the gate of the sheepfold'. These images, in a way, resonate the 'bridge-being' in Jesus through his self-emptying sacrificial suffering leadership-style for the salvation of all. This is a style of leadership that invites and gives way, instead of pushing or pulling, it leads by patiently waiting for others to take steps, even to trample on itself, toward the meadows of new life. Its leadership is realized only when others actively take part by making use of itself. In this way, it invites and transforms others to become leaders themselves; leading now means allowing participation and taking part now becomes leading. Bridge-being is closely related to

participation, because it promotes, enables, and deepens participation. It leads by serving and serves through self-giving, that is, “lying down” for the sake of greater connection, and participation.

The self-emptying sacrifice of Jesus urges all synodal missionary followers of Christ to become bridges themselves for all in faith, hope and charity. Through the self-emptying incarnate and participatory leadership of Christ has the Asian version in ‘taking off one’s shoes’ in approaching others with unselfish service mindedness and fraternal concerns (cf. ACAS 180). ‘Taking off one’s shoes’ indicates the need of open-mindedness with deep respect for others.

Hence, there is the urgent need of avoiding authoritarianism and clericalism from all behavioral patterns (cf. ACAS 112). In all structures, programs and services, all concerned need the awareness that one is offering one’s own charisms and gifts for the good of the body of Christ, as a continuation of the mission of the risen Lord in the world (cf. BD 119). An out-going Church definitely assumes the nature of an ecumenical consciousness and finally embraces the whole humanity with its plurality and diversity in cultures, religions and social situations. An ‘out-going Church’ becomes a ‘field-hospital’ as Pope Francis describes (cf. Pope Francis, *Homily, 24 September, 2013*), and true ecumenical and interreligious dialogue and life would emerge and flourish (cf. ACAS 75). Thus, in the threshold of the third millennium, Asian Christians have the God-given plural and diverse contexts in which being synodal and participative would provide the new mode of being a ‘servant Church’, imitating Jesus Christ who washed the feet of his disciples.

In order to realize this vision, each follower of Christ has to become bridge-beings in the world that needs mutual healers by mutual synodal listening, self-emptying participation with missionary zeal that was found in Christ Jesus and his faithful disciples throughout the centuries of Christian history. Primarily, there is the need for the Church to form synodal leaders capable of assuming the role of ‘being-bridges’ at all levels (cf. BD 115). This sort of service-leadership will generate some new pathways for journeying together, searching in the light of the Holy Spirit, discernment and mutual offering of gifts for a participative and missionary oriented Church, in the mode of a ‘field-hospital’ for the struggling humanity. This sort of selfless service-oriented principles and values would cultivate a spiritual

culture of a synodal pilgrim journey in communion, participation and mission with fuller expressions and affirmations of FABC's long-standing project for the triple dialogue of religions, cultures and the poor of Asia.

For Reflection and Sharing:

1. Have we sufficiently stepped into the salvific, self-emptying, incarnate and participatory servant leadership of Christ in Asian soil, aligning with the joys, hopes, sorrows, and anxieties of the Asian peoples and their living realities (cf. *Gaudium et Spes* (GS) 1)?
2. What factors are hindering the Church in eliminating authoritarianism, clericalism and discrimination from her communities, structures and programs, so as to give birth to a new-creation in Christ Jesus (cf. 2 Cor 5:17)?
3. Are we also not blamed by Jesus, that this generation is 'praising me with their lips, but their hearts are far away from me (cf. Mk 7:6; Mt 15:8)? Let us check ourselves if we are still generating counter-witnessing in the Christian way among the peoples of Asia?

2. THEOLOGICAL AND BIBLICAL REFLECTION

In the diverse and complex socio-political, cultural, and religious landscape of Asia, the concept of "bridge-building" is not merely a pastoral strategy but the theological core of the Church's synodal mission. The FABC documents emphasize that becoming "bridges and bridge-builders" is the image that best describes the mission and purpose of the Church in Asia (cf. BD 110-118)

a. Jesus as the Ultimate Bridge

The theology of bridge-building is deeply rooted in the history of salvation. In the Old Testament (cf. Gn 28:10-19), Jacob's dream of a stairway connecting heaven and earth symbolizes God's initiative to counteract human sin, which severs our connection with the Creator, with others, and with creation. This dream finds its ultimate fulfillment in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who kenotically emptied Himself to serve precisely as the bridge, reconciling all things to God and making peace through the blood of His cross (cf. BD 121).

The biblical narrative of the road to Emmaus (cf. Lk 24,13-35) further serves a profound bridge-building function. By walking into the disciples' despair, Jesus builds a bridge between the death of a mighty prophet and the glory of a suffering Messiah, bringing forth new life and hope from the ruins of pain and death. Inspired by this, believers are called to be "Easter people" who actively play the role of bridge-builders in the Church and in society (cf. 191).

b. The Bond of Paschal Mystery

The intimate bond and bridge-building through the paschal mystery of Christ became fully revealed in the resurrection of the Son. The risen Lord has commanded his disciples to proclaim the good news of salvation to the whole world. The called out (*ecclesia*) missionary disciples of Christ were sanctified on the day of Pentecost, and they were sent out with the power of the Spirit poured out on them. The Church that was inaugurated on the day of Pentecost stands as the body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit in the world. Into the Body of Christ and in the Temple of the Holy Spirit, more and more members are incorporated as one body through Baptism (cf. FD 24). Those who are incorporated through baptism are incorporated sacramentally through the holy Eucharist and other sacraments day by day.

The Church, the Body of Christ, learns from the Eucharist to strengthen unity in plurality. The unity of the Church and the multiplicity of Eucharistic assemblies stand as the sacramental mystery of unity in diversity. The Eucharist demonstrates the harmony created by the Spirit, not as uniformity but as incorporation proper to each one into the mystical body of Christ in the world (cf. FD 26). The Church brings up her children in a bond of unity, harmony and peace.

c. From "Dialogue" to "Multilogue"

The Synod on Synodality envisions the Church as a "sacrament," acting as a sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of the unity of all humanity (FD 54). In Asia, where Christians are a minority, the Church must transcend being merely an inclusive "tent" of refuge; it must actively become a "bridge-builder" in the vital work of peace and reconciliation (cf. ACAS 153).

For decades, the Asian Church has prioritized a "triple dialogue" with cultures, religions, and the poor (cf. BD 21). However, synodality pushes this further into a "multilogue" – a multilateral engagement that includes youth, women, governments, civil society, and the marginalized (cf. BD 112). Theologically, this means the Church cannot be self-referential but must serve the world (cf. BD 19). In regions fractured by armed conflicts, fundamentalism, and systemic injustice, this bridge-building mission demands that the Church act as an agent of reconciliation, which requires the courage to dialogue with both the victims and the perpetrators of violence to break the vicious cycle of vengeance (cf. BD 113).

d. Overcoming Clericalism and Co-Responsibility

A synodal Church demands that all the baptized share responsibility for evangelization. Documents point out that a major obstacle to ministry and mission is "clericalism," which stems from a misunderstanding of the divine call – treating it as a privilege rather than a service, and exercising power in a worldly manner. Therefore, leadership formation must challenge this distortion and promote a culture of transparency and accountability (cf. BD 18, 78; FD 74, 78).

To appropriately and effectively respond to current challenges, formation becomes a crucial factor. This requires the concerted response of bishops, priests, religious, and laity. Clergy must be trained to empower the laity to live out their baptismal commitments in both the Church and society. The future of the Church depends on cultivating leaders who can listen, discern, and share responsibility (cf. 191, pp.70-75).

For Reflection and Sharing:

1. Bridge-building requires deep humility, respect for the "sacred ground" of other cultures, and the shedding of our prejudices, symbolized by taking off our shoes (cf. BD 180-185).

Question: What specific "shoes" do we need to take off individually and as a community so that we can genuinely listen to and build bridges?

2. The Asian Church is called to engage in a "multilogue" that transforms inward-looking groups into "Small Human Communities" inclusive of people of all faiths and backgrounds (cf. BD 21).

Question: Looking at our immediate neighborhood, who are the groups currently left outside our "tent", and what concrete actions can our community take to transition from an inward-looking group to a "Small Human Community"?

3. In an Asian reality often wounded by political oppression, violence, and economic exploitation, the Church is urged to be an agent of reconciliation (cf. BD 110-118).

Question: How can our local Church courageously act as a bridge of healing and prophetic justice, ensuring we are not just silent bystanders but active peacemakers in the face of the divisions?

To understand more deeply and self-appropriate the values of bridge-building and participation, let us allow the word of God in John 1: 43-51 to guide us.

Biblical Reflection: John 1: 43-51 (Jesus Meets Nathanael)

We may want to start our Bible reflection with a song.

Let us all read this text from John, chapter 1:43-51, Jesus meets with Nathanael. We may want to read the text a second time. As we read it, we may put a straight line on a word or a phrase that inspires us. We may also put a broken line on a word or a phrase that disturbs us.

After a few minutes of silent reflection, we may want to share on the word or phrase that inspires us and also those that disturb or bother us.

Sharing in small groups. After our sharing, we continue...

In this passage, we witness the transition of Nathanael's attitude toward Jesus changing from contempt (cf. Jn 1:46: " 'Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?' Nathanael asked.") to admiration and even declaring Him as "Son of God", that is for Nathanael, "king of Israel" (Jn 1:49). Jesus then invites Nathanael to continue change his attitude from revering Him as a politically promised figure to a deeper appreciation of His identity and relationship to Heaven and to God. He told Nathanael that "Amen, Amen, I tell you, you will see 'heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on' the Son of Man."

It is commonly understood that this verse refers to Genesis 28:12, where Jacob "had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the

earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it." Therefore, Jesus is referring to Himself as the ladder or stairway between heaven and earth which grounds our faith confession that He is the only mediation between God and humanity.

Noteworthy is the fact that though Jesus compliments Nathanael's confession as "faith" (Jn 1:50), He nevertheless designates Himself as "Son of Man" and not as "son of God" as Nathanael calls Him. This is to correct Nathanael's understanding of Jesus that tends to weigh more on a political sense than on who Jesus truly is. He is truly the glorious Son of Man who comes in the final day from the right hand of God (cf. Dan. 7:13-14), but He is also the humble Son of Man who has no place to lay His head and must be handed over (Mt.8:19-20), to suffer and die and rise again. This phrase therefore is closely connected with His paschal mystery, in particular His Cross, where He lays down His life for the sake of our salvation. The true ladder from earth to heaven is the Cross of Jesus, or better, the crucified Jesus who lays down His life on the Cross to bring humanity to God and vice versa.

3. CONVERSATION IN THE SPIRIT

In the light of reflections like the one suggested above, we may proceed to converse with one another in the Spirit in three rounds (cf. Method of conversation in the Spirit described in the documents of the Synod on Synodality).

Round 1 could be facilitated with the help of guiding questions like the following that we suggest as examples:

- How am I feeling when I contemplate the image of Jesus as the ladder between heaven and earth; as the poor, humble and suffering Son of Man and as the crucified one on His Cross?
- What am I thinking about being bridges and building bridges nowadays in Asia? What factors in Asian contexts that invite or require me and us to be bridges?
- How is being-bridges related to synodal participation? Why is it important for synodal participation in Asia?

- How am I desiring to be bridges in my own particular contexts, given my own conditions? What does it mean for me/us to become bridges here and now?

Action Planning

Keeping in mind the concrete contexts that our community are facing, we may facilitate Conversation in Spirit as many times as needed to discern in common and to come up with an action plan for formation on leadership and participation as bridge-building. We can use various models of pastoral planning. The guidelines below are examples and suggestive.

1. What are the contexts surrounding us that are related to leadership and participation? What are its light and darkness?
2. What are our strengths and weaknesses relating to leadership and participation as bridge-building?
3. What goals are we desiring to attain in formation on leadership and participation as bridge-building?
4. What will we do to attain those goals? What are the best practices that I know as promoting bridge-building style of leadership and participation?
5. What is the time frame of these goals/our plan?

4. BEST PRACTICES FROM FABC: GEN Z BIBLE

The Gen Z Bible entitled “Identity: Identified – Navigating the Challenges of Life”, is not really a project of, but promoted by, the Office of Evangelization. Archbishop Simon Poh, bishop of Kuching (Malaysia) who heads the Office, shared how the DNA of synodality was in the very conception and production of this Bible. It started in 2019 when the Diocese of Kuching hosted a UBS-APCA (Asian Pacific Catholic Affinity) on the Bible with United Bible Society. Archbishop Poh was invited to share his experience of the Synod on Youth in Oct 2018. Mr. John Bergin, a NZ Catholic, shared the concept of a Bible to respond to the issues faced by young people.

Inspired by the Synod on Youth, consultations were carried out across Asia to ask what are the questions of life and issues affecting the young people. These became the questions that were given to

Catholic Bishops, religious and lay leaders for their respective articles that were used in the book. At the end of each article, there is a QR code. Scanning the QR code leads to a video testimony by a young person on the issues faced in life. The videos lead the viewer back to read specific lives of Bible personalities.

The reason for this title was: when a young person identifies an issue in life and discovers the answer in the Word of God, he or she will discover a self-identity as a child of God. These issues were inserted in between the New Testament Bible. In addition, the life-giving words of God that bring hope, meaning and purpose in life, direction and guidance, and what Jesus speaks to one's heart, are highlighted in yellow throughout the NT.

The same App is available on the Android Play Store or Apple. All the above media are interlinked - printed, video, app - and lead to the Word of God - leading to an encounter with the Lord Jesus. Bearing the imprimatur and endorsements of bishops, it is being translated in different languages.

It is indeed a wonderful synodal project because it 'walks with - *synhodos*' with young people in their daily life concerns and issues, especially as the book is an interactive work. The youth is an important sector in the Synodal Church, as can be seen in the Synod Documents. Aside from them as a resource, missiologists, theologians, artists, linguists, etc. worked together to produce this - a truly synodal undertaking.

C. MOTHER-WHISPERING HOPE AND MISSION

1. CHURCH AS MOTHER OF THE POOR

Poverty in Asia is a complex issue because the continent contains both some of the world's wealthiest societies and many low-income communities. Rapid economic growth in some countries has lifted hundreds of millions of people out of extreme poverty over recent decades. While Asia is home to some of the world's wealthiest individuals, it also has the majority of people living in extreme poverty. Poverty in Asia takes many forms. There are those who suffer material deprivation, including ethnic minorities, migrant workers, urban slum dwellers, refugees, and displaced persons. There are also those who experience social exclusion and are often overlooked both by society and by the Church: "the uneducated, disengaged youth, persons with disabilities, persons deprived of liberty, members of lower castes, divorced and remarried persons, single mothers, the elderly and infirm, people living with HIV, individuals struggling with substance dependency, and persons who identify as LGBTQIA+, etc" (ACAS 104).

The image of the Church as a mother is relevant in dealing with the challenges of poverty. The image keeps the traditional Christian idea of the Church as a nurturing mother, but interprets it through the lived experience of poverty, suffering, community, and interreligious coexistence in Asian societies. Like a mother in a poor Asian household caring for many children with limited means, the Church in Asia embraces, often with great struggle and compassion, the countless poor and marginalized people who require special accompaniment on the synodal journey (cf. ACAS 103).

Like a mother, we are called to look courageously into the faces of the poor, to recognize and welcome them with love and dignity as children of God who deserve care, attention, and belonging. We must also become the voice of the poor. Too often, the cries tribal communities, indigenous peoples, and the economically disadvantaged go unheard. At times, fear of conflict with authorities or pressure to remain silent has caused that, we distance ourselves from these communities and fail to respond to the "cry of the poor." (cf. ACAS 108).

At the heart of this mission is the value of *solidarity*. Solidarity with the poor means more than sympathy for those who struggle economically. It is the recognition of their inherent dignity and the understanding that their lives are deeply interconnected with ours. True solidarity calls us not only to acts of charity, but also to active commitment in transforming unjust systems that perpetuate poverty. It challenges society and the Church alike to place the needs of the vulnerable at the center of concern and action.

For Reflection and Sharing:

Who are the poor in your life context?

Has the Church put the preferential option for the poor into practice in real and concrete actions?

INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AND MINORITY: WITNESS - WHISPERER

Asia is a continent of immense diversity and profound spiritual richness. More than 2,300 languages are spoken throughout Asia, reflecting the continent's extraordinary cultural, ethnic, and social diversity. Asia is also widely recognized as the cradle of many of the world's great religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Jainism, Sikhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Shintoism, and numerous indigenous spiritual traditions (cf. ACAS 1; BD 64).

At the same time, the Asian context presents many serious challenges. Despite the richness of religious diversity, parts of Asia continue to experience religious conflict, intolerance, discrimination, and persecution, both subtle and direct. The growing culture of violence, often aggravated by weak justice systems, social inequality, corruption, political oppression, dictatorial governments, and unjust laws, creates insecurity and suffering for many communities, especially religious minorities. The politicization of religion has further complicated the ability of minority groups to practise their faith freely and peacefully (cf. ACAS 109).

Christians in Asia are also deeply aware that they are, in most countries, a minority community, except in places such as the Philippines and Timor-Leste. This minority reality calls the Church to cultivate humility, sensitivity, and respect toward the beliefs and traditions of other peoples. Respecting the sensitivities of Asian

cultures and religions must remain at the heart of the Church's mission and witness.

In this setting, evangelization in Asia often takes place through what may be described as “dialogue, witness, and whisper.” Even if we are in the minority as a religious community, we evangelize by witness and “whispering the Gospel” through personal encounters and by actively living out one's faith (cf. ACAS 171). Dialogue begins with openness and sincere encounter. It means listening respectfully, learning from others, and working together for peace, justice, and the dignity of all people. Dialogue is not a compromise of faith, but an expression of Christian love and humility. The Church proclaims Christ most effectively through the witness of life. Christians are called to embody Gospel values through compassion, integrity, simplicity, service, and solidarity with the poor and suffering. The witness of Christian communities, schools, hospitals, and charitable institutions often speaks more powerfully than words alone. In many Asian contexts, the Gospel is shared not through loud proclamation or confrontation, but through a quiet and respectful “whisper.” This whisper is the silent testimony of lives transformed by “personal encounters and personal experiences with Jesus Christ and contributing to the community of the Church as a communion of communities” (ACAS 171). It is communicated through friendship, accompaniment, humble service, and faithful presence. To “whisper” the Gospel means to allow the love of Christ to radiate naturally through actions, relationships, and daily living.

For Reflection and Sharing

Describe negative and positive experiences in relationships with followers of other religions.

How can we become a 'bridge' or build bridges in concrete life in relationships with various adherents of other religions?

2. THEOLOGICAL AND BIBLICAL REFLECTIONS

Mission with the Poor

In today's world, the problems faced by the poor are often overlooked and neglected. The concentration of wealth and power in a few groups of people leads to the neglect of the welfare and the needs of

the poor and the marginalized, as well as our common home, the Mother Earth (cf. FD 48).

“‘God’s heart has a special place for the poor’ (FD 19; EG 197). The whole Christian community is called to recognize in those made poor the face and flesh of Christ, who, though He was rich, became poor for us so that we might become rich through His poverty (cf. 2 Cor 8:9). The preferential option for the poor is implicit in Christological faith. The direct knowledge of the suffering Christ (cf. EG 198) possessed by those who are poor makes them heralds of salvation received as a gift and witnesses to the joy of the Gospel. The Church is called to be poor with those who are poor, who often constitute the majority of the faithful, to listen to them, learning together how to recognize the charisms they receive from the Spirit. The Church also needs to learn to recognize them as agents of evangelization” (FD 19).

Jesus was born in the manger, a witnessing sign of poverty (cf. BD, 124). In his proclamation to the poor and the weak, he himself has first become the poor and the weak. (1 Cor. 9:22-23). (cf. BD, 164). Nowadays, the joys and the sorrows, the hope and anxieties of people and the poor (cf. GS 1) are the “joys and sorrows of all of us, Christ’s disciples.” (FD 2). When we realize that God reveals to us his mysterious salvific plan through the poor in their very lives (BD 124), would we still hesitate to put them at the center?

For a synodal Church, inclusivism is a value to be cultivated. Everyone is welcome, especially the poor and marginalized, for example, in terms of sexuality, identity and marital status (FD 50). The Church does not exclude anyone even in the face of cultural barriers. In creative ways, we seek to transcend the tension between the attitude of inclusiveness (for instance, some people may perceive it to be a scandal to include some marginalized groups into Church membership) and the call to be faithful to the Gospel values (cf. ACAS 74, 106).

We are empowered for missionary activities by the love and mercy of God as fully revealed in Jesus Christ. In our mission to the poor and the peripheries, we do it as what Jesus has done: we accompany the poor and we are witnesses to the gospel in solidarity with them (cf. BD 164). This solidarity is not a one-way compassion, but we also learn from them as the poor invite us to “ponder the mysterious wisdom of God” (BD 124).

Despite of the challenges, in our mission, we proclaim the Good News to the poor by words and we also take concrete actions and stand with them (cf. ACAS 108). “In our mission to the poor and the peripheries, we must listen to vulnerable communities and work towards protecting them and their environment, rights, and privileges” (ACAS 70). In our listening to the poor and the cry of the earth, we live synodality in solidarity with the poor in our common home. “Synodality and integral ecology both take on the character of relationality and insist upon us nurturing what binds us together; this is why they correspond to and complement each other concerning how the mission of the Church is lived out in today’s world” (FD 48). In this way, we stand in solidarity with the peripheries.

Mission with Neighbor Religions

God dwells among us in the Incarnation of the Word (John 1:14). God is with the entire humankind and not just with Christians. The multi-religious and multi-cultural context in Asia “makes it almost compelling to engage in interreligious dialogue as a way of building peace, reconciliation, and harmony” (ACAS 75). “Our neighbour religions and some societal forms also live out a sense of synodality” (191, p. 54).

Employing “the theology of communion,” John Paul II’s apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* follows the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and describes “the Church as the pilgrim People of God to whom all peoples are in some way related” (EA 24; 191, p. 54). Our relationship with all humanity is cultivated in our response to God’s love, and to serve and love our neighbours (cf. BD 165).

While there are many fruitful examples of collaboration (cf. ACAS 75), developing a loving relationship with our neighbours is not without challenges. For instance, in some places, there is discrimination and violence among peoples of different faiths. Amidst the difficulties, we are energized by our faith in the Risen Christ to build bridges with others (cf. ACAS, 116).

Responding to this context of minority in dialogue with the rest of society, the image of the Church as a “bridges and bridge-builder” (cf. BD, 110) becomes especially meaningful. Becoming bridges and bridge-builders best describes the mission of the Church in Asia and the Good News she proclaims to the peoples of this continent and

beyond. This image reflects the very mission of Jesus Christ, whom Christians proclaim as the incarnate Son of God — born in Asia, raised within Asian culture, and the source of a spiritual tradition that continues to bring hope to humanity. Christ came to reconcile humanity with God and people with one another. Following Him, the Church is called to build bridges across divisions of religion, culture, ethnicity, class, and ideology.

Walking with God, we are hopeful that “in collaboration with our brothers and sisters of Christian traditions and neighbour religions, we will help promote a culture of peace and harmony, the economics of inclusive growth and development, holistic approaches to education and character formation, and the advancement of science and technology geared towards total human development” (BD 161). In our cross-cultural and interreligious synodal journey together with our neighbour religions, the Church of Asia contributes to building a better Asia for everyone. (cf. BD 165).

For Reflection and Sharing

Our responsibility for mission to the peripheries and our neighbours are not confined to priests and missionaries. Every baptized is a missionary disciple in the synodal church. (cf. International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church* (2 March 2018) 53; FD 4) How does our ecclesial community mobilize every member to have an increased awareness in responding to this missionary call? How could we discern “a renewed missionary impulse” (cf. FD 3)?

“In his letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul describes his understanding of being a disciple and missionary of Jesus Christ: ‘To the weak I became weak, to win over the weak. I have become all things to all... All this, I do for the sake of the gospel, so that I too may have a share in it.’” (1 Cor. 9:22-23). (BD 164). How does the scripture strengthen us in our proclamation of the Gospel through accompaniment with the poor and attending to their needs?

In Asia, the Catholic Church is the minority church. How do we, taking into account our own contexts and challenges, proclaim the good news to our neighbours in a prudent manner through “whisper” and “personal encounters” by living out our faith in Jesus (cf. ACAS 171)?

Biblical Reflection - Luke 10: 29-37 (The Good Samaritan)

Having examined the context and value of the three mission topics and conducted a theological reflection on each, the focus now shifts to a Biblical reflection through a 'Conversation in the Spirit.'

This reflection centers on the 'Parable of the Good Samaritan' (Lk 10:29-37).

Prior to this parable, Jesus identifies the greatest commandment as loving God and 'loving one's neighbor as oneself.' In response, a scholar of the law, seeking to justify himself, asks, "And who is my neighbor?" It is precisely to answer this question that Jesus shares the story of the Good Samaritan.

This approach facilitates a 'Conversation in the Spirit' regarding the values—such as solidarity—demonstrated toward the poor, the nature of dialogue between individuals of different religious backgrounds, and the ideal relationship between the majority and minority within a single society.

For Reflection and Sharing:

1. How does this gospel passage help you understand solidarity and synodality better?
2. Who among your neighbors are calling on you to be a Good Samaritan?

3. CONVERSATION IN THE SPIRIT

Choose one topic (a, b, c) and use it for Conversation in the Spirit. Choose the other topics for another time.

a. Jesus Christ himself has become the poor for the poor. How do we put ourselves in the shoes of the marginalized? How does the scripture on the Parable of the Good Samaritan empower our fervor in our proclamation through accompaniment with the poor and attending to their needs?

b. The Good Samaritan helped a Jew—someone different from himself—even while passing through the land where the Jewish people lived. Through the Parable of the Good Samaritan, we are called to engage in dialogue with people of other religions. What

negative mental frameworks do we continue to harbor, preventing us from dialoguing with neighbors who practice a different faith tradition?

c. In the parable, the Samaritan is a minority in the region inhabited by Jews. Yet, despite being part of a minority, he cared for a member of the majority – even when other Jews chose to pass by. In this way, the Good Samaritan proclaimed the Gospel to the victim through a subtle yet powerful 'whisper.' What could be deeper reasons for your/other member's hesitation in proclaiming the Gospel?

Action Planning

1. In our actual daily lives in community/neighborhood, who are the poorest? Who are 'in trouble'? In what ways can we be Good Samaritans?
2. How could we engage in dialogue with people of other religions in our own neighborhoods/towns?
3. As a Catholic in Asia (minority), in what ways can we proclaim the Gospel?

4. BEST PRACTICES FROM FABC OFFICE: SUSTAINABLE LIVING

Due to the global climate emergency situation, the Office for Human Development of the FABC has been very active in *Laudato Si* or living ecological conversion, discipleship and mission. The care for our common home is a constant mission area in the whole Final Synod Document. How does this Office do their work in a synodal way? One of their workshops on Sustainable Ecology was done in 3 countries/regions, 3 languages and 3 different kinds of groups and settings: in the Philippines (Southeast Asia), it was facilitated in one diocese- the Diocese of Gumaca attended by leaders of Basic Ecclesial Communities (grassroots communities in the neighborhood using the national language, Filipino). A separate seminar was also held in the Philippines for priests and religious. In Bihar (India in South Asia), it was in Hindi language and the participants were 45 priests. In Hong Kong (East Asia), one in Chinese, they collaborated with the Commission for Integral Human Development in Hong Kong and attended by lay and clergy.

To be synodal means to be missionary and care for our common home is the most urgent mission of the church globally. But to be synodal means doing mission also in a synodal way. With the OHD-FABC, the synodal value of communion was also practiced: they connected with different countries in the 3 regions of Asia, respecting their context, culture (language, etc), and responses to the challenges affecting them. With the participation of different kinds of people (grassroots, clergy, lay and religious) with their own and varied giftedness and skills, doing mission would be more enriching and sustainable too.

CONCLUDING INSIGHTS: ASIAN MISSIONARY DISCIPLES - WEAVING HARMONY, WHISPERING HOPE AND WITNESSING LOVE

For Asians, walking together is a spiritual and human commitment to recognising the dignity of every person. It calls believers to build authentic relationships marked by reverence and mutual understanding, leading to deeper communion and harmony. In a synodal community, differences are not viewed as obstacles but as gifts that enrich the life of the Church. By connecting with one another and weaving bonds of solidarity, the community becomes a living sign of unity in diversity, where every voice is welcomed, and every person has a place.

The final document emphasises that the conversion of relationships is essential for becoming true missionary disciples (cf. FD 49-78). This conversion requires moving beyond individualism, exclusion, and indifference toward a culture of encounter and shared responsibility (cf. *Dilexit Nos* 17; FD 51). Synodality challenges people to listen attentively, engage in sincere dialogue, and accompany one another through moments of disagreement and difficulty. Rather than allowing divisions to weaken the community, a synodal approach encourages reconciliation, patience, and openness to the perspectives of others. Through these practices, the Church becomes more capable of witnessing to the Gospel in a fragmented world.

Synodality invites continuous reflection on the quality of relationships within our communities, parishes, and workplaces (cf. FD 58). It especially calls attention to the presence and needs of the

most vulnerable, including the poor, marginalised, lonely, and excluded (cf. FD 63). A truly synodal community does not leave anyone behind; instead, it creates spaces where people feel heard, valued, and cared for (cf. FD 60-67).

In Asia, the Church's evangelizing mission is inseparable from "bridge-building and "bridge-being". The spirit of synodality demands that the Church's leadership abandon the model of working alone and claiming on authority, moving instead toward facilitating communion and participation. Through comprehensive and profound leadership formation, the Church will equip a group of "synodal agents" filled with the love of Christ the Way and the Gate. Lying down in humility and with burning patient zeal, they will be bridges of peace, dialogue, and reconciliation amidst differences, fear, hostility and conflicts.

Even if Catholics and Christians were only 1% of the population, evangelization happens as hope is whispered among neighbors, in struggles and triumphs, and the witness of love especially for the poorest and marginalized and even for our common home are proclaimed in daily life. In this way, walking together becomes a testimony of communion, harmony and reverence, revealing an Asian Church that accompanies people with humility, compassion, and hope (cf. FD 77-78).

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FABC Papers:

196. Synodal Assembly on the Mission of the Christian Family in Asia. Camillian Pastoral Care Center, 11 – 15 May 2026, June 2026
197. “Synod on Synodality and Ecumenism: Ecclesial Unity for Effective Witness in Asia” by Archbishop Felix Machado, Chairman, OEIA-FABC, June 2026
198. XII FABC Plenary Assembly, The Call to Synodal Conversion and the Mission to be Bridges and Bridge-builders in Asia. “You will see greater things...” (Jn 1:50), August 2026
199. Pathways for the Implementation of the Synod, from the XII FABC Plenary Assembly: The Call to Synodal Conversion and the Mission to be Bridges and Bridge-builders in Asia, “You will see greater things...” (Jn 1:50) by Cardinal Mario Grech and Fr. Giacomo Costa sj., August 2026
200. FABC PAPERS PERIODIC INDEX, Papers 176-200 (2022-2026) by James H. Kroeger, M.M., August 2026

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