

# Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu



## Synthesis Report



For a synodal Church  
communion | participation | mission





# **Submission of Pre-Synod Synthesis Report Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu**



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## 1. Introduction: Key Synthesis Points

The synod experience was first and foremost, very interesting for the participants. It was the first time ever held for the faithful in the grassroots to participate and to give their feedback.

There were some difficulties in organizing the synod process for the Archdiocese due to pandemic restrictions, time and geographical locations. The vast number of Catholics is in the rural areas and in remote villages. Distance and communications are always the setback to reach out to the remote rural areas. Those who managed to get involved and participated in the synod process were excited and at the same time showed concern and wonderment.

Leaders from the Parish Teams were assigned to facilitate the group sharing where one person was assigned to take note on the feedback given by the participants.

All feedback were recorded and submitted to the Parish to be synthesised. Unfortunately, not many parishes have been able to conduct the Parish Synod Assembly to adopt the synthesis due to time constraint.

Most if not all the feedback showed similar concerns and responses. The responses and feedback are compiled in this synthesis.



Synodal Process at St. Peter Claver's Parish Church, Ranau, Sabah



## **2. Body of Synthesis: Structure**

### **2.1 The Process Taken**

The Archdiocese has 19 Parishes and in each Parish is divided into zones. In each zone, there are many Catholic communities and BECs. Besides the Parish communities, there are 9 Commissions in the Archdiocese and many Lay Movements.

Each Parish, Commission and Lay Movement was invited to respond and to give feedbacks to the questionnaires provided by the Archdiocese.

Out of the 10 questions provided by the Universal Church, the Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu has chosen only 4 sets of questions. This is due to the other questions are already on-going process in the Archdiocese via her Pastoral Plan, Mission and Vision.

The respondents were from various groups of people including children, youth and adults of both genders.

Out of the 19 Parishes, only 16 Parishes submitted their responses. Out of these Parishes, 7 are urban parishes, 6 sub-urban parishes and 3 rural parishes.

4 Religious Congregations, 3 Lay Movements and 1 Commission submitted their feedback / findings.

One submission worth mentioning is the children from a small town of Kudat at the north of the Archdiocese (Attached – Appendix 1). The Feedback from the Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu is in Appendix 2

There were also almost one hundred individual submissions which were done through the Google Form.

The Estimated number of Participants is more than 12,000 in total, made of adults (men and women), children (aged between 7 to 12) and youth.

## 2.2 The Experience

### 2.2.1 *Low*

1. Church needs to be more attentive, open, concerned, more interaction with other groups
2. Church lacks formation programmes and need of technological upgrading
3. Need to promote charisms, formal discussions, involvement with other groups
4. Renewal according to the current situations / signs of the time
5. Practical problems during pandemic: Internet access esp. for online survey
6. For many outstation chapels, the respondents had problem in responding to the questions due to education level, reluctance, etc
7. Poverty, loss of income, loss of jobs

### 2.2.2 *High*

1. During pandemic, in some parishes, massive involvement of Sunday school teachers, parents & students responding in the synodal process
2. Awareness of need to increase depth of understanding of synodality in parishes
3. Religious groups were actively involved in the synodality
4. Learned to be more attentive, objective, concerned, open and considerate to opinions of others especially diverse opinions
5. Church groups who participated appreciated the Synod process. Most expressed themselves openly



Synodal Process at St Bernard's Chapel, Terian  
(One of the outstations of St. Michael's Parish, Penampang, Sabah)



## 2.3 The Feedback



1. Expected parishioners to be more devotional and discerning
2. Lack of maturity in faith
3. Many don't know their faith and the church teachings
4. Sick and elderly people could not receive Communion during pandemic
5. Many lost jobs and struggling financially
6. Need guidance and formation
7. Need good leadership
8. Question: What can God do for me? Why do I come to Mass?
9. "Spiritual life and worldly life compete for my time."

## 2.4 The Current Reality

1. The loss of sense of sin
2. Lay people are inspired by the Holy Spirit. Youth are active in church
3. Priest and the people must love one another; have willingness to serve, participating in church activities
4. Money is still essential
5. Lack of renewal programmes. Need to organise programs to renew faith, education to encourage people to come back to church to pray, serve and educate.
6. Intra-group synodality is strong but not intergroup
7. About 70% of the Church goers do not belong to any groups.
8. Have to be mission-oriented
9. Not much had been done to minister and to reach out to the poor and those on the margin (LGBTQ, those marriage reinstituted, divorced, widows, single parents, newly married, marriage yet to be con-validated, various disabilities, etc)

## 2.5 Growth in Synodality

1. Church has much to do on this matter
2. Need more formation, daily bible reading
3. Encourage more people to be more active in church
4. Involve all in the life and leadership in church
5. To grow in love through seminars and workshops
6. Parish priest should visit more the outstation chapels, outreach church communities and celebrate Mass together
7. Leadership in rotation
8. Demolish VIP culture; go beyond seniority
9. Need more intergroup collaboration through retreats, bazaars, Lent and Advent programs among parishioners
10. Empowerment to give us courage to proclaim the Truth
11. More dialogue between priests and people.

## 2.6 The Cultural Image

1. Sense of community - symbolized by Paddy - living as a community bonded in culture and traditions.
2. We are Asians and are community / family-orientated.
3. There are understanding and cooperative despite the differences in background, rooted in the Catholic faith.
4. Openness, respectful, honouring and listening to each other
5. Collaborative, Obedient and Submissive especially to leadership
6. Unity in diversity: The uniqueness in charisms and mission of each group speaks of diversity, richness and vibrancy of the parish.
7. Love for celebration and fellowships that bring about togetherness, e.g. Parish feast days, cultural feast days, anniversaries.
8. Language differences tend to segregate parishioners
9. The different age and language groups having different experiences on the faith journey and way of living speaks of the different needs.

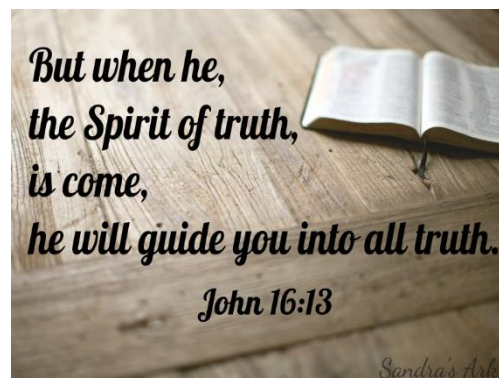




### 3. Conclusion

#### *What is the Holy Spirit telling us?*

The Local Church needs renewal programmes, formations and trainings in various levels and ministries, to be updated with the current issues and to curb various social problems.



#### **1. Awareness**

Every Catholic needs to be made aware that he/she is called to participate actively in the life and mission of the Church.

#### **2. Social and Environmental Issues**

The various social issues (i.e influenced by technology, Islamisation, secularisation, apathy) have increasingly impacted the church in so many ways. Creative ways need to be used to tackle and curb it before it gets too overwhelming. Environmental issues are also not much being addressed in spite of the *Laudato si* had been released since sometimes ago. The Church needs to organize activities to make people aware the importance of environment (i.e beach and river cleaning).

#### **3. Leadership**

Based on the feedback, leadership could be the downfall of the church in various levels. Leadership styles need to be seriously considered especially among the priests and parish leadership team. Leadership needs to go beyond seniority. Leaders also need formation.

#### **4. Faith Formation**

Many thirsts for formation and religious knowledge. The laity needs to be formed and trained in various levels and capacities. They deserve to be formed and informed about the Bible, Church Teaching, etc. This formation will enhance their knowledge, skills and capabilities in the service and ministry of the Church.

### **5. *Discipleship***

The laity is over dependant on their leaders. Empowerment and Discipleship need to be instilled to the laity so that they would be courageous to minister. Those in special ministries need to be properly formed / trained and commissioned.

### **6. *Outreach***

Reaching out to the marginalised and the poor is lacking, especially those single parents, newly wedded couples and those not fully in line with the Teaching of the Church (i.e: LGBTQ, those marriage reinstituted, divorced, single parents, newly married, marriage not blessed etc). Formation and Training are needed for these special ministries.

### **7. *Youth***

In spite of many activities had been done for the youth, many still feel that the Youth is still neglected and need formation. Lively and creative activities are needed to attract the youth to return to the Church and to be involved in ministries. Parents play important role in this matter. They need to encourage their children to be involved in the Church activities and ministries.



Synodal Process – One of the Lay Movements



## **Appendix 1**

### **Feedback from the Children from Kudat Parish**

**RUMUSAN JAWAPAN SOAL SELIDIK KANAK-KANAK BAGI PROSES KONSULTASI SINODAL  
ST PETER KUDAT.**

**Sasaran: Tahap 1- 4 (berumur 7 -10 tahun)**

Cara pelaksanaan:

i/ Sebelum menjawab soalan konsultasi, taklimat diberikan kepada kanak-kanak menggunakan aplikasi zoom. Persembahan power point disediakan sebagai bahan taklimat. (Tahap 4)

ii/ Pembimbing meminta ibu bapa pelajar membantu anak masing-masing menjawab soalan melalui aplikasi whats app.

Cara penyampaian soalan dan jawapan:

i/ Soalan diberikan dalam bentuk google form dengan respon berbentuk pilihan dan jawapan pendek.

ii/ Menggunakan aplikasi whats app dengan kaedah “copy paste” soalan dan jawapan

**Analisis jawapan:**

**1. Apakah yang anda ingin katakan kepada Uskup, Father dan Sister? Adakah anda mengenali uskup agung di archdiosis kota kinabalu?**

Terima kasih kerana melayani kami.

-Shalom father/sister

-Shalom,father . Apa khabar.

Semua pelajar menjawab kenal dan dapat memberi jawapan yang betul tentang nama uskup John Wong

Anak tidak kenal.

**Adakah anda mengenali paderi dan sister yang melayani di paroki kita?**

semua mengenali paderi dan sister yang melayani di paroki Kudat

- Anak tidak kenal nama tetapi kenal wajah Fr dan Sr

- Father Julius,Fr.Wiandigool, Sr.Mary, Sr.Doris, Sr.Dasremary (Nama- nama yang diberi)

**2. Siapakah orang yang anda suka jumpa dan bercakap di gereja?**

- Tuhan
- Paderi
- Sister
- Kawan2

**3. Jika anda sedih, takut dan risau, kepada siapa anda akan beritahu?**

- Allah Bapa, Berdoa kepada Tuhan
- Ibu bapa (Kepada orang tua saya)
- kakak

**4. Adakah anda bercerita tentang Yesus kepada kawan, sepupu, saudara?**

- **pernah** (70 %)
- **tidak** (30 %)

**5. Apabila anda bercerita tentang Yesus, apa yang orang lain katakan kepada anda?**

- mereka memberi respon yang mereka faham
- Yesus yang baik
- Tidak ada.
- Mereka berasa gembira
- Mereka menanyakan soalan tentang Yesus semula
- Mereka memuji saya

**6. Adakah orang bercerita kepada anda tentang Yesus?**

- **ada** ( Ibu, bapa, kakak,father dan sister)

**7. Apakah anda mengikuti Misa Kudus atau Ibadat Sabda pada Hari Minggu?**

- ya

Siapakah yang membawa anda untuk mengikuti Misa Kudus atau Ibadat Sabda pada Hari Minggu?

- Ibu bapa

**8. Mengapakah kita datang ke Misa pada hari Ahad?**

- mendengar sabda Tuhan
- sebab hari Tuhan
- Dekat kepada Tuhan
- Berjumpa paderi dan kawan2

- berdoa
- menguduskan hari Tuhan
- Tidak tahu.
- Bosan di rumah
- Untuk berdoa kepada Tuhan
- Mendengar Sabda dari paderi
- Untuk meminta pertolongan dan menyembah Tuhan

9. Apakah yang anda lakukan semasa mengikuti Misa Kudus atau Ibadat Sabda?

- fokus
- berkelakuan sopan
- mendengar homily paderi
- berdoa
- senyap
- Ikut berdoa Bapa Kami dan menyanyi.
- Mendengar apa father cakap
- Mendengar sabda Tuhan
- Menumpukan perhatian dan tidak berbuat bising

10. Apakah perasaan anda mengikuti sembayang atau perayaan dalam gereja?

- gembira
- selesa
- tidak rasa kosong
- tenang
- rasa diberkati
- Kadang-kadang suka..kadang-kadang tidak.
- Berasa gembira dan bersyukur

11. Lukiskan bagaimana gambaran gereja menurut anda?

- Tempat untuk berdoa





12. Pernahkan anda membantu orang lain? Bagaimana?

- pernah
- menjaga ahli keluarga yang sakit
- membimbing rakan dalam pelajaran
- mengongsikan makanan kepada kawan di kelas yang terlupa membawa makanan
- membantu mengangkat kawan yang oku
- membantu jiran menjaga haiwan peliharaan semasa mereka balik kampung
- membantu guru mengangkat buku
- membantu kerja rumah
- membantu rakan
- mengajar sepupu berdoa
- Pernah. Saya pernah tolong tunjuk arah kepada kawan. Saya tolong mummy cuci piring.
- Pernah. Saya membantu kawan saya menyiapkan kerja sekolah bersama-sama.
- Pernah. Saya membantu mengajar rakan saya yang tidak seberapa pandai.

13. Apa yang paling anda suka dan tidak suka di Gereja?

- suka- ada tempat untuk berdoa
- Suka : jumpa kawan-kawan, jumpa dengan Tuhan, berdoa kepada Tuhan,mendengar sabda Tuhan, belajar di sekolah minggu.

- Tidak Suka : lama duduk diam-diam, bunyi hentakan kerusi , tidak ada
- tidak suka: -mengantuk, duduk diam-diam, ada umat yang bising, duduk-bediri

14. Apa yang akan anda lakukan untuk mengubah apa yang tidak anda suka?

- tidur awal
- tegur dengan sopan, berharap warden dapat mengawal
- berfikiran positif
- Melihat persekitaran gereja
- Berhati-hati menurunkan kerusi

15. Apakah ada orang di Gereja yang membantu anda membuat keputusan? Siapa?

- ada - Paderi, Ibu,abang,kakak dan warden.
- Tiada.

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## **Appendix 2**

### Feedback from the Questionnaires

**Question 1a. Are you involved in any church's ministry? Yes or No? If No, did anyone (from the church) reach out to you?**

A Majority of those responded whether on individual level or at parish/commission level are involved in Church ministries, with favourable experience such as sense of communion, companions on the journey, sense of belonging, a place where we can be true to ourselves, joy, support, sense of acceptance, humility, peace, calm, refresh and re-focus, good hospitality and fellowship, friendships, Vulnerability.

Some of those who are not involved responded that they see this role irrelevant as companions. It was also noted the following are areas for improvement:

- Leadership: Favouritism, shy, lack of inspiring role model, decisions are not being followed through
- Communities and Support: Lack of enthusiasm and community spirit, competition, lack of initiatives from parishioners

**Questions 1b. If Yes. How are you called to grow as companion in the ministry?**

For the majority who responded that they are involved in ministry shared their roles as companions are as follows:

- i. Serving in different aspects of the Church/Parish through groups, ministries and communities, and being involved in leadership roles, sharing individual's gifts and talents
- ii. Volunteering, self-awareness, self-motivation, Participation, Collaboration
- iii. Giving guidance, Seminars and training, Retreats, formation
- iv. Accompaniment/Companionship/Listening, Pray for one another, Parenthood
- v. Faith Formation, Bible Sharing, Leadership Formation, Education
- vi. At work to colleagues
- vii. Evangelisation, witnesses of faith through sharing of lives and testimonies, missionary and charity works
- viii. Social Media and online platforms
- ix. Music and songs

**Question 1c. Who are being left on the margins?**

- Youth/Young people, especially those lack of confidence
- Lapsed Catholics, less/non-active Catholics, Non-Believers, the believers, new converts
- The Poor, the uneducated/less educated, those living in remote/rural areas, the migrants
- The Elderly, People with Disabilities, the marginalized, the distressed, the depressed, the sick, the lonely
- Families: Single parents, the fathers, unwedded mothers, divorcee/separated, children whose parents are not married in Church, broken marriages and families, those involve in marriages not recognized by the Church, children in pusat perlindungan, those affected by domestic violence.
- Part-time workers, Workers, Businessmen, those who are busy with work, the rich and educated
- Drug addicts, alcoholics, those in recovery centres
- The unvaccinated
- Teachers, students who live in at hostels
- LGBTQ
- Politicians
- Those who are abused by Church authorities, those who have misunderstanding and grudges with members of the church especially church leaders, those who have witnessed and wounded by the wrongdoings of church leaders, those who feel marginalized/excluded by the Church's law.

**2. (a) What do you understand about the mission of the Church?**

- Evangelisation and spreading the good news- to make Jesus Christ known to all
- To build a united Christian community
- To serve
- Journeying together.
- Witnessing

**(b) What hinders the baptised person from being active in the mission?**

- Laziness, ignorance, lack of awareness, and misconception
- Growing pandemic cases
- Busy with other commitments
- Lack of confidence and diffidence
- Pride and unforgiving attitude
- A lack of catechises, no personal relationship with God
- Not willing to let others take over.

- Personality conflict / Difficulties with church leaders other parishioners
- Economic reasons and social influence
- Lack of knowledge about the church, faith and Jesus Christ.
- Time constraints
- Do not want to be involved and committed
- Segregation, Sectarian, Discrimination, Secularism
- Far distance from home to Church
- Parents do not encourage their children
- Health and disabilities
- Rejected by Church leaders

**(c) What areas of mission are we neglecting?**

- Children and youths
- Lapse Christians and those who are genuinely looking for God
- Those who left the church
- More and new efforts on the family esp. for the men
- Communal service
- Unable to fight for equality between Covid-19's vaccinated and not vaccinated. As such the unvaccinated are now the outcast in the church.
- Family life ministry especially for the divorced and the LGBTQ
- Evangelisation in the rural areas
- Formation of their relationship with God
- Unity among the people
- Basic theological knowledge
- To help those in need.
- Special activities for single parents, senior citizens and youth
- Volunteers for natural disasters and to those in need and marginalised
- Those couples who had not been blessed in their marriage
- Newly wedded couples
- Rural areas
- Human development
- Social justice / Justice and peace
- Compassion and love
- Family faith formation, lack of family visitation - young couple & young families –
- The voice of the powerless - Reaching out people of other faith - Lack of zeal and courage to do the evangelization –
- Mission in Education especially in Mission School. –
- Lack of faith formation especially for those in rural areas.
- Those who are poor and have disabled
- Solidarity with all God's Creation - promoting the love and care for creation



- Globalization.
- Disparity of rich and poor
- Reaching out to the poor and marginalised
- Give formation to the
- Social and political Issues
  - Reaching out the marginalized.
  - Care for God's Creation - promoting care for our mother earth - our common home.
  - Faith Formation for Family and accompaniment especially for the young couple
  - Out-reaching the lapse Catholics or those who have not been to church for so long.

**(d) How does the community/companion support its' members to serve the society in various ways including the marginalised?**

- Sunday classes
- Family visits and Praying together
- Embrace, invite & inclusive in church activities
- By serving the people who are marginalised
- To have the right attitude, emphatic to the individuals, programmes that can attract them back or to get their engagement and to create awareness
- Formation in bible knowledge, studying the Scriptures,
- creating opportunities to serve and celebrating such experiences, providing resources,
- Awareness,
- Bonding approach
- Financial Assistance for those in needs
- Clear Communication
- Journeying together
- Outreach to the vulnerable, aged, sick, orphans, poor, marginalized.
- Pastoral counselling and pastoral ministry
- Caritas group needs to be pro-active in serving the poor and marginalized
- Legion of Mary and other Lay-Movements need to do their part actively in any community activities and payers
- Be responsible Christians and genuine in their service
- Networking with various groups and organizations

**(e) What do you think the Parish / Diocese can do to help you to live out your service to society?**

- Reach out all the Christian community
- Reach out to the marginalised
- Be transparent.
- Formation to the laity for sound information and knowledge on Church's teachings
- Formation for laity for children ministry
- Ensure all clergymen, religious, lay ministers, catechists show such qualities to qualify them to lead followers.
- To admit discrimination is happening because of the Covid-19's SOP
- Conducting Christian faith formation program
- Attract youth to participate
- Continuous formation for leaders and faithful
- To revive BEC programmes
- Children below 12 years old to be inducted to the church ministries so that they would know the ministries in the church.
- Rotation in ministries for younger people and not the same people to serve and minister
- Sacramental and Liturgical
- Faith Renewal programmes
- Periodic communal activities with the Parish priest

**3. (a) How do we promote collaboration with other church groups, religious communities, other organizations and neighbouring dioceses?**

- Charity works. Reaching more people, spread the words of God. Utilize the social media platform in common.
- Start with a regular meet up to discuss what are the common issues faced in the community and together work on it. Else can organise activities where all can participate. By finding a common ground by which we can collaborate as equals.
- Sharing of resources. Holding joint conference activities. Exchange opinion through dialogue.
- There must be personal sharing and witnessing that can touch people's heart so that people can become closer to each other.
- Avoid unwritten competitions that can keep relationship away among communities and groups. Negative comments have to be stopped. All comments must be positive which is to encourage and to appreciate. When all communities

and groups cooperate and work together closely and in a friendly atmosphere, love will be formed among them and grow.

- Start with our own KK diocese first. I have yet to even encounter a collaboration among the priest with the religious communities or among different religious communities.
  - Should any group or groups organize activities in the church; religious communities, or organizations, or diocese, try as much as possible to support and to respond to the invitations, to support them.
  - Discussing common topics and issues. One of the ways perhaps it's good to create 'networking system', for regular encounter to hand in hand discuss for the common good for all. Creates mutual understanding.
  - Faith formation also important, to have knowledge of other faith/denomination, to have good hospitality, more listening at grassroots. Proper training to collaborate, tap the people with abilities/skills, respect each group's charism. Examples of events: Bible study, teaching of the Church. Formation awareness within the community or church or family are needed to have a better understanding on unity in diversity.
  - We have to promote collaboration with open mindset. We have to be opened in organizing more activities to pray together, strengthen of faith, motivation to serve and socialize to get to know about each other.
  - Apart from that, leadership is crucial. Parish priests and priests should be presence and give full support for any collaborations works. Leader should understand the mission and vision of the Church. Leadership also should be by rotation, to allow groups and communities to be part of Parish Pastoral Council. Collaboration by rotation is for the discussion among groups/ministries to support each other, to create understanding among new and existing members. Encourage collaboration beyond the limitation of groups/ministries, languages and cultural background towards a common goal/ mission (for common good).
- 
- Build genuine friendships. Acknowledging each other, have good relationship, have good networking, respecting differences and diversity while supporting anything that geared to common good.
  - Various creatives ways to foster solidarity and understanding (through i.e; culture, sports, teamwork, dialogue, visits)
  - To organize an introduction to on the various organisation within the church, religious communities and other organisations

- Visits to other parishes or communities in other places. Through this visits the faithful would be able to know each other and to have information exchanged in ministries, working together and to foster relationship.
- Continuous consultations from various levels
- To have only one media platform for the Archdiocese because for now, each parish has her own media platform.
- To have integral conference on marriage and family (all begin from family)
- To have more activities for Youth (i.e. Sabah Youth Day, etc)
- All activities to begin from BEC
- To instill opened-minded attitude. This could be achieved through clear and good communication that could be obtained easily through media. The information need to be current, consistent and ultimate.

**(b) What particular issues in the Church and society do we need to focus more?**

- Children and youth
- Help community to literate with the bible.
- The poor and marginalised
- On gender equality
- Ignorance on one's role as a parishioner
- The family institution. The influence of the world on men/husbands/fathers, women/wives/mothers, children. Teaching on issues such as pornography, corruption, care of the environment.
- The Sunday homily/Word could encompass real life experiences.
- The present leaders are not willing and not welcoming to expand their active group members. As a solution for the said issue, is to welcome new group of people by having several ways of approaching.
- Faith formation is major important. Methodology for faith formation also need to change in transmission of our faith to reach out to our young people. Solid Catechesis before confirmation as well as Solid Catechesis to help the couples for their marriage life. Increase/improve the understanding of Biblical knowledge.
- Focus more in teaching a religion of love by using examples of Jesus. To truly apply Christ's teachings.
- Time management Physical and mental health issues. Financial struggles. Drugs addict.

- Lack of priests. Vocation promotion. Some priests have the attitudes of not a good listener. Legal action should be taken against priests and church leaders who sexually abused women and children. Misuse/mismanagement of church funds by priests and church leaders.
- Dioceses/Parishes have different set of rules and regulations that are inconsistent with one another. Some Parish allows certain things, others do not allow. There is no standardised rules and regulations and these are confusing to the parishioners.
- For the Church: Relationship between the Church and the lay Society : Education of children of illegal immigrants.
- 
- To have more activities on renewal/strengthen of faith both in families and servers. Promote unity among church servers, communities and congregation so as more people come to church.
- Apologetics, Racism, Poverty, the marginalised, Environmental issues, cultural, political, moral and societal issues, physical and mental health, Abortion, Suicide, Abandoned Elders, family and marriage issues, sexuality, science and faith, people with disabilities, addictions, Apathy, Secularisation, Islamisation, and the digital world.
- Need to promote the culture of dialogue between the different races and religion in Malaysia particularly in Sabah in order to live in peace and harmony with one another.
- Ignorance towards the church and community. Self-centred is pertinent.
- Economy -The Catholic Church is a Universal Church. She needs to be concerned and to give assistance to the needy. There are various ways that the Church could help the needy. The Local Church in Sabah needs to be creative in understanding the problems and needs to the various people
- Communication doesn't not restrict to the elite and leaders only. It had to reach the grassroots people.
- Unity among the faithful.
- The LGBTQ persons.
- Understanding the true meaning of ministry.
- To love those who profess different beliefs
- The ambience of the location whether it is conducive (especially for the disabled)

- Lack of appreciation towards Priests and Religious
- Liturgy during mass, sacraments, current teaching of the Church, church tradition, difference in belief and church doctrine. Books and references need to be available in the local language. Formation needs to be enhanced.
- Faith formation
- Lack of understanding in Catholic Faith and knowledge in the Bible.

**(c) How can the Church dialogue with and learn from other sectors of society?**

- A series of talks and seminars. Having open discussions on relevant and common issues/problems.
- Through the social media platform.
- To create several channels for the society to reach out the church.
- Politics and social terms.
- Having dialogue by going down to the field and dialogue with those who are actively involved in other sectors of society and make continuous connections, not just once in a while.
- By being humble, willingness to engage and be open minded in showing eagerness and enthusiasm. Inspire and motivate so as to enkindle the peoples' spirit to be more involved. Look for the common issues faced. Build good relationship.
- Provide professional counseling. Create Job opportunities. Faith and Leadership Formation, Teamwork. Create Net-working with government and NGOs. Be aware of the current situation/issues of our society and get involved. Start from the leaders.
- Acknowledging the importance of other sectors, their specialties, expertise, resources, to have a better networking, supporting and encouraging whatever is for common good.
- Create awareness first – the Bishops, priests and religious are not on the pinnacle. The Laity is part of the Church and they have the right and responsibilities.
- To give and take
- PPC / MPP need to be united and humble when facing the faithful.



- To give opportunity for NGO and government agencies to be closer to the faithful.
- The usage of technology to reach out. To have a Webpage that is easily accessible and informative.
- Information sharing and deepening in Bible knowledge
- Charity events
- Working together with the community to organize suitable programme in line with the vision and mission of the Archdiocese/ Church.
- To foster peace
- Programmes that could involve the general public

(d) What experiences of dialogue, collaborations and learning from each other do we have regardless of religions, political affiliation and backgrounds?

- Catechesis talks
- Knowledge of different religions.
- Human rights.
- Solidarity of the Christian churches in Sabah, joint programmes.
- Seminars, walkathons/sports, civil events like celebrations, blood donation, disaster relief efforts, recycling efforts,
- Bible studies.
- Openness of income and views
- The sharing of responsibilities and the experience of working together. Mutual trust and respect among different religious groups. Religious harmony.
- Unity) What we have learned is that all religions, political affiliation and backgrounds do have common and positive grounds.
- The Sacred Heart Parish Caritas Committee is one of them.
- Topics of social justice. Experiences of tolerance, mutual understanding and respect, help and love among religions. Create openness in positive thinking by collaborating, sharing and impacting new knowledge.
- Consensus, unity and empowerment in developing the vision and mission of the church as a whole.
- Experience of building up the kingdom of God by sharing our common human dignity. Respecting others, listening and especially always to remember that everybody has its dignity that is God's beloved child.
- We/Church are doing and take responsibility and opportunity to learning from each other: especially during the time of pandemic collaboration with the government, KKM (MoH) and religions have a common good to the society, religions and without looking the backgrounds.
- Acknowledging responsibility for the environment and for economic justice. At the same time recognizing / acknowledging the expertise or talents of others regardless

who they are. Tolerance and understanding in many issues regardless of background in addition to facilitating many things.

- Diplomatic dialogue between Catholics and other Christians denominations, and even Muslim. Nowadays our Church starts networking with other organizations (GO/NGOs) for the welfare of the society as a whole. Compromises, prejudice towards the Church. During Christmas open House activities, people of different faith come together to experience the joyful and peaceful atmosphere. Inter-churches and interreligious dialogue, joint-occasions and meaningful exchanged programme (Christmas, Harvest festival, Hari Raya ,Chinese and Years).
- Able to learn and understand their situation and difficulties in life
- Lots of advantages, the Catholics able to understand the mission of the Church
- Positive impact and understanding are fostered. Racism could be curbed
- Humility, Opened-minded, fellowship and awareness
- Dialogue about faith, environment, religion and daily life
- Leading style and acceptance style, which is more opened and to reach out to those marginalised.
- Eye and mind opening experience that each person on earth has his / her own difficulties and setbacks in terms of political, religion and background.
- Family and global issues
- Respect and humility
- Learn from each other so that boundary could be set and to hurt one other or to ridicule once's religion.

**4.(a) What kind of formation does the Church offer to help you to walk together as companions in the service of others?**

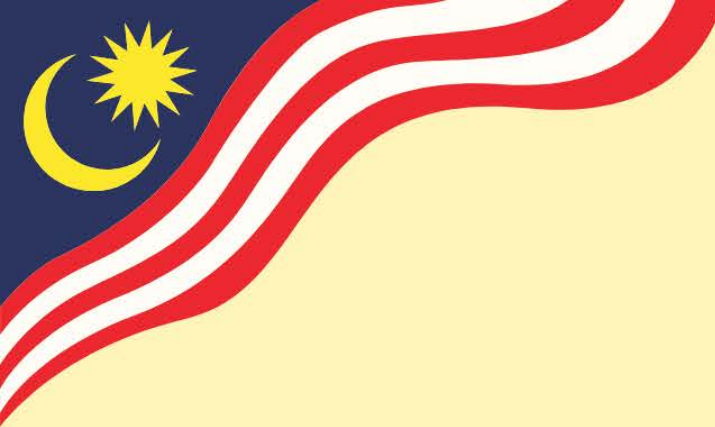
- Formation that unite the church and Christian community such as Lay Apostolate movement Neo-Catechumenate, Couple For Christ (CFC), Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR), Divine Mercy, Women's league, Youth ministries, Altar Server, Vanguard of Mary, Legion of Mary, LJCCC, Apologetics, Boys' Brigade etc. where we have programs like retreats with various spiritualities, recollections, seminars, discipleships and talks so that we will be informed, to have the awareness/knowledge, leadership and inspiration on the areas that we want to serve and to build the capacity that needed.
- Evangelisation and communication such as visiting the interiors and out of the parish to help them in their social problems
- Community Formation that cultivate humility, love and respect.
- Pax assembly where there is sharing and hearing of each other.
- Good Spiritual material, Homily that related to the current times and issues
- Youth formation programs and activities such as SYD, PBK, etc.
- Social Media
- Fellowship activities, Bazaar, Carnival, Feast Day celebrations, Carolling, Choir, Visitations, youth groups, Eucharistic Adoration, Devotions
- Church activities and formations through Liturgy, Sunday school, RCIA, BEC, Sacraments, Catechetical, Corporative works
- All activities at the level of parish, zone and chapels.
- Counselling and Characters Building
- Care for our Mother Earth
- Support from priests and religious in pastoral services
- Motivational Programs and technics to answer the students

**(b) What other formations should be offered?**

- Formation to reflect and deepening the meaning of the vision and mission of the archdiocese.
- Faith Formations: Bible (4 gospels), Moral Theology, Theology, Catechism of the Catholic Church, Canon Law, Catechetical, Liturgy, Sacrament, Family & Marriage, Spirituality, Apologetics, Church system & history, current issues related to the church, understanding of Catholicism with other religions, social teachings, vocation, Church musics, environmental care, Theology of the Body, God's creation-human science, good and inspiring sermons that related to the current times and lives of the people, offer all that teaches the religion of love.
- Have on-going retreats, recollections, long and short courses, conferences, seminars (Life in the Spirit etc.), weekly BEC gathering to share about faith, pilgrimages,

workshops, good spiritual books, spiritual direction, adoration, dialogues and sharing to listen to each other, brainstorming, critical thinking, consultation, effective ways to solve issues, following up with all the inactive Catholics, self-formation, and community empowerment

- Community Leadership & Management formation - Community Building, youth leadership, servant-hood to inspire service, stewardship, accompaniment, conflicts managements
- Ministries should have good structure, clear vision and mission that focus on faith formation, yearly planned programs and targets.
- Formations to the youths, children, Catechists, and services in liturgy.
- Psychological and Personalities formation - Mental issues, counselling (Marriage, social, drugs, pressure, depressions, suicidal etc), character buildings, handling of personal issues, pastoral care, spiritual direction, healing, emotional control, handling of the sick and elderly.
- Involvement of religious in formations
- Charity services - visiting the marginalised, families, parishes, migrants, sick, elderly etc.
- Mission and Evangelism Methodology: Effective Communication to form confident preachers that align with church teachings, to evangelise effectively with the current world and issues, and using of social media to reach out
- Convention and Christian youth camp - SYD, PBK, Youth outreach and empowerment
- Fund raising formation to help those in need
- Picnic and share faith, sports and other fellowship events
- Bazaar, Carnival, big events that involved and empowering all communities in the church
- Review, renew present ways of doing things with the goal of forming full-fledged Catholics passionate with God and the advancement of His Kingdom.



# Diocese of Keningau



## Synthesis Report



For a synodal Church  
communion | participation | mission





## **Pre-Synod Synthesis Report KENINGAU DIOCESE**

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#### **Introduction : The Purpose of the Synthesis**

#### **Synthesis Key Points**

Synod or "Journeying together" is not something new for the Diocese of Keningau. Since the erection of the Diocese of Keningau on 6 May 1993, it has since taken on the theme and vision "The People of God Journeying Together". This means, coincidentally, the Diocese has lived the "Synodality" since its erection. This spirit of "Journeying together" has coloured the journey and development of the Keningau Diocesan Church which is now 29 years old. In the past, Keningau Diocese has consistently held a "Synod" once in 3 years. Synod in the sense of "meeting or assembly", for the Diocese of Keningau is PUKAT (Catholic Assembly). This will be attended by Bishop, Priests, Religious and lay leaders. It is through this "PUKAT" that the Pastoral Planning of the Keningau Diocese is jointly reflected and redefined.

However, upon receiving the programme of Synod 2021-2023 from the Vatican, confusion arises. Confused not because we do not know what to do but because we have done the "Synod" (PUKAT) process for eleven (11) times. The Keningau Diocese has already been "synodal" and the repetitive process of what has already been done is felt. However, a new dimension has been obtained and experienced after studying the process of the Synod 2021-2023 that will be implemented. We see that this is a new opportunity to further emphasize and clarify the situation and picture of the people in Keningau Diocese. We also see that this is God's call to "go deeper" (Luke 5:4), to reach out to all people, listen to their voices, bring and integrate them into a real and true community, involving them in common celebrations and missions. The Church ultimately walks with them in all situations and circumstances of life, without anybody being excluded or neglected. This is how we felt like Peter and the other disciples - the fishermen - who already knew and had been fishermen for a long time. However, after meeting Jesus, Peter was not only called to go into a deeper place, but was also called and sent to be a "fisher of men" (Luke 5:10).

As a whole, the Synod process has opened up new ideas for viewing, evaluating and Pastoral Planning as a whole. The Synodal process demands a heart that is always open to the way God greets His people. Even more challenging when Covid-19 pandemic is still at a suspicious level, yet gets a call to hold a meeting or meet with the people. Therefore, the Synod programme was somehow "forced" upon the church because it was still afraid and had to follow the government's SOP. Yet once again, the Synodal Process is a tangible proof that God is never silent when His people are attacked by terrible fears. God never forsakes the people He loves. He always wants to communicate with us - His people. He is a God who cares deeply for His Church. He also wants to tell the Church not to succumb to worldly



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fears. Indeed, in times of the pandemic, human beings are more likely to rely on their own views and thoughts. There is also no deny that many are badly affected by the pandemic. Crisis of faith occurs and moral degradation are on the rise. The synodal process gives the awareness as not to let fears and anxieties drown out spiritual growth. The process of the Synodal Church teaches to have and put on the same heart and mind as Christ (cf. Phil 4: 2-9). In this case, prayer becomes vital in order to be able to desire and see the spiritual side of every event in life.

This process of the Synodal Church has also raised a significant spiritual awareness, not only among the ranks of leaders and ministers of the Church but also at grassroots level. This is something that is really exciting, especially for the synodal team. It is a difficult process but the results are immensely satisfying and gratifying. Hence, the synodal process and its results bring about a spiritual renewal that is both personal and communal. This process and its results bring about the renewal of minds/thoughts and views of the people about the Church, the world, current issues, about the Vision and Mission of the Church, ecology, ministry and vocation, participation and more.

As a growing Church, much pastoral planning has been undertaken. This synodal process has also served as a "re-calling" of pastoral programme that are beneficial to the development of the people's faith and the Church. The challenges are many, but we learn through this synodal process to constantly believe in God's participation and not to give up easily and despair, not to make weakness an obstacle, instead always looking for opportunities in the midst of waves and pandemic storms. The process of the synodal Church also teaches us to continue to walk "on a mission" in Christ, because Christ's mission for His Church, which is to build the Kingdom of God, never ceases, but continues until the day of its fulfillment.

The synodal process unites the people separated by fear, rediscovers the lost, strengthens the weak, increases the faith of the people and adds to the people's insight the Universal Church. This is a very positive thing and opens up new opportunities for further pastoral planning. Because it is the principle of the Synodal Church itself that wants to listen to all parishioners regardless of backgrounds, status, skin colours, education, customs and cultures. It has opened a space and a place for all people to make their voices heard without hesitation. At the same time, we also learn about the way how God works in the Church not only through the leaders and those who serve but also through individuals that exist in the Church.

Because of this, the synodal church process has made people realise the importance of real unity and make people aware of the vision and mission of the church, specifically in the Diocese of Keningau. It also reveals the weaknesses that exist in the church and in each place respectively. Revealing existing challenges with efforts to face and overcome them as well as the reality of the situation and condition of the people from various aspects. The process helps to describe the needs that require attention. Expressing people's dreams or hopes for the Church and the future. Meanwhile, the synodal process strengthens relationships between people from all walks of life and backgrounds. Affirming people's belief that they are heard,



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cared for, needed and accepted. The process also reveals the effectiveness of pastoral planning and parish administration. Especially for Keningau Diocese, this Synodal process has indeed revealed vividly that people have lived the spirit of “Journeying together”.

Finally, thanks be to God for this Synodal Church Process, we have the opportunity to evaluate and reflect critically on all pastoral plannings, on the existence and identity of the Church in the midst of a world full of obstacles and challenges. These also include the Communities of the People of God, about Participation and about our shared Mission. Hopefully, the outcome of this Synodal Process will open up new chapters for pastoral planning that is more contextual, more communicative and educative which is transformative in nature as a whole towards achieving the goals of the Keningau Diocese.

## **2. Body of Synthesis : Structure**

### **The Process Taken**

The main and first step taken is to form a core team at the Diocesan level. The team then reviewed and studied the existing documents. Plan implementation strategies from the Diocesan level to the grassroots level. Create a handbook as a guide for all Synodal Teams at the parish and grassroots levels in order to carry out the Synodal process. Then invite all Parish Priests and Chairmans of Parish Councils/Mission (MPP/MPM) from all Parishes to be briefed on the Synodal Church programme. Meanwhile, the questionnaire is prepared by the core team. The questionnaire has four categories according to age, namely children (from LSKK - 14 years below), Youth (15 to 45), general/adult (from age 46 to 59) and senior citizens (60 and above). KLMTTC (poor) and Migran groups are also involved in the synodal process. The questionnaire focuses on four major contents or topics namely, Church, Family, Ecology and Social.

The allotted time frame was so short coupled with the pandemic situation that part of the briefing process has to be postponed. The core team is always willing to assist the Synodal team at the Parish level. Thanks be to God that the Synodal team at the Parish level was able to conduct the briefing effectively. The parish then formed sub-teams to spread out to each parishioner at the grassroots level (KUK and KKD (BEC)).

The process which is inclusive in nature, has tried to involve all people. In accordance with the spirit of "journeying together" the core team does not move on its own but is assisted by a line of members of laity who are given continuous guidance. This method has succeeded in reaching out to people from all corners of life. The existing committees have also been entrusted to carry out the synodal process in their own respective places and contexts. Several places have provided guidance and briefing at grassroots level.

Questionnaire is multiplied and disseminated to the people through committees, communities (KKD-BEC) and families. This method really facilitates and gives a high degree of participation among the people. The congregation is given ample time to respond or answer the questionnaire



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independently. After the questionnaire are answered by the parishioners, the synodal team from the grassroots level make a formulation, then followed by the team at a higher level until the core team of the Diocese. The Diocesan core team then sits, reads, evaluate and formulate together the results of the synodal process of each parish and mission.

### **The Experience**

The present Synodal Church process this time around provided an incredible experience for all teams. It begins with the formation of a synodal team that is not as young as imagined. Differences of educational levels and business became major obstacles for the Synodal team. Similarly, among the faithful, very significant educational differences complicate the process of answering the questionnaire and the process of formulating. Yet this is where unity and openness are built, regardless of who they are.

As the pandemic is on the rise, synodal must continue. The synodal team has to deal with high risks, fears and anxieties from within the team itself and from among the people. These are coupled with geographical and transportation challenges with little or no internet coverage inconveniences. In some places, the optimistic spirit of the people and the team is hampered by the lack of facilities and transportation problems. No less, the people and the team must sacrifice time, energy and material to reach out to the people in these underprivileged areas that are still lacking in the basic necessities of life.

The very diversified background of the faithful also greatly colours the process of synodality. Sometimes the team has to be resilient, strong and patient to face people with diversified backgrounds and fixed mindsets. These include the personality of people who are uninterested, unconcerned or do not want to get involved in the process; and the personality of the people who are adamant/stubborn, egocentric and self-centred. The team is also faced with people with disabilities, in need of/requires special attention and people without education. In order to serve these people with special needs, this calls for the Synodal team to make more sacrifices and to be more patient.

There are also meaningful and valuable experiences of people who are always open in accepting others, affirming and accepting different opinions, and wanting to sit together for a same purpose. There are also those who give the impression of seemingly silent and quiet people, but when they speak, many issues and opinions were raised with different thoughts and views. Sometimes it is difficult to come to a consensus or unanimity of issues due to individuals withstanding and safeguarding their own opinions. This experience teaches all to be more open and capable of thinking beyond one's own freedom of thoughts, which is to accept and consider the opinions of others. It is in this experience that the main key to "Journeying together" is found, that is, openness to others.

Apart from these, the synodal experience also enhance and reinforce critical thinking. Beginning from its initial preparation process to the implementation stage and finally the formulation process. All these requires clear, mature and wise thinking from the sub-teams at the grassroots level and the core team. Nonetheless, it makes us aware that, we should not be complacent with



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the achievements of the present, nor be lulled by the comfort zone of our usual pastoral efforts or plans. We should be aware that there are still neglected people out there, who are really struggling in life, while others live in abundance. Eventhough there are many pastoral programme that have been implemented, we feel that we are still lacking in many ways. Synodal experience really teaches us not just to think too much, but to ACT efficiently and effectively.

In all these experiences, one thing is certain, the team always felt the presence of God and His guidance. Through these experiences, God strengthens, confirms, and opens new ways to continue to develop and deepen the faith and His Church.

### **The Feedback**

We thank God that the people have shown eagerness in following and participating in the process, especially the leaders from the grassroots level. From this we know that, if people are given guidance and trust, they will be able to help in the development of faith and the Church. Previously, the vast majority of lay people understands that the affairs of the Church are the sole responsibility of the hierarchy. Thus, very few people are involved. Through this synodal process, we see the spirit and involvement of the people from the grassroots in all the processes, from the initial preparation to its formulation.

The outcome of the synodality process revealed many positive and negative aspects, especially regarding service, communication, community, pastoral programme, leadership, family, social issues and many more. This reveals the openness of the people in giving voice to their opinions. No people's voice is ignored, that is the principle of the "Synod". Although there are bitter issues, they will all be included and considered in the pastoral design of Keningau Diocese.

To achieve this synodal goal, a team consisting of ministers and lay leaders at the grassroots level is well prepared so that they are capable and courageous when encountering the congregation. The people are also open to receive and listen to the synodal team that comes from among themselves. Thus, through this process of the Synodal Church, the people feel cared for, given a voice and heard, not only within the Diocese but with the Holy Father in the Vatican. Therefore, the synodal process is a "healing factor" for the people. Synods have healing and unifying values for the people. From distrust of leaders to trusting them because they feel cared for and heard. From uncertainty to being convinced that they are part of the Universal Church. This strengthen the unity of people both\_ communally and universally.

### **The Current Reality**

The challenging reality during the synodal process was the Covid-19 pandemic. During this pandemic, the faith-experience of the people went through ups and downs, there were those who experienced spiritual aridity, faith and moral crises. It is indeed undeniable that the pandemic has a bad effect on spiritual development of the people, although not all.



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However, it has been found from the results of the synodal process that there are still people who want to be involved in church programme or activities. But there are also some who are still afraid, ashamed, unwilling or have not opened up their hearts and those who are just ignorant.

Meanwhile, the mentality of the people is still not encouraging. People tend to understand community with the synonym of "activity". No activity means no community. Likewise, "Synodal" is synonymous with community. Synodal means community, which is based on activity.

With the recent Pandemic scare, presently people are still comfortable with the convenient online-style approach on most dealings and happenings. Therefore, time is needed to come back and adapt to real life gatherings. Decentralize service approach, from center to outside station.

### **Growth in Synodality**

The Synod process provides a broader picture and insight into the reality of the situation and the current state of the faithful. It also opens new avenues for pastoral and parish governance approaches. The shared process that has been experienced so far is reflected, assessed and will be improved again. Pastoral designs also receive useful criticism for improvement. In short, the synodality process has helped the Church itself to see and evaluate itself. The synodal experience also awakens pastoral bodies not to ignore God's voice in designing and implementing pastoral programme. The synodal experience also reminds us that the development of the Church is the responsibility of all people, not only among the leaders. Because the synodal itself pays attention and listens to all people. The voice of the laity from the grassroots also has spiritual and pastoral value for the building of faith and the Church.

The Synodality also invites all people to remember and to live out the grace of the Sacrament of Baptism. The spirit of the people was revived after being silenced by the pandemic. They long for an active community life with activities. They miss the atmosphere of togetherness. Meanwhile, a longing for a Church that truly serves the people without being neglected is also raised. They long for real unity among hierarchies, leaders and servants of the people down to the grassroots level involving all age groups. Nonetheless they also aspire leaders and ministers to truly live out their vocation in true purity and holiness.

We believe the Holy Spirit has worked in every individual who has participated in this Synodality process. Most people do not dare to express their feelings towards the Church, to pastoral policies and to styles of leadership and ministries. However, through this synodal process, people are given a voice, space and freedom, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to participate in the process of building the faith and the Church. The Holy Spirit calls each individual to join together and participate in pastoral efforts to build the Kingdom of God, making the earth – this common home – a safe place to be inhabited by all living things.





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Synodality calls on the entire ranks of the leaders of the people to truly prepare themselves to serve the people who are very diverse in terms of customs, cultures, levels of education, economy, social status, geographical differences and burdens of life. This is the resistance and challenge for the Church in Keningau Diocese. In that diversity, the synodal process has united it with the spirit of "walking together". Therefore, the cultivating of Synodal Culture among the people is an important step that needs to be implemented.

Furthermore, the Church is called to live a spirituality of "openness to the world". Being open to the world means not turning a blind eye to the current world situation, and remaining confident in the work of God the Most Holy Trinity in the Church. Whilst the church is busy dealing with spiritual matters, it should not ignore the issues faced by the people. This includes social and economic problems and environmental pollution. As Jesus said in John 17:15, "I do not ask you to take them out of the world, but to protect them from evil."

The world is a place or field for the seeds of the Kingdom of God to be sown, grow and bear fruit. The church as a Sacrament is the main actor. Seeing and realizing this, the hierarchy and leaders of the faithful cannot carry it out without the involvement of the faithful as a whole. The results of the synodal process are evidence that there are important matters that have not been dealt with and need attention from the leadership.

All people are involved in the synodal process. People communicate with each other, share their feelings and experiences, strengthen and help each other re-live the atmosphere and spirit of the early church in the Acts of the Apostles. Thus, today the Church is called back to the main starting point whilst on the journey to the Promised Land, Heaven. The rapid development and change of times, coupled with personal, self-willed and selfish attitude have caused the road that is being travelled to begin to fall apart. This is where the process of the Synodal Church plays a very important role. The Church becomes aware of the realities of the world that are being faced by all people. The realities of the development of the faith of the people and the Church itself at this present time. Therefore, this synodal process has given rise to new ideas for pastoral planning and open new horizons for pastoral policy.

### **The Cultural Image**

Several cultural images have emerged through the synodal Church process. The dominant culture is the culture of wanting to be together. This culture is motivated by the characteristics of the customs and cultures of the communities since their ancestors liked to gather. We see this culture according to the spirit of "Journeying together", but this needs to be clarified according to the proper understanding of "People of God journeying together".

The culture of openness among the people is also highly praised and admired. Especially openness to migrants. Migrants who are in the midst of the people, are accepted by the people that they become part of the Basic Christian Community (KKD). They are not ostracized or excluded. Even their group is also highly encouraged to be involved in many services in the church as well as in committees. This culture of openness ensures that no



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people are excluded or discriminated. There are no people who are not involved, except those who do not wish to be involved. None are excluded because of discrimination, except for those who experience certain problems.

Next is inclusive culture. This culture is seen in the spirit of wanting to take responsibility in efforts to complete the synodality process. They feel that this is a joint programme that must be implemented and completed together. This culture is very well carried on in the life of the Church. This inclusive culture is also what helps the success of the synodal process. This Synodal programme is indeed difficult but with an inclusive culture it can be completed with satisfactory results.

At the same time, it is also discovered that online culture is increasingly permeating people's lives, especially during the pandemic. On the other hand, online culture is very helpful, but in the context of spiritual development, it needs to be considered and adjusted. People prefer online because their business is much easier and cheaper. However, such thinking cannot always be applied in the context of spiritual development which prioritizes process.

Apart from the online culture, instant culture is also increasingly influencing people. The many obstacles and business, time and economic constraints are the driving forces for the emergence of instant culture. This instant culture is described or characterised as laziness to think critically and wisely. One of the popular expressions among the people is "it is important to be present" or "it is enough just to be present". Instant culture lowers the value of participation. Participation is not only measured by attendance.

On the other hand, people have a relaxed but meaningful culture. This is a slightly confusing culture. People don't like to be too serious, preferring a relaxed way. It doesn't look serious but when it is done, the results are beyond expectation. There are people who know but pretend not to know, want to but are shy, some like to just follow. In general, the spirit of serving is high but they don't know how to start, there are also those who just jump right in. So it is the responsibility of the animators to guide and direct the people so that they know what needs to be done as members of the Church.

Most parishioners understand the Church is not a formality but a reality of life. This is illustrated through the understanding that the Church is the people of God who walk with the Proclamation of the Kingdom of God. A small part understands that the Church is a matter of spirituality only, the reality of life has no place. This understanding is a narrow understanding of the church as a place of worship only.

### **3 Conclusion : Recommendation**

The research questionnaires that were circulated consisted of 4 categories according to age. The results provide an overview of the reality of the people by age group, thus is able to get a comprehensive overview of the Keningau Diocese Church. There are different areas, different situations and circumstances and they have different but interrelated concerns. Through the synodal process, it is discovered that the people are getting familiar with the





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word "Synodal". In other words, the synodal process is increasingly being internalized by the people. Therefore, even though the process has been completed to this stage, it is necessary to continue to cultivate the "Synodal Culture" through programme and activities that will involve all people of all levels and age groups.

Most people understand the Church as God's people who journey together in proclaiming the kingdom of God. It should be realized that the Church is not an abstract concept or idea nor is it merely an institution where ideas and policies are created. The Church is a divine reality in the real world – a world full of challenges, so the Church needs to be truly present as a Sacrament of Salvation (LG 48). But a small number of people still understands the church as a building. Therefore, the continuing catechetical efforts on the Church need to be enhanced and strengthened.

The synodal results found many shortcomings and weaknesses in most places. This situation calls for a re-examination of pastoral approaches and parish governances, rethinking pastoral policies, and then making improvements and refinements.

We see the reality and picture of the people who are very positive, have charisma and talents, but most of them still don't know where the channels are and how to develop and use them. Therefore, continuous assistance needs to be administered and executed.

Pastoral programme that are designed need to take into account the needs according to age categories. It is essential to understand that the psychology of faith development are according to age categories in order to design a pastoral programme that is according to their level of faith development, and also according to the realities of life they are facing.

At the same time, especially young people face various kinds of life's challenges in an increasingly complex world. Many experiences crisis of faith, moral degradation, involved in social problems, excessive pressures and many more. Meanwhile, in the family there are also those who are going through a despairing period of hopelessness. So we need specific pastoral programme and activities to help people who are facing serious problems.

Meanwhile, the role of parents is also an urgent matter that needs to be strengthened. The church starts from the family, so it is appropriate and proper for parents to take an important role in the formation and education of faith for their children. Efforts to make parents aware of their roles and responsibilities as parents need to be carried out. One of which is through Continuous Domestic Church empowerment programme.

In order to face the people's culture that is less beneficial to the development of faith, continuous efforts are needed to win back the hearts of the people so that they can return to living a culture that is more beneficial for the development of faith, such as the culture of reading, the culture of solidarity and others. Specifically, with regard to on-line Mass, it is not the main choice, but only an alternative means.



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As a result of the Synodal Church process, there are still additional issues that need to be attended to in the pastoral planning. The mystagogy stage for newly baptised need to be enriched and looked into. Apart from this, the quality of service needs to be improved; such as certain homilies is of poor quality, the weak personalities of leaders and those who serve the people. Create the awareness that our children need to receive education from an early age, free space and space for young people, the role of senior citizens in the church, church constructions and its facilities, preservation of God's creation and the continuous enrichment of faith.

#### **4. Appendices:**

### **SUMMARY OF SYNODAL CHURCH QUESTIONNAIRE (UNDER 14 YEARS OLD)**

#### **1. What do you want to say to Bishops, Priests and Sisters?**

- Give greetings: Peace Greetings, Good Morning, Thank You for your service to the people.
- Words of support and appreciation of their services
- Ask for prayer/blessing/healing/advice/guidance for themselves and their families
- Want to pray for them
- Express a desire to serve / provide service recommendations, especially to the LSKK (Children's Liturgy) / catechetical
- Invite them to their house
- Ask for a gift (buah tangan)

#### **2. Who are the people you like to meet and talk to at church?**

- People - family members/relatives/friends
- Priests and Sisters, Jesus, Known people, Leaders and counsellors in the church, Altar servers/Youths

#### **3. If you were sad, scared and worried, who would you tell?**

- Parents and family, The Lord Jesus and the Virgin Mary
- Close and understanding friends, Priests/Sisters/brothers/Bishop
- Teachers who teach, Trusted person
- God parents, Pray to Our Lady
- Counsellors, Grandmother/Grandfather, Catechists
- express feelings in the book, Listen to music, Be silent
- Neighbour

#### **4. Do you tell your friends, cousins, relatives about Jesus?**

- Yes, always/ever
- None, Rarely/sometimes

#### **5. When you tell stories about Jesus, what do others say to you?**

- Gratitude and thanks

Keningau Diocese

- They are happy and listen carefully
- They say they are very nice/like to hear/admire Jesus
- Excited and thankful for the word of God, Jesus is very good and great
- Agree and share stories about Jesus
- Said to be a fanatic - dislikes, bored
- Indifferent, considered showing off, harassing, ridiculing
- Believe, understand and respect despite different religions
- Asked to be a sister/Nun
- Reprimanded for pretending like a Priest

#### **6. Do people tell you stories about Jesus?**

- Yes there is: Parents, family members, friends and Pastors during Mass, Catechetical teachers, Grandma, while attending a seminar
- Never
- Sometimes/rarely
- Yes, but when drunk

#### **7. Do you attend Holy Mass or Worship on Sundays?**

- Yes, Attend Mass Online
  - Attending prayers at other Churches because there is no catholic church in our village
- Sometimes
- No, lazy
  - No, the house is far from the church
  - No, No, because under 12 years old, parents do not bring to church

#### **8. Why do we come to Mass on Sunday?**

- Sanctify the day of the Lord, hear the Word of God, receive the Body of Christ, Pray and ask for God's blessing
- Celebrating the Eucharist
- To strengthen our relationship with God
- Because by accepting Christ Himself, every day we will be led by Him to grow in faith, hope and love
- Listen to the pastor's advice and homily
- Glorify God
- Ordered by my mother
- Involved in liturgical services
- Remembering the resurrection of the Lord
- There is longing
- Because the Catholic church teaches us to come to Mass on Sunday
- Dont know
- Never go to church
- Parents bring us to Church
- Confess sin and ask for forgiveness

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- Attend catechetical guidance classes
- Eliminates sadness
- Strengthen relationships
- Meet friends
- Because of holidays/working rest days
- Feeling happy and having fun going to church
- Ask for blessings

### **9. What do you do while attending Holy Mass or during service of the Word?**

- Pray to God
- Living the Holy Mass, listening and meditating on every word of God and preparing the heart before receiving the Body and Blood of Christ
- Focus, sit still, be silent, pray, listen to the words and homily of the priest, and follow the choir
- Pray for God's forgiveness for the sins we have committed
- Give full attention during the consecration
- Reflect the good teachings during Holy Mass
- Respect the journey of the Holy Mass
- Don't know what to do
- Get out of church to talk to friends, play games, get bored and sleep
- Serve happily
- Make a loving offering
- Pray for those who are unable to attend Holy Mass
- Go to the canteen, eat sweets

### **10. How do you feel attending a prayer or celebration in church?**

- Proud, happy, enthusiastic, feeling happy, rejoicing, grateful
- Calm, peaceful, close to God and comforted
- Find peace and forgive each other
- A relief when returning home, Feeling 'recharge', confirmed
- Feel blessed, Feel safe
- Feel free from problem, Feeling loved by God for being able to gather and pray with other people
- Happy because there is a clear purpose in my life
- Tired/Hungry/bored
- Don't know
- Sad to get up early to church

### **11. Draw what do you think the church is like?**

- The shape of the Church building
- The shape of the building of the Church and the congregation
- Painting of the Sacred Heart of Jesus
- Church buildings and symbols of the Cross
- Altar, Cross and Bread

Keningau Diocese

- Picture of people holding hands
- The church building and me
- Draw a circle and note what is done as a congregation in the church
- People, church buildings and God's created world
- Picture of two hands holding a heart (in the heart there is a church building)
- A picture of a safe church, there is joy and a sense of closeness to God
- People pray
- No one knows because they have never seen and entered the church
- Candles
- A description of the place of saints and sinners
- A description of a boring place
- A description of heaven
- A picture of a church that promotes fellowship, faith, faith and hope

## **12. Have you ever helped others? How?**

- Ever -
  - Helping parents and the elderly, helping grandmothers sell vegetables, find firewood etc.
  - carry things
  - Helping people to stand up, Visiting the sick
  - Pray for those in difficulty and troubled
  - Provide information on how to pray and information on the tasks given
  - Giving / donating money and clothes, food and drinks
  - Fetching people to church- elderly and disabled
  - Following “gotong royong” in the church

## **13. What do you like and dislike most about the Church?**

Likes:

- Love listening to the pastor's homily, Listen to spiritual songs
- Love to pray and hear the word of God, Contribute to the collection
- Serving, Stay still, Quiet atmosphere
- Likes to receive communion, Like Sunday school
- Like to meet friends at church, Love a clean toilet
- Love the lively atmosphere during Mass
- Love the people who take part reflectively during the homily
- Love to meet Jesus, Praise and worship
- Likes to attend church activities, Like to pray with the family at church
- Love the serenity of the church, Love the Children's Liturgy
- Organized seating, Christmas day
- There is a meal, Likes to meet Priests/Sisters and talk to them

Dislikes:

- Storytelling in church, Noisy, Playing, Animal disturbances
- Dirty toilet / no water / no toilet



Keningau Diocese

- Long sermons / homily / Long Mass and Worship, standing too long
- Crying children, People walking around
- Not paying attention during Mass / disrespectful
- Smoking, gossiping, falling asleep in church
- Mass is conducted in Dusun language because they do not understand
- The church is crowded when leaving the church, People play the handphone
- Old Sunday school, Wear a mask/face mask
- The church is dirty and old, No seats, A hot church

**14. What will you do to change what you don't like?**

- Pray and ask for God's help to change/inspiration
- Rebuke politely, change yourself, come early to church
- Be quiet and focus on praying
- Cleaning the toilet
- Homilies is shortened but compact
- Make an announcement for the congregation to reduce movement during Mass
- Believe in God and keep faith in yourself
- Positive thinking, getting used to the situation
- Do something to change yourself
- Be honest and ask for advice
- Be nice to people you don't like
- Notify parents and meet with church Leaders
- Forgive each other
- Set a good example
- Improving church infrastructure needs

**15. Is there anyone in the Church who helps you make decisions? Who?**

- Yes, Priests, Bishops, parents, God, Providers, church leaders, friends, Sisters, Charismatic groups, class teacher, facilitators teacher, catechist, God parents, Family, Holy Spirit, Grandmother
- I make my own decisions

**16. How do you pray during a covid-19 patient?**

- Pray at home with the family, Attend Mass Online- Pray online
- Pray before bed, Personal prayers and rosaries with the family
- Pray for protection and transmission of C-19
- Daily Prayer / Prayer of Divine Mercy / Prayer of the Eternal Helper / Prayer of Saint Michael
- Read spiritual books
- Unorganised
- Never prayed / not yet good at praying
- Listening to daily online radio (kupi rohani)

Experiences throughout formulating the answers :



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During the summary process, the analyst found:-

- A description of the statements faced and experienced by the respondent.
  - Feeling happy because children are able to express their views, opinions, feelings and problems that they are going through.
  - Some parishes make the summaries too general (abstract), brief and do not describe the real situation of the children.
  - There are still many parents who pay less attention to the formation of children's faith
- Many children still have difficulty understanding the homily due to the use of the local language.
- Church infrastructure facilities in outstations need to be improved.
  - Children are not yet able to appreciate the Liturgy of Holy Mass and Worship.

No.	Parish/Mission	Respondents
1	Kuala Penyu	42
2	Beaufort	137
3	Tambunan	215
4	Toboh	376
5	Kemabong	171
6	Sook	808
7	Tenom	328
8	Sipitang	11
9	Membakut	109
10	KSFX	809
	Disabled	20
	Total	3,026

Formulated by:

Rev.Fr.Rudolp Joannes

Sr.Patricia Limun

Stella S.Kinsik

## SUMMARY OF SYNODAL CHURCH QUESTIONNAIRE (YOUTH)

### 1. For you, who is the Church?

- The church is God's people journeying together.
- A place where everyone knows and serves God.
- A place where faith develops through the sacraments of the church.
- Prayer Center: A place to praise, pray and glorify God.
- However, there are also youths who consider the church to be just a place of worship and there are also those who do not know the meaning of the church.

### 2. As a young person, do you feel listened to by the church?

- YES

Because given the opportunity to serve, give creative insights and ideas.





Keningau Diocese

Get support and encouragement from church leaders such as the Holy Father, Bishops, Priests and Religious.

- NO

Feeling left out.

There is rejection from more senior parishioners and youth leaders.

The opinions of young people are considered trivial and insignificant because they are considered too young and lack of faith and experience.

There are also youths who say they do not know because they have never spoken.

### **3. Are you free to express your opinion? Where?**

- YES

In the family, BEC (KKD) KUK .

Church: during seminars, at different commissions and committees, Sunday classes.

Public places: such as at school, in the meetings, gatherings and at work.

Through suggestion box

Social media: Whatsapp, Facebook, Instagram. Tiktok.

NO

Because , considered young, feel judged by others.

Not confident in their own opinions.

Most respondents stated that they never said anything because they did not know or were not sure whether they were heard or not.

### **4. What are the characteristics of people you are comfortable talking to, sharing opinions and expressing your feelings?**

- People who are mature in faith, positive, open -minded and responsible.
- The closest people, such as family, relatives, fellow Christian serving in the Church
- People who are calm, patient, gentle, sensitive, caring, non-judgmental, sincerely helpful, not arrogant and can give good advice.
- People who are empathetic and sympathetic.
- Good listener, understanding, friendly, tolerant, rational.
- Good at keeping secrets - Trust
- There are also those who state that they prefer to hide their own feelings unable to trust others.

### **5. Where do you feel valued and listened to?**

- Home: In the Family
- Church: In seminars, retreats and so on.
- KKD (BEC)/ KBK (Youth commission)
  - School, Workplace, Social media
- Some also feel they have no place to be heard.

### **6. Do you know the issues that are happening in this world?**

- YES





Keningau Diocese

Health: Pandemic Covid19.

Unemployment, natural disasters, war, politics, corruption.

Environment: global warming, natural disasters

Family: Divorce, incest, domestic violence

Social: LGBT, suicide, depression, transgender, abortion, abuse of illicit substances such as drugs and medicines.

Religion: Islamization, conversion. Sexual abuse, sexual harassment,

Human trafficking for organ sales, prostitution and slavery.

Economy: Unemployment, income loss leading to more hunger and financial hardship.

- NO

Some respondents stated that they did not know or were not sure because they did not care.

### **7. How and from where do you know the issues the world is facing?**

- Social media: Facebook, Instagram, Tiktok, Television
- Church: Through pastoral homily and the sharing of church ministers.
- Newspapers, Herald, Magazines, Catholic Sabah.
- Friends, Teachers in schools.

### **8. What are you most worried about ‘tomorrow’?**

- Death, Crisis of Faith, Inactive and leaving serving the church
- Health / dangerous diseases.
- Employment: Unemployment and loss of income.
- Current world conditions, Worry about any changes in life/unknown
- Whether the church and the congregation will grow or not.
- Increasingly loss of humanity and overly selfishness.
- Uncertain future, family, children, and fellow believers.

### **9. To whom can you easily tell your worries?**

- Family member, God
- Friends: Close friends, co-workers.
- Church Leaders: Priests, Religious, Catechists, Specialist counselor
- Communities such as KKD (BEC), Spiritual guides

### **10. What do you think is the importance of religion?**

- Applying good values in life, to become a useful human being.
- Life guidelines, listening to God’s word, Shaping personality
- The source of truth and life through the sacraments of the church.
- Cultivate a close relationship with God, Guarantee of life eternal

### **11. What is on your mind right now about the Church and the future?**

- The faithful is increasing in numbers and growing and involved in the church ministry.
- Deepen and develop spiritual faith, Proclaim the good news.
- There is unity in the Church, Church building and pastoral ministry



Keningau Diocese

- Many new generations in church leadership, Concerns about the spread of heresy.
- The presence of political elements in the church such as the abuse of power by church leaders.
- Social and Individualistic influences.
- The lack of youth participation in ministry in the church has led to concerns that the church will only be filled with senior citizens.
- The number of parishioners decreased due to several issues such as religious conversion and on the basis of marriage.
- There are parishes where the attendance of parishioners to church is declining due to the covid19 pandemic and it has become common after a long time not to go to church.
- Pastoral weakness where the church becomes a materialistic measure.
- The church is growing but the spiritual faith of the people is becoming more fragile due to technological advances and people turning their backs on the church and pursuing worldly things.

## **12. Where are your talents / talents known, valued and able to grow well?**

- In church ministry: Choir, Altar Server, Lectors, Youth Ministries, Wardens and other committees.
- School, campus, university.
- Home, Workplace
- Community – KKD (BEC)
- Social Media: TikTok, Whatsapp, Facebook, Youtube, Instagram, Sports.

## **13. What do you think is the role and identity of young people in the church?**

- Be a succession to continue leadership in the church.
- Being the backbone of the church in order to be able to develop new ideas, the church is always progressive, creative and eager to bring about innovation in the church program.
- Be a mentor and motivator to children and peers in matters of religion.
- Be a witness of faith to all people, The youth, the hope of the church
- Apply gospel values at home, at church and everywhere.
- Promote Vocations

## **14. Do you feel free to serve? Explain.**

- YES

No coercion or impediment to serving

Get support and encouragement from family

The self that wants to serve, There is joy in serving

- NO

Constrained by problems, work commitments, studies

There is no openness to serve, Too humble and feel unworthy to serve.

Haunted by past lives and lack of self-confidence to serve.

Fear of being criticized and judged.

Have to serve because there is a position in the committee / ministry

Age factor.

### **15. What are your future dreams / ideals about the church?**

- The church is getting stronger, the congregation is growing and united.
- The church helps those who have gone astray, are away from family, are abroad, involved in social problems such as drug abuse, and so on.
- The church needs to give opportunities for those undergoing problem in the sacraments of the church because salvation is for everyone.
- Reaching out to people who are moving away from the church.
- The church needs more faith-building programs.
- The congregation feels accepted in the church to live out the Diocese's theme of journeying together.
- Youth ministry is becoming stronger and more active and has a close relationship with God.
- The Catholic Church is not oppressed and there is tolerance with other religions.
- The church monitoring any sharing catechesis or any church teaching.
- The Church works for peace and love.
- Build a more comfortable church building and renovate the existing church.
- The church grows according to the signs of time.
- The Church builds on the basis of love, justice, mutual love and without judgment.
- More and more young people are responding to the call as priests and religious.
- The Church continues to guide and support youth.
- Repentance to those who leave the church.
- The Church is sensitive to the weak, the poor, the marginalized and the disabled.
- Construction of church buildings in rural areas or areas that have faithful but no church buildings.
- Conduct spiritual activities at different community - the family / KKD / KUK / ZON / Parish level.
- Church leaders are more open and listening without excluding any party / congregation.
- Church leaders avoid sensitive scandals.

### **16. What are your hopes as a YOUTH?**

- More youth activities and active participation from youths.
- Be strong in faith and put God first in life.
- Be a better person, responsible, confident, brave and wise in decision making.
- Able to make parents and God proud and happy.
- The opinions and voices of the youth are always heard and given the opportunity to participate in pastoral programs in the church, especially in the parish itself.
- The strengthening and knowledge of faith so that the youth better understand the teachings of the church.
- The younger generation does not abdicate responsibility in carrying out the mission and goals of the church in order to bring positive influence to others.
- Always be united in active service in any ministry in the church.
- More people are responding to the call to become priests and religious.



Keningau Diocese

- Using the sophistication of technology as a medium to draw closer to God.
- The catholic church has acceptance / understanding / dialogue with churches of other denominations.
- Parents can educate and bring children to know God.

### **17. How did your faith develop during the covid19 pandemic?**

- Faith grows because we can pray together and get family guidance.
- Self -repentance because we realize that every moment is an opportunity to do good and meditate on the word of God.
- Learn various mediums to develop faith through technology, peer sharing and social media applications during a pandemic.
- Family ties are closer because there is more time with family.
- There is a longing to serve God with fellow youth.
- Increasing faith:

There is an opportunity to follow the worship of the word / daily holy mass.

Be more diligent in prayer.

Always be grateful / appreciate life.

Not affected due to online activities (Zoom / Google Meet).

- Faith is challenged/declining

Due to the non -smooth internet network, causing the Online Mass is often disrupted so that the focus on following the Mass loses focus.

Feeling incomplete because of not being able to receive communion.

Rarely pray and rarely read the Word of God until it feels far from God.

The influence of social media through gadgets / technology.

The spirit of serving is decreasing because they are getting lazy to go to church because it is common at home only.

### **Experience throughout formulating the answers:**

- During the summary process, the analyst found that:

There are parishes that make general conclusions only without any explanation of the actual situation.

There are youths who do not answer some questions because they do not know.

There are also youths who prefer to hide their feelings and do not believe in their own church and family.

Many youths are afraid of being judged, criticized, 'gossiped about' so they are afraid to serve.

There is a gap between 'old people' and youth where youths feel hindered in using their talents and creativity in ministry because 'old people' do not give them the opportunity to grow.

Youth should be heard and involved in the planning and pastoral programs in their respective parishes.

The youths realize the importance of strengthening their faith and spiritual development for themselves and the people.

The youths are sensitive to the needs of the people such as the construction of church buildings and upgrading existing church buildings.



Keningau Diocese

Church leaders do not walk with the youth. Therefore, church leaders need to listen and dialogue with the youth.

The youths are actually sensitive and know the situation and circumstances that are happening around them.

No.	Parish/Mission	Respondents
1	Kuala Penyu	41
2	Beaufort	331
3	Tambunan	392
4	Toboh	1,106
5	Kemabong	284
6	Sook	1,109
7	Tenom	718
8	Sipitang	41
9	Membakut	166
10	KSFX	1,593
	Total respondents	5,781

Formulated by:

1. Sr. M. Lucynia Jeprin
2. Roney Alfred Eming
3. Fr. David Gasikol (Absent)

## Summary of Synodal Church questionnaires – GENERAL - Diocesan level Section A

### 1. What do you think it means to “Journey together”?

- Bishops, Priests and parishioners are united, involved in spiritual activity programs.
- The spirit of unity (unity) in carrying out activities, service in the Church from the root level, regardless of the background of the people.
- Support each other, respect each other, pray for each other, cooperate in the growth of faith and the church
- Living in a community based on activities
- Openness to help each other, be sensitive, care for others and in receiving reprimands

### 2. Are there any marginalized individuals or groups, please explain?

- Those who haven't opened their hearts yet
- Communication Breakdown – Family problems – marital status
- Social problems – getting involved in social problems
- Geographical and economic problems
- Personal development – Personal view
- “Leadership style” that causes people to feel marginalized



Keningau Diocese

- No one is marginalized because of discrimination
- Note – Form a body/team to reach the marginalized people.

**3. How have you grown as a friend to others?**

- Open heart to others – accepting, loving, appreciating, helping
- Get involved in church and faith building services
- Attitude to take care - take responsibility
- Active and effective communication
- Practice of pure values/Gospel

**4. How do prayers and liturgical celebrations foster community life?**

- Prayers and Liturgical Celebrations unite people – space/opportunities to unite
- Strength in community
- Personal Spiritual purpose – want to grow
- Appreciation of the contents and parts of the liturgy

**5. Is there a space for involvement given to women and youth in liturgical celebrations, please explain?**

- Yes, the Church is open and inclusive in all fields
- Women and men are equal / equal dignity
- Some are shy/don't dare, and it's always the same person

**6. Are there any pastoral programs or activities that can be carried out to foster the spirit of journeying together?**

- Yes – All programs can foster the spirit of walking together
- Program up to the root level
- “Fellowship” needs to be controlled

**7. Is there a pastoral program that is carried out according to the current situation?**

- Yes it fits - But needs improvement and co-ordinations
- Only sometimes people are busy, time constraints - Sometimes overlaps
- There are places that are less active
- Programs that are more likely to seek and consume funds

**8. Are there any pastoral programs or activities that are run based on the spirit of “walking/journeying together”?**

- Yes, in general with the spirit of walking/journeying together
- Programs that consume funds - KSFX

**9. How do we relate to adherents of other religions and those who do not have religious beliefs?**

- Overall good- A small part is not ok, there are parties who are racist, have disagreements

**10. To what extent are you aware that this world is our common home and we need each other.**

- we need Interdependence and connecting
- The world is a gift from God – a home and a common place
- to maintain and preserve

**11. How is the spirit of walking together implemented in your family?**

- Pray together and caring spirit
- Good communication – take and make policy together with family,



Keningau Diocese

- Family celebrations – family gathering

## **Section B**

### **1. How is the voice of the laity heard, especially women and young people?**

- Engagement – involves in all areas
- Opportunity- giving space for growth
- Meetings and programs -
- Attention – counseling, visits
- Utilize social media

### **2. What makes it easier or prevents us from hearing the voice of the people?**

#### **a. Prevention/avoidance**

- negative human attitudes that are unsupportive and not pro -active
- Communication breakdown
- Misuse of social media

#### **b. enablement**

- Involvement in meetings/activities/gatherings
- Appreciation of the value of openness to give and take
- Social media

### **3. To what extent do we listen to the marginalized?**

- Visits – visit, listen, help and care for them
- Leadership – consider and involve them in the community through programs at the KKD level
- Few are not heard

### **4. To what extent do we pay attention to those who are not active in the church?**

- by visiting them
- Through KKD programs/activities
- Encourage not judge
- Engagement – engage them and be a companion to them

### **5. To what extent are we open to hearing the voices of those who differ from ours?**

- Accept the uniqueness of each individual
- Take steps and don't rush to make decisions

### **6. Is there a place for minority voices, especially those who are poor, marginalized or neglected in society?**

- In general yes, few are missing
- The church needs to be open to accepting anyone
- Leadership

### **7. Do all people have freedom of speech, opinion, reprimand, suggestions, etc.?**

- In general, all have freedom of speech, Few get less freedom
- Don't know and are reluctant to voice, Only AJK (Team) voicing out

### **8. How is administration carried out in our parish?**

- Generally good, satisfactory,
- The style of administration follows the Priest - another Priests has another way





Keningau Diocese

- However, it still needs to be improved and refined, especially with regard to the management approach

**9. To what extent are the laity involved in the pastoral program?**

- All people are involved but a few are not involved
- People are more involved in programs at the KKD level BEC (grassroot level)
- Through committee and apostolate
- It is necessary to encourage involvement from the people

**10. How do we promote the participation of the laity in pastoral planning?**

- Through the excitement of the program – print and digital media
- Through the promotion of various activities and programs at all levels by involving all people
- Awareness program of general vocations of laity

**11. How is the quality of communication in your family, especially communication between husband and wife, parents and children, and between siblings?**

- In general good but a small part has communication problems, disputes
- Children are closer to gadgets
- On average there is praying together

**Section C.**

**1. What do you think is the mission of the Church?**

- Journey together as a community of God's people to witness and proclaim the Kingdom of God.
- To be the Sacrament of Salvation/Love

**2. According to your understanding, who is the Church?**

- Most understand the Church as the People of God, but a small part still understand that the church refers to a building that is a place of worship

**3. What causes a baptized person to be inactive in the Church?**

- Crisis of Faith - collapse of faith
- Family problems
- Personal problem
- Social problems/moral crisis
- Worldly influences - selfishness
- Time, financial and transportation constraints
- Unprofessional leadership
- Sermons/homily are not good

**4. How do you support people who serve the community in various fields? (e.g. politics and social, scientific studies, education, enforcement of social justice, protection of human rights, environmental concern, etc.)**

- Pray for them
- Provide support, advice, encouragement and motivation
- Get involved in the activities implemented

**5. To what extent do we cooperate with neighbourhoods, local communities, associations and public movements, in dealing with social problems that occur?**

- Provide support and cooperation





Keningau Diocese

- Good communication

**6. What relationship does our Church community have with other Christian traditions and denominations?**

- Have a good relationship but some feel uncomfortable
- Mutual respect and cooperation, tolerance
- Involvement and joint organization of programs

**7. To what extent does the Church pay attention to KLMTC?(marginalised)**

- In general the Church pays attention, but there are a few who feel that the Church pays less attention to them.
- There are still some that need special attention and monitoring
- There is a needs to have special pastoral program

**8. Do you see the earth getting polluted/aging? - What is your opinion on the statement of the earth getting older, explain?**

- Everyone sees the earth getting polluted/old
- Awareness is high but action is still lacking to protect and preserve nature
- The earth is polluted due to human attitudes

**9. Have I ever been a source of environmental pollution?**

- 95% acknowledged the cause of the pollution
- The rest confess indirectly

**10. To what extent do you cooperate with efforts to preserve and conserve the environment?**

- Almost all responded to and participated in programs and campaigns related to the environment. It's just that the culture is still lacking. That means efforts to preserve and preserve the environment are still lacking.

**11. How sensitive are you to the needs or problems of each member of your family?**

- Always be sensitive and caring
- Through prayer, communication, discussion, support, attention, help, always be aware etc.

**12. How did your faith develop during covid-19? What are the challenges, what efforts and suggestions for developing the faith?**

- Some people experience decline in faith
- few undergoes faith development
- Some experience ups and downs

Challenges :

- Fear of silence
- The family economy is affected
- Family relationships tested
- Spiritual thirst

Proposal :

- Be patient
- Multiple programs involving small groups
- Diligent and faithful in prayer
- Publish Spiritual Books



Keningau Diocese  
- KKD (BEC) visit

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1	Kuala Penyu	42
2	Beaufort	231
3	Tambunan	389
4	Toboh	983
5	Mission Kemabong	108
6	Sook	997
7	Tenom	290
8	Sipitang	47
9	Membakut	100
10	KSFX	2,218
	Total respondents	5,405

Formulated by :  
Msgr. Gilbert  
Fr. Ronie  
Patrick  
Sr. Evelin

### Summary of Synodal Church questionnaires - Senior citizens - Diocesan level

#### 1. Do you feel neglected in the Church? Why?

NO : Feel valued, prioritized and accepted as a Church community. Still actively serving. Felt cared by fellow parishioners and Priests. Ongoing visits through KKD and consistent communion. Become a reference source. Information is obtained through Mass Media

YES : Sometimes overlooked, Misunderstood, seldom go to Church

SOP prevents Senior Citizens going to Church

#### 2. Do you feel valued and needed in the Church?

(Answer is the same as the first question)

#### 3. To what extent are you involved in Church programs?

ACTIVE : Involved at their own pace. Always supporting financially and moral contributions.

NOT ACTIVE : Only attend Sunday services/Mass.

Do not know which activity be involved in the Church. Never given a role in the Church.

#### 4. Are your voices or opinions / Suggestions heard?

YES : The voice of 'old people' is still heard, Become a source of reference

NO : Communication problems



Keningau Diocese

Senior citizens are not given the opportunity to make suggestions or opinions. Rarely speak up and suggest. More silence. Suggestions are ignored

**5. How is your relationship and Communication with family?**

GOOD : Very good. There is Whatsap group. Family T'Shirt, Unity, pray together. Good communication between husband and wife eventhough they have different religions.

NOT GOOD : Expecting Family Strengthening seminar to be held. Worry about children converting

**6. To what extent are you involved in preserving and conserving the environment?**

Involved in the efforts of the Church and NGOs to protect and conserve the environment. Support : Church efforts for example Earth Day. Involved in efforts to preserve the environment such as growing vegetables, fruits and flowers. Active and there is an awareness of caring for the environment not to use herbicides, chemical fertilizers and avoid open burning.

**7. What are the challenges and obstacles faced in participating in Church activities?**

Age factors and health problems. Work constraints

Overlapping activities outside and inside the Church. Home, away from Church and transportation problems. Illiteracy

Busy taking care of grandchildren

Church leaders are looked down and judged. Makes me tend not to follow

as well as. Unable to accept the present leadership. Regular Church activities are held at night.

Financial problems

**8. Who is the person you expect to always be by your side?**

God, the Holy Spirit, Family, Community

Priest, Religious, Catechist.

**9. What are your dreams or ambitions for the Church?**

Unity and openness. Physical Development of the Church is upgraded and the environment is harmonious. To produce quality people. To produce a generation of believers and grow in the Church. Increasing number of Priests. Children are interested in serving. Doing continuous evangelism. Always help the elderly and do not isolate them. Openness to socio -cultural, political and economic. The Malaysian government respects freedom of religion.

**10. What are your hopes for the Church?**

The Church hears all the voices of the people. A place where peace, unity, joy is found. Progressing according to the current situation. Children, teenagers, youth become active as they are future leaders in the Church. The backbone to political stability. Listening to public reprimands.

Powerful voice Be, Firm so that young people are not attracted to other religions.

**11. What would you like to contribute to the Church?**

Keningau Diocese

Prayer, materials, energy, thoughts, skills, finances and time. Be a witness of Christ and be a synodal people.

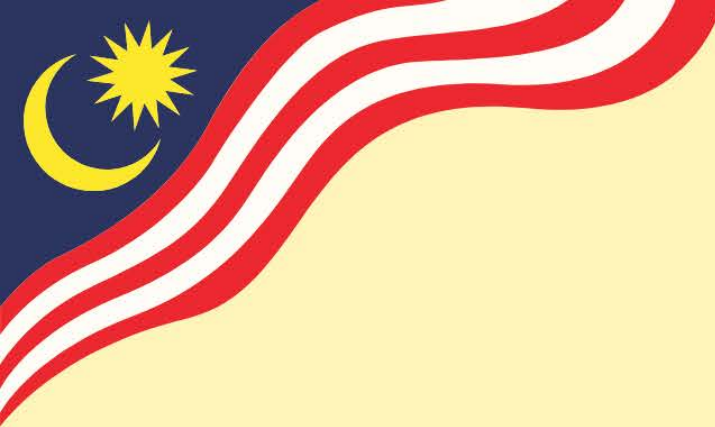
## 12. How was your faith experience after Covid-19?

Worried, depressed, Disappointed, calm, faith remains strong and feels fine. Stay compliant with SOPs. Positive thinking. Consistently pray. Attend Mass Online. Longing to receive the Body of Christ. Missing a distant family. Worried about getting infected. Bitter experience when family and self are infected.

Meaningful experience receiving the Sacrament of baptism during pandemic. Feel sad when senior citizens are not allowed to attend Mass.

No.	Parish/Mission	Respondents
1	KSFEX	488
2	Mission Kemabong	82
3	Holy Cross Toboh	408
4	St Theresa Tambunan	242
5	5 Membakut	60
6	Sook	431
7	Kuala Penyu	61
8	Beaufort	151
9	Tenom	198
10	Sipitang	9
	Total	2,130

Formulated by: John Lainsin, Fredoline Umis and Nancy Nelly



# Diocese of Sandakan



## Synthesis Report



For a synodal Church  
communion | participation | mission



# For a synodal Church

communion | participation | mission



## **DIOCESE OF SANDAKAN REPORT 2022**



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## INTRODUCTION: THE PURPOSE OF THE SYNTHESIS

### ▪ Synthesis Key Points

The Diocese of Sandakan, like all the local churches throughout the world, and as required by the General Secretariat for the synod of Bishops, had launched the synodal process under the guidance of the bishop at the diocesan level on 17th October 2021. From then on, although constrained by the “movement control order” and “locked downs” due to the covid19 pandemic, all the parishes and mission stations painstakingly undertook and completed the process.

The synodal process was an opportunity of grace for all the people of God (clergy, religious, and lay faithful) as we looked into the realities of the Church at the local level and together with the whole Church we let our voices be heard. In this way we contribute to the success of the process of the Synod of Bishops as envisioned by the Holy Father, Pope Francis: *For a Synodal Church; Communion, Participation, and Mission*.

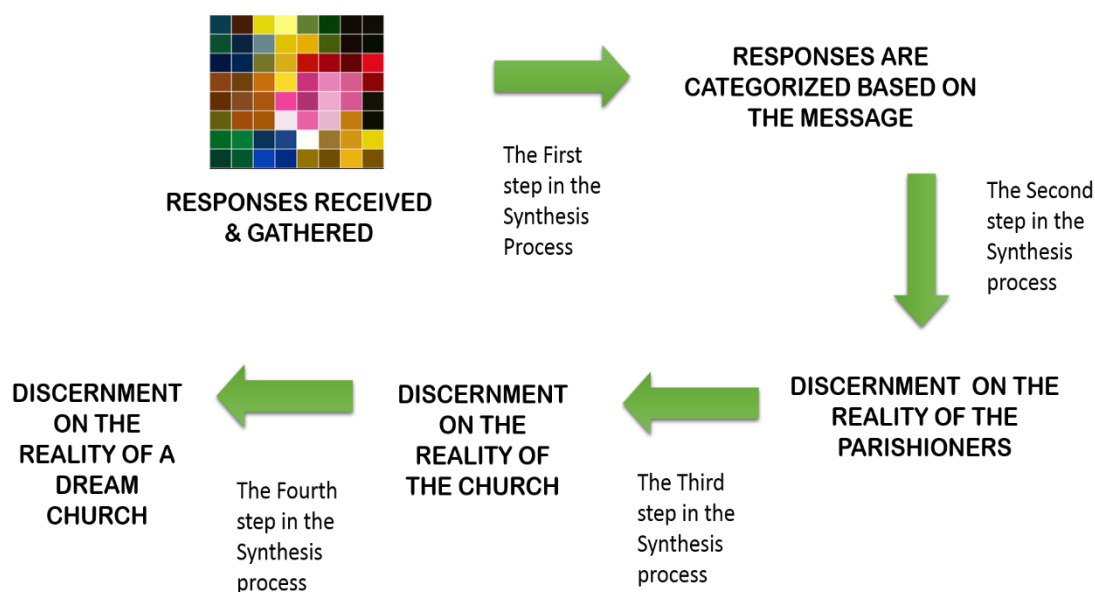
Through the synodal process, we come to realize as well that not only does the diocese participate in the Synod of Bishops on synodality of the Church, but it also better highlights and confirms the Diocesan Vision and Mission, and indirectly, we reviewed our Pastoral Plan and uplifted our resolve to implement them. In the light of the synodality our Diocesan Pastoral Plan calls us to renew our way of being; working together and moving forward by attentively listening to one another.

(Extracted from Bishop Julius’ Foreword on the Diocese Report on the Synod of Bishop)

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## BODY OF SYNTHESIS: STRUCTURE

### 1. The Process Taken





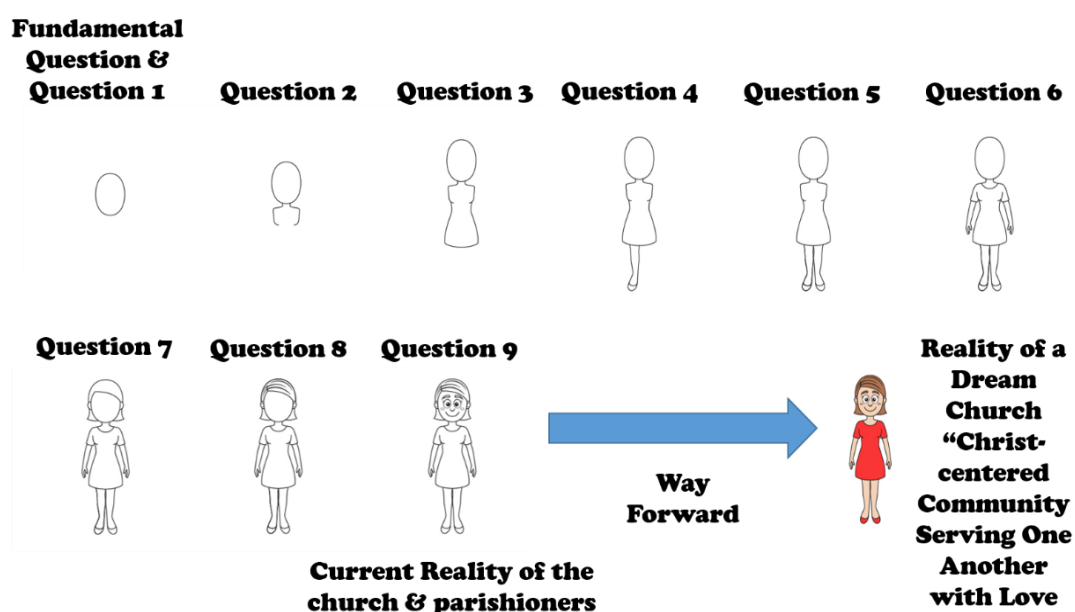
After its launching on the 17<sup>th</sup> October 2021, a briefing on the synodal process was held online mainly to the Clergies, Religious, member of Parish Pastoral Council and community leaders. The briefing was held on the 27<sup>th</sup> October 2021 in hoping that the same process can be cascaded to communities and ministries in their respective parish.

There were 10 questions that we refer from the Vademecum (5.3). The questions are simplified to make it easier for parishioners to understand. Due to the strict SOPs, most of the process are in the form of hardcopy questionnaire that was given to the parishioners, communities and ministries at the end of Mass and meetings. Even though members of the PPC “turun padang” to meet and listened to these people, an online questionnaire is also prepared for those who are unable to come and join to any synodal meeting.

The process of gathering the “voices” from the people has been done in four months’ time. The findings were synthesized by the PPC member or the Synod team. This is to allow them to see and reflect the realities that happens in their own parish. An opportunity to re-learn, to grow together and to discuss necessary steps to move forward as a parish.

The final report was submitted to the Diocesan Focus committee for further synthesizing. There are few steps taken in this process and taking the guide provided by the Vademecum, has led the team to discern on the realities of the parishioners, the church as a whole and finally came up with a Diocesan report that captures the essence of all the “voices” on the ground.

The Discernment process can be shown as follows:



Each questions helps in building up and broaden the people's own experience as Christian. This actually aspire us to envision what kind of church we want to be. These realities had assist us to see and reflect further in our way forward in line with the Diocesan Vision and Mission.

## 2. The Experience

During the Diocesan Pre-Synodal Gathering that was held on the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> June 2022, participants has been given the opportunity to share their personal experience in participating the the Synodal process at parish level.

It shows that the process had given them the space to be bold in voicing out their concerns, sharing hardship and challenges especially in their ministry in the church. They also shared the importance of journeying together as a community which involved all walks of life and to ensure that no one is left behind.

In addition, parishioners felt that they are being listened too. This is what they needed, they need their voices to be heard and being judge too quickly. It shows that the church cares for them. They also felt strongly whole church (clergies, religious, lay leaders and faithful) to be united, work together, understands one another and be patience as to enable them to have a listening heart.

The word 'SYNOD' becomes a new talking point. People are interested to know and understand the impact it has to their lives. Therefore, the need to further explain is necessary. The sense of 'URGENCY' is there knowing that the whole synod process bring out the need to act rather than just remain at the discussion level.

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Aside from having good personal experience, they also encountered challenges in terms of reaching out to those in the interior due to distance and no transportations. Other challenges are the people themselves who does not want to be involved in the process. They thought that the Synod is the responsible of the priest and church leaders. Not only that, even some families are not giving encouragement to their young people to participant in the process.

## 3. The Feedback

After the whole synod process, they shared that they felt the meaning of "journeying together". The spirit of journeying together to fulfill the Vision and Mission of the diocese must continue to be instilled at all levels of the parishioners especially in the diverse and multi-cultural community. The involvement from the young people is crucial because they are the future of the church who will be continuing the Mission of Christ.

The current synodal process have not reached all due to many factors and particularly because of covid-19 pandemic, time constrain, lack preparation at the top level, distance, communication breakdown and many more. However, this is not happening only during the pandemic but looking it happened before therefore, there is a need to

re-look into the method and style of approach to better participation from all levels of parishioners especially the marginalized and poor.

#### 4. The current reality

Sandakan Diocese comprises of 5 parishes and one mission. The mother church of the parish is located in the town area except for the mission where its mother church *is* located in one of the villages under the mission's territorial jurisdiction. Under each parish, there are sub-parishes and several chapels located across the entire parish territory. Many chapels are located in remote villages whereby to reach them, the priest has to drain their energy to battle the long-distance and difficult terrain. Because of the pandemic phenomena, not all the chapels in the remote villages were reached out for the listening process. Even more accessible villages are also not fully sampled following the movement control order (MCO). Because of the MCO restriction, the only workable option to carry out the process was through virtual gathering using the zoom application. Nevertheless, on a few occasions, some gatherings were able to be conducted in physical attendance because of the more relaxed Standard Operating Procedure on some activities which include gathering. In spite of the hindrance, all the parishes were able to obtain a fairly adequate sample for the purpose.

Having synthesized all the responses obtained from the respective listening questions which comprised of one fundamental question and 9 thematic questions (**refer to Appendix 1**), and after prayerful discernment of the synthesized responses (**refer to Appendix 2**), the following are the discerned reality of the parishioners and the reality of the church.

REALITY OF THE CHURCH	REALITY OF THE PARISHIONERS
General weakness in the understanding of "Journeying together", why?	Reality of the parishioners: Diverse understanding about church journeying together, where some views that it is an essential characteristic of being church, while others as spiritual enrichment, people of God in unity and continuously pastored, formed and shepherd.
Apparent weakness of Journeying together in the church. Why?	Reality of the parishioners: Awareness about church journeying together, to a certain extent <i>does exist</i> , but there are still significant <i>evidence</i> of indifference that arise from the multiracial, multicultural and multi-lingual society.
Lack of true compassion. Why?	The practice of compassion is somewhat happening and manifests as

	a passionate way to serve those in need. But this is seemingly weak and unsustainable. If this remains unabated, the hope and faith of the lay faithful towards the church as a place to seek remedy to their personal problems may gradually erode and may lead them to seek solutions elsewhere.
The significance of active participation in the Liturgy, is somewhat overwhelmed due to other weaknesses. Why?	Active participation in the liturgy is nurtured. But due to the laities' limited understanding of the liturgy of the Mass, they become passive participants, rather than active participants.
Essential missionary development goals not fully explained and emphasized. Why?	There is an apparent general awareness and understanding of being a missionary. But lack of persuasion (pastoral training) and commitment of the faithful leads us far from achieving the mission. This is compounded by the apparent problems from within, arising from the institutional framework.
Narrow span in dialogues participation. Why?	Participation in the church dialogues is nurtured but does not reach or extend out into the society at large.
Undefined direction of journeying together with other Christian denominations. Why?	There is an established connection, but limited in scope and lack of common goal for which a shared mission is set to be accomplished.
Weak in True Teamwork and co-responsibility. Why?	Reality of the parishioners: Generally, teamwork and co-responsibility are apparent, but some hesitations are evident.
Weak in communal and spiritual communal discernment. Why?	There are evidence of mutual sharing for the common good and awareness of listening. But it is not sustainable due to leadership problems.
Reality of the church: Insignificant propagation of living a life of communion, participation and mission. Why?	Apparent weakness in Common and fair understanding about living a life of communion, participation and mission. This may have risen due to an inappropriate institutional framework and approach.

## Causal Factors

Where the reality of the parishioners and the reality of the church may have risen due to many factors which include:

### Institutional framework

- Not promoting the gift of talent to flourish

### Institutional approach

- Development and *formation* programs are not effective in instilling spiritual enrichment

### Leadership

- The attitude of self-actualization
- Leadership quality that is incapable of instilling interpersonal relation

### Others

- Priest/laity ratio,
- Places of Worship
- Well trained and pastorally grounded Catechist
- Daily Masses accessible to all faithful
- Guided Retreats
- Counsellors
- Walk in confessions
- Trained and well-grounded Bible studies guides
- Religious infrastructures
- Classes, schools, pastoral colleges
- Sabbatical leave for priests and nuns to attend refresher courses, and deepening of their minds

## The ideal reality of the church or envisioned reality of the church

Accordingly, for a synodal church: Communion, Participation and Mission are naturally required to bring about the dream church sodality. Of which, the reality of the envisioned church synodality is:

1. The People of God fully understand what is “Journeying together” with coherent understanding about church journeying together, whereby all of the view that it is an essential characteristic of being church, spiritual enrichment, people of God in unity and continuously nurtured, formed and shepherded.
2. The *faithful* of the church are journeying together as a *consequence of general awareness about church ‘Journeying Together’*.
3. True compassion is the norm in the church because passion is manifested and sustainable as a way to serve those in need. The church is a place to seek remedy for personal problems.

4. Strong and active participation in the Liturgy. Since active participation in the liturgy is nurtured and the laity have full understanding of the liturgy.
5. Essential missionary development is established. *This is a result* of the general awareness and understanding of *being a missionary* with committed actions toward fulfillment of the mission supported by a proper institutional framework.
6. The broad span of dialogue participation because participation in the church's dialogues is nurtured and extended into the society at large.
7. The ascertained direction of journeying together with other Christian denominations because of established connection with a wider scope and common goal for which a shared mission *is set to be accomplished*.
8. Strong True Teamwork and co-responsibility because teamwork and co-responsibility *have been* established.
9. Strong in communal spiritual discernment that promotes mutual sharing for the common good, and an awareness of the importance of listening and sustainability due to strong leadership.
10. Intensive propagation of living a life of communion, participation and mission, promotes a common and fair understanding of the *concept* (living a life of communion, participation and mission) arising from an appropriate institutional framework and approach.

## Hope and Faith

With the will of God, ideal synodality will manifest in the entire Catholic Church, *where* the people of God journeying together as one - Christ-centered Community Serving One Another With Love.

### 6. Growth in Synodality

This Synodal process has actually helped us see and reflect on the needs to grow as a synodal church / Diocese. It has affirmed us to realize that in order to grow, the people of God need to come together, putting aside all differences and need to have a sense of mission – Christ's mission.

We are invited to deepen the call to renewal and to make it clear that renewal does not only concerns individuals but the entire Church (EG: 26). There is always the tendency that leaders of the church do not want changes and prefer to remain stagnant in the "zone" they have created. Due to this matter, continuous formation is needed to plant and nurture the "seed" of mission in their hearts.

We are also being affirmed that the whole synodal process has actually leads us back to the 6 mission goals of our Diocese as follows:

- a) To nurture active participation in the church with the Eucharist as the source and summit of Christian life.
- b) To foster the spirit of unity in diversity.
- c) To intensify on-going faith formation.
- d) To enhance living the gospel values through deeper understanding on the Social Teaching of the Catholic Church.
- e) To promote vocation
- f) To foster family values.

## 7. The Cultural Image

The logo symbolizes the multi-racial and multi-cultural community of the Diocese of Sandakan. The significance of the logo is explained as follows:





Map of Sabah that highlights the Diocese of Sandakan, constituting St.Mary's Cathedral Parish of Sandakan, St Martin Parish of Telupid, St Dominic Parish of Lahad Datu, Our Lady of Fatima Parish of Beluran, Holy Trinity Parish of Tawau and Paitan Mission.



An abstract drawing of a boat which symbolizes the Church and the Divine light that shines through the Church in the Diocese of Sandakan.



The seven (7) people in different colours and shapes represent the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural community in the Diocese of Sandakan.

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The cross symbolizes that Jesus Christ is the center of the church and to fix our focus on Him alone in which our faith depends on, from the beginning to the end. (Hebrew 12: 2)



The Holy Spirit, God's loyal helper sent to assist in our journey towards becoming the Christ – centered community, serving one another with Love



## CONCLUSION

The local churches of the Diocese of Sandakan, like any other Catholic churches that spread throughout the world are all this while in synodal form, given the way how they organize and operate spiritually. But everyone, particularly the laity did not realize it as the usage of the term synod is confined to the Bishop Assembly called the Synod of Bishop of which the Head is the Pope.

Having said that the local churches are in synodal form, their synodality on the other hand has its strength and weaknesses as indicated by the reality of the parishioners and the reality of the church which are able to be reflected after prayerful discernment of the responses gathered from the listening process.

Given the strength and weaknesses of the reality of the parishioners and the reality of the church, for the synodal church: communion, participation and mission to be realized, the envisioned reality of the church is essentially be achieved. For this purpose, 6 dotted strategic goals come with the objectives as the way forward to be pursued.

### Way forward

To achieve the ideal synodal church being envisioned, the following strategic goals *are* to be accomplished: -

#### **To nurture active church participation with the Eucharist as a source and summit of Christian life,**

Objectives:

1. Stressing the importance of parental role, serving as the forefront in providing the catechesis of their children and supporting their involvement in church activities.
2. Organizing various spiritual and social activities with the support and help of pastoral groups and parishioners, as well as the active participation of religious and priests, aimed at promoting wider participation in the church.
3. Organizing seminar on liturgy, aimed at stressing the importance of the Eucharist, as being the centre and summit of the Christian lives.
4. Empowering leaders and members of Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) and other communities, encouraging them to be actively involved, in faith formation within their communities.
5. Bringing awareness among parishioners the importance of the homily, being an important part of the liturgy.
6. Reaching out to parishioners and explaining to them the importance of being Church.
7. Having proper preparation for Sunday liturgy aimed at enhancing parishioners' participation in the celebration.

### **To foster a spirit of unity,**

#### **Objectives:**

1. Organizing seminars aimed at inculcating the understanding of being church.
2. Providing opportunities, both spiritually and socially, to integrate and unite the various communities.
3. Cultivating and nurturing a culture of acceptance.

### **To intensify ongoing faith formation,**

#### **Objectives:**

1. Organizing seminars aimed at inculcating the understanding of being a church.
2. Providing opportunities, both spiritually and socially, to integrate and unite the various communities.
3. Cultivating and nurturing a culture of acceptance.

### **To enhance living the Gospel values through a deeper understanding of the Social Teaching of the Catholic Church,**

#### **Objectives:**

1. Promoting awareness and care for God's creation through Sunday school.
2. Organizing seminars on faith designed to enhance parishioners' knowledge of social justice, human right, dignity and activities.
3. Developing an appropriate outreach program aimed at renewing the faith and missionary spirit among parishioners.
4. Formulating awareness programs for parents on the importance of instilling and nurturing the Gospel values among their children from an early age.
5. Emphasizing the need for appropriate training programs and guidance for the catechists and pastoral leaders to impart effectively the Social Teaching of the Catholic Church.

### **To promote vocation, and**

#### **Objectives:**

1. Forming a vocation team.
2. Promoting vocation awareness among young people to respond to God's call to priesthood and religious life.
3. Fostering vocation culture to the priesthood and consecrated life in one's family.

### **To foster family values**

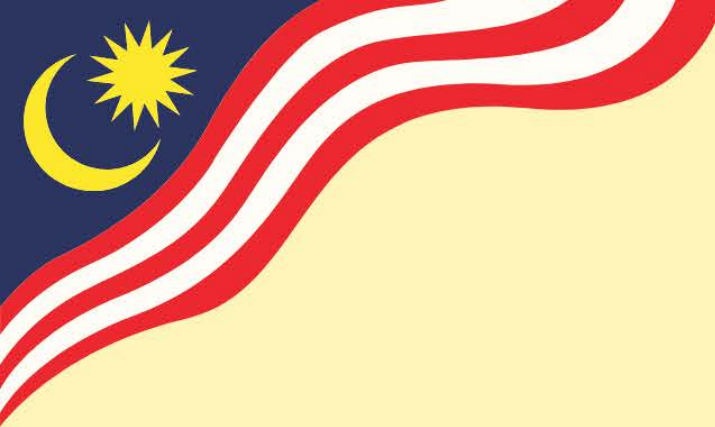
#### **Objectives:**

1. Forming and strengthening family institutions as the domestic church.
2. Strengthening and sustaining family values.
3. Establish a family counseling centre.

## **SUMMARY**

To sum-up the whole process, we again are affirmed that the synodal experience has urge us

- I. To nurture active participation in the church with the Eucharist as the source and summit of Christian life.
- II. To foster the spirit of unity in diversity.
- III. To intensify on-going faith formation.
- IV. To enhance living the gospel values through deeper understanding on the Social Teaching of the Catholic Church.
- V. To promote vocation.
- VI. To foster family values.



# Archdiocese of Kuching



## Synthesis Report



For a synodal Church  
communion | participation | mission

**ARCHDIOCESE OF KUCHING**  
**PRE-SYNOD SYNTHESIS REPORT**

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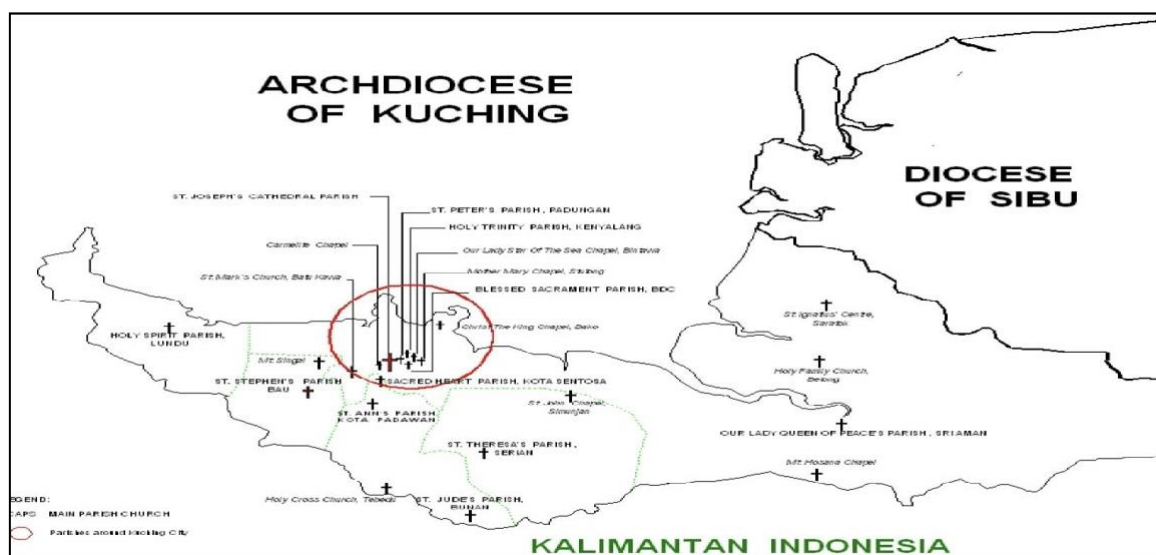
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## 1. **INTRODUCTION: SYNTHESIS KEY POINTS**

### **1.1 Spirit of Synodality**

For Kuching Archdiocese, the spirit of synodality had actually began as early as 1989 when it held a series of key pastoral events that led to the formation and building up of the whole church as the Archdiocese of Kuching comprising 12 parishes (6 city and 6 rural) and the eventual formulation of its Vision "*We are the Church, Disciples of the Word, in Communion for Mission*" during ACTS Congress 2012. These came to fruition with the steer of the Holy Spirit and the relentless collaborations and engagements among clergy, religious, lay leaders and grassroots in villages and parishes that stretched from Lundu district in the southern tip of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division of Sarawak to Saratok in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division. Kuching Archdiocese has about 350 outstation/Mass centres to serve the multi-ethnic community. Refer *Appendix 1-A* on Sarawak ethnic composition and Catholic population.

The formation of Kuching Archdiocese necessitated the establishment of the Parish Pastoral Councils (PPC) in all 12 parishes which today are supported by 4 Archdiocesan Commissions namely (i) Christian Family Life (ii) Bible & Faith Formation (iii) Mission & Human Development and (iv) Youth; and 4 Archdiocesan Committees namely (i) Faith Formation (ii) Vocation (iii) Social Communications, and (iv) Deliverance & Exorcism. The boundary of the Archdiocese of Kuching covers the areas as in *Figure 1* below.



*Figure 1 – Boundary of Archdiocese of Kuching*

Following the 2012 Congress, archbishop/emeritus, priests, religious, lay leaders and grassroots from the 12 parishes once again congregated as one family in August 2017 at the first Kuching Archdiocesan Pastoral Assembly (KAPA) to listen, deliberate on progress, concerns, issues and challenges experienced by the church and parishes and to formulate action plans which eventually were endorsed at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council (APC) Board Meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> September 2017. The preparatory works prior to the Assembly involved 'Voices on the Ground' survey feedbacks deliberation using the 'SEE-JUDGE-ACT' methodology (also referred to as 'Review, Reassess, Renew') led by parish leaders and their grassroots before escalation at the KAPA, based on a 'bottom-up' approach. Central to this process is the invocation of the Holy Spirit to stir and steer hearts and the enthronement of the Bible as an inspiration to the congregation. This whole process became the norm approach throughout the Archdiocese and considered similar to the synodal concept of "*participation, communion, mission*" advocated by the Vatican.

### **1.2 Synod of Bishops' Synodal Process Roll Out at Kuching Archdiocese**

i) Coincidentally, in mid 2021 the Archdiocese began to prepare for its 5-year term review of its vision-mission journey post KAPA 2017, with a view to reset its direction and revitalise the existence and

growth of the Catholic faith into the new millennium, given the prevalence of a turbulent world brought about by the pandemic, unpredictable political and socio-economic state of affairs, technological and ecological shifts, changing demographics (emergence of urban poor, in-country migrants, gender expression, etc) and new opportunities (e.g. interfaith collaboration; technological advancement).

ii) In line with the direction and guidelines provided by the Synod of Bishops, the Archdiocese at its 30<sup>th</sup> APC Annual General Meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2021 endorsed the 5-year Roadmap integrating the planning, preparation and participation of key pastoral events viz Parish Pastoral Assembly 2022 (PPA), KAPA 2022, Synod of Bishops 2023 and Pan Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026 (PMPC2026). See Appendix 1-B.

### **1.3 Key Milestone (Refer Appendix 1-C)**

The key milestone in rolling out the Synodal process in the Archdiocese is summarised as follows:-

25/9/21	Presentation of the Integrated Roadmap and Synodal Process Guidelines to APC Board AGM for adoption (via Zoom) (40 attendees)
16/10/21	Briefing and consultation by Fr Patrick Heng on the Roadmap, Synodal Process Guidelines & Preparatory Plan at the Archdiocesan Joint Day of Recollection – Archbishop, priests, religious, seminarians, parish pastoral councillors, commission heads, lay leaders (via Zoom) (300 attendees)
17/10/21	Launching of the Archdiocesan Phase of the Synod of Bishop at Sunday Mass by His Grace, Archbishop Simon Poh via live-streaming and also in all parishes Sunday Mass
Nov'21	Formation of APC Synod-KAPA Central Working Committee (APC CWC)
	Development of KAPA 2022 Survey Questionnaire, embedding the Synodal process guidelines and Archdiocese 5 Vision Dimensions – Faith Formation, Communion, Mission, Human Development and Social Justice, as a tool to facilitate synodal engagements with grassroots.
	Formation of the 12 Parishes' Synod-KAPA Work Teams, led by rectors
22/12/21	Briefing and Launching of KAPA 2022 Survey Questionnaire to parish rectors, priests, work teams, komiti gereja kampung/tamans/Mass centres by Fr Patrick Heng (via Zoom) (80 attendees)
Jan-Feb'22	Parishes' facilitation of the Survey exercise & synodal process
28/2-15/3/22	Survey feedbacks analysis and synthesis by APC CWC team
25/3/22	Submission of Synodal process report by parishes to APC CWC
26/3/22	Presentation of Overall Survey Findings to APC 47 <sup>th</sup> Executive Board Meeting
31/3/22	Dissemination of Individual Parishes Survey Findings for preparation of their Parish Pastoral Assembly (PPA).
23/4/22	Briefing and consultation by Fr Patrick Heng to parish rectors, PPCs and WTs on PPA 2022 Planning, Formats, Templates & Timeline
24/4-23/5/22	Parishes conduct Pre-PPA consultation and engagements with grassroots using the SEE-JUDGE-ACT approach to reach as far as zones, kampungs and tamans
1-30/6/22	Parishes conduct their respective PPAs.
July-Sept	Synthesis of PPAs outcomes in preparation for KAPA 2022
Oct 2022	KAPA 2022

### **1.4 Synodal Process Experience**

i) The greatest challenge faced by parishes of Kuching Archdiocese was the limitation of conducting the much-adapted physical engagements and reach outs to grassroots in both urban and rural areas in view of the pandemic movement control order (MCO) and the strict enforcement of the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) by the State Government. Nonetheless, parishes were able to conduct

the consultations in small groups virtually via zoom and/or social media platforms, mainly led and facilitated by their respective priests, parish councillors, work teams and prayer/zone leaders (Komiti Gereja Kampungs/Tamans). Parish priests leveraged on their homilies and church announcements, virtually as well as whenever Masses were allowed, to advocate the spiritual context of synodality and the process of engaging 'voices on the ground', an exercise so familiar with the community as they had participated in past Archdiocese Congress and Assembly. However, because of the pandemic situation, the Archdiocese and parishes were not able to bring the best out of this synodal process as the community had been so accustomed to physical and spiritual engagements and thus did not respond well with virtual interactions.

ii) KAPA 2022 Survey questionnaire in 3 languages (English, Bahasa Malaysia and Mandarin) became an essential tool that helped parishes and grassroots to reach out, interact and respond in a more focused and objective manner on their experiences during the pandemic. Open-ended questions and statements in the questionnaire on the 5 vision focus areas (Faith Formation, Communion, Mission, Human Development and Social Justice) enabled respondents to freely air their feelings, experiences, observations, views, opinions and suggestions, affecting them personally, family-wise, community and church. At the close of the survey end February 2022, there was 4,787 responses, majority of which were from the rural parishes (62%) while the rest from urban parishes (38%).

iii) Despite the limitations and challenges experienced by the entire Archdiocese, there were few notable observations from the process:-

a) Positive

- grassroots (respondents) were more attentive and critical of challenges, issues and concerns affecting the church and the community (felt through personal experiences and also easy accessibility to varied religious programmes/devotions/Masses on social media e.g. YouTube, Zoom etc).
- grassroots were more expressive in their experiences and observations – their spiritual wellbeing, relationship with God, clergy and community; their role in mission of the church;
- parishes and grassroots' ability and willingness to adapt to change such as leveraging on digital mode of communication; synergy in sharing resources (contribution of funds to parishes in need especially in rural areas),
- parishioners' quick response to relief aid (food, financial) - being more sympathetic and empathetic to others.

b) Negative

- limitation in accessibility to digital communication (unstable/non-availability of network, unfamiliar to use gadgets) dampen interests to participate in the synodal process.
- tendency of parishioners especially the young ones to feel isolated and losing their spiritual connection with the church following long period of physical/social distancing.
- reluctance to come back to church for Masses – too complacent and comfortable with live-stream Masses.

## **2. PROCESS TAKEN**

### **2.1 Steps of Consultation**

i) The consultation first began at a higher level with the presentation of the Synodal Process Guideline and Timeline issued by the Vatican to the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council Executive Board for adoption on 26<sup>th</sup> September 2021. Thereafter, the formation of the APC Synod-KAPA Central Working Committee (APC CWC) led by Fr Patrick Heng and comprising priests and representatives from Parish Pastoral Councils, Mission & Human Development Commission and Youth Commission. The APC CWC



developed the KAPA 2022 Survey Questionnaire as a tool to facilitate the synodal process, considering the limitation of the prevailing Movement Control Order (MCO) to conduct physical engagements in parishes. The framework is shown in *Figure 2* below.

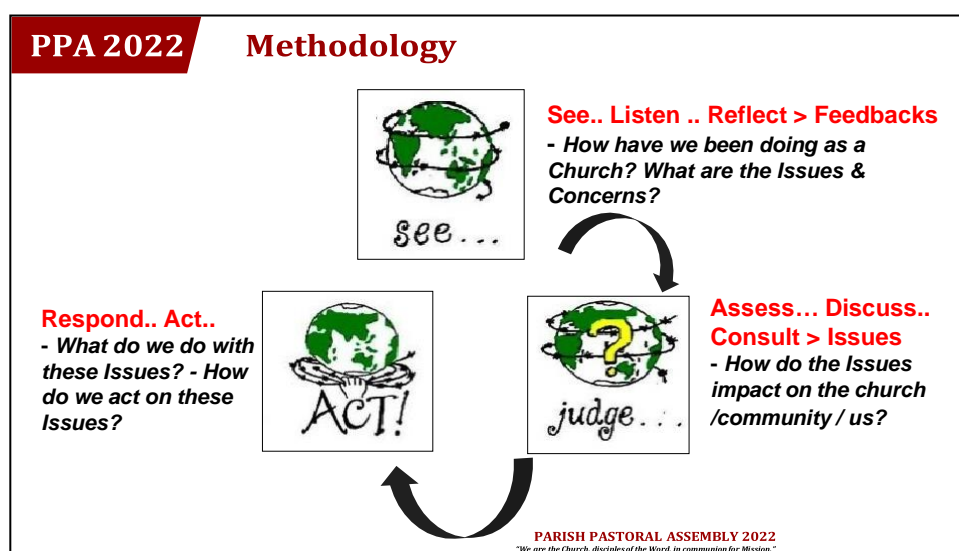


*Figure 2 : KAPA 2022 Questionnaire Framework*

ii) The second phase of the consultation involved leaders of the 12 parishes - rectors, priests, religious, parish pastoral councillors and lay leaders where they were briefed with the guidelines and process steps by APC CWC during **3 occasions** viz. (i) **Joint Day of Recollection on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2021** (ii) **APC 46<sup>th</sup> Executive Board Meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2021** and (iii) **Synod Facilitators Briefing on 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2021**.

## 2.2 Questions Posed & Methodology

i) Standard questions to facilitate the process of consultation and the use of See-Judge-Act methodology (as illustrated in *Figure 3* below) were extended to parishes to stimulate discussions and draw experiences, feelings, views and opinions of grassroots using the above KAPA 2022 Questionnaire as a guide. The Questionnaire covered the 5 Vision dimensions of the Archdiocese's Vision and Mission i.e. *Faith Formation, Communion, Mission, Human Development and Social Justice* that actually embedded the essence of the 4 encyclicals – *Amoris Laetitia, Evangelii Gaudium, Fratelli Tutti* and *Laudato Si'*. Refer Appendix 2.



*Figure 3: SEE-JUDGE-ACT Methodology*

## **2.3 Measures Taken to Engage & Reach Out**

### **1. Formation of Work Teams & Zones**

i) Parishes formed their own Work Teams (WTs) to facilitate and steer the consultation process, reaching out to as wide as possible to their community and grassroots. Work Teams were assigned respective Zones and/or Groups (ministries, apostolates, church committees, other community groups). For rural parishes, facilitations were mainly done by the Parish Pastoral Councillors, Komiti Gereja Kampung/Taman and/or Zones Leaders. Parishes with outstation/Mass centres had to assign zones to facilitate groups to reach out to parishioners/peripheries in their respective areas. *Refer Appendix 3 – Zones.*

### **2. Reach Outs & Participation**

i) Parishes leveraged on all forms of reaching out to parishioners: priests homilies, church announcements, social media (Whatsapp groups, Facebook, website, Zoom sessions etc). Questionnaires were sent on Google platforms so that parishioners could participate online at their convenience. Printed questionnaires were disseminated to those who are not IT savvy or having constraint with telecommunication facilities in their areas - elderly and kampung folks. Dialogue sessions and weekend formal gathering (where permissible) by Work Teams/Zone representatives and online Zoom sessions were forms of engagement and consultations. Assistance of family members were encouraged to help answer questions especially to the elderly/illiterate.

ii) Due to the MCO and despite rigorous reach out efforts, only 4,787 parishioners managed to participate in the process, the majority of whom were from the rural parishes (62%) while the rest from urban parishes (38%). Of the 3 languages involved in the consultation process, Bahasa Malaysia was widely used (66%), followed by English (29%) and Mandarin (5%). Gender wise, 55% were female and 45% male; while age-wise, 46% were from the 36-55 years; 26% from the 18-35 years, 26% from the 56-75 years, 5% from the under 18 years and 1% from the 76 & above. In terms of employment profile, majority were in permanent employment (46%), unemployed were 16% and studying were 13%. 73% of the participants were parishioners representing grassroots. Noteworthy groups are the RCIA and peripheries from the interior Kampung.

## **3. THE EXPERIENCE**

### **3.1 High Points**

i) Rural grassroots were more responsive in voicing their feelings, experiences and suggestions especially in the area of faith formation (catechism classes for children), possibly because they were more close-knitted as a community and able to relate to the environment and events around them. They included the peripheries. These are parishes of St Ann Kota Padawan, St Jude Bunan-Tebedu, Our Lady Queen of Peace, Sri Aman.

ii) Parish (St Ann Kota Padawan) that leveraged on close collaboration and commitment of parish priests, church leaders, Komiti Gereja Kampung/Tamans in engaging and journeying with their parishioners in this process achieved the highest participation (1,173 responses) within the Archdiocese despite having to cover 6 zones with many kampung located in remote areas with weak/no telecommunication services.

iii) There was notable perception that embracing a synodality culture can help church to be more responsive to parishioners' needs, re-examine its strengths and weaknesses for improvement and growth and parishioners to reflect and renew their spirituality/faith.

### **3.2 Low Points**

i) There was low participation/mild response from among urban parishes than expected despite having good access to digital mode of communication. Participation was mainly among those active in church as the rest were those who might not have much interest to be involved in the church life and mission and those who are IT illiterate and needed physical guidance.

### **3.3 Attitudes & Feelings**

i) Although majority of the leaders and parishioners appreciated the intent and approach of the consultation process, however the MCO, stringent SOPs, fear of COVID-19 infection and stigma of isolation had discouraged most to participate in the exercise either physically (where permissible) or virtually. Generally, there was this sense of disconnection with the church given the prolonged absence from Masses and church activities. Most parishes felt the option to reach out to grassroots was very limited and untimely (done during MCO) such that the noble intent of the synodal process could not bring full benefit to the beneficiaries i.e. parishes, Archdiocese and parishioners in general.

ii) There were some level of reluctance among parishioners who were not in favour of being reached out/consulted via virtual platform, possibly for a number of reasons: feeling impersonal of the whole process, hence could not feel the spiritual context/connection; not IT savvy; did not understand terminology used in briefings and questionnaire; methodology (See-Judge-Act) and questions posed were too deep for their understanding (spiritual inadequacy), sceptical about the purpose and benefits of undertaking the process as the exercise seemed to be repetitive and same as those done in earlier Congress/Assembly yet significant outcome was not felt or seen.

### **3.4 Diverse Points of View**

#### **i) Personal Relationship with God**

There was mixed reaction among church leaders in respect to question on personal relationship with God: some felt this might be too personal and sensitive as it encroached on an individual's spiritual wellbeing, while others perceived it favourably as a form of one's self reflection and an opportunity for the church to find ways to connect with those needing support.

#### **ii) Advocating the Catholic Faith through Church Practices**

Different sectors of the parishioners especially youth having different opinions or stand on how Church activities should be carried out. Church is perceived to have failed in advocating the Catholic faith. Religious classes and homilies perceived as not putting adequate emphasis on basic spiritual teachings especially for grass roots.

### **3.5 Fruits of the Holy Spirit**

i) The launching of the Archdiocesan Phase of the Synod of Bishop Mass on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2021 was celebrated by His Grace, Archbishop Simon Poh, live-streamed from St Joseph's Cathedral Kuching and concurrent Sunset/Sunday Masses in all parishes invoked the stir and steer of the Holy Spirit in guiding leaders and parishioners in the synodal process. Homilies, church announcements and prayer to the Holy Spirit "Adsumus Sancte Spiritus" during devotions and group engagements instilled the spirit of teamwork, mutual understanding, humility and perseverance. Despite the physical constraints, some rural participants (those involved in briefing and cascading the questionnaires) experienced the feeling of joy, patience and faithfulness. Some parishes expressed gratitude as the whole process provided avenue for leaders and communities to reconnect and be heard especially with the prolonged MCO.

## **4. THE FEEDBACK**

### **4.1 Leadership**

i) There was strong commitment of parish priests, parish pastoral councillors (PPCs) and lay leaders in communicating and advocating the spirit of synodality, the process and implication to the church and community. This was complemented by the formation of Work Teams comprising PPCs, lay leaders, youth, Komiti Gereja Kampung/Komiti Gereja Taman who were trained by APC CWC to explain the significance and process of synodality and the vision of the Pope. This signified committed leadership at all levels.

ii) There was expectation on church leadership to be more open and non-judgmental towards diversity i.e. gender expression and individualism.

#### **4.2 Significance – Spiritual Growth**

i) There is deep concern especially among urban parishes that the church should do more to support and journey with the RCIA neophytes/newly baptised in their spiritual growth. Godparenting roles need to be reinforced. Welcome the newly baptised to participate in ministries such as choir, warden to assimilate them into the church family.

ii) For the young, extend pastoral care and guidance such as spiritual/moral support, fellowship, leadership mentoring and counselling to Catholic groups in tertiary and higher institutions. Advocate non-judgmental attitude among Catholic students.

#### **4.3 New/Interesting Perspectives**

i) The process of conversion into the catholic faith such as RCIA and RCIC should not be complicated. Unlike those of other faith like Islamization which is very simple thus allowing more people to embrace their faith.

ii) Church leaders should be allowed some flexibility when dealing with religious and political issues in the church community especially in advocating social justice and human rights. Encourage Christian Ministers in using their political status to advocate and protect the church/Christian faith, in contrast to the Muslim Ministers who are always ready to defend Islam in every single aspects.

iii) Basic catechism formation programmes for parents were recommended so that they become the first catechists to their children.

iv) More empowerment to town and kampung/taman communities to lead and participate in the works of mercy such as relief aid for the poor and needy in the spirit of communion and mission.

v) There is desire to see the role of the church advocating human development for the underprivileged youth through establishing collaboration with other skill/employment institutions as a missionary outreach programme to help them build their future and remain in the church family.

vi) Social teachings of the church that put emphasis on interfaith relationships and implications of conversions should be introduced even at very young age to strengthen the resilience of the young in dealing with social pressures and loyalty to embrace the Catholic faith.

#### **4.4 Real Life Experiences**

i) Keeping up the faith in times of the MCO pandemic is a real life test for resilience and perseverance and the emergence of new norms/practices for the church and community.

ii) There was this dilemma of either embracing the Catholic faith or other faith at early age, given the inadequate access, guidance and exposure to the Catholic church and its teachings.

### **5. CURRENT REALITY**

#### **5.1 Church Ideology & Healing**

i) General perception of some parishioners and also others of different faith is that the Catholic faith is rather cumbersome to embrace due to its strict protocols/doctrines as, compared to other denomination which is far much easy and simple.

ii) The church should adopt a softer approach to be receptive in listening to suggestions, grievances and expressions from parishioners and not just turn them down and/or judge them; be more affable (friendly and warm) in reaching out to its peripheries, be sensitive and adaptable to their ethnic culture.

Exclusivity, favoritism and biasness should be eradicated as this negativity will turn away people from the church.

iii) Strong spiritual and emotional support of elders and peers is very much needed to help the young and vulnerable to be resilient in dealing with temptations for interfaith conversion and diversion from teachings of the church.

## **6. GROWTH IN SYNODALITY**

i) Church should have avenue or platform for parishioners to air their worries, burdens and seek emotional and spiritual guidance in a safe, trusting and empathetic environment as this is central to the spirit of synodality. Lay organisations should be more responsive in rendering relief and rehabilitation support (financial, facilities, manpower etc) to those who are struggling emotionally and/or financially during crisis.

ii) Church and community working alongside to be creative in responding to the new norm of rejuvenating its mission purpose and instilling Christ-centred faith deepening programmes.

iii) Church leaders and community can sustain the spirit of synodality by embracing and advocating openness for participation, consultation, listening and sharing as a culture that will strengthen relationship among the community.

## **7. THE CULTURAL IMAGE**

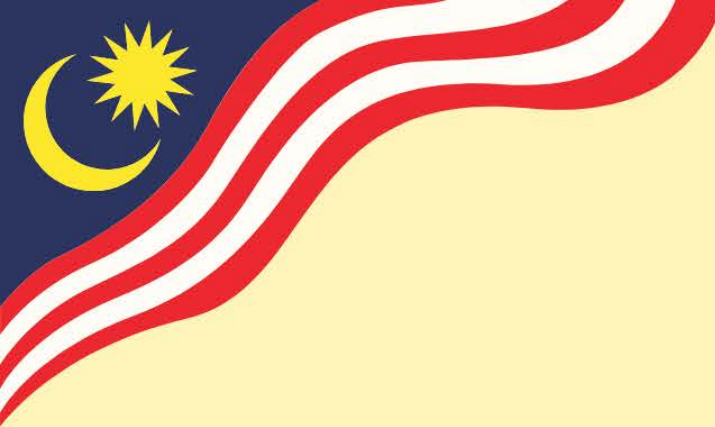
i) A vibrant, caring and progressive church that inculcate unity in diversity among its community, one that will draw more youth to serve in the Lord's vineyard, and one that will relentlessly reach out to the peripheries.

ii) A House of Worship that preserve inclusivity and the uniqueness of our traditional identity of various ethnic groups.

## **8. CONCLUSION**

i) Experiences and feedbacks from this whole synodal process form the basis of drawing the focus areas for deliberations at the forthcoming Parish Pastoral Assemblies scheduled in June 2022 and preparation for the Kuching Archdiocese Pastoral Assembly scheduled in October 2022 as the church moves forward into the new future.

ii) The spirit of synodality will undoubtedly continue to be the hallmark of the Catholic faith in the Archdiocese of Kuching as it advocates its vision as *"We are the Church, Disciples of the Word, in Communion for Mission"*.



# Diocese of Sibü



## Synthesis Report



For a synodal Church  
communion | participation | mission



# Synod 2023

# Synthesis Report

## Diocese of Sibü

Prepared by the Secretariat Team  
Synodal Process Sibü



Diocese of Sibü,  
Sarawak  
Malaysia

# Walking Together: Towards a Synodal Church



## **Synod 2023 - Synthesis Report of the Diocese of Sibuyan**

### **1. Introduction**

There were many challenges faced in carrying out the consultation among the People of God in the diocese of Sibuyan. Not only did the facilitators have to deal with the passivity and the fixed mind-set of the people consulted, they also had to deal with the scepticism of many, including the priests. Many felt that the whole process was a complete waste of time and effort as nothing worthwhile would come out of the consultation. Inaccessibility was also a major challenge considering that a number of the parishioners from rural parishes live remotely from the main towns. Moreover the myriads of languages that exist among the various cultures proved to be an insurmountable challenge when it came to explaining the synodal process. But nothing could be a greater hindrance than the coronavirus pandemic with many citing the pandemic as the main factor in not participating.

A number of difficulties arose out of the challenges. The scepticism expressed by many of the parishioners and priests contributed to a lack of participation in the consultation and the lack of support by many of the clergy. The laity have never been forthcoming in expressing their opinion on church matters and have always relied on the clergy to show the way. Even though the availability of the internet made it possible to utilise social media as a means of consultation, those in remote areas did not have this means nor the connectivity and besides, many of the rural folks, as well as the elderly in urban areas, are not savvy in using social media. The lack of trained facilitators and the scarcity of translated materials meant that many were left out or did not fully understand the purpose of the consultation and hence did not participate. This lack of facilitators also meant that it would be nearly impossible to reach all those living in remote villages. The fear and restrictions imposed as a consequence of the pandemic contributed greatly to a reluctance to participate in face-to-face meetings.

As a consequence of the many challenges and difficulties faced, it is understandable why the consultations were mostly among those who were already active in church groups and organisations who live in towns where the possibility of uninterrupted online interactions in the safety and protection of one's own home were easily and conveniently available. Even that is not to be taken as a given. Many were still reluctant to be consulted or to share their stories out of fear and mistrust. Moreover, many are of the opinion that their voices do not count. There is a misguided view among some that nothing derogatory or negative should be said about the church or the clergy. However, among those who took the opportunity to express the hurts and disappointments they have suffered through the hands of some clergy albeit the church, the online and personal consultations provided the anonymity that allowed them to speak freely and without reservations.

What was surprising was the reaction of some of the participants who notably were quite grateful to be given an opportunity to voice some of their grievances, especially about the treatment some of them had received from church authorities. Some of them expressed joy and happiness that the church is expressing a willingness to listen and allowing them the opportunity to speak freely and express their views openly. There were also participants who were curious yet excited about taking part in the synodal process. The enthusiasm shown by the older members was unexpected and it was even more surprising to learn that the youth felt neglected. Despite the challenges and difficulties faced, the courage of those who participated was especially noted. Almost all groups, lay movements and communities participated in the synodal process despite the challenges and difficulties faced.



## 2. The Process

In order to coordinate the consultation process to be carried out at the diocesan level, a Diocesan Synodal Coordinating team was established by the main Diocesan Synodal Coordinator who had been appointed by the Bishop. This team consisted of either one or two representatives from each of the twelve parishes of the diocese. Thereafter, the various parishes created their own team to carry out the synodal process in their respective parishes. Regular meetings were held through Google Meet to monitor the progress of the consultation taking place in each parish as well as to disseminate information pertaining to the synodal process. Each parish was encouraged to recruit facilitators for the consultation. The initial group of facilitators from the various parishes was given training and encouraged to use a response sheet to collect the necessary data from the respondents.

The parishes embarked on the consultation process in their own way, taking into account the local situation. Some opted to use questionnaires while others preferred to carry out the consultation virtually. However, face-to-face consultation was the preferred mode and highly encouraged. The Diocesan Coordinating Team prepared materials for the dissemination of information regarding the Synodal consultation which included prayer cards and brochures in different languages, and a video.

The initial target groups were the active members of the parishes especially those who were already members of various groups and organisations in the church. This was later extended to include the regular church-goers who were not members of groups. The facilitators were also encouraged to reach out to those who were on the peripheries.

The Diocesan Synodal Secretariat was eventually formed to organise the synthesis report writing as well as the Pre-Synodal Assembly. The Coordinating Team was responsible for collecting and compiling the data from each of the parishes following a given template. The Synod Secretariat compiled the first draft of the Diocesan Synthesis Report by putting together the reports of the twelve parishes as a single report. This was eventually edited and reduced to the required number of pages.

The main questions asked during the consultation were the two fundamental questions:

- How is synodality happening in our local church today?
- What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our “journeying together?”

These questions were posed in a number of ways according to the situation. Some facilitators preferred to use the 10 thematic questions, using those that are relevant to each specific group of respondents while others freely spoke on various topics such as church, parish, clergy, leaders, organisations, offering comments, criticisms, and suggestions for improvement. Some organisations answered all the ten different thematic questions in small group sessions virtually. Some parishes used different sets of questionnaires for different groups/categories of people in the parish.

One of the many drawbacks on the method used to coordinate the consultation efforts throughout the diocese was the overarching dependence on the parish representatives. When the parish representatives failed to attend a meeting or misunderstood instructions or misinformed others in their parishes, or were disinterested in the process, there was a likelihood of excluding a big section of potential participants. This happened in a few of the parishes in one way or another.

Another drawback was allowing the parishes the freedom to carry out the consultation using whatever method they were comfortable with. This was to ensure that the parish were not expected to adopt a particular method as they were in a better position to know what would work best in their own particular situation. This led to varying results and inconsistencies in the data collection which could easily have been avoided if a standard procedure was adhered to. On hindsight, it would have been far better to standardise the procedures for consultation for all the parishes to avoid confusion and complications.

Efforts were made to try to include as many people as possible from all walks of life in the consultation process. In the urban centres, the consultations were carried out to include as many people as possible through the members of groups, organisations and communities. Each group had its own facilitators and these facilitators were also requested to reach out to other individuals who were not members of groups. In the rural parishes, there was a heavy reliance on catechists and prayer leaders to reach out to those living in longhouses and in remote areas and understandably, it was difficult to cover a huge area in the limited time frame given for the consultation. Questionnaires and flyers were also distributed in many of these remote areas and eventually collected. A lot of ground was covered by including the consultation in other church programmes such as marriage preparation, catechism classes, but also through face-to-face encounters during weddings, funerals and other social activities. A few dedicated facilitators reached out to special groups such as the youth, teachers, students, the LGBTQ community and the migrant workers in the oil palm plantations. One facilitator reached out to those on the peripheries through a feeding programme. Those unable to meet up were encouraged to participate in sessions online while there were also some who preferred phone calls and meeting up in their homes or coffeeshops.

Because of some misunderstanding, some people were left out of the consultation. Some thought that it was meant only for those not involved in any church groups or committees. Some elderly folks thought that it was beyond their capabilities. Some youth did not participate due to the notion that their opinions were not important and would not matter anyway. Some were totally against taking part because of their mistrust towards church authorities or anything to do with church and lack of commitment to the church. Those lapsed were also sidelined and showed no interest in church-related matters while there were those who were happy with things as they are and had no issues at all. Many of those living in remote areas were especially left out of the consultation due to inaccessibility issues.

It was noteworthy that quite a large number of youth took part in the consultation process because of the efforts of six young working adults. They were able to reach out to about 650 youth in schools, the university and also to some belonging to the LGBTQ group. A majority of the youth maintained that they were not given opportunities to serve in the church and their services and opinions were not welcomed and often felt marginalised by the church. The participation of the elderly and their caretakers brought to the fore the need to give more attention to their needs. Unlike in former days, there is a decline in home visitation from the clergy or church leaders and in the distribution of Holy Communion to the sick and housebound. Many of those who used to serve actively in the church now feel neglected and forgotten. The participation of the divorced was also noteworthy. They highlighted the lack of available help and opportunities to share their desperation within the church. Often they received the help they needed from the other Christian churches. Some have even become Muslims or Buddhists to get some respite. Noting that divorced cases are on the rise, it was suggested that the church should expound her stance on divorce and offer to rehabilitate divorcees into church life and provide counselling and advice to couples whose marriages are on the brink of break-up.

### 3. The Experience

The consultation process provided an opportunity for the participants to express their thoughts and opinions on church-related matters. It was also an opportunity for the church authorities to listen to the grievances, joys, happiness, complaints, experiences, hurts, fears, courage, and sufferings of the People of God. By taking part in the consultation, the participants were reassured that they need not fear when they spoke their mind. They were made aware of the need to walk together in communion with one another despite differences in race, nationality, language, culture, education, age, status, occupation or wealth in order to be Church. They were also reminded of the need to make an effort to be involved and focus on the building up of the church community. The consultation could be utilised as a tool to empower the community.

When consulted, many were open-minded and had positive ideas on how to improve the parish and therefore made a concerted effort to provide feedback while others were more reserved. There was excitement expressed over the fact that the voice of the ordinary Catholics can now be heard by the hierarchy and the church. But there were also mixed feelings on the process but most were enthusiastic, forthcoming and grateful for the opportunity to speak out and hopeful that things might change. Though welcomed and timely for some participants, there were also those who felt frustrated because of the lack of information concerning the Synod. Some were shy and hesitant about sharing and therefore apprehensive and resisted the consultation out of fear, mistrust, and scepticism. Some were simply lukewarm and non-committal and indifferent towards the whole process. There were some too who felt regret over the critical remarks concerning the visible shortcomings of the church leaders.

As a result of this consultation, a lesson in patience and an acceptance of criticisms and opinions of others have filtered through the facilitators. In spite of the various shortcomings encountered, the required information was nevertheless obtained. By going through with the consultation, the participants became acutely aware of the need to listen, to share views, opinions and insights in order to bring forth concerns and therefore provide the opportunity for healing and to identify areas where help is needed. There was also a realisation of all concerned of the importance of missionary work, including a recognition of the failure in advancing this cause and that besides a solid faith formation, there is a need to listen to the Holy Spirit and to each other. Not only the clergy, but together with the laity, the People of God have the responsibility of proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ and this can only be carried out if the church is in communion as a community of faith. Therefore the priests should not be elevated and treated as “Boss” and any form of clericalism is to be avoided. Through the consultation process, a good channel of communication has been established, especially for reaching out and listening to the parishioners thus bridging the gap between the clergy and the laity and giving a more realistic picture of the situation of the church community. Overall, the consultation has been experienced as an opportunity for the People of God to come together to open up new horizons for the local church to pursue the continuity of God’s mission and to discover innovative approaches to carry out the church’s mission in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, thus providing a deeper understanding of one’s faith and role in the church.

### 4. The Feedback

In terms of issues which indicated to the participants the state of “journeying together” of the church community, the following were contentious with varying points of view. Many of those consulted felt that the church should be more flexible when it comes to the question of **Holy Communion for the divorced** or remarried while others felt that they should be refused outright-

ly. If the People of God were to walk together, then the divorcees and their children should be assisted, especially in sacramental matters. "Walking together" also includes **outreach to the poor**, the widowed, and the orphans. While some maintained that they have always been in the forefront of the church's outreach, others felt that their care has been neglected. Moreover, if the church had been "walking together," then there should be a sense of **care and concern during the pandemic**. However, many felt that the church failed to provide the necessary spiritual care, assurances and concern at a time when it was most needed. There was a lack of concern for the spiritual life of the people as no online Masses or devotional activities were made available online from the Diocese. On the contrary, others claimed that the church has lost the sense of sacredness and holiness because of the live streaming of the Eucharist and other devotions. When it came to **faith formation**, there should be more flexibility in terms of scheduling classes especially for those working outstation or on shifts or irregular hours. Some maintained that the length of the RCIA programme should be tailored to the needs of the individuals and others want more emphasis on mission, formation and vocation in post-baptismal instructions. Many were of the opinion that if the People of God were to walk together, then there must also be transparency when it comes to **financial matters** of the parish. The people should be allowed to know how the money of the parish is being used and decisions on church development should not be made only by a few individuals but be brought up for discussion. Church resources should be shared within the whole diocese. Consultation sessions with **the youth** revealed how they felt they were being treated by the church. They felt manipulated, like tools used for work such as cleaning and being altar servers and were not included in decision making. However, others spoke about the youth being only interested in their electronic devices rather than serving the church. As for **the clergy**, some felt that they should spend more time on the spiritual needs of the people and liturgical celebrations rather than busy with parish administrative matters which could be left to the expertise of the laity.

Among the many responses from the participants, there were some that were particularly significant. Many of the respondents felt that there was a lack of synodality in certain areas of church life.

- In the area of youth empowerment, it was felt that more responsibilities, such as leadership roles, should be delegated to the youth and more activities organised around their faith formation and service to the Church.
- The contributions of professionals should not be underestimated but should be utilised especially in financial and health matters while also acknowledging that finding a balance between participating in church life and family commitment could be tricky.
- In terms of financial transparency and accountability, there appeared to be a reluctance to share information on resources and hence a call to be more open in this area of church life. Moreover, the resources should be shared out as financial assistance to church organisations rather than requesting for more donation and depending on groups to fund themselves.
- There is seemingly a lack of concern to assuage the culture of "fear of death." Many lamented the lack of a Catholic cemetery in Sibu and felt the need for a more efficient and caring funeral service team.
- The pastoral care and outreach to people such as the newcomers, the elderly, those living in remote areas and the marginalised are often viewed as being neglected. Newcomers should be welcomed and outreach to the elderly, those in failed marriages, the migrants and the lapsed should be looked into. Some felt alienated from church life because of perceived favouritism and discrimination being practiced in the church. Some groups were perceived as being selective and exclusive. Because of the remoteness of some villages and longhouses, pastoral care is often limited or lacking especially for those who wish to receive the sacraments. There is a lack of priests and the high cost of transport to attend Mass in chapels ac-

cessible only by boat deter many from receiving pastoral care. Moreover the lack of support by being the only Catholic in a longhouse or rural area creates a huge challenge to practice the faith.

- Many felt that the faith is being challenged and that faith formation is generally poor and hence there is a lack of zeal for mission. Because of this lack of faith formation, secularisation seems to be outpacing the church in her efforts especially when the church allows herself to be influenced by the world through the use of social media for Masses and devotions and using Psychology and Sociology to explain away the supernatural. Moreover, every service provided by the church now has a price tag. Even the foundation of the church's social doctrine appears to have been lost.
- Due to the lack of synodality within parish life as experienced by many, there seems to be a support for more consultation among the People of God, especially to bridge the distance between the hierarchy and the various categories of the faithful. Many who participated were personal and emotional in their sharing, and quite open and honest about their own lack of involvement in church life.

As a result of the consultation process, many new perspectives opened up for all those involved.

- The use of online social media platforms opened up the possibility of using them further to promote the faith and to use them as tools to reach out to the young.
- The call for more transparency opens up the possibility of sharing resources and to put them into good use in the diocese, especially in the poorer areas.
- There is a recognition that the church is not simply a place of worship but a sanctuary where one belongs, where the elderly and others can have their needs attended to. The church has also a place in society. This must be reflected in the prayers of the church and in the social activities carried out by the church in the local communities. This new outlook on the church awakens the faithful to new possibilities in outreach especially in cultivating inter-personal relationship, practising collaborative leadership, fostering unity and fellowship and prioritising youth activities. A right approach in these experiences will provide opportunities for growth in understanding, charity and faith which will remain a bulwark against being influenced by outside forces. This comes to the fore in matters of inculturation between faith and the local cultures.
- There is a felt need to revisit and renew faith formation. There is a lack of experienced faith formators as well as teaching materials and as a result, there is a call to set up an online database of teaching materials. Others felt that the sacraments of initiation for adults should not be administered separately, resulting in the unnecessary lengthening of the formation programme. Post-baptismal formation should focus on our commitment to Mission. The importance of the Sacrament of Marriage must be emphasised anew.
- The importance of the BECs in promoting synodality is brought to the fore as a result of the consultation process. Not only do they provide connectivity and communication among the faithful in the different parish localities, they also play an important role in reaching out to the unchurched.
- There is a renewed call to safeguard against secularisation and the erosion of the faith. The divide between daily life and religion is wider than ever with changing values based on achieving happiness through living honestly, providing security, education, family needs, good career and hard work. Religion is being exploited to achieve this end with many showing little faith. There is a recognition that this is a result of inadequate evangelisation and not encountering the Risen Christ.
- There is a renewed focus on the Mission of the Church. The synodal consultation has opened up opportunities for healing and reconciliation and presents itself as a way for the lapsed to return to the church. Therefore, there is a need to be reminded of the mission of the church. This calls for more formation of all concerned to become signs of faith so that others will discover God's love and forgiveness through them.

- The possibility of continuing the synodal consultation process in another form or forum was sounded by some of the respondents. They saw it as providing them an opportunity to be heard and listened to by the church authorities.

There were some sharings which were especially moving. Some of those who shared exhibited resilient faith despite difficulties and sufferings especially that of being the only practicing Catholic in the family. There was also a story of a person who was inspired by the prayers and preaching to get closer to God. Another inspiring story concerns the welcome and support given by the Legion of Mary to some foreigners. The compassion shown by a priest in allowing a non-Christian couple to be buried in a Catholic cemetery resulted in the children returning to the church. There were other stories which were disheartening, for instance, that of not being able to attend Mass because of transport problems, that of being turned away by the church but accepted by another Christian church and especially the attitude of some church leaders causing some to leave the church.

The following are points of view which seem to have strong resonance among the respondents.

- There is a crisis of faith.
- There is also a lack of worthwhile youth activities.
- Care of the elderly needs to be improved (create ministry, establish care home, provision for elder-friendly infrastructure around the church, provide transportation).
- Clericalism should be guarded against by improving relationship between clergy, leaders and laity, having more consultations, avoiding favouritism and discrimination, and priests improving on their demeanour.
- Greater compassion is needed for the marginalised (migrants, disabled, children, single parents, lapsed/former Catholics etc.).
- Concerted effort must be made to recruit members for church groups.
- The teaching of faith/catechism is challenged by the lack of teaching personnel and resources.
- The church should look into reforming the laws on marriage, divorce and remarriage.
- The length of catechetical instructions should be tailored to an individual's faith journey.
- Vocation to the priesthood should be strongly promoted.
- The use of social media should be encouraged among the youth for outreach.

The following are points of view which were mentioned less but are noteworthy.

- Establishing a columbarium which is affordable.
- Providing financial support and fringe benefits for church workers and family members (catechists).
- Ordaining retiree/widower as deacons to ease the shortage of priests.
- Creating more activity centres for children and those with disabilities.
- Encouraging more priest visitations to the longhouses.
- Establishing finance committees to look after financial matters of the parish.
- Providing a channel to voice grievances against the clergy and church leaders.
- Establishing a welcoming committee for newcomers to the parish.
- Reviving or renewing church ministries to enhance greater fellowship and unity.
- Having the bishop visit the parish more often to improve communication, better understanding and to boost the morale of church workers.
- Keeping good priests longer in a parish to finish the development there.
- Working towards a more inculturated church.

## **5. The Current Reality of Synodality in the Diocese of Sibu**

It cannot be said that the whole diocese is making a concerted effort to take part actively in the synodal process. Even some church leaders are not concerned or interested, claiming that it might be used as a means to voice complaints about the church. Some felt that this process is an exercise in futility as their views would never be taken seriously or into consideration by the church authorities. In fact, many were afraid to mention anything derogatory against the hierarchy lest they be targeted or seen as ungrateful. The feedback and responses from the consultation were mostly critical of the church's response to the pastoral needs of the parishioners. Many saw the church as lacking in compassion, rigid and inconsiderate when it comes to dealing with parishioners who are in some kind of difficult situation. There is seemingly a lack of outreach. The church seems to be too inward-looking. There is a lack of focus on mission and on-going formation.

Generally, many at the grassroots level felt that they do not have a say in the decision making process in the diocese. Many decisions affecting the church or its infrastructure or renovations are not transparent to the laity. Many expressed dismay at the continuing reliance on the clergy, especially when everything about the church must come from the initiative and approval of the clergy. In other words, the church is still very much clergy-centred. What the consultation has done is to offer an opportunity for many to voice their grievances and displeasures at the continuing reliance on the priest for every decision to be made concerning the church; from the use of church funds to the many activities that are carried out. Without prejudice to the commendable efforts of so many priests, many are of the opinion nonetheless that the priests should stick to what they were ordained for, that is, caring for the spiritual needs of the people. Other matters should be entrusted to those more qualified to handle them and the laity should be trusted more in decision-making. If synodality is to be cultivated, then transparency and accountability should be upheld in all church matters. Unfortunately, there were also others who were appalled at the way some priests treated certain parishioners with disrespect and unfairness, leading some to conclude that the relationship between the clergy and the laity should be addressed.

The responses and feedback received appear to be mere complaints and grievances about the state of affairs within the parishes, rather than a disclosure of how synodality has taken root within the life of the church community. But it also indicates dissatisfaction within the church. Many of these grievances are directed against the church on how it has fallen short of expectations: the church has failed to do this or that, the church has failed to respond in the way it should, but what it has indicated is that there is a clear lack of understanding among the respondents of what the church is all about. There is a lot expected from the hierarchy. There seems to be a dichotomy between the church as the hierarchy and the church as the People of God. Most parishioners have failed to accept themselves as the church but instead referred to the hierarchy as the church. But it cannot be denied that this dichotomy also discloses the state of synodality within the Diocese. Despite appearing as grievances, the responses and feedback received seem to indicate that there is a lack of synodality within the Diocese even though synodality is more apparent and visible in the life of the small communities and groups within the parishes.

In order for synodality to take root, the following matters need further consideration.

- The relationship between the hierarchy, church leaders and the laity needs looking into.
- Mutual respect and compassion must be upheld in tending to the problems and pastoral needs of the laity.
- With regards to church laws and regulations, flexibility and compassion should be exercised in response to the problems affecting the lives of the people.
- Conversion of heart and changing our negative attitudes toward multiculturalism must take place for unity, mutual acceptance and understanding to prosper among the People of God.
- Inculturation should be accepted and practised at every opportunity to initiate mutual enrichment between Christianity and local cultures.

## 6. Growing in Synodality within the Diocese of Sibiu

For synodality to grow in the Diocese, a few important and practical steps may be taken.

- Walk in communion with each other through listening and being guided by the Holy Spirit.
- Listen regularly to the People of God by carrying out consultations among the clergy and the laity through meetings and interactions to foster closer relationship.
- Encourage participation in groups to nourish spiritual life.
- Revive and reorganise the BECs.
- Carry out more home visitations.
- Allow the youth a bigger role in the church.
- Use social media and other communication tools effectively.
- Include the laity in decision-making in the church.
- Show humility and compassion and a willingness to listen and support each other in our spiritual journey and in our church activities.

The respondents expressed their aspirations and expectations for the Church thus:

- For the church to be outward looking, a more visible engagement of the laity in the church's mission is required.
- The church must move towards being a warm, welcoming, caring and loving community of faith.
- To uphold the motto of the diocese "That All May be One," a visible sharing of resources in the diocese is to be considered.
- The contributions of the youth should be recognised and accepted through relevant formation, guidance and engagement.
- The differences between urban and rural churches in the areas of spiritual development and infrastructure should be avoided and efforts for growth should be consistent and go hand in hand.
- The inclusion of the laity in major decisions affecting the life of the church community should be respected and upheld.
- The clergy are expected to reach out, listen and journey with those at the grassroots level.
- The clergy are also expected to be people-oriented, exercise understanding and helpfulness instead of being judgmental and legalistic in their approach to people's problems.
- To foster unity, cultural differences should be addressed by having more activities which showcase unity in diversity.
- To remain strong in faith and be integrated into church life, the People of God are expected to undergo ongoing formation and to be involved in groups or church organisations.

To address the respondents' aspirations and expectations, the following ought to be considered:

- Carry out regular consultation among the People of God to create mutual trust, respect and love
- Include lay people in the decision making of the parish
- Be more transparent in church financial dealings and other projects
- Learn to mutually listen to one another, be compassionate and understanding of people's problems
- Carry out more outreach to the poor, widowed and orphans, the sick, elderly and the housebound
- Allow the youth more say and involvement in the life of the parish
- Conduct ongoing formation programmes for parishioners
- Improve collaboration and coordination for more effective leadership
- Encourage participation in social activities to foster unity and better relationship
- Encourage parishioners to join church groups or organisations for support
- Re-evaluate the liturgical celebrations to include more inculturation
- Pay regular home visits to families
- Visit and reach out to mission outstations more frequently
- Work out a plan to bring back the lost, lapsed and unchurch
- Reorganise the BEC programme



## 7. Conclusion

In light of the responses and feedback of the participants in the consultation, the following recommendations were proposed to promote synodality:

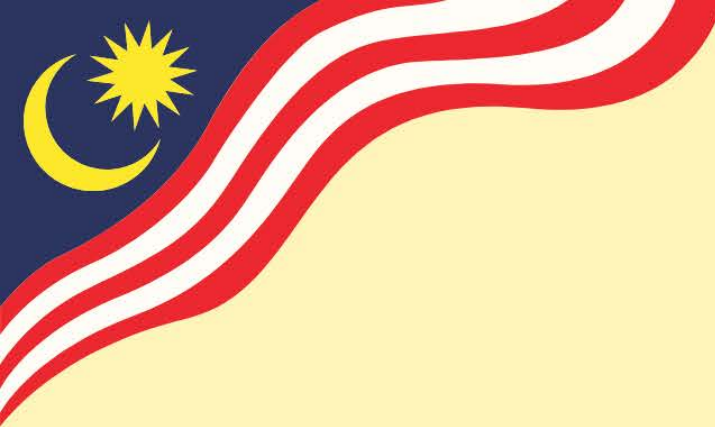
- Bridging the distance (fostering communion)- A synodal church is inclusive and tries to include everyone, even those who live on the peripheries. In order to grow in synodality, relationship and trust between the clergy and the laity have to be strengthened, communications between the various language groups, the clergy and the laity, those in remote areas, all need to be enhanced through various means, regular consultation should be the norm, information must be communicated, listening must be practised at all times, differences to be ironed out amicably, and decisions concerning the church must be agreed upon together.
- Creating communities (encouraging participation) - A synodal church is a community of the People of God where each member uses his/her gifts to build up the Body of Christ. Each member contributes to the life of the community and has a part to play in it. Encouraging church members to be part of a BEC enables them to fulfil their particular role in the community: caring for the less-fortunate members, praying and worshipping together, learning and working together to build community. With a network of small communities, consultation can easily be carried out and greater participation in church life can take place.
- Reaching Out (promoting mission) - A synodal church is a community where all members are compelled to carry out the mission of Jesus in the world by reaching out to the poor and those living on the peripheries. The church community is called to promote mission, to gather the lost and bring them to be part of the Christian community.

In order that the recommendations be implemented, at the recent Pre-Synodal Assembly of the Diocese of Sibü, the following resolutions were made:

*Led by the Holy Spirit, in the spirit of synodality, we resolved to continue to walk together as the People of God by:*

- **fostering communion** among the bishop, priests, religious and the laity under a common vision through regular consultation and listening sessions to provide opportunities for enhancing communication, dialogue and decision-making on issues pertinent to the church, thus creating greater transparency and accountability.
- **encouraging participation** of the faithful in small communities of faith through church activities centring around faith sharing and faith formation, fellowship, guidance for the youth and outreach to the elderly, poor and those on the peripheries in order to create an environment whereby the faithful from all walks of life irrespective of their race, culture and status are fully supported and strengthened, integrated and united, and are enabled and empowered to share their gifts and talents in the service of the whole church community without being judged.
- **promoting mission** so that together as the Body of Christ, we may bring others to Christ through the oneness expressed in our liturgies and in the inclusivity as practised by the various church communities despite differences and especially through our efforts to reach out to those who live on the margins of society.

Because of the multi-ethnicity and culture of the people in the diocese, it would be unfair and inappropriate to adopt a particular cultural image from any of the ethnic groups to represent the synodal experience of the people in the diocese. The multi-ethnicity and culture of Sarawak and the efforts of the people to maintain harmony, integration, respect and religious tolerance while aspiring to statehood already clearly illustrates the synodal journey that the Diocese should embark on.



# Diocese of Miri



## Synthesis Report



For a synodal Church  
communion | participation | mission



# **PRE-SYNOD SYNTHESIS REPORT**



**DIOCESE OF MIRI**  
**SARAWAK**  
**MALAYSIA**

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## INTRODUCTION

In October 2021 Pope Francis convoked a Synod on Synodality, asking that the first phase be a process of encounter, listening and discerning with all people of good will. This report provides a summary of the processes and outcomes, and the highs and lows of inviting the people of the Diocese of Miri to reflect on the question Pope Francis asks.

### About the Diocese

The Diocese of Miri consists of 14 parishes amidst an approximate population of 800,000 which covers an area spanning from Lawas in the northern tip of the State of Sarawak to Belaga in the middle of the state. The Mass-going attendance on pre-covid figures (2019) was about 30,000 of the total Catholic population of 120,000. There are 27 Priests in active ministry in the Diocese. All of the 14 parishes were engaged in the synodal process.

## Re-reading the Synodal Experience

The synodal process was led by Bishop Richard Ng and Rev. Fr Andy Lee, with 6 volunteers providing the Core Steering Group, and a Working Group of 2 volunteer representatives from each parish, as well as representatives from other groups.

The core team started drafting the questionnaires, all around the themes of Communion, Participation and Mission, on 6<sup>th</sup> October 2021 and 2 weeks later, on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2021 the consultation started with a pastoral letter from Bishop Richard followed by a launching Mass at the Cathedral of the Diocese. The questionnaires were distributed in English, Bahasa Malaysia, Iban and Mandarin. The parishioners had the choice of either answering the questionnaires on paper or online via google forms.

Initially the consultation was to end by the middle of December 2021 but, after the extension for the submission was announced in November 2021, it was continued until 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 when the compilation phase started. Unfortunately, the Pre-Synod Gathering that was scheduled to be held on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2022 had to be postponed to 14<sup>th</sup> June 2022.

### Listening and Discernment

From the announcement of the Synod on Synodality, it became clear that the Church was being asked to learn or rediscover something anew. The practice of communal discernment, so familiar to parts of the Church and quite alien to others, including Miri Diocese, is not a survey, nor a vote, nor in the ordinary sense a consultation but rather an invitation to learn how to listen.

As the majority of the people had never been involved in a synod before, it was necessary for all to learn the meaning of the word 'synodality,' in order to understand Pope Francis' purpose in asking for this consultation phase. Documents from the Vatican, "Vademecum" and "Preparatory Document" were read, simplified and explained particularly to parish representatives, and on the Diocesan website.

The parish representatives in turn held little meetings of their own to explain the synodal process to their parishioners. Everyone was given an opportunity to express their voice in the Church, especially

those whose voices were seldom heard in the Church. Through the synodal process, we are reminded that the Church is not only the sole responsibility of the few or privileged ones, but of everyone (clergy, laity, religious). Everyone has a place in the Church. Everyone has something to offer for the building up of the kingdom of God.

As expected, there was initially a fear of being judged when parishioners were asked to voice out; or fear of being treated differently when expressing one's opinion freely and honestly. Many negative comments appeared to come not out of malevolence or cynicism but a simple lack of knowledge of the functioning of the parish, of the diocese and of the wider Church. People were unsure of how to raise concerns without feeling guilty of accusing the clergy or of being disloyal to the Church.

Having gathered together and listened, people recognised that the next step was to discern the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Discernment seemed to be a potentially fruitful stumbling block, because when people became aware of the challenge of discernment, they wanted to learn more about it, recognized it needed more time, and it has become one of the strands to take forward into the next phase of the synodal process or perhaps the formulation of e.g. a Diocesan Pastoral Plan.

### **Difficulties of timing and resources.**

The timing of our diocesan synodal process limited opportunities for publicizing the synod. The movement and gathering restrictions due to the pandemic as well as the people's hesitancy to gather made parish synodal meetings close to impossible. Some were indifferent and do not see the importance or need of the synodal process of consultation. Furthermore, due to time constraints, engagement of those who could be described as 'on the margins' was not carried out on a wide scale. In the rural areas the leadership of the catechists and the prayer leaders was instrumental in getting the people to answer the questionnaires either individually or collectively.

Due to the large area of the diocese, of which more than two-thirds are in the rural area, communication is a challenge. As parishioners have access to different forms of communication, e.g. social media, and the internet, the Diocesan Facebook was the obvious and established route for communication to disseminate information regarding the synod. However, relying on this was not unproblematic, as its availability for synodal communications from the diocese or from synod representatives, was often interrupted due to poor internet connections.

Prayer was also an important aspect of this consultation. Every meeting began with the 'Adsumus Sancte Spiritus', the prayer to the Holy Spirit for the Synod. And this prayer was also recited at the end of each Sunday Mass all over the diocese.

Prayer was integral to the work, and to the process. Some participants commented that it had seemed unusual and a bit awkward for them at first, to be sharing their prayerful reflections, but that they had come to enjoy both the time of prayer, the opportunity to reflect, and sharing their own reflections.

The overarching question posed by the Synod, namely: *How is this "journeying together" happening today in your local Church? What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our "journeying together"?* (PD, 26) has clearly provided a healthy challenge to us all.

*'The Synod is a process in which the whole Church goes down on her hands and knees and listens to the voices on the ground. But the Church can only listen clearly when her knees are knelt in prayer and her hands reach out in humble service to the poor and the lowly.'* (P130)

## THE PROCESS TAKEN

For the process of the consultation, Miri Diocese decided to reach out to as many people as possible. Hence, we decided on 4 different types of paper/digital questionnaires for the process of consultation and they were translated into the major languages used in the Diocese, namely English, Mandarin, Iban and Bahasa Malaysia:

**Questionnaire A** contains questions based on the 10 themes from the synod handbook with emphasis on communion, participation and mission. The format of the questions was both objective and subjective and as such would elicit quantitative and qualitative answers. This questionnaire was meant for urban parishes as many of the questions are more relevant to their situation and background.

**Questionnaire B** was simpler and was meant for those in the rural setting. It contains questions like:

- What words can you use to describe the Church? How is your relationship with the Church leaders (bishop and priests)? What would you like to say to them? What would you like them to do? What are the happy or sad experiences that you have experienced in the Church? How did this experience influence your relationship with those who are in the Church? In your opinion, what are the main challenges faced by the Church and what is the main weakness in the Church? Give suggestions as to how we can overcome these challenges and weaknesses. What are your hopes or dreams for the Church in the future? What are the things that should be the focus of the Church in the years to come?

**Questionnaire for Teenagers** was similar to Questionnaire A but in the language that teenagers could relate to. In addition to giving qualitative and quantitative answers, teenagers were encouraged to express their answers using their own creativity:

- Create a video of 3 minutes on how the Church is now compared to what you think Jesus wants it to be.
- Create a video of 3 minutes on what you understand about a Church that is walking together and participating in mission.
- Write a poem about any 1 of the following: Going to Mass, the Catholic Church, Serving in Church, Listen to me

**Consultation for Children** – in this consultation,

- We ask children to draw: a happy Church, a priest with people after Mass, a priest listening to your parents, you and your friends serving in Church, you or your friend telling a boy or a girl who is not a Christian about Jesus
- We ask children to write a poem about my church, Sunday Mass, Jesus.

Due to the restriction of movement and gathering together during the pandemic, it was very difficult to engage many participants in the consultation process. For those in the city parishes they were able to submit their responses online. For those in the rural areas where internet connectivity is poor, the people submitted written feedbacks. Catechists and prayer leaders were trained in order to be able to facilitate the consultation process in their respective rural parishes and Christian communities.

There were 2450 responses received and this makes up about 8.2 % of total Mass attenders. Responses came from all parishes right across the diocese. 8 % of these were practicing Catholics, 0.2 % had left the church, 7 % were adults aged over 21 years old, 1.1 % were teenagers between the ages of 13-19 years old and 0.07 % were children 12 years and below.

The groups of people whose participation was especially noteworthy were the teenagers and children as this is the first time that we have heard the input of teenagers and children on what their view of the Church is and as young as they are, they made some very striking comments. Perhaps the most striking comment from the teenagers was that they asked to have their opinions heard and be given a chance to lead and serve without the adults (whom they addressed as old aunties and uncles) breathing down their necks.

## THE EXPERIENCE

The synod process is something very new to most of the people in the diocese. As such, it took some time for the idea of synodality and consultation to be understood and for the feeling of awkwardness in speaking out to be overcome. But once this was overcome, the people gave good feedbacks, suggestions and constructive criticisms.

### **The high points or consolations:**

- Everyone is given an opportunity to express their voice in the Church, especially those whose voice are seldom heard in the Church.
- Through the synod process, we are reminded that the Church is not only the sole responsibility of the few or privileged ones, but of everyone (clergy, laity, religious). Everyone has a place in the Church. Everyone has something to offer for the building up of the kingdom of God.

### **The low points or desolations:**

- There is fear of being judged when asked to voice out; or fear of being treated differently when expressing one's opinion freely and honestly.

### **The following are the notable dispositions, attitudes, feelings, tensions and disagreements from the listening process:**

- i. Indifference:  
Some do not see the importance or need of the synodal process of consultation. They are comfortable where they are at. Some are sceptical of this synod process; it is good in theory, but difficult to put into practice.
- ii. Ignorance:  
Many still do not know what the Synod process is all about due to a lack of catechesis.
- iii. Reaching out:  
Due to the pandemic, the consultation process is quite difficult because many people are still hesitant to gather together physically.
- iv. Lack of enthusiasm and courage to explore new horizons:  
there is tension between those who are comfortable with structures and doing things according to what was done in the past, and those who want to see some changes in the Church.

The topics or issues gave rise to diverse points of view due to the diversified cultures, races and languages found in the Diocese of Miri as well as the different faith experiences of each member of the parish community. There are some whose faith are still at the beginners' level and some who are



more mature and have had a long journey in their faith. Thus, it is not possible to generalize their feelings or depth of faith during the consultation process.

**Overall, the fruits that the Holy Spirit has brought about through this experience include:**

- The realization that the Diocese should listen to the voice of the people as they are the *sensus fidelium*.
- The reaffirmation of the fact that everyone in the Church is looking for a place where they can have a sense of belonging, that they are loved, accepted and welcomed and that they have a community that cares for them and that they can depend on one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.
- The confirmation that there is unity in diversity. Everyone has a story to tell. Everyone has their own background and unique faith experience. Unity is not uniformity. The Church is called to embrace these differences as an expression and work of the Holy Spirit which brings all into communion.

## THE FEEDBACK

Respondents were very open with their feedbacks and suggestions and there was generally a sense that they were interested to see the Church move forward as a united, loving and truly Christian community. There was emphasis on the need of good relationship between the clergy and the laity. Only when there is good relationship can service be done well. This relationship is based on faith and Christian love, not on success, gains or mere service. Many of the criticisms given were constructive in nature. Here are some of the areas that were more outstanding:

### ❖ Prayer and worship

The overwhelming majority of parish submissions highlighted the centrality of the Mass to our life as Catholics, it is at the 'heart of communion', the 'perfect prayer' and the 'main unifying force'. Indeed, it was noted that there was no Catholic community without the Holy Eucharist; it is where 'we come together as a Catholic family' and 'the Mass speaks to real-life but often we fail to make the connection: conversion, forgiveness, being nourished and transformed and with a mission in life.'

There was a generous acknowledgement that different people appreciated the liturgy differently and that there is room for different ways of praying. Music was felt to be a possible way to encourage young people to stay involved and of being inclusive to different cultures. Others suggested the Church should be more missionary, explain the Mass more, help different people to find a role, for example, single people getting overlooked as a group.

Besides the Eucharist, a big majority of respondents, including teenagers, acknowledged the importance of the Word of God in their spiritual lives and how it has brought consolation to them in the midst of trials. Some respondents noticed that in recent years there has been a lack of activities, such as seminars and conferences, to boost their spiritual lives. They want more spiritual activities and one that has been mentioned a number of times is to bring back the charismatic renewal. A few suggested the parish should be more vibrant and joyful: "We are a dismal church, closer to purgatory than heaven, we should be more outward looking." Some people were nostalgic about the old days when the church was a more tight-knit community.

One concern was from a person who said that the sacrament of reconciliation should be done to respect the anonymity and privacy of the penitent. Access to the Sacraments was mentioned, particularly in relation to 'due reverence' at Mass, the loss of Sacramental opportunities during lockdown and the looming shortage of priests.

Much of the synod encounters in the diocese was done in the period of time when the country was gradually emerging from the restrictions of the Covid pandemic. This emerged in the expressions of concern and appreciation as people rejoiced in returning to Mass. They also acknowledged with deep gratitude the “wonderful gift of being able to watch and participate in Mass online.” Some reflected on how the lockdown had made them appreciate Mass and receiving Holy Communion. More than one person remarked that we took many things for granted before the pandemic. Several people reported they had re-found their faith during the pandemic, and others that they had prayed together more as a family.

#### ❖ **Participation → Inclusivity**

Inclusivity was a large and broad category into which was assigned all mentions of issues to do with Church teaching and behaviour which did not afford equality to various groups. The language of equality somewhat masks the underlying pain, sadness and deep feeling caused by the restrictions. Equal opportunities for women and the youth in all roles in the church organization was the most frequently mentioned. Women felt that they were often overlooked due to their gender, even though they may be as capable as men. One respondent observed that women are still involved in ‘flower rotas and cleaning rotas, but not in decision making.’ The youth felt that they were often “brushed aside” where decision making is concerned.

There was dissatisfaction with the lack of equality of opportunity for the laity to share in collaborative ministry with the priests. The laity want to know of the developments and projects in the Church. There were suggestions that there should be a suggestion box for the people to voice their suggestions and concerns. Some respondents felt that more ecumenical effort and development of relationships with other faiths should be encouraged. The divorced and remarried expressed great hurt at their exclusion.

#### ❖ **Authority → Clergy**

Parishioners from across the diocese were appreciative of the charisms, pastoral work, commitment, and hard work of their parish priests. Many were very grateful for the efforts made by priests to ensure mass was available online during the pandemic and availing themselves when the Sacrament of Reconciliation was sought. Many clearly had a very positive experience with their priests, varyingly described as ‘dedicated and prayerful’, ‘kind and inspiring’, exhibiting ‘good leadership.’

Nevertheless, there were some critical comments about relationships with the clergy. These seemed to be related to questions of authority; clericalism, making decisions about what happens in the parish without consulting the laity and the better treatment of rich and influential parishioners were mentioned. The laity feels that the Church’s hierarchy need to be more fatherly and not just concentrate on raising funds to build churches. They want a better and familial relationship with the bishop and priests. Another point that was brought up many times was the homily given during Mass. The people asked that priests give inspiration to the people to lead holy lives and not lecture or scold them.

The need for cooperation, collaboration or even co-responsibility was a recurring theme and clearly one dearly felt: ‘need to work with parishioners and collaborate, avoid appearing as dictators who see no need to explain their decisions or to seek advice’.

#### ❖ **Mission → The Church and her Mission**

In a large number of Synod responses there was a strong sense that the Church must be there for all, a ‘hospital for sinners and a haven for saints’. Without undermining the Lord’s challenging call to repentance and holiness, it was felt strongly that the Church should embrace all its members: those on the peripheries and those bruised by our hurting world. This was seen to include especially those from

minority groups, those who have been abused, people who are divorced and re-married, as well as the LGBTQ. Respondents also felt that the Church should address the current real world issues such as premarital sex, marital breakdown, LGBT, with mercy and compassion, like Jesus did. Some respondents sounded the alarm of the rise of Islamization and suggested that the Church help address this issue too.

#### ❖ Young people

Young people wanted to feel that their voices are being heard by the church and that they could play a more important role in the Mass. They wanted the Church to be more encouraging and inviting. Young people expressed that there were put off by the Church's attitude towards women and youth. They want the Church to be more inclusive. In addition, they ask that they be given opportunities to serve and be involved in decision making bodies and not be looked down upon because of their age.

For the children who took part in this consultation, their view of the Church was more positive. A number of them composed songs praising Jesus, while others wrote poems about the Church and Jesus and some even drew pictures of what a happy Church should look like.

## THE CURRENT REALITY

The current reality of the Church as gleaned from this consultation includes the following:

- i. The church need to be more sincere, friendly, accepting, kind and non-judgmental and non-discriminating towards its people by implementing friendly policies and changes to benefit and improve the laity's development and leadership within the church regardless of age, race, gender, financial standing and status.
- ii. The Church should adopt a merciful approach towards those who are suffering particularly those who are divorced, LGBTQ, single mothers, the lapsed and the marginalized. Many are fearful of coming back to Church as they are afraid of being judged and rejected.
- iii. Church authorities should share information regarding decisions made by the Church with the congregation and the congregation be allowed to give their opinions on those decisions before they are finalized and implemented. Many urban respondents felt that the church isn't listening to them and there is an information gap between what the church is doing and what the parishioners know.

The people felt that due to the lack of communication between the Church and the laity in the past, many have been hurt and they propose that the following areas are in need of healing and conversion:

- a. Those alienated by the church; single moms, divorcees, second marriages, LGBTQ groups, broken families, migrants, foreigners, the mentally ill, the disabled, those living sinful lives and non-believers. Our Catholic churches are less friendly and less compassionate towards real world issues and problems. The church has to stop being judgmental and be more compassionate and merciful by implementing outreach programs to make it possible for them to join or return to the Catholic church.
- b. Those who are not involved in any ministries or apostolates who feel alienated and voiceless; the Church needs to be more sensitive towards them.
- c. Spiritual formation of the people have not been given priority. The people are hungry for growth seminars and conferences that can help them to grow deeper in their faith.

- d. The preferential treatment accorded to wealth, status and familiarity needs to be stopped. The Church belongs to everyone regardless of wealth, status or race and everyone should be treated equally as a child of God.

## **GROWTH IN SYNODALITY**

Many people reported that they were pleased and surprised to be invited and have the opportunity to write out their views and be listened to. One person pointed out that having this survey was helpful in providing a reason and purpose for the consequent building up of community. There was great depth of feeling of anger, betrayal, and hurt expressed about the abuses of the church. There was also great joy and gratitude, identifying the process as “spirit-filled”. People also expressed the wish that the synodal process would continue, and parishes, the diocese and the universal church would take account of what they have learned.

For those who were engaged in the consultation process as facilitators, they too felt humbled when listening to the many in great depth and fervour-filled sharings. It was seen as a spirit-filled experience, which “allowed the space for the blessings of each other to fall on us all.” It was also surprising and unexpected to hear people expressing views which were often different from expectations.

Here are some major points regarding Synodality captured during the consultation process:

### **a) Walking together**

- i. Church activities are done together or in groups (all come together and get involved) including participating in prayer and active involvement of the congregation
- ii. Openness to all, accepting each other through dialogue to build healthy relationships, not judging people who rarely come to the Church so that all feel comfortable being in the Church, creating an atmosphere of mutual respect
- iii. The spirit of cooperation between the Church leadership and the parishioners to achieve the mission of the Church and finding the best way to carry out the mission and vision of the Church, where responsibility and burdens are shared.
- iv. Giving attention and showing good example to those who do not yet know God. We should serve as Jesus served. Support should be given to one another, not only spiritually but materially and financially as well.
- v. Our faith should be deepened through seminars, etc.

### **b) Listening to one another**

- i. Provide opportunities and avenues to voice opinions or feedback, such as providing a box that allows the public to express their difficulties, make a census or survey questions to get the opinion of the people, so that the people can speak if they disagree with anything that does not suit the situation
- ii. Always ask the people (dialogue with the people), without judgment and mutual respect-communication, giving opinions, advice and thoughtful reprimands, building friendships, listening without prejudice or apprehension, accepting the weaknesses of others, accepting and listening to each other's opinions. Have an attitude of heart that is always ready to listen and act accordingly
- iii. Hold a session or forum to give opinions between priests and parishioners in a relaxed atmosphere, without excluding any group.

- iv. Communication through mass media - The Church should reach out to the people through modern means e.g. Social media with the aim of helping and guiding each other without discrimination.
- v. Church leadership should be neutral to all parties regardless of race, colour or gender and particularly financial status and public influence.

**c) Participation in Mission**

- i. Opening opportunities for the public regardless of status to participate in Mass in the Church with gentleness and not coercion.
- ii. Hold seminars to bring those who are lapsed back to God. Those in the church should be instilled with the responsibility and awareness that they too are to be involved in the mission of the Church.
- iii. Hold evangelistic outreaches to the rural areas with a genuine spirit of concern for the salvation of others.
- iv. Activate and maintain well the social communications channel of the Church.

**d) Dialogue**

- i. Hold meetings between church leaders and parishioners to encourage parishioners to speak out and give opinions, and be informed of the developments in the church, as well as to make decisions together.
- ii. Parishioners should be allowed to speak without fear of being ostracized or punished.
- iii. The laity and the church hierarchy should work hand in hand to build God's Kingdom. The laity asks that the hierarchy to not be aloof and distant.

The participants looked forward to having a Church where their opinions count and they can have good relationships with the bishop and priests and be brothers and sisters to one another on the journey.

## THE CULTURAL IMAGE

Miri Diocese consists mainly of people who are used to the "gotong-royong" spirit and communal living. The communal corridor of the longhouse is the centre of communal activities such as celebrations of weddings and harvest festivals. It is also where discussions on community matters are carried out among the villagers. Disputes, arguments, complaints and other problems among villagers are discussed with village elders to reach a solution in order to maintain the harmony in the village. Thus, the villagers journey together for the common good.

Some of races actually come together to help plant paddy for each family's farm. They work together so as to complete the sowing process in one day for that farm. They take turns to help each family. In this way, the paddy harvest time for the longhouse community is at the same time.

Our church should also be like a longhouse community where dialogue and listening to one another and cooperation has to be put into action. The respondents feel that we need to implement the culture of zero-discrimination, that is, a one-church-embrace-all approach and servant leadership model. Every church cleric, community/ group should be open to serve anyone regardless of race, language, financial standing etc.

Thus, Church office personnels need to project the culture of being friendly, welcoming, respectful, understanding, humble and approachable in handling queries/ appeals/requests for assistance from parishioners. The church should also inculcate a family atmosphere where all are welcomed and know that they belong and have something to contribute to the kingdom of God here on earth.

## CONCLUSION

From this synodal process, members of this engaged Catholic community want to see the Church thrive into the future. People feel there is an opportunity to change, grow and thrive with continued engagement building on the Synodal process.

Discernment needs time. If the first step of the synodal process is the gathering of the information which is necessary for following a discernment cycle of 'recognising', 'interpreting' and 'choosing', with the eyes of the disciple, for the Kingdom, then there is a larger, more focused, diocesan-wide discernment process which is yet to be engaged in.

The synodal process itself was life-giving, allowing space for 'blessings of each other to fall on us all.' The strength and depth of feelings, positive and negative, were conveyed very strongly and movingly in the responses to surveys and in listening encounters. It clearly was seen as a Spirit-led process for moving onward as Church.

## Songs composed by Children

### **Gerejaku**

Tempat aku bertumbuh  
 Dalam iman yang teguh  
 Mulai dari sekolah minggu  
 Sampai usiaku dua belas

Di tempat ini aku beribadah  
 Untuk mengenal Tuhan yang kusembah  
 Pada hujung minggu yang indah  
 Kuterima berkat, kasih dan anugerah

Allah selalu hadir disini  
 Melalui khotbah, nyanyian dan rohani  
 Walaupun jalanNya tak terselami  
 Tapi janjiNya pasti digenapi

### **Tajuk : Yesus**

Saat ku panggil nama-MU  
 Ku dengar jawab-MU  
 Saat ku sebut nama-MU  
 Ada kuasa dalam hidupku

Saat ku memuji-MU  
 Ku rasakan hadirat-MU  
 Saat ku dengar firman-MU  
 Ada damai dalam hatiku  
 Saat ku setia pada-MU  
 Kau selalu menyertaiku  
 Saat ku taat pada-MU  
 Mujizat terjadi selalu

Saat ku dekat pada-MU  
 Kau selalu memberkatiku  
 Kaulah Tuhan Allahku  
 Yesus Kristus Juru Selamatku

## Allah Bapaku

Allah Bapa sungguh besar kasihMu  
 Engkau selalu hadir dalam setiap langkahku  
 Sungguh indah ku menjadi anakMu  
 hidup dalam kasihMu, kasih yang tak ternilai  
 Tak sanggup aku membalas kasihMu,  
 hanya ini Bapa yang ku bisa  
 Bapa, trimalah persembahan hatiku,  
 nyanyian pujian kepadaMu  
 Ini diriku jadikanlah alatMu,  
 trimalah Bapa persembahan hati

## Poems

Thania Wendy Leey (SB)

Rabu

9. November 2021

Tajuk Sajak : Yesus semangatku

Yesus Semangatku  
 Penguat iman dihatiku  
 Penghapus dosa dunia ini  
 Yesus Semangatku  
 Penebus insan di dunia  
 Penegak kebenaran yang abadi

Kau semangat baru  
 Penyelamat manusia  
 kau rela mengorbankan diri  
 kau bebaskan kami  
 Dari belenggu kegelapan  
 Dengan hidup yang amat baru  
 Hanya kau pembimbing umat Mu



Rozanne Rynnia  
anak Irmansandra  
Sk Menuang

Kasih Tuhan Yesus

Kasih Tuhan Yesus tidak akan mati  
Meski dikubur berkali-kali  
Kasih Tuhan Yesus tetap berseri  
Meski awan gelap menutupi

Kasih Tuhan Yesus tetap memancar  
Meski matahari tidak bersinar  
Kasih Tuhan Yesus tetap bersinar  
Kasih Tuhan Yesus tetap segar  
Meski semua telah memudar

Kasih tetap abadi  
Meski semua telah berhenti  
Kasih Tuhan Yesus tetap menyertai  
Meski semua telah pergi

Franceska cassandra

3 Bestari

Khamis

18 November 2021

### Yesus Sahabatku yang Baik

Yesus Sahabatku yang baik,

Engkau tidak pernah meninggalkan aku,

Engkau menyilamatkanku pada waktu kesusahan,

Engkau memberikanku kekuatan ketika aku sakit,

Engkau menghiburkanku ketika aku berduka,

Engkaulah tempat ku berlindung.

Yesus Sahabatku yang baik,

Walaupun banyak cubaan yang aku alami,

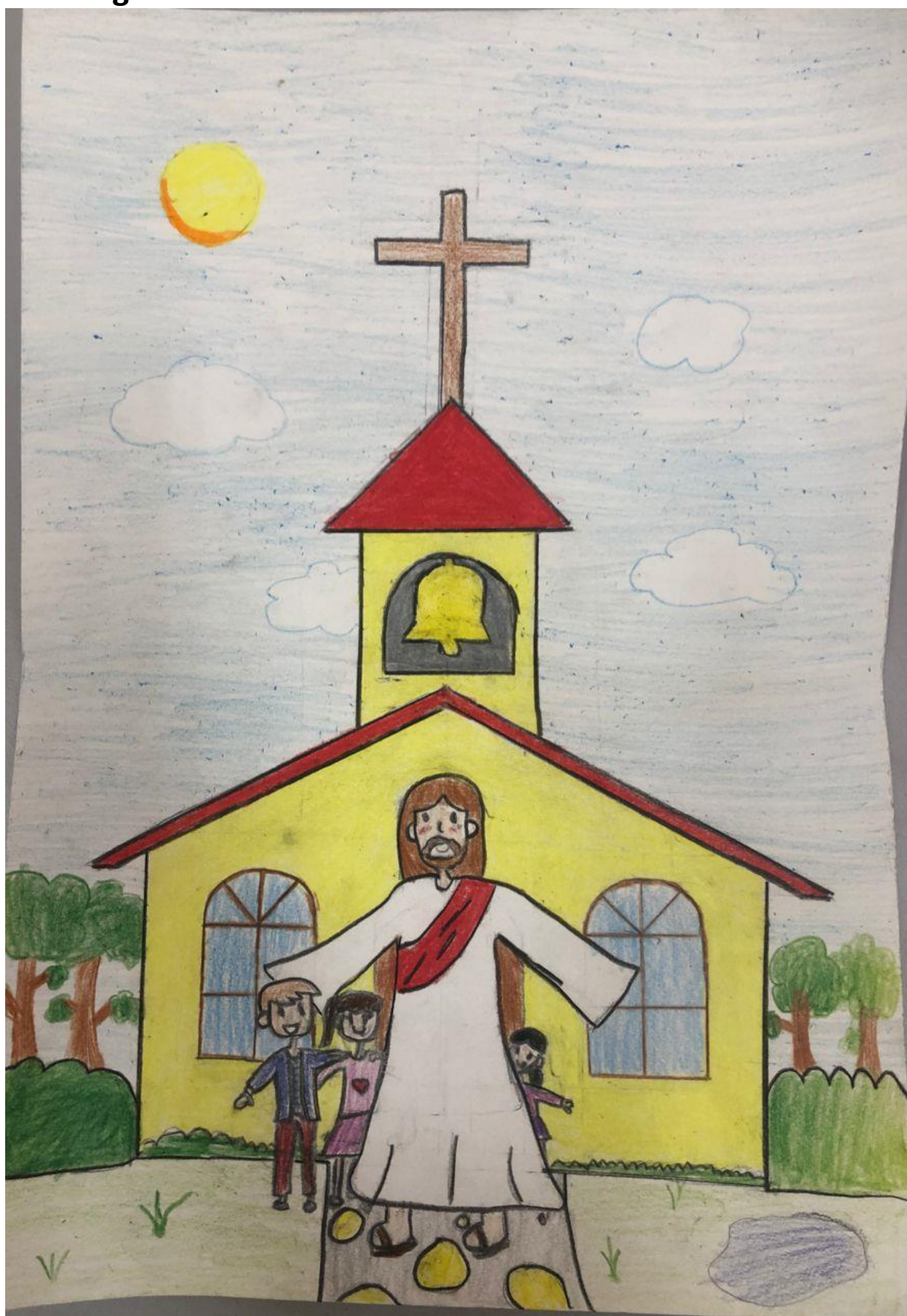
Engkau tetap selalu bersertaku,

Engkau tetap menuntun tanganku,

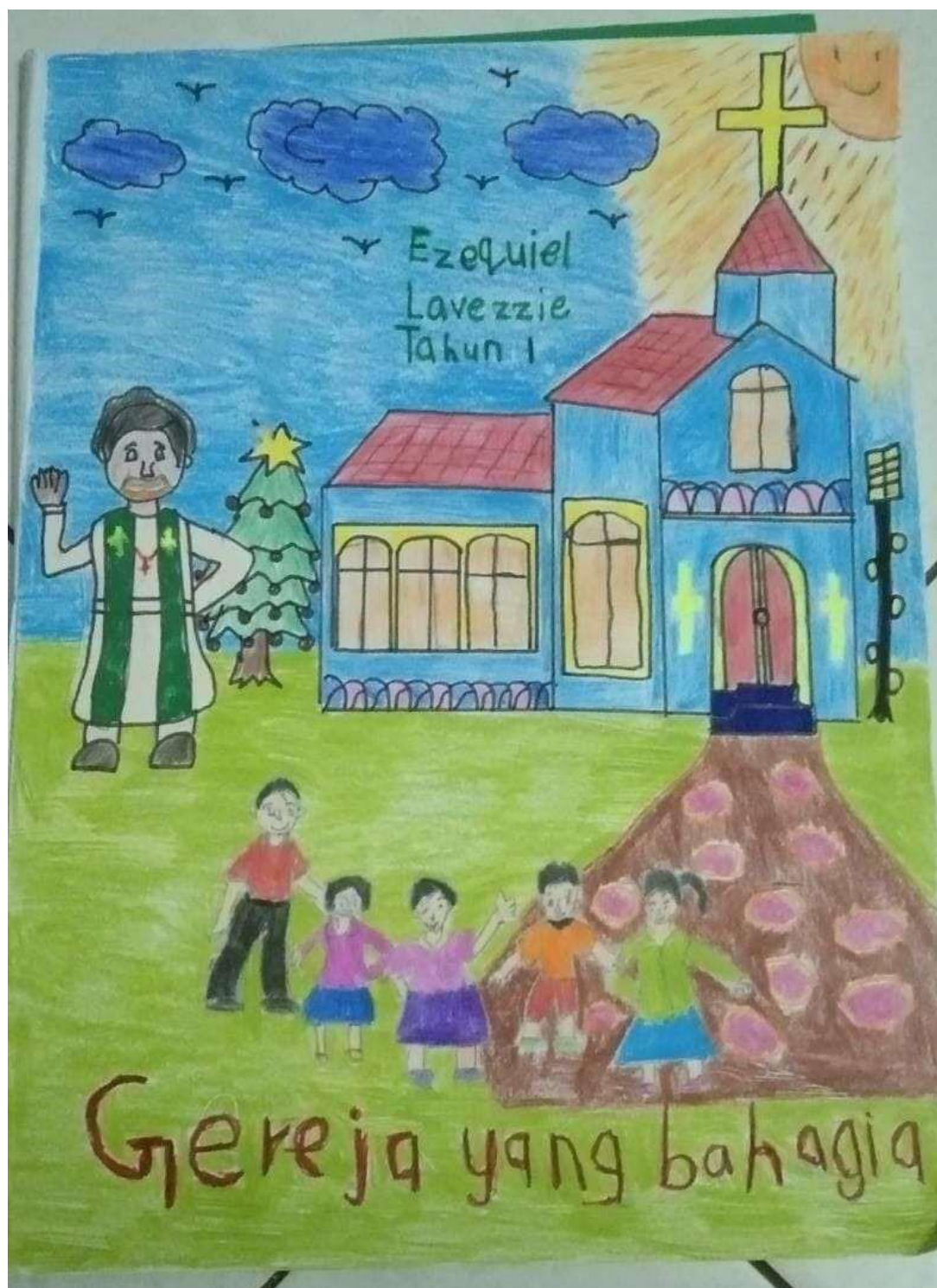
Tak pernah engkau meninggalkanku,

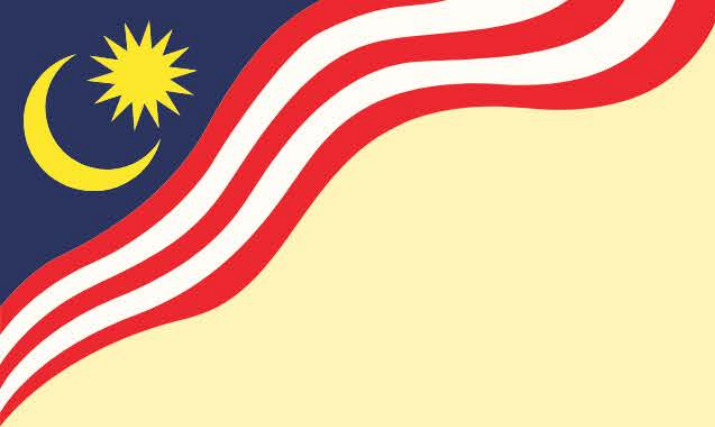
Terima kasih Yesusku.

## Drawings









# Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur



## Synthesis Report



For a synodal Church  
communion | participation | mission

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## Synthesis Key Point

The Diocesan Synod Secretariat was formed by Archbishop Julian Leow and Fr. Mitchel Joseph, our Advisor, led the team through a retreat to prepare for the synodal journey. We were shown the scenes and images of **Part III. Listening to the Scriptures** that gave us ideas to express the Gospel creatively, giving it a new dimension today. We reflected on God's invitation to live and share the Gospel through the person Jesus, and realised how the present moment had taught us to appreciate life and to continuously grow in God's love despite the world emerging from a continuous lockdown, tightened with stringent regulations on social distancing. We understood the intentions of the Pre-Synodal Assembly that shared a similar social setting of the 'Council of Jerusalem' that needed discerning and listening to the Holy Spirit. The 'quiet mode' of transporting our thoughts helped us with the insights to the journey as we prayed and reflected on the **FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION**, a display of a unique **system**, prompting personal and community reflections. The **TEN THEMATIC NUCLEI**, modelled a **toolkit** for collating data using three parts: **recalling experiences**, **re-reading experiences** in greater depth and **gathering fruits** by the need to embrace the distinct experiences of God's people, in the essential dimension of the Church. Initially, we had difficulties in accomplishing the mission of translating the synod documents into the three languages with a common mind, as the theological, canonical and pastoral literature was not easily understood by our translators. The retreat ended with the preparation of a synod 'blueprint' offering useful guidelines for the mapping of a broad consultation process, highlighting what the Lord is asking of us. In keeping with the culture of time, the diocese is encouraged to 'walk together' to integrate the people's voices without losing the ecclesial characteristics of the synod, instead be clear of the diocesan priorities. Along the synodal journey, we recognised the need to 'bring connectivity to everyone' and 'bridge the digital divide' as many people in the rural areas were without internet facilities or mobile gadgets. There were times we 'hit a brick wall' as without connectivity, we could not continue our digitally structured data collection plan. The synod team began a 're-navigation plan' by visiting the people in the outskirts to collate their responses, meeting them personally and understood the inspiration of meaningful connections.

(Appendix I)



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The **Synod Briefing Sessions** and **Orientation Workshops** saw the systematic implementation of the Synodal Journey for gathering responses within two months (Dec 2021-Jan 2022). The timeline of nine months (Sept 2021 - May 2022) became a reality when the findings of the responses was released to Archbishop Julian within the assured timeline that is by May 2022. This completion of our report is attributed to the guidelines provided in the Vademecum and Preparatory Document that we adhered to stringently. It was our goal to work with the existing leaders in the diocese to drive the ‘synod message’ across, but we faced a challenge with leadership issues within parishes that did not participate in the exercise.

In ‘journeying together’, we heard the voices of the ‘women with stigma’ - divorcees, separated or single again, where stories of them being treated like outcasts and refusal to allow participation in church. Gossips and outrageous accusations have scarred them for life and they refused to return to church for being shamed and hurt. As for the LGBT community, they wanted better visibility with leadership roles for their community at parish level as they felt marginalised and ignored. We crossed path with the ‘new poor’ who were affected financially due to loss of employment. Some had very deep wounds, unwilling to forgive past abuses, and some facing mental health issues. Surprising the Orang Asli participated actively in the synodal process, voicing problems courageously to the synod representatives. They raised their plights of being deprived of basic rights to education, and an increase in the percentage of illiteracy. They have realised that without education, they were backward in life and wanted libraries for their children. They were also sad to see the graduates from their community being unemployed as securing jobs have become very difficult after the pandemic. Lastly, we had the opportunity to visit the elderly, where we their cries of feeling abandoned, neglected and forgotten by their children, family and even the church that was heart breaking. They highlighted their struggles with health issues that needed medical care and as they were homebound, they yearned for the company of their BECs and friends. They also wanted us to know the pains of being lonely, as urbanization has derailed family values and morale, creating vacuums in their lives. They wanted the church to remember them as they were active leaders and who had contributed much in the past.

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## A. The Process Taken

The first Briefing Session followed by a Synod Orientation Workshop for representatives of both parish and ministry levels, were conducted virtually and in-person using the guidelines from the Handbook. We also had the clergy, religious, migrants and people from the peripheries to participate in this journey. As the entire process was fully automated, we gained the trust of the people who responded courageously and truthfully through a link posted in our website. The **Fundamental Question** was the **system** put into place, and the **Ten (10) Thematic Nuclei** was the **toolkit** was a good structure for us to formulate the survey questionnaire following these three (3) areas: **recall**, **re-read** and **gather** using ‘type form’. The synodal process was conducted by guiding and unfolding the discussions to topics with structured questionnaire. (Appendix II) & (Appendix III).

The responses sent through the link, was gathered through the process of collecting using ‘type form’. The collated data were batched in three parts and segregated for responding to the Synthesis batched as **B. The Experience** (for recalling experiences) **C. The Feedback** (re-reading experiences) **D. The Current Reality** and **E. The Growth In Synodality** (gathering fruits to share) and subsequently, the entire analysis will lead to **F. The Cultural Image**. For the Data Analysis, Python Data Analytics were used for synthesizing, sorting and filtering based on splitting into TN1 to TN10. The Microsoft Excel Keyword Based Data Extraction was used for narrowing down scope based on keywords and the most common & repeated words & phrases.

At the same time, manual retrieval of data unrelated to keywords were also gathered to study the importance of significant feedback although not frequent highlighted. We found some of these ‘minor’ concerns to be noteworthy & required immediate attention. The segregation of negative and positive feedbacks was crucial for answering the **Body of Synthesis** from **A-F**. The **Conclusion** depended on the scope of data retrieved from feedback and recommendation in moving forward as a diocese. The Data Counts are depicted into Charts for easy references in highlighting proportion of participation & non-participation from the community. (refer to Appendix I)



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## B. The Experience

### HIGH POINTS

The most significant point seen from this synodal process was the coming together of the clergy, religious, ministries, parishes, people from all walks of life, from the peripheries where everyone came together with an open mind and heart to participate in this synodal process committedly and enthusiastically. They came with the mindset to experience changes with new ways of being a synodal church.

### LOW POINTS

Many were skeptical with the direction of the synodal process where they questioned the reliability of the responses or data collated, the manner it would be processed, selection of synod team members who were involved in the exercise at parish level. The low levels of trust among one another were rather disturbing, especially among the senior groups. There was also the grievance of poor direction and lacking of leadership that hindered them from sharing their responses or participating in the synodal journey.

### CONSOLATIONS

There was hope in the many who participated with the confidence of seeing a renewed church. There was a sense of appreciation for the clergy and leaders who has won the confidence and support of the people. The strengths of the church on the whole, was her willingness to see changes with Christ-centered.

### DESOLATIONS

The lack of usage of the findings of year after year at assemblies, data not utilized properly shunned people away from participating in any new initiatives, as it was seen as a waste of time. The unwelcoming attitude and discrimination, posed a barrier.

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The merging of responses from **Recall & Re-read Experiences** provided the replies for concerned areas

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### C. The Feedback

The reflection based on the experience gathered shared that the elderly and youth are left behind in the growth of the church. There is a need for the priests to re-look at parish level leadership where power struggles and ‘priest’s favourites are being roped in for leadership positions. The long serving leaders who have been holding on to the parish ‘reigns’, are still being powerful and influential despite being around for more than ten years. We need the injection of new leadership styles befitting current needs and it must be encouraged to welcome the younger generation for newness with creativity.

The Archbishop is also to review the issues with the clergy by sending them for retreats and formations, find ways to improve their Scripture knowledge, enhance the quality of homilies, guide them to engage positively in people relationship and most importantly practice humility and be Christ like. The leadership of the laity seemed to be influenced by the clergy, being authoritative and commanding, especially when the parish priests are in cohorts with leaders who have their personal agenda.

Real life experiences highlighted that was moving was when a few churches were not permitted to participate in the synod process and not allowed to send their responses via the link as the priests were against it. A group of people from these parishes shared their grievances with the Synod Advisor. This was found to be noteworthy. The diocese requires good leaders under the guidance of the Archbishop, especially in guiding the clergy and the people of God.

The feedback of the Orang Asli highlighting their plight on their poor living conditions especially in just not having the basic necessities like clean drinking water was moving. It gives parishes and ministries a scope to plan future projects that could include these neglected people. We must learn from NGOs and others religious bodies in safeguarding the welfare and needs of the marginalized. It will be good for AOHD-PIHD and BECs to plan ahead to collaborate with these outside the church groups.

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## D. The Current Reality

Dialoguing is important to identify the real needs of the people. Conflicts and misunderstandings occur when what is seen as the best for the people may not what the people really want. The current times require the ministries and parishes to observe, discern and collaborate with almost everyone around us to meet the needs of the entire community, not Christians only.

The top-down approach with centralization is not effective anymore as we need have a discerning and listening people of God willing to serve with a pastoral approach. This requires formation, training and retreats in the synodal way, working down-up from grassroots where idealistic views from the top is irrelevant today. We need a compassionate church, not administrative to fulfil tasks and duties in accomplishing targets, becoming heralding churches with events and activities, neglecting the cries of the poor and marginalised. Feeding the poor can become a fashion and self-glorifying acts for personal satisfaction.

Recognizing the roles of women has become a great concern where some churches do not even allow women communion ministers, is a terrible gender discrimination. Women are used for labourer's functions, being denied of leadership roles in parishes and lack opportunities to promote greater sense of communion for everyone with fairness.

The youth are also in a predicament as they are no longer interested to attend Mass or participate in parish activities due to their mindset with online Masses. Youth ministry has not been able to inspire the young ones with same activities and events like in the past without any new ideas to connect and rejuvenate them. At parish level, they are not entrusted with leadership roles as they are seen as incapable. They often regarded to have age gaps and being unable to work with the elders. It is important that these issues are addressed before we lose our young people, especially when their talents and ideas are useful or relevant.

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## E. Growth in Synodality

The findings from our responses have highlighted the process of being rooted in discernment and prayer, being open to the movement of the Holy Spirit. It is important to practice the art of listening to one another but above all pay attention to what the spirit is saying. The Archbishop must listen carefully to the views of the faithful, in promoting communion and bringing about a plan of change for the diocese. The Archdiocese Pastoral Team must review the structures of the parish leadership, like the PPC, PCC, PFC and others to meet the suggestions of the people derived from Parish Assemblies. Most of the time personal agendas of priests and leaders are introduced despite the collating of responses from surveys or interviews at the assemblies, but the outcomes usually differ from the original announcements at parish assemblies in front of the Archbishop.

The diocese's structures must be revisited the Archbishop and his pastoral team to restructure and review the current needs and changes that has taken place over the years. This is to encourage the building of communion of communities and promote participation while inspiring mission outreach. The voices and suggestions and feedback of the people must be reviewed stringently with scrutiny and monitoring by the archbishop's team to ensure a fair diocese with a welcoming attitude, without bias or non-discriminative, truly listening and discerning to the voices of the people.

The area of inter-faith can be reviewed further with more collaborative activities to create wider awareness. We are also required to look into the needs of the community from other religious bodies or other denominations collectively and the diocesan ministry must look at setting up parish level ministries to work with people of other faiths too.

Language groups have highlighted the need to be visible in parishes with multi-language community and not to be deprived of their 'mother tongue' especially in expressing their ways of worship and reverence to God.

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## F. The Cultural Image

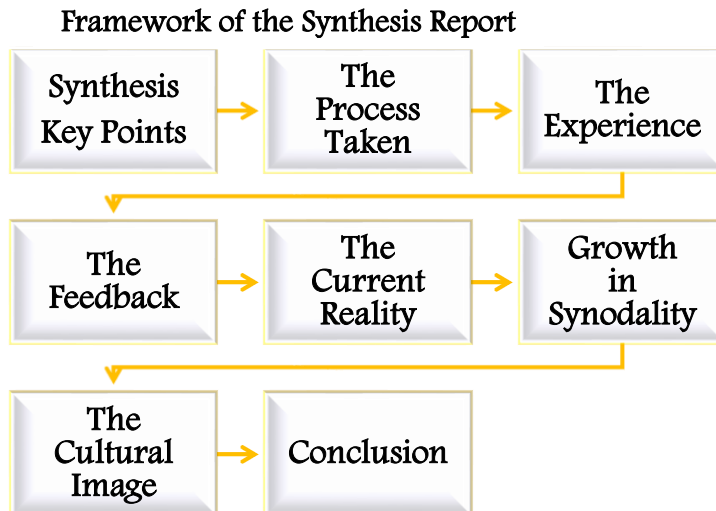
Over the decade, the government restrictions on practicing our faith have affected our ability to promote our faith openly. The social hostilities involving religions with laws and policies restricting religious freedom have a great impact in the way our faith is practiced in this country. The restrictions on approvals for processions and open sharing of the faith like in other countries has posed great challenge in our evangelisation mission. The struggles we had faced the last ten years with numerous court cases for the usage of the word “Allah” has left an imprint in the lives of the Catholics. Islamization with restrictive set of laws and policies has definitely taken a toll on the spread of our religion.

The role of missionary schools in Malaysia is not the same anymore as these schools are pushed with Islamic agenda, with our Christian children being forced to recite Muslim prayers at the start of school assemblies. This indirectly has a great influence on our children where they are exposed to the Muslim religion and begin to appreciate the faith due to ignorance, peer pressure and incentives offered. The biasness in offering scholarships to converts has become a great concern for parents too. The exposure of our young children has a tremendous impact where they are seen converting at a later age of maturity.

It is also sad to see that the church authorities are not given the choice of nominating the Heads of Schools and today, the principals are Malay men and women. This is also the factor that contributes to the financial status of these schools as they are unable to sustain or self-support the running of the schools and had accepted government aids for the last fifty years.

Over the years, despite the many efforts, religious holidays of the Christian faith are not permitted in this country and employers are often unhappy to grant leave for special days of obligation. This has also created the ‘no sense of belonging’ among working or school going Catholics.

## Conclusion



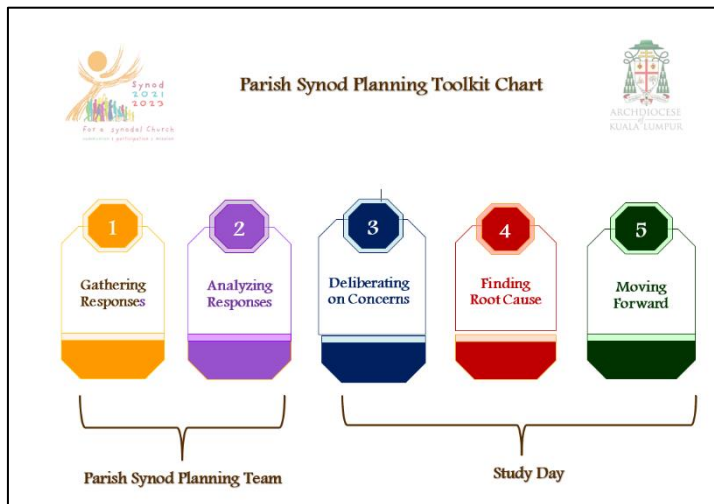
In adhering to the framework of the **synthesis report**, the responses have highlighted key concerns and issues for the diocese to address through the many approaches at both parish and ministry levels.

### Study Day

The whole church comprising of ministries and groups are requested to sit together to review the responses derived from the synodal process that will be given a guideline. The working team has to review, analyse and synthesise the collated raw data. As for the few parishes without any data, a set of questionnaires and tools will be provided to re-participate in the synodal process. The Tools for Analysing and Synthesising the collated responses from the Thematic Nuclei. The guidelines for designing the process of moving ahead based on the findings will be carried out over a period of three (3) to six (6) months as the suggested timeline. It will be to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the parish structure, the implementation of activities, the selection of formations or retreats, implementation of events at parish level and any others relevant to the respective parish. At the same time, the team can also identify potential ‘issues’ or ‘concerns’ that emerges from this synodal exercise. The structures of the PPC-PCC-PFC can be revisited with guidelines of the Study Day Handbook. The organising of the parishes approaches to a synodal church will be the prime concern and interest that can communicate the needs and desires of the parishioners from all walks of life without leaving anyone out, especially the lapsed Catholics, and those in the peripheries. The Study Day that was designed based on the responses and suggestions provided in the survey, intended to review the current needs of the parishes and ministries. They are to work in organising retreats with a Synodal approach to revisit all aspects of the responses collated from the Synodal Survey. A synthesis report is to be prepared as a development plan for further implementation.

## Parish Pastoral Assembly

The development plan will be presented at the Parish Pastoral Assembly to get the views, opinions and voices of the parishioners from all walks of life. Once it is presented and consensus are obtained, the relevant groups can take charge and implement the planned activities for the parish.



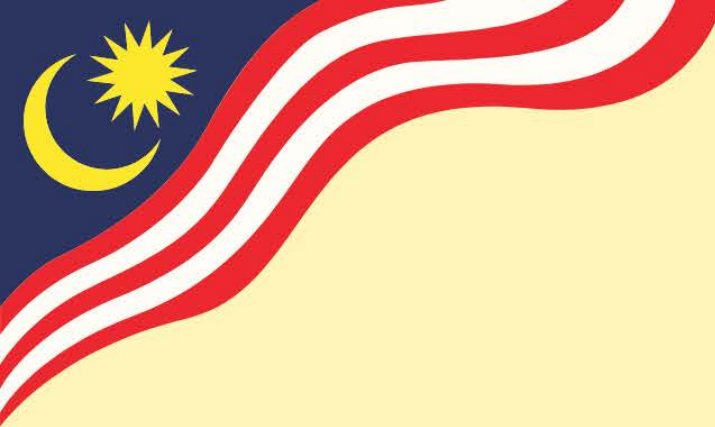
The Parish Priest is fully responsible in ensuring the appropriate direction for his parish as there will be briefing and training sessions on how to use the **SYNOD PROCESS TOOLKIT** for analysing and synthesizing the responses collected in three parts. The toolkit will be shared at the Clergy Recollection for a step-by-step implementation.

The monitoring of the stages will be observed for improvements and amendments.

Let us respond to the synodal call by prioritising the areas of concerns of our parishes. Once the priorities are selected from the synodal survey findings, unpack each of the concerns for proper implementation for a meaningful synodal journey as we become active agents in building the Kingdom of God. We must nurture the People of God with the spirit of charitable dialogue. There is a need to for a changed perspective of listening to the voices of People of God beyond hierarchy and administrative orders but through deep discernment and attentive listening with the heart. Remember, that Synodality is the life and mission of Christ. Today, we have recognized that the hard-hitting question for this diocese, is a call for conversion of **LEADERSHIP** and **RELATIONSHIPS**.

Prepared By:  
Rita Krishnan  
Synod Contact Person





# Diocese of Malacca Johore



## Synthesis Report



For a synodal Church  
communion | participation | mission





MJD  
50  
2022



**DIOCESE OF MALACCA JOHORE  
PRE SYNOD REPORT**

**FOR A SYNODAL CHURCH: COMMUNION,  
PARTICIPATION, AND MISSION**

**PREPARED BY MJ DIOCESAN SYNOD TEAM  
31<sup>st</sup> MAY 2022**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The Diocese of Malacca Johore as a people began our reflection on our synodal journey last October. It was a reflection on a journey that was made not at the most conducive of times because of the Covid pandemic yet, it was still a journey and more so a reflection of witnesses of Christ in the diocese today. Reflecting on our synodal journey with honesty, openness that is coupled with courage, enabled us to reflect sincerely on the path the church has taken in the diocese. It is undeniable that the quantum leap in information technology coupled with the immense role played by the social media, the church has been affected both in negative and positive ways in the understanding, practising, acceptance of the faith which is often at the receiving end whenever there are “interesting” stories regarding the clergy and the church hierarchy. Yet, this did not deter but somehow provided greater avenue to grow in faith and witnessing for the faithful *anawim* who are both committed and willing to sacrifice for the Church.

The preparation for the synodal process gave an opportunity for the diocese as a whole to sincerely reflect its call to build the Kingdom of God, here and now with all its aids, distractions and threats. Questions that were both challenging and thought provoking met with mixed reactions. Some used it as a platform to share their faith journey, some their joys, others their grievances’, anger, disappointment, then again some their hopes and vision. Whatever transpired, it can be said with certainty that people talked about their faith, the church and its concerns.

Prayer was a necessary aid in this journey. It gave an opportunity to come away from the normal routines, just to reflect deeply on these questions that actually helped to see how much of the Communion, Participation and Mission has been a part of our Christian life. An honest open ended entry into the unknown, paved the path for realization and awareness to set in before one could ask, “Where do we go from here?”. The Cultural Image that transpired from the reflection was a tree that’s growing, fruitful, being useful for the birds to built its nest and yet some branches withering and wasting away. However, being rooted in Communion, Participation and Mission, the tree continues to reach towards the light.

## **1. HOW WAS THE CONSULTATION PROCESS DONE?**

“Nothing is impossible to God”(Lk 1: 37) gave the much needed boost and enthusiasm when the call for reflection and with soul searching was made by the Pope. With much restrictions and SOPs in place, it was a challenging task to draw out the resources that were available in order to ensure that the call to Communion, Participation and Mission was neither dampened nor averted by the current societal norms, economic struggles and ever new changes and challenges. While it was inevitable that fears enmeshed with uncertainties did pose a big threat to our noble quest, yet the perseverance and resilience of many made the journey a memorable one.

The techniques used in the survey was through online feedbacks and printed hard copies that were available in various languages. The centrality of the process was very parochial. Besides the church setting, there were many people who were reached out including the Basic Ecclesial Communities, the Religious communities, the Orang Asli communities, those in mixed marriages and disparity of worship unions, children home, single parents, the migrants and those with special needs. On the whole, it was a reflective journey of the people of God in the diocese. The *modus operandi* was done at the parish level with the Parish Synod Team working together with the priest of the parish.

As a prior preparation a general briefing on the Synodal document was given in English and this was followed through with briefings sessions in the various languages that gave the participants a glimpse into the questionnaire that would be given to them. All these sessions were done online. The Diocesan Synod Team members were at hand to assist whenever necessary throughout the process. The questionnaire which was given out in 4 languages through printed copies and also through online survey covered questions about companion on the journey, listening, speaking out, celebration, sharing responsibility for mission, authority and participation, discerning and deciding, dialoguing in church and society, and Ecumenism.

All the parishes in the diocese took part in this process with an estimation of more than 5000 people taking part in the survey. It was a mammoth discernment exercise that invited everyone to be still and yet discovering the whispers of the Holy Spirit that made its presence felt throughout the exercise. At the parish level the process concluded with the Parish Synod Team presenting the outcome of the parish survey to the parishioners in March 2022.

## **2. WHAT WERE THE EXPERIENCES OF THE CONSULTATION PROCESS?**

### **2.1 POSITIVE RESPONSES RECEIVED**

2.1.1 The synodal call was in fact a moment of grace where one shares personal convictions of being called to witness to one's faith. This faith which is believed, lived and experienced was shared and used as an undisputable tool to evangelize.

2.1.2 The reflections help to see goodness within oneself who is entrusted with the time and space to explore and use the God given talents to deepen our friendship, strengthen the faith of one another thus making God's promises to be with us until the end of the world a real encounter.

2.1.3 The story of the Kingdom of God includes my story as well. Our life is not just our private matter but a living evidence of the history of the Church. We are the ones entrusted by God to live and share the kingdom with others at this particular time in history.

2.1.4 The Word of God is alive and active. Its relevance is practically experienced and Gospel values are still lived, believed and spoken about by all people of goodwill.

### **2.2 LOW MOMENTS**

2.2.1 The diversity of the church while giving the hues to our faith and expression, unfortunately has also become in a certain sense an obstacle in maintaining a closer understanding and communion with those from the various language groups. Differences in languages, educational backgrounds, economic polarities and social standings can be visible division makers in the church.

2.2.2 In the enthusiasm of building up the parish and ministries, some have inevitably fallen into the snares of favouritism and politicking. Both clergy and the lay faithful seem to be unconsciously promoting them. The model of the church as hierarchy is often cited to justify motives and actions.

2.2.3 Impure motives, fear of rejection and danger of populism are some of the other dangers that are seen obviously present in the parishes which can pose a threat towards unity of the church thus resulting in sectarianism within the church.

2.2.4 The harvest is indeed great yet the labourers are still few. It is a great struggle for the church to make Catholics zealous disciples who are able to influence, shape and build the world with Gospel values.

## **2.3 FRUITS PRODUCED**

2.3.1 There is a good positive feeling of pride, love and appreciation for our faith, Church and mission.

2.3.2 Reliance on the guidance from the Holy Spirit has been on the rise with many claiming their gifts and talents as they hold firm to the faith even when they are successful in life.

2.3.3 There is much time given to deepening of prayer life and becoming Word centred Catholics. What was once thought to be an exclusive quest of the religious and clergy is now being practised and longed for fervently by all.

2.3.4 Advancement in the social media has enabled us to go beyond space and to reach anyone and everyone wherever they are. The prudent use of social media platforms can actually bring much life and hope especially to the post millennium generation.

2.3.5 Joy filled missionaries of Christ are refreshingly heart warming for the church. Their presence and ministry often open the door to being inclusive and creative in showing Jesus to the world today.

2.3.6 Adaptability and flexibility in responding to the challenges and demands of the times in a Christian way can prove to be a herculean task for the church yet many are following this path by still being faithful to the teachings of the Church.

### **3. THE FEEDBACK RECEIVED.**

#### **3.1 SIGNIFICANT**

3.1.1 Love for the Gospel and the Church has not waned over time. While being challenged by the various man-made “temporal gospels”, the love for the Gospel of Christ and the church still prevails.

3.1.2 The various formation sessions and the frequent requests for sessions on the Scriptures have highlighted the importance of the Word of God in being a daily booster for the people.

3.1.3 Pride of being and belonging to a church makes mission and missionary activities more fruitful thus gaining support in living our identity as a Church that is in communion within itself and with others.

3.1.4 People long for a deeper spiritual life which is expressed in the attendance at the daily mass and Eucharistic adoration or Holy Hour.

3.1.5 Sacraments are sought and celebrated with joy.

3.1.6 Concern for the poor, sick and needy has always been an indelible mark of the Church. Pastoral charity makes the church stronger especially when an isolated cry of the poor and needy becomes an opportunity to show oneness.

#### **3.2 REVEALED SURPRISES**

3.2.1 Being a part of a pluralistic society and cultures, the church is affected by the changes that influence the world. The social standing, educational level and economic powers are creating hairline cracks even among the church members where even BECs are not spared.

3.2.2 Active participation of the laity in the church has seen much growth yet clericalism still poses a threat. Abuses still exists and appears in financial and administrative matters.

3.2.3 The fixed mindset of some of the parishioners who resist change and adaptation sometimes hinder growth and positive outlook. While being orthodox has its blessings and advantages, orthodoxism retards the whole aspect of diversity that can assist progress.

3.2.4 Fraternal charity is not a condemnation of a failure but a corrective guidance that is pretty much necessary for self-improvement and spiritual pruning. It is rather disturbing when fraternal correction is not given gently with a dose of compassion and worst still when both the clergy and laity see it as something negative and detrimental to one's egoistic self-confidence.

3.2.5 Social issues such as LGBT which seems to be attracting the young and the old as a way of expression and living needs to be handled delicately while not compromising on the teachings of Christ.

3.2.6 With the heightened expectations on academic excellence, the diocese should take the opportunity to assist those who need financial assistance in order for them to continue their further studies.

### **3.3 UNEXPECTED FINDINGS**

3.3.1 While agreeing that no one is perfect, it is disheartening that there still exists in the Churches people serving in ministries with impure motive and living double lives. This includes people who are not being faithful to the teachings of the church, neglecting the reception of the sacraments and practising syncretism.

3.3.2 Factions within the church caused by preference and clique mentality is hampering efforts and intentions to build a more participative church that is inclusive while inviting those who are idle in the church.

3.3.3 Change is inevitable yet how much is too much for the church. Differing world views that influence the lifestyle of people is also pressuring the church to conform or be outdated. This pressure is even influencing the thoughts of many who are rooted deeply in the Catholic faith and traditions for a long time.

3.3.4 While the Church is One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic, there are members who do not feel that they belong to the One Church of Christ. Indifference, secularism and favouritism creates exclusivity and ostracizes those who are different from them in whatever seems to be the criteria that exclusivity is built upon. To complicate matters further, there seems to be a subtle mentality that over emphasizes of the diversity of the church neglecting the unity as a whole. There is an urgent need to work towards a common language that unites all peoples in any liturgical celebration, meetings, social gatherings and even formation.

### **3.4 THE NEW PERSPECTIVES**



3.4.1 We are constantly watched and monitored by people *ad intra* and *ad extra*. As a Church more than ever we need prudence to speak and act with courage. While witnessing for Christ is a necessary act, how we react or respond would paint the church in a good or bad light.

3.4.2 Creativity should be encouraged and welcomed in the Church. This however would require new ways of becoming and living as believers. Catechesis has to be looked into urgently. With the tension of catechesis being centred around Scripture, witnessing, experiences of the individual and doctrines, a balance needs to be struck that would eventually create space and platforms for genuine creativity and growth in the transmission of faith and witnessing. New wine, new skins are constantly an invitation and a call to Grow, Glow and Glorify.

3.4.3 Old models of faith and martyrs are often forgotten, only to be preserved as museum pieces. Christ like witnesses are pretty much lacking. The need to be Spirit filled, motivated and passionate witnesses in the world are still needed. While the church does not exist to entertain the world, it still has the obligation of being the conscience of the world in ways that are comprehensible and visible to the modern world.

3.4.4 Interfaith marriages have become too common these past few decades. This presents the Catholic party with an option to practice the faith, become lapse or follow the faith of the spouse. In such situations where faith is not the main criterion in deciding matters to family life, evangelization and mission becomes the anonymous victim.

#### **4. WHAT HAS THE HOLY SPIRIT INSPIRED THE COMMUNITY TO SEE REGARDING THE CURRENT REALITY OF SYNODALITY IN THE DIOCESE INCLUDING THE PRESENT LIGHTS AND SHADOWS?**

4.1 The availability of facilities within the church compound augurs well for sessions, faith formation and other formation programs for the parishioners and community. These facilities are generously shared with those who need a place and space for programs that build up the community.

4.2 Generosity and availability in times of need, are to be applauded where the people are willing to go out of their comfort zones to reach out by sharing their resources and providing for the less fortunate.

4.3 The spirit of the early church that strived and strengthened itself through small communities is a success story for the church in Malaysia for the past few decades. However, since the turn of the century, the commitment and participation in BEC gatherings are on the wane. Many are reluctant to attend the gathering for various reasons. Some still see BECs as a way to connect with the Catholics in their neighbourhood

4.4 Competitive spirit that is correctly directed helps in the growth of a parish. Yet, if it gives birth to parochialism by feeding it, this eventually would lead to egoistic self-glorification. This reality is seen slowly creeping into the urban parishes with the social media being used as a tool for self-exaltation. The church was not built on “thumbs up” but through teamwork, sacrifice and communion with others especially those who are different from us.

4.5 With the building of bigger cities that attract the young for further studies and job opportunities the rural parishes are becoming emptier. This coupled with an ageing population and smaller families, calls for a serious review and response for the needs of the rural parishes.

4.6 There are certain issues that have been faithfully surfacing each time surveys are done at any level, be it at the Parish Pastoral Assembly, the Diocesan Synod or even the Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Convention. How do we respond to them? Do we wait for the question to just disappear? Some of these recurring themes are the poor quality yet quantity filled homilies given by the clergy, the lack of attention given to home visits and pastoral care, too much emphasis being given to race and language groups, the Church being materialistic and money minded with the people treated as an inexhaustible ATM machine and lack of direction on how to move or respond in times of need.

4.7 Prayer, discerning the will of God that is followed with dialogue with the people are constitutive elements that cannot be eliminated when deciding and making decisions that are vital for the Church. Closed up attitudes that is not open to the voices of others can deprive the Church the direction and lead that are offered by the Holy Spirit. We need to be good communicators so that the messages sent are clearly understood.

4.8 The survey was participated mostly by the adults and the elderly. The voices of the young and teenagers are rather wanting. Such being the case, how can we plan programs that are not owned by or preferred by the younger generation? While there is a galore of talents among the young people of today, the ability to engage while inspiring their faith and mission needs to be given attention.

## **5. IN WHAT WAYS IS THE HOLY SPIRIT INVITING THE DIOCESE TO GROW IN SYNODALITY?**

5.1 The journey with the heart of the synodal Church provided everyone the platform to speak and to listen to the stories that are personal, heart-warming, inspiring, worth repeating and will surely be remembered. From the individual looking at oneself and pondering how one has listened to the voice of the living God to becoming the light and salt as called by Jesus, the onus now is to think and feel as a Church for the Church. Unless the image of the church as the body of Christ becomes real, we will miss the joys and sufferings of others by pushing these to the peripheries as a private and personal experience of an individual. The early church knew what it was to be one at the table, in prayer, in teachings and in fellowship. The Holy Spirit is the agent who makes all this possible.

5.2 The post modernism thought that exalts the human person as absolute should be treated with caution. The Church is one yet it is not single, it is diverse yet not divided. It is therefore a challenge that has to be faced in order that the church does not become irrelevant to the people of today. With the prompting of the Spirit, we need to decipher what is the Holy Spirit saying to the Church and the people of today.

5.3 “We wish to see Jesus” (Jn 12: 21), the request of the Greeks to Philip is echoed and repeated by many even today who long to meet the Lord. The Church has been very much centred on the sacraments to aid the people in their faith journey. In themselves sacraments are efficacious, yet when ignorance and complacency creep in, it risks being emptied of its meaning leaving it as a hollow and empty ritual that fulfils merely the societal basic Catholic

requirements. There needs to be more concerted efforts to bring people to Jesus in order that they stay with Him.

5.4 The Holy Spirit reminds and teaches us the life and teachings of Jesus Himself and asks us to give Jesus to others. Thus, receiving the Holy Spirit should inspire us to inculcate and produce fruits that manifest that Jesus is indeed growing within us for the well being of the Church and the society. Christ-like attitude, leadership, generosity, sacrificial giving are pretty much expected from the church leadership be it the clergy or laity. It is a legitimate and valid request and expectation.

5.5 There were calls for the diocese to be more proactive in addressing the lack of pastoral care. Fulltime Pastoral care workers are needed for efficient planning, implementation and administration of the plans instead of just depending on volunteers. It would be ideal if all the parishes can have its own pastor in the near future. Faith formation material need to be relevant in helping the people to understand the faith in today's contextual situations. The approach of the diocese has to be more evangelical, missionary, being faithful to the command of Jesus towards God and man.

## **6. STEPS TOWARDS GROWTH IN SYNODALITY**

### **6.1 PRAYER**

“Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess 5: 17) and pray with a goal. It is also necessary that prayer has God as its guide and goal. Without this clear understanding, prayer becomes a monotonous routine or that is done to fill scrupulous practices only when there is time. Prayer unites us with God and others in ways that are truly mysterious yet tangible in the events that unfold in our lives and in the church.

### **6.2 PASTORAL CHARITY**

The Holy Spirit never fails to inspire people always in everywhere to be a pastor for the people especially for those who need spiritual and temporal assistance. *Kenosis* pushes us out of our comfort zone while charity keeps us consoled in our uneasiness for sharing God's love with others.

### **6.3 PERSEVERING PATIENTLY**

“Let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up.” (Gal 6: 9). Many success stories come about because people believed and continued to persevere in doing God’s will. As Church we are called to persevere in being faithful to the call of God even in the midst of confusion and trials and to be humble in the midst of glorifying successes.

#### **6.4 PEOPLE CENTREDNESS**

There needs to be intentional systematic planning that strengthens the current church which are inclusive, cohesive and courageous. The one Church of Christ needs to be felt, belonged and loved as One church with the needs of the diversity attended with impartiality. The Church needs unifiers who are able to connect with all the people of God, ministering to the growth of the laity whose needs and demands are ever increasing and changing.

#### **CULTURAL IMAGE:**



## DESCRIPTION:

The Cultural Image that transpired from our reflection and soul searching was “A Tree”.

The tree is nourished by Communion, Participation and Mission which are its roots. It is growing strong reaching for the light. It's fruits are variety, emphasizing the role played by the Holy Spirit in bearing fruits in the lives of the faithful. The right side of the tree is fruitful, abundantly colourful so much so the birds of the air comes and built its nest on it. This symbolizes the

growth that the Church in the Diocese has experienced over the years which are evident in the growth in terms of spirituality, charity, commitment to ministries and goodness that is shared with others. Scripturally it also shows the people who are on the right hand side as seen in Matthew chapter 25. On the left side, the image gives a gloom reality of those who have wandered far from God and man. They are no longer one with the branches. Being withered and dried the leaves detached itself from the branches and falls down. The branches are still fresh, thus giving hope for future life that is possible through repentance, conversion and realization of the fact of us being a part of God's great dream and blessing for humanity. The light coloured circle that encapsulated the tree represents that whole world. The Diocese of Malacca Johore is but a small part in the great plan of God yet it is an important part that cannot be denied in its existence and contribution towards the building of God's kingdom. The butterfly with the cross is the logo for the Malacca Johore Diocese 50<sup>th</sup> Jubilee celebrations. The butterfly flies from the side which has growth and withering leaves. Symbolising the journey that has been made, is now our point of arrival and the point of departure for the future of the diocese.

## CONCLUSION

“For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission”. Communion, Participation and Mission are not options to choose from but commitments that hold us as One People on One Journey towards One Destination. For the Diocese of Malacca Johore, the synodal process can be seen as a “diocesan retreat” which was participated and responded by many. All that waits to be seen is if the synodal process would only fill minutes of meetings or creates meetings that guides the church and the people of God in a renewed way in the world today. The excitement is in the air as the diocese is on the path to celebrate its very own milestone this year. It is a celebration of a journey that shows the faithfulness of God who has journeyed with and shining through the talents and brokenness of men and women of today. The pages of its story are filled with gratitude to God for the many blessings we have received and have become for one another. It is a story that is shared since it has been mingled with the participation of many Christ centred people in its journey. It is a story of mission just seeing how much the Holy Spirit moved the missionaries who arrived here with a vision that aided them to build not just churches but faith communities that have continued to thrive all these years. As we move on, our commitment now should be to become One in Communion, Zealous in Participation and Persevere prayerfully in our Mission.

## **APPENDICES:**

## **1. PERKONGSIAN GRADIANA UN (INDONESIA)**

Saya Gradiana Un dan suami saya bernama Frederikus Nigel, berasal dari Indonesia, Provinsi Entete. Saya bersama suami berkerja di kebun buah-buahan, di Melaka.

Sebelum perkahwinan kami diberkati, kami sudah memiliki seorang anak perempuan yang berusia 10 tahun. Sebelum ini, kami tidak merasakan damai kerana hidup dalam kesedihan dan amarah. Tetapi setelah mengikuti beberapa sesi persiapan perkahwinan yang telah diberikan oleh Sr. Magdalena Kopong, akhirnya, perkahwinan kami telah diberkati pada 17hb Februari 2022.

Saya sangat gembira dan bersukacita kerana akhirnya perkahwinan kami diberkati. Saya merasakan hidup saya dan suami semakin baik dan damai, meskipun berhadapan banyak cabaran. Suami saya juga semakin banyak berubah terutama sekali dari aspek iman.

Tuhan sangat baik kerana selalu mendengarkan doa kami. Tuhan memberikan berkat anak kepada kami, saya disahkan mengandung anak kedua. Namun, kegembiraan ini tidak bertahan lama, kerana saya mengalami keguguran dan sekaligus kehilangan bayi. Meskipun kesempatan merasakan kegembiraan ini hanya dalam beberapa ketika sahaja, namun saya tetap bersyukur untuk kebaikan Tuhan.

Terima kasih kepada Fr Moses Rayappan, Sr. Magdalena Kopong dan Sr. Liza Anggie yang telah banyak membantu kami dari mula sehinggalah perkahwinan kami diberkati.

## **2. PERKONGSIAN JOAN JURIDAH (ORANG ASLI)**



Saya Joan Juridah, Orang Asli dari Batang Melaka. Saya mula mengenali Yesus melalui Fr. Anthony Naden. Saya mengenali Fr. Naden ketika berumur 11 tahun setelah saya dan keluarga berpindah ke Batang Melaka. Kakak saya berkahwin dengan pasangannya yang beragama Katolik. Ketika itu, Fr. Naden datang melawat di kampung kami.

Fr Naden, merupakan seorang yang sangat dihormati di tempat kami. Ini bukanlah kerana kedudukannya yang tinggi tetapi kerana beliau sangat suka membantu masyarakat Orang Asli. Sepanjang mengenali beliau, Fr. tidak pernah memaksa, meminta mahupun mendorong kami untuk mengikut jalan Yesus. Walau bagaimanapun, dari apa yang Fr. lakukan dan tanamkan di hati kami, jelas menunjukkan sebenarnya itulah yang Yesus mahu Fr lakukan. Fr. membantu secara senyap tanpa mengharapkan sebarang balasan dan adakalanya Fr. diperlekehkan oleh masyarakat kami dan juga orang luar.

Fr membantu saya sejak zaman sekolah lagi. Apabila saya menghadapi masalah atau memerlukan seseorang, beliau akan membantu dan selalu mengingatkan saya *“Ju, tutup mata dan berdoa lah. Yesus akan selalu ada dan membantu kamu”*. Itulah yang saya amalkan dari dulu sampai sekarang. Walaupun saya bukan beragama Katolik pada masa itu.

Perkahwinan saya dengan Rex Rizan a/l Tan Ah Kuang telah diberkati di Gereja St. John Vianney Tampin pada tahun 2014. Suami saya seorang Katolik. Saya pernah bertanya dengan seorang Paderi di Gereja Visitation, Seremban bagaimana proses untuk mengikut jalan Yesus. Tetapi, sayangnya pada masa tersebut saya tidak mendapat bantuan yang saya perlukan. Saya kongsikan rasa kekecewaan dengan Fr Naden. Apabila melihat kesungguhan saya, Fr telah memperkenalkan saya dengan seorang Paderi iaitu Fr. Moses Rayappan, yang pada masa itu baru bertukar ke Melaka. Fr. Moses, Sr. Magdalena Kopong dan Sr. Liza Anggie telah datang ke rumah untuk mengongsikan iman dan memberikan katekesis iman kepada saya dan anak-anak.

Saya dan dua orang anak lelaki saya telah dibaptiskan oleh Fr. Moses Rayappan pada 20 Disember 2020, bertempat di Gereja St. Francis Xavier, Banda Hilir, Melaka. Manakala, suami saya juga menerima Sakramen Penguatan pada masa itu. Syukur dan terima kasih yang tidak terkata saya panjatkan kepada Tuhan, kerana akhirnya saya menjadi anak Tuhan. Terima kasih kepada Fr. Moses Rayappan, Sr. Mag, Sr. Liza dan teman-teman dari Gereja Kem Terendak yang menyokong saya.

### **3. CAROLINE AMANI**

My name is Caroline. I am a parishioner of the Church of St Theresa Masai. My husband's name is Charles and I have four sons. I was born in a Hindu family. I did not know anything about Christ or Christianity but the only thing I remember was that my family was anti-Christian. Since my childhood I grew up with this understanding. I first got to know about Jesus when I was in secondary school. My classmate will read a thick book and tell me about Jesus and his family. She told me that Jesus was a good man but he was crucified for us and on the third day He rose again. The first time I heard this, I thought it was a fairy tale. Later as I starting reading the book, I found it interesting and inspiring. Therefore, I wanted to know more about 'the person' who is willing to die for me. I became interested to know more about Jesus. I enrolled for RCIA and became a Catholic before I got married. My family did not approve of my choice to marry a Catholic man. The words from prophet Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you" (Jer 1: 5), touched me, giving me hope. My husband's family taught me some prayers and often brought me for Mass. I began loving Jesus more in my life.

An incident happened when my eldest son, Calvin Isaac was 11 months old. While playing with some boys, he was pushed down on the floor causing serious damage to the veins of his ear canal and he became deaf. My world became dark. Why did God do this to me? Why? I just could not accept it. I took him to many doctors but all efforts were futile.

The parishioners of the Church of St Teresa Masai gave me much encouragement and support during these trying years. I kept my faith, believing that God did not abandon me nor my son but God has a plan for us. I accepted it and moved on with life. Slowly I began to see the power of God at work. I send my son to the special school where I met many other children who were hearing impaired. The parents of the children started a support group to help and encourage one another. I was beginning to see the hand of God working through my son. Through my son, God has used me as an instrument to help other children with disabilities. I could feel with the children and their parents. My son is now 26. He has completed his studies and is now independent and works at a printing shop. I believe that all this is God's will for me. I am not shy to share about my God and religion to anyone and everyone wherever the occasion arises. I have seen the Lord Jesus working wonders in my life. I have tasted the Lord and indeed He is very good. Now I am convinced that no matter what the situation is, Jesus is there to help and guide me. I will believe and love Jesus all the days of my life.

#### **4. KYLE'S TESTIMONY**

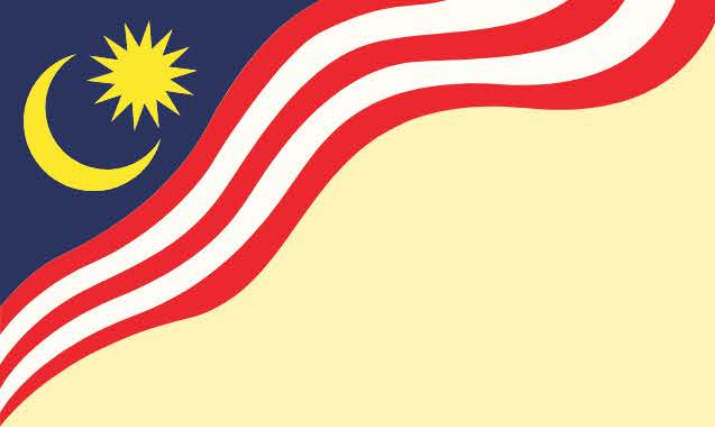
My name is Xavier Sinathamby, from Christ the King, Kulai Church. I want to share a true story in my life; an unfortunate incident that took place in 2013. My 10 years old son, Kyle

Emmanuel, was admitted in a private Hospital for severe headache. The CT scan result showed, he was suffering from “Hydrocephalus”. That was the first time I heard of such a diagnose and the doctor explained that, it is actually fluid retention in his brain. Kyle underwent a surgery on 11<sup>th</sup> Dec 2013 to implant a “VP Shunt”, a device to regulate the fluid flow from his brain. The doctor said it is common to have “Shunt” implanted and Kyle was discharged after almost a week. A follow up scan revealed, there was bleeding in his brain due to over-draining by the “Shunt”. Kyle was admitted again and since then, he had undergone not one or two, but six surgeries to get the right setting of the “Shunt” but none was successful. Kyle’s condition deteriorated, the bleeding extended to his inner brain. He was in a tremendous pain due to the pressure. He was no longer able to eat and lost a lot of weight drastically.

Seeing Kyle’s condition was getting nowhere plus the financial constraints I went through, I had to transfer him to the Government Hospital. Doctors in GH initially advised me that the current “Shunt” may not be suitable for him and suggested for a replacement. A surgery was scheduled for this, but on the day of the surgery, before entering the operating theatre; Kyle experienced fits for the first time. Awkwardly, same thing happened on the second schedule, Kyle experienced fits again just before entering the operating theatre. Meanwhile, his condition deteriorated further, he was now in coma stage and warded in ICU. We were helpless and unable to see Kyle’s suffering any longer. At this point, we surrendered everything to God and was even ready to let him go.

We knew that God was beginning to intervene, when the doctors proposed an alternative latest procedure known as ETV with a 50% success rate. It was then I understood the reason for the postponement of the earlier surgeries. The ETV procedure went on successfully, Kyle no longer needed a “Shunt”. After almost 3 months in the hospital, he was finally discharged in March 2014, on Holy Thursday. However, Kyle was unable to talk, walk and was being tube fed. He was paralyzed due to multiple brain surgeries in a short period of time and was in a wheelchair. Nurses were preparing us to accept Kyle’s condition that he will be retarded for the rest of his life. Despite the devastating news, we brought back home a paralyzed child, but we never gave up our hope but, believed in miracles. It was tough caring for him, the family and work.

Despite the struggle, we were blessed with good and faithful people around us. Miracle started to work in Kyle’s life; when we saw little progresses day by day. During the month of the Rosary, the statue of Mother Mary was brought to our home by the BEC group and on that day, Kyle said a few words. Within just 2 months, Kyle miraculously improved in speech, mobility and finally able to eat. The doctors were amazed and puzzled with his drastic development. His therapist was speechless, they could not figure out, how this was possible. Until now, the doctors are unable to diagnose the root cause of his illness. It has been almost 9 years now, he seemed to have a complete recovery. My family and I will continue to walk in faith, as we believe that it is through faith and prayers that our son was saved. Throughout the whole process I have learnt a lot of lessons in life. This incident has taught me to be open and to see things in a different perspective. Through this miracle that we witnessed and experienced, what we read in the bible about the healing stories done by Jesus became very real.



# Diocese of Penang



## Synthesis Report



For a synodal Church  
communion | participation | mission

# DIOCESE OF PENANG PRE-SYNODAL REPORT

This is a compilation of responses on the synodal questions from the three Deaneries of Penang Diocese.

## (A) THE PROCESS OF CONSULTATION

- Simple Questionnaire
- Elaborated Questionnaire
- Chatbot
- Modified Questionnaire for Children
- **Responses were obtained through:**
  - Online answers to questionnaire and Chatbot
  - Zoom Meetings
  - Face to Face meetings

## (B) PARTICIPATION

Participation from people in the diocese from various parishes ranged from 5% to 38% of the population. An approximate of 2000 individual responses and 50 group response was taken. A total of 24 parishes had responses submitted in the online database. Small chapel/ministry groups had also manually submitted responses at parish level. Their feedback is included in this report

Key challenges to reach out included restrictions on movement caused by the Covid 19 pandemic and the inability by many to use online methods to respond. This is an estimate as it was pointed out that no clear number was shown in many places to establish a definitive percentage

## (C) THE EXPERIENCE

- Opportunity to meet and go through the synodal process
  - Sincere Feedback
  - To be able to contribute to the growth of church as one community
  - Enthusiasm of Leaders and parishioners in the process
- 1) The Challenges:**
- Lack of understanding of elaborated questions and the synodal process
  - Difficulty to reach out due to Covid 19 restrictions
  - Time constraint
  - Not able to fully reach out to those in peripheries
  - Social/cultural/geographical context of parishes differ thus posing unique situations for each parish
  - Most parishes were unable to reach out to the persons who were considered being in the peripheries.
  - The questionnaire was considered to be not-relevant by some
  - The use of online feedback forms was considered to be a one-way communication
  - Time was considered to be short

- A general apathy (indifference) towards the whole process
- Demographic challenges
- Based on past efforts (e.g. PMPC) not hopeful that anything will come out of this
- Not willing to share time in the synodal questions
- Many found the word synodal very frightening and mystifying

## 2) The Insights:

- Enlightened by this synodal process
- Value of the synodal process of answering the questions in the group/ family/ ministry.
- Visible commitment of leaders was seen
- An opportunity to rekindle and revitalize the spirit of Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs)
- Relationship Building
- Opportunity to Stop and Review on things we take for granted
- Life experiences shared
- Majority focussing on **negative feedback**
- The respective leaders or ministries, as well as all of the parishioners shall work hand in hand on the action items and improvement plans.
- Analysing the feedbacks collected was very interesting as it showed if our parish was doing well or not so well.
- Many feedbacks were on the attitude of our Clergy and Ministry Leaders. Egoism played a Major role.
- Parishioners wanted clearly Clergies to be more humble and to reflect Christ. They wanted Leaders to be understanding and patience.
- A general pointing out by most on a **need to be more “Listening and Empathetic”** These words were repeated in several feedback report
- This synodal process is something that can continue
- Some (a minority )feel that there is no change needed in the Church and they have a preference for the status quo
- We get to learn and understand the understanding of each member in our group where by improvement works has been carried out as soon the questionnaire is done.

## (D) THE FEEDBACK FROM PERAK, NORTHERN & PENANG DEANERY

### 1) Communion

- Synodal Process gave an opportunity to gather and come together
- There is a sense of Belonging in the Church
- Consultation has already been part of the Church
- Emergence of Digital life in the way we are as Church
- Opportunity to gather to talk about the joys and struggles in the respective ministries
- Fear of Islamization and secularization of our Youths unites us
- Synodal Process brings everyone together
- Relationships keep communities alive
- Discovery of new talent among the people
- Online masses kept us close to God and faith
- People in Leadership take things for granted
- Need deeper relationship with
- God
- Eucharist
- Each Other
- Ministries
- Need for Respectful and Empathetic listening

- Lack of unity among priests
- Priests ignore people; "Lord over laity"
- Need for pastoral work and dialogue with other communities in society
- Need to bring unity in BEC; Responsible BEC
- A need to focus on Holy Spirit in BEC gatherings and discussions
- we all have a role to play in discerning and living out God's Call for His people
- Elderly feel left out and neglected
- Divorce and Separation
- Need tolerance
- Sermon should touch the community rather than pin-point anyone.
- Home visits/desire to serve regardless of disagreement and going extra mile to reach out to those who have left the church.
- More people out there are willing to listen but it depends on how we share the message, good news. Pray in time of misunderstanding.
- No unity/lack of unity/no stronger bridge -building in family as well in the church.
- Selfishness / not accepting others/Hatred/ jealousy.
- Those in responsibility/authority using hard words/break the communication among us/hurt by word/ Autocratic leadership vs democratic/power play in church. Criticizing someone in public rather than talk to them personally.
- Afraid to talk to the priest who are bias(not seeing the real situation but condemn people easily). Little pastoral and more attention in building physical structures.
- Respects to the priests are slowly eroded. Priests who ignore people/ using bad words to them/ talking about cast.
- No unity among priests in the same diocese also.(criticizing each other, cannot accept other priest) lead the community into confusion, separating us ,lead us to misunderstanding each other. Afraid to talk to the priest who are bias(not seeing the real situation but condemn people easily).

## 2) Participation

- High interaction within a ministry
- Continued to serve during pandemic
- Had been journeying together
- Social Media and online methods is used to reach out
- Need more involvement of:
- Youth
- Elderly
- Children
- One person pointed out the lack of listening in these words: **"No one Listens to me"**
- Need empathetic Listening
- People don't involve for fear of being hurt
- Youth don't feel engaged; Lack of young parishioners serving in Church
- Non-Catholic members of families are left out
- Need to develop new leaders
- Egoistic, lack of listening, opinion is not accepted by church leaders
- Not open to feedback
- Need for more formations in faith, Church teaching and Word of God
- Need expert youth Counsellors, psychologists
- Listen and accept LGBT community
- Need involvement of parents in catechesis
- Need well trained catechists

- Christ is “too serious and boring” to youth. Not reaching out to tik-tok minded youth
- Need to move from Clergy Centred to laity centred Church (People of God)
- Need apostolates for minority groups such as Filipinos
- Need for genuine appreciation of different cultures and languages
- Listen to voices of less educated
- Still weak in information dissemination
- Church must give more importance to pastoral work than other activities. Example: building constructions and etc.

### **3) Mission**

- Mission as a Way of Life
- Formation programs available
- Journeying together among ministries (One mind, One Heart, One Goal)
- Reaching out was carried out during pandemic
- Works or charity is being carried out
- Church has been threatened by political and nations policies and restrictions
- Inactive Evangelization
- Need to reach out beyond parish boundaries
- Need more reaching out and works of charity
- Complacency and lack of enthusiasm
- Maintenance rather than mission
- Need to dialogue with people of other faith
- To become a post-Pentecostal people-boldly step out of fear and proclaim the Gospel – (We are timid, scared and hiding behind smart-phones and tv)
- To tackle relativity in poverty
- Religious sensitivities that must be observed and avoided in Malaysia when serving outside the Church
- Catechism teachers not following the current trend in delivering classes
- We are going further and further away from understanding and feeling Love of Christ. There are too few around who are able to replicate this Love.
- Have patience, empathy and make an effort to really know someone and also my brothers and sisters in Christ.
- Nurture leaders who are open, adaptive, approachable, good listeners

### **4) Cultural Images**

- The different language groups are working well. There is much cooperation although still much room to improve. As for the migrants, very little is done as there are not many migrants who attend church celebration.
- Not all necessary language apostolates are paid attention to
- There is good cross-culture integration. Some language groups are doing well in their pastoral and ministry works whereas some seem to be complacent. However, there is a general understanding and cooperation within all language groups. Various cultural celebrations are held (e.g. Ponggal, Mid-Autumn, Chinese New Year) to unite parishioners

### **5) 17 Concerns From Perak Deanery**

- The Perak Deanery took a slightly different approach in the synodal response reporting. They also pointed out that the from the responses 17 concerns can be extracted out. Namely:
  1. Sense of Belonging:
    - Consultation had been part of our Church



- Encouraging to see all involved through this synodal process
  - The many who come for Mass and go back without sense of mission
  - Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) where laity and priests are working together
  - Need to practice more communal discernment and solution finding that one person doing it
  - arm chair critics who dissuade, confuse, demoralised and intimidate potential servers
2. Formation & Catechesis
- Lacking in systematic Faith Formation
  - Need deeper understanding and experience of Eucharist and Word of God
  - Need to talk about teachings of the Church
  - We also must equip ourselves with knowledge of current issues
  - Need trained and dedicated full time staff such as youth formators, counsellors psychologists and others
  - Children should be trained to participate in the church activities
  - More teaching and training area required regarding social, political responsibilities
  - Laity need theological learning
  - We have all the resources but we are lacking in openness and courage to empower the laity
3. Evangelization and Re-evangelization
- Within and outside the Church, vital actions are needed to more faithfully live out our call to be missionary Disciples of Christ
  - We are to respect the religions of others We are united in our beliefs about the Trinity about Jesus Christ as our Lord Saviour We are divided on how to evangelize to non believers even on how to minister to one another
4. Dialogue: responsible speaking and active listening
- We have come to realise the importance of observation, sharing of thoughts and problems especially thought provoking instances that challenged our current status quo
  - People are not speaking out or telling the truth as they are worried about the remarks thrown over to the people who are voicing out their opinions or grievances
  - Diversity in pastoral committees and openness to listen to ALL views and not strictly just saying YES to priests
  - Be open minded to ideas coming from all levels strata
  - When we listen we should not " or have the other person see things our way only We should be open to admit that the other person has something to contribute
5. Service centeredness
- While efforts in helping to the needs of others are existing among our parishioners, they are existing mostly on a personal basis Our Church has service groups such as 'Vincent de Paul', Prison Ministry etc which are active in carrying out their duties However, their activities are confined to the group members only and they seemed to be the same people over the years and the community is not collectively involved
  - Mission should start from each individual family level
6. Preferential option for the poor
- Food aid was given during Covid Movement Control Orders
  - We need to help the needy in other ways like skills upgrade, so they can " for themselves There are many talented people in our church that can help teach people how to better manage themselves like how to manage finances, how to bake, cook etc These

- To listen more and to remind one another of the mission of synodal life and implement it in our life
  - Challenges in supporting minority groups and indigenous people. We are reluctant to engage them
7. Inclusivity
    - It is quite encouraging to know that our Pope wants to hear the voice of each one of us
    - The ones with the ' voice seem to hijack the entire consultation especially on Basic Ecclesial Community levels
    - We do not make efforts to identify those who are being disenfranchised in our parish and or society and putting efforts towards rectifying this
  8. Prayer & sacraments
    - Many are praying for everyone especially those affected by the Covid 19
    - We spend years in Catechism to prepare ourselves for the Sacrament of Confirmation, yet when it comes to the Sacrament of Matrimony the preparations is severely lacking for the couple
  9. Leadership
    - The youths are left out without proper training and thus, there is no continuity in the leadership
  10. Companions on the journey
    - Need guidance for Church Leaders
    - Catholics think since they already have Communion with Christ in the Eucharist, they don't need each other (attending Mass only for own benefits but not bothering about fellow parishioners)
  11. Community building
    - We are concerned with what kind of church that we want to be in the future
    - We are very much behind from being an ideal Christian community Our faith is not in tandem with our actions in daily life
  12. Communication
    - The synod question response were open and frank in sharing their experiences and points of view
    - For some the mission is still unclear Parishioners are doing blindly what they are asked to do
  13. Social communication
    - Many claim they are not able to use computers and are not able to participate in online channels
  14. Ecumenism & interreligious
    - Communications with people of other denominations don't seem to be so rampant in our church
    - We should be well prepared if we want to have a religious discussion with other denominations as they are well versed in Bible
    - To allow Christians of other denominations to receive Holy Communion in the Catholic Church
  15. Youth
    - Youths are moving away from faith as well as out of the parish for job
    - They lack role models
    - Educating the youth in faith and deepening their faith should be our priority
  16. Diversity
    - Improve language apostolates
    - The plurality is a strength in the parish to live a synodal life
  17. Discernment
    - Listen more to what the Holy Spirit is telling us

## (E) OVERALL SUMMARY FOR PENANG DIOCESE

This overall summary was done by looking at the three deaneries reports and looking for points and phrases which came out in a repeated manner. The words were then presented at the Diocesan Level Synodal gathering and accepted by the group and the Bishop

- A focus on Relationships (accompaniment) – *The feedback was suggesting that there needs to be a deepening in relationships in the following area:*
  - *Relationship between ministries*
  - *Relationship between priests and laity*
  - *Relationship with God*
  - *Relationship with the Eucharist*
- A need to be a more Listening & Empathetic Church, especially among Leaders. To Speak with Courage in love (without Fear) – *it was felt that often many are not able to speak out in fear of being shut down by priests or by leaders. “The ones with the ‘ voice seem to hijack the entire consultation especially on Basic Ecclesial Community levels”*
- A need for greater Inclusivity:
  - Youth- *They are moving away from the faith and are not actively involved in the life of the parish. “Lack of young parishioners to serve in church Poor BEC participation Lack of servant leadership”*
  - Elderly- *Not fully active in life of the parish. Their need to be cared for*
  - Marginalised & Minorities- *The marginalised like migrants, lapsed Catholics and minority groups are often left out. They were also not reached out to during this synodal process due to challenges of movement restrictions of the pandemic and lack of time. Language apostolate too is not fully active in many parishes*
  - Poor- *Need a continued effort by all to reach out to the poor. There was good initiatives in reaching out to them during the pandemic*
  - Respect Cultures- *This is being done in most parishes and it has to be continued*
- To make Evangelization and Mission our way of Life. (go beyond boundaries of the parish)

# ARCHDIOCESE OF SINGAPORE

## PRE – SYNOD SYNTHESIS



For a synodal Church  
communion | participation | mission



## **Recommended Summary Template Submission of Pre-Synod Synthesis Report**

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## 1. Key Synthesis Points

Singapore's Synodal Journey started on 17 Oct 2021 with the opening of the Diocesan Phase. Synodal conversations commenced from Oct 2021 and returns from the conversations were done via the myCatholic.sg platform, which started from November 2021 and ~~were~~ closed on 5 May 2022. A total of 16,898 Catholics submitted 4,140 unique forms during this period. The analysis of the responses led to them being grouped into seven main concerns raised. These were on

1. Discipleship and Christian Living
2. Evangelisation
3. Formation and Education
4. Structures and Governance
5. Liturgy, Prayer and Spirituality
6. Parish Life
7. Relationships

Singapore held a two-day Archdiocesan Assembly to further discern and deliberate on the responses received. Two days of prayer and discernment were set aside for the delegation of some 500 Catholics (clergy, religious, laity) across 132 participating Catholic entities (parishes, organisations, lay movements, schools).

The Holy Spirit inspired the community to make recommendations in the following order of priority:

1. Discipleship & Christian Living
2. Formation & Education
3. Liturgy, Prayer & Spirituality
4. Relationship
5. Governance & Structures
6. Parish Life
7. Evangelisation

Following from the Archdiocesan Assembly, an Archdiocesan Pastoral Council will be formed by August 2022 to further study and recommend a pastoral plan by December 2022.



## 2. Structure of the Synodal Process

### 2.1 The Process

The Synodal process in Singapore started in November 2021 when representatives of Catholic groups were invited for an online meeting with the Archbishop of Singapore and the Archdiocesan Synodal Committee of Singapore. Subsequent to the meeting where the objectives of the Synod and what it hoped to achieve were explained, the questions for the Synod conversation in Singapore were released to all Catholic organisations. All information and resources related to conducting a Synodal conversation was also placed on a webpage dedicated for this purpose ([www.catholic.sg/Synod](http://www.catholic.sg/Synod)).

### 2.2 The Conversation Questions

Stemming from the past experiences of Singapore's Collective Discernment Exercise in 2021, it was a concern whether the original questions given in the *Vademecum* would be deemed too difficult for the laity's understanding and whether the language of the Church could be a possible deterrence to the people's participation. Therefore, with this in mind, the fundamental and thematic questions given by Vatican were simplified but made sufficiently broad based so that they did not become a barrier to participation. (Please see Annex A for the simplified questions used.)

To help people get into a mode of being comfortable with sharing their faith stories, the fundamental question was structured as such:

- Share about your personal journey of faith, and if possible, how has this shaped you.
- What hopes & worries do you have for the future of the Catholic Church?

To help deepen the reflection for this fundamental question, we also asked people to discern:

- What were the joys you experienced?
- What tensions and challenges have you faced?
- What were the moments that brought you closer to God?
- What were the moments that brought you away from God?
- What do you think God is prompting you to in this life?
- Where do you see the Church walking with you on this journey?

### 2.3 The Training and Engagement

To provide our facilitators with the confidence to carry out the Synodal conversations in the right spirit and pastoral approach, training sessions were held via online means, and were attended by more than 200 people. To equip people on the conversations, many resources were created and shared across the Archdiocese, including a set of videos to be used with young children so that they too could be engaged in this Synodal conversation. Individual



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groups who created resources for the Synodal process were also encouraged to share with others through a common google drive that was set up for all Catholic organisations.

#### 2.4 The Data Collection and Analysis Process

To aid the collection of feedback, a digital online form was created and launched for either individuals or groups to use. Returns could be submitted either with names or anonymously. The online form closed on 5 May 2022.

Groups that were already in touch with Catholics on the fringe were engaged to aid us in reaching out to them. Synodal conversations by Courage Singapore, for example, were specifically organised to get the participation of Catholics with same sex attraction. There were also efforts made to engage our Christian brethren in interreligious dialogues led by the Archdiocesan Commission for Inter-Religious Dialogue.

To analyse the responses, we employed two methods, namely Human Classification and IT analysis of responses. In both methods, only unique values were analysed. All responses were read by a team of people (thereafter called readers) who would thereafter classify the responses according to subjects.

The initial set of responses submitted in November and December 2021 were initially classified against a set of 21 subject headers adapted from the Adelaide's Diocesan Assembly Consultation Analysis 2021 report. It was noted that most of the subject headers from the report's themes were applicable for the responses in Singapore. However, there were a few subjects that were not listed in the report but were prevalent amongst our responses, such as evangelisation and re-evangelisation.

Subsequent to this, as a practical measure in handling the various subjects, the small classes of subjects that emerged were grouped into broad themes. Thereafter, all responses received from January 2022 to May 2022 were classified against the identified themes. This is also done in part to facilitate the discussion sessions expected to be done during the Archdiocesan Assembly, where delegates were asked to discern the themes of discussion. Thus, having a smaller number but broad-scoped themes was the approach adopted for the Assembly's discussion.

From the re-grouping of subjects into broader themes, we were able to identify seven (7) themes in total. Once categorised into the seven themes, the classified responses were then passed over to the IT analysts to further analyze the data points. All text responses were converted to spatial points via Tensorflow Hub's Universal Sentence Encoder Multilingual v4. Similar responses and sentiments were clustered and then identified within the responses.





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The geometric median and all the samples identified to represent the clusters were then studied to understand the meaning behind each cluster of responses. Vertex weighting was also applied to group responses according to their group sizes by weighted ICA, weighted spectral clustering and weighted geometric median.

## 2.5 The Experience & Response

Initial uptake of the Conversations was slow in the months of November and December 2021, as this period was also the Singapore Archdiocese's 200 years' celebration. Conversation participation were ramped up in subsequent months, especially in the months of March and April 2022. The table below summarises the participation and feedback on the various topics.

Conversation Topics	Forms	Participants
Journeying Together (Main)	2,047	11,041
Co-Responsible in the Mission	217	1,031
The Journeying Companions	336	974
Speaking up	291	819
Celebration	214	723
Listening	246	547
Authority and Participation	178	477
Ecumenism	196	424
Dialogue in Church and Society	159	344
Synodality	132	295
Discerning and Deciding	123	223

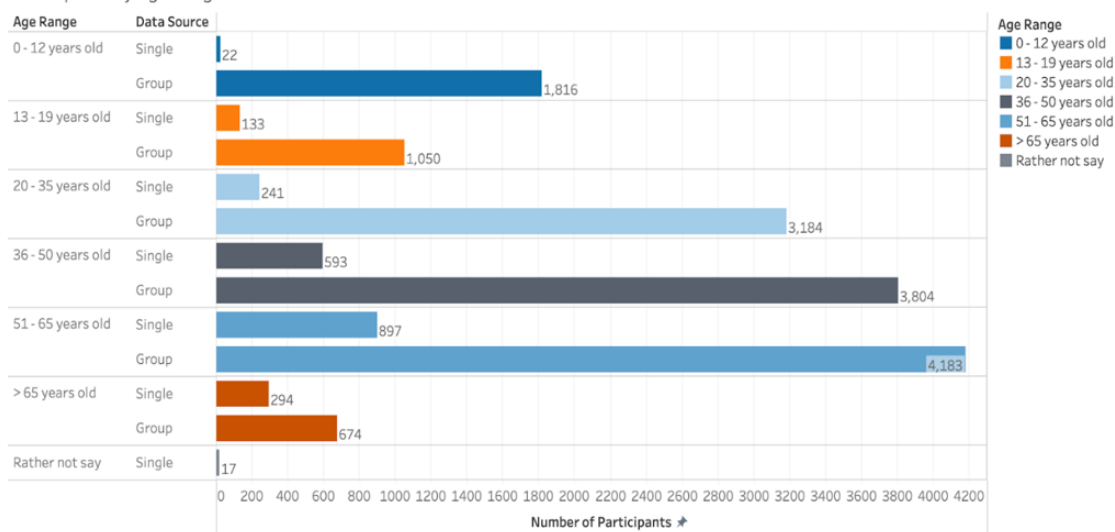
Table 1: Breakdown of forms and participants according to Synodal Conversation Topics

Not unexpectedly, many of those who responded were older Catholics, especially those from the 51 to 65 years age group, followed by those in the 36 to 50 years age group.



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Participants by Age Range



Overall, these were the responses received:

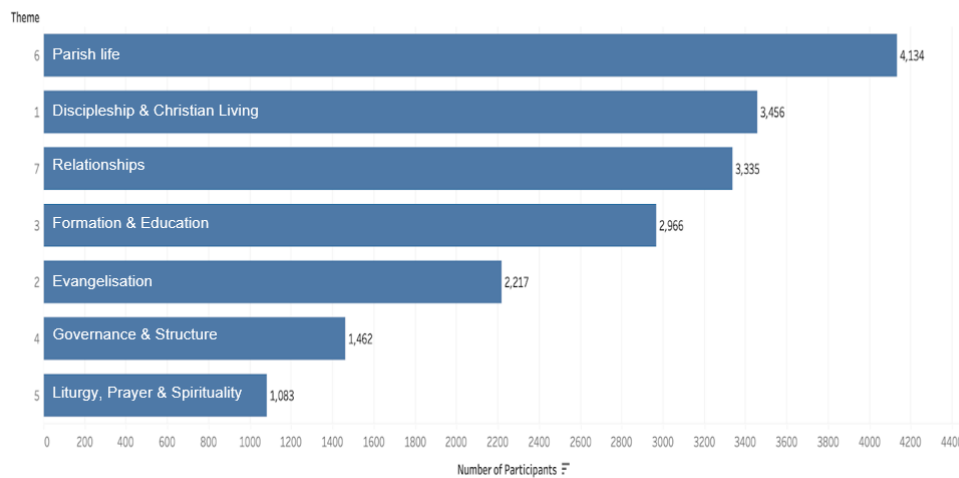
Number of valid & unique forms received from singles..... 2,197  
 Number of valid & unique forms received from groups ..... 1,942  
 Number of persons taking part in the Synod Conversations..... 16,898  
 Total forms analysed.....4,140 unique forms

## 2.6 The Findings

Overall the responses were clustered into seven themes. The theme that resonated with most participants was Parish Life, followed by Discipleship and Christian living. The theme on Relationships, forged either within the family, the parish or church communities, had the third largest number of participants. Of interest is that liturgy, prayer and spirituality had the smallest number of participants concerned with it. However, the importance of prayer as a tool of communicating with God was very much shared in relation to other themes, such as Discipleship and Christian Living and Relationships.



Participants by Theme



A lot of insights were available from the given responses. Most responses were positive and hopeful in nature. The majority of participants, who professed to be close to the Church, shared how important God was in their lives. Many shared their God encounters and how such life-changing moments were critical to help them return to Church or to strengthen their prayer lives and relationship with God.

From the Synodal responses, the broad summary is as follows:

- Discipleship must be something that Catholics want to embrace, beginning with the planting of faith in the family, and nurtured through prayer.
- Evangelisation is important but people are hindered from doing so because of their fears, ranging from the lack of knowledge of apologetics to courage in witnessing their faith.
- Formation is critical, and needs to be structured as a lifelong and on-going concern for Catholics. Catholics need to be convinced of the importance of lifelong faith formation in their lives. Poor faith formation may result in nominal Catholics leaving the Church.
- Structures and Governance of the Church need to be made more welcoming, transparent in order for Catholics to feel a greater sense of belonging. Two polarities emerged, one side citing that the Church was too hierarchical and rigid, and needed more flexibility, while the other side wanted to see more reverence and tradition brought back to Church as they felt too much accommodation was made to modernism.
- Liturgy, Prayer and Spirituality are important facets of the faith, and need to be actively cultivated in Catholics. Many were concerned about how Catholics saw the importance of the Mass and the Eucharist in their lives.
- The Church was widely acknowledged as an institution of importance to the participants especially as a place where they worship God. Clergy and laity need to be



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co-responsible for the Church, especially in the Parish Life, where the support of the faith is felt through communities and neighbourhood groups. While there were many positive stories about how parish leaders were supportive of their faith, several Catholics also called for better formed leaders in the Church. While calls for more formation were made, ideas on exactly how formation should be done were raised by the laity and would be concerns that the wider Church needs to reflect on.

- Relationships that people share are cited as being influential in shaping their own faith. Many older Catholics were concerned that young Catholics would be influenced to leave the Church through secularism, materialism or individualism.

About 25% of the participants who claimed to be either neutral, not close to the church or do not belong to any church communities, were, by comparison, less positive. Several were critical of the Church, in terms of its engagement with the people and its outreach efforts. Almost all offered suggestions on how improvements or restructuring could be done to better the church experience of the faithful (e.g. better programmes, more welcoming activities, more caring leaders, more genuine fellowship, less church politics).

What was clear was that this Synodal process had reached out to a wide spectrum of people, including those who have been hurt by the Church, either by the clergy, religious or even lay leaders. What is heartening is that even those who were hurt, still cared enough to write in and express their disappointments and wish for changes to be made. The hurts cited by people included how they felt their priests or fellow Catholics misunderstood them, were not compassionate enough towards their situations or were not transparent enough. Calls were made for the Church to be more welcoming and transparent with the people as well as to be genuine with the faithful.

Overall, the responses showed a deep desire to be better Catholics, to have a stronger faith life and a strong yearning for a better relationship with God and the people of God. There is a concerted acknowledgement that our faith formation can be better strengthened, as can our church structures and governance to be a more welcoming, transparent and non-judgemental church. Communities were cited in many instances as good structures that can be used to form people and to build meaningful relationships amongst the faithful, as communities can be a source of strength in the faith journey of people when they are properly organised.

## 2.7 The Consensus

As part of the Synodal conversation, participants were also asked if there was consensus and what their feelings were. Overall there was strong consensus among the participants. All but 37 responses, or 98% of the group conversations had consensus. In terms of the feelings



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raised, while there were several who expressed disappointments with the church, the overall sensing is that there is hope – even when things were not good, that hope in the Triune God will prevail and there is hope that something good will emerge from this Synodal process.

## 2.8 Further Discerning of the Responses through the Archdiocesan Assembly

Based on the Synodal Responses submitted, some 500 Catholics across 132 organisations and parishes were nominated to be delegates at the Archdiocesan Assembly held on 10-11 June 2022.

The Assembly process began in May where delegates gathered twice online to be briefed on the Assembly and the process involved. Information concerning how the Archdiocese was organised and operated, as well as an extensive report and analysis of the Synod Responses were shared with all delegates who were also placed under an oath of secrecy and fidelity to ensure that confidentiality was kept.

During the Assembly, delegates were placed into groups, where each group had at least a priest or a religious, to share their thoughts and discernment. Interspersed in the Assembly programme were prayer moments as well as Eucharistic Adoration, and dialogue sessions that allowed the faithful to openly share their thoughts with one another. Alongside the reflections, delegates also deliberated on the possible recommendations that the Church could consider. A total of more than 900 recommendations were given.

## 2.9 The Current Reality

During the Archdiocesan Assembly, emerging from both the discussion and prayers, the delegates were also asked to indicate the priorities that the Church in Singapore needed to focus on.

The Holy Spirit inspired the community to make recommendations in the following order of priority:

1. Discipleship & Christian Living
2. Formation & Education
3. Liturgy, Prayer & Spirituality
4. Relationship
5. Governance & Structures
6. Parish Life
7. Evangelisation

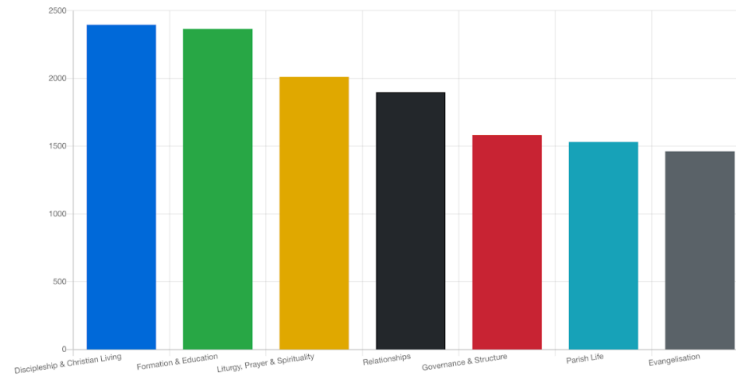


### Results for Indication of Priorities

Tabulate Results

Final

Total Votes: 473  
Score





### 3 Conclusion

There are several points of learning from the initial slow take up of the synodal conversations. Firstly, while the archdiocese has completed the bicentennial celebration last year and the church here came through a collective discernment exercise from that celebration, this synodal process is different as in its intent to reach a wider audience including those who are not visible and/or are at the margins is not within the usual reach of the church. The delay in the return of the responses is an indication that the church needs to come to the realisation of who do we have and who have been left out or have been invisible and unheard. The inclusion of this particular audience with much intentionality has helped raised the awareness here that indeed we have among ourselves people who are at the margins and are left out in our consultation in the past.

With the realisation comes the question: where are these who are at the margins, the unheard and the invisible? It took time for the church to find and build trust with this audience to convince them that indeed their views are important and we want to hear them however challenging or difficult to hear. While it is not quite possible to build firm trust in the short time, it has generated enough energy to encourage some of these to speak up and tell their stories. The church remains humble by their sharing and the resolution that we bear the pain and burdens together.

While the participation across the archdiocese only involved 16,000 people, the posture of a listening church has given enough hope to people to come out to share their concerns and hope for the future of this church. It is important to learn from this and to remind and encourage all, especially those in leadership about the important stance of a listening church. When we can listen well, we can grow relationships that mimic the perfect relationship of the Trinity becoming a sign of hope for others.

Comparing the responses from the Synodal Conversations and the outcome from the Archdiocesan Assembly, what was clear was that there is a strong need for the many parts of the local Church to be in Communion with one other in the Mission of the Church. From the Assembly, the delegates were in consensus that there is a oneness of purpose and oneness of unity, and more than ever, we as the Body of Christ, need to come together as collaborators and to be co-responsible to build up a vibrant, evangelising and missionary Church in Singapore. Synodality was felt as all delegates were able to have open and honest sharing without any judgement. Instead the focus was on listening with the ears of their hearts.

To this end, Cardinal-elect William Goh announced that in Singapore, an Archdiocesan Pastoral Council will be formed to take a deeper look at the recommendations and work towards coming up with a Pastoral Plan. Nominations for suitable candidates to the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council will be open until 31 July 2022. Thereafter, a four-person committee, together with Cardinal-elect William Goh, will appoint the Council by August 2022. The appointed Council will thereafter come together in September and November to



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work out an appropriate Pastoral Plan which would be shared with the Archdiocese by December 2022.

Certainly, from this consultative and spiritual exercise, we have gained a holistic sensing from our Catholics who have shared their dreams and visions with us. We have also heard the voice of the Holy Spirit through the Assembly. In the very words of Pope Francis, it is now the time for us to *“allow hope to flourish, inspire trust, bind up wounds, weave together relationships, awaken a dawn of hope, learn from one another, and create a bright resourcefulness that will enlighten minds, warm hearts, give strength to our hands, and inspire ... a vision of the future filled with the joy of the Gospel.”*





## Annex 1: Questions used in Synod Conversation

1	<p><b>Main Questions*</b></p> <p>Our faith is a journey, which starts when we are baptised and ends when we eventually meet God in Heaven. We invite you to share your journey and experience as a Catholic, and where possible, to suggest what can be done to better our journey together.</p>
	<p>Share about your personal journey of faith and if possible, how has this shaped you.</p>
	<p>What hopes &amp; worries do you have for the future of the Catholic Church?</p>
2	<p><b>THE JOURNEYING COMPANIONS:</b> In the Church and in society, we are side by side on the same road.*</p> <p>As baptised Catholics, we are all companions on this “faith journey” to understand and love God better. Let us think about how we are growing in our faith and who are the people who are helping us do this. We also think about the ones we need to help to get to know Jesus better.</p>
	<p>In our Church, who are the “companions” in our faith life?</p>
	<p>Who are the people that we have not reached out to? Why?</p>
3	<p><b>LISTENING:</b> Listening is the first step, but it requires having an open mind and heart, without prejudices.*</p> <p>Pope Francis said that "Listening is never easy. Many times, it is easier to play deaf. Listening means paying attention, wanting to understand, to value, to respect and to ponder what the other person says." We want to know whether we are really listening to the people around us. Are we listening with an open heart and mind or are we choosing to ignore the people that need our love?</p>
	<p>In the Church, what stops us from listening to those who have different views than ours?</p>
	<p>As the people of God, how can we better listen to the voices of the elderly, the youth, the poor and the socially excluded (e.g. special needs, marginalised, divorced)?</p>
4	<p><b>SPEAKING OUT:</b> All are invited to speak with courage and parrhesia, that is, integrating freedom, truth, and charity.*</p> <p>Words have the power to either give people hope or to destroy them. As people turn to social media to share their views, how do we react when we receive false information or fake news? In this topic, we want to explore how ready we are to speak up for what is right and for God's Truth.</p>
	<p>Do I always speak up courageously, honestly and responsibly?</p>



	Do we do this in our Church, family, workplace, school and society? If not, why?
5	<p><b>CELEBRATING: “Journeying together”</b> is only possible if it is based on communal listening to the Word and the celebration of the Eucharist *</p> <p>Jesus is inviting every one of us to a celebration every time we go to Mass. For our Almighty God, it is a celebration every time we take time to pray, to read the Bible and to truly celebrate the Eucharist at Mass. In this topic, we want to think about our prayer life and how close we are to God.</p> <p>Share about my prayer life - Why and how do I pray? What is my prayer life with God like? When do I turn to God in prayer?</p> <p>What can we do to better encourage people to read the Bible and celebrate Mass?</p>
6	<p><b>CO-RESPONSIBLE IN THE MISSION:</b> Synodality is at the service of the Church’s mission, in which all her members are called to participate *</p> <p>We are called to listen to Jesus' call for us to 'Go out and make Disciples of all the Nations.' We do not need to travel to a foreign country to do this. All Jesus is asking us to do is to live a missionary life. This means we do not just speak about God but we show God's love in a real way through the lives we lead, especially by showing mutual love among us. We share this mission and responsibility to bring people to Jesus. People who see and witness God's goodness in us will then also want to know who this Jesus is.</p> <p>What stops me from telling others about Jesus &amp; my faith? Am I shy, afraid or unwilling?</p> <p>How are we supporting one another on this Mission to make Jesus known to others?</p>
7	<p><b>DIALOGUE IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY:</b> Dialogue is a path of perseverance that also includes silences and sufferings, but which is capable of gathering the experience of persons and peoples</p> <p>True dialogue requires us to humbly listen with an open mind. Through dialogues, we want to reach an understanding with one another. It is not a debate where the intent is simply to win the other person with what we say. When we are in a dialogue, the aim is to build trust and friendship with each other as well. If we are in a true dialogue, we want what is best for each other, and we want to encourage collaboration. Even if the topic is difficult, we are called to listen and respond in a loving way that reflects God's love.</p> <p>How can we, the Church, dialogue with and learn from other parts of society (e.g. in politics, economics, culture, civic society and the poor)?</p> <p>How can I speak in such a way that reflects God’s love?</p>



8	<p><b>WITH THE OTHER CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS:</b> The dialogue between Christians of different confessions, united by one Baptism, has a special place in the synodal journey.</p> <p>Catholics and Christians worship the same God. Yet when we meet Christians of other denominations, do we see them as fellow brothers and sisters in Christ or do we see them as our opponents? This topic invites to reflect on the relationships Catholics share with our Christian brothers and sisters. We are invited to consider how we can walk forward together with each other in unity because of our common love for Jesus.</p> <p>Share about the friendships you have with Christians of other denominations.</p> <p>What do we share and how do we journey with other Christians together?</p>
9	<p><b>AUTHORITY AND PARTICIPATION:</b> A synodal Church is a participatory and co-responsible Church.</p> <p>Through this topic we are called to explore how leadership is being practised in our church groups, in the parishes, in our Catholic organisations or movements, and in the Archdiocese. We, the lay people, priests and religious are called to walk together as collaborators in building God's Church here. This does not mean we take over each other's responsibilities. Rather, we are called to recognise the different strengths we bring and to consider how can we continue to take on a more synodal (journeying together) approach when we participate in Church.</p> <p>How can we encourage more people to be active in the Church?</p> <p>How can the lay people work together with the priests &amp; religious to be co-responsible for the mission of the Church?</p>
10	<p><b>DISCERNING AND DECIDING:</b> In a synodal style, decisions are made through discernment, based on a consensus that flows from the common obedience to the Holy Spirit.</p> <p>As Catholics, when we decide on something important, we are invited to pray over it before making the decision. We do this because we want to invite God to be part of our thinking and reflecting process. This is the process of discerning, when we seek to listen to what is God's will rather than insisting on our own will. In a church community, it is just as important to do such discernments as well. The clergy and religious as well as the lay people are called to listen to each other in a synodal way, so that having listened to each other with open hearts and minds, better decisions can be made for the whole people of God.</p>



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	What ways or processes do we use in decision-making in our church community/ministry?
	Do our decision-making methods help us to listen to the whole People of God?
11	<p>FORMING OURSELVES IN SYNODALITY: The spirituality of journeying together is an educational principle for the formation of the human person and of the Christian, of the families, and of the communities</p> <p>In our life, we know that we are called to continually learn and re-learn as part of our lifelong learning. This includes our faith as well. Our faith needs to grow day by day. When God leads us to new ways of understanding His love, we learn how to better love Him and then bring His love to others. This on-going formation helps us become better children of God. It also helps us to be better able to take part in the mission Jesus is calling us to, as well as engage in this journey of "walking together" with other people.</p>
	How do we form people, especially those who hold roles of responsibility within the Christian community, to make them more capable of “journeying together,” listening to one another and engaging in dialogue?
	What do you think can be done so that you can grow or form your faith in synodality better?



# **APOSTOLIC VICARIATE OF BRUNEI DARUSSALAM**

## **PRE – SYNOD SYNTHESIS**





# SYNTHESIS DOCUMENT FOR SYNOD 2021-2023

FOR A SYNODAL CHURCH: COMMUNION, PARTICIPATION & MISSION.  
APOSTOLIC VICARIATE OF BRUNEI DARUSSALAM



## **INTRODUCTION TO THE SYNODAL EXPERIENCE**

As enlightened in the *Preparatory Document* for this Synod, the purpose of this Synthesis Document conducted for the Vicariate of Brunei Darussalam is to help to *"imagine a different future for the Church and her institutions, in keeping with the mission she has received, depends largely on the decision to initiate processes of listening, dialogue and community discernment, in which every person can participate and contribute"*.

### **Discerning The Synodal Path**

Under the guidance of the Vicariate Administrator and the two Parish Priests, a Synod Working Team for the Vicariate of Brunei Darussalam was created in early October 2021 before the launching of the opening of the Synodal Path by Pope Francis in the Vatican on 10 October 2021. The team comprised of eight laypeople from across the Vicariate's three parishes coming from various walks of life and race. Another member was added in November 2021, specifically to focus on the social media angle of the Synod.

The Synod Working Team discerned and came up with 5 general questions for everyone (Catholics and Lapsed Catholics alike) and 6 specific questions for Catholics and another 6 specific questions for Lapsed Catholics. In addition, there were 7 simple "Yes" or "No" questions that were set up for the young children channeled through the Sunday School system. They were also asked to draw and color what they thought Jesus is asking them to do better in his Church.

It was decided that the Consultation Process focus largely on the Catholic community – both the active church-going and the lapsed Catholics. We wanted to find out how the Catholic community can work together to build the church and its community in Brunei Darussalam further.

There was a separate online survey created to get feedback from other faiths and other Christian denominations. However, we did not expect the responses in this space to be significant as there were sensitivities at play in conducting a private survey outside the confines of the Church community in a predominantly Muslim country. In addition, there were additional challenges in not being able to have physical contact and face time in light of the COVID-19 pandemic situation in the country.

The drafting of the questions for the above surveys took some time as the Working Team tried to keep the questions worded as simple as possible whilst leaving room for respondents to answer in an as truthful and flexible way as they wanted. Some would write one-sentence short replies, whilst others would write paragraph length detailed answers. The process started with more questions followed by a distilling process to get to the final set of questions. That process had some questions culled, which led to some members of the Working Team understandably not being happy.

*This document was prepared using the guidelines stipulated in the Synodus Episcoporum document dated 25 February 2022.*

## **The Consultation Process**

The survey was open for responses from 11 November 2021 to 28 February 2022.

Initially, the survey was only drafted in English. However, as the Working Team started to raise awareness of the survey and the relevance and purpose of this Synod, it was suggested to translate the survey into the three common languages spoken in the Church here, namely Tagalog, Bahasa, and Chinese.

In the early part of the survey, we presented it through the various Pastoral Councils and church groups to 520 participants via online meetings to raise awareness on the Synod. This was the most challenging phase of the Consultation Process as due to COVID-19 restrictions, all of these briefings had to be done via Zoom or Google Meet.

During the time of the Consultation Process, the volume of responses to the surveys had highs and lulls. All in all, there were 370 responses online that comprised of online responses, paper surveys (that were subsequently input online), and interviews. Usually, there would be a burst of survey responses after it was encouraged or reminded again by the priests after Sunday masses. Efforts in the social media space by creating videos were done by the Social Communication team to raise awareness levels on the Synod and to encourage and underline the importance of being heard in the Synod consultation process.

Of the 370 responses, 41% were from the Filipino Community, 30% were of Chinese origin, 19% were from the local indigenous groups and 6% were from the Indian community. 59% of those who responded came from the main capital district of Brunei Muara, and 40% came from the smaller populated district of Belait. 13% of the online responses answered the Lapsed Catholic questionnaire section.

A separate Children's survey was launched in January 2022 and concluded in mid-February 2022. The survey obtained 109 responses with the median of the age group being 9 years old. More information on the findings here will be shared in this document.

The synodal process responses here brought a realization of what has already been generally perceived which is that the Catholic Church in Brunei Darussalam is thriving. This is despite it being a small Christian



community in a Muslim majority country. The precedent condition has led to greater cohesiveness born out of a sincere appreciation to express and practice their faith here freely and without hindrance.

Nonetheless, there are still areas of the Spirit that seem to be calling us to reflect on in a deeper sense with the hope of achieving greater synodality within the Church which will be shared in the next part.

## **DISCERNING THE COLLECTED CONTRIBUTIONS**

### **How is this journeying together happening today in your particular Church?**

In the Church in Brunei Darussalam, despite our human failings and challenges, we believe God is great and always present in our lives and are grateful for the presence of the Church in our daily lives. There is a consensus that being a Catholic and living a life that is good and wholesome, and spiritual is good enough coupled with attending mass. That being said, there is a palpable hunger for more in areas such as Bible study, community-based activities such as prayer meetings, community service, charity activities, etc. and they look to the Catholic Church to address that yearning. It should be noted that the Church here already has all these activities in various forms and that responses of the latter could be stemmed from the lack of awareness due to the curb in in-person physical or face-to-face activities arising from COVID-19 measures.

There is a healthy foundation of youth which will be the next generation of this Catholic Community, that are hungry and in search for God in their daily lives. They want more activities that will steer them to fulfill their spiritual hunger and are willing to mix with other Church denominations to grow together. They are perceptive in realizing that people are *“broken on the inside even if they don’t show it”* and there is a wanting to help people. There is also a strong sense of empathy and compassion in some Church parishioners that drive them to want to help other people especially the lonely and the needy. If their needs are not followed up in the desired manner, they may not attend Church regularly.

They want to see their faith in action by looking to practice their faith through acts of charity, be it in visiting the sick, the elderly, to community service in helping those in need. This is especially relevant as quoted in James 1:27 – *Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself unstained by the world.*

There is also a desire by some to have a conscious effort to bring their lapsed Catholic family members back to Church.

The Church through its liturgical music largely sings traditional and reverential songs in the form of hymns. Whilst there is beauty in reverence, there is a request if the music can be more flexible to accommodate Praise & Worship songs at certain masses (e.g., youth).

Focusing now on the children in the Church in Brunei, aged 12 and below, almost all (99%) of those in the survey are happy coming to Church and feel that the Church is part of their big Christian family. This is supported by the presence of them attending Holy Mass with their families as well as being able to connect with their friends in the Church.

The survey did show that over 73% of the children were not involved in any form of Church ministry. Whilst most of this is possibly reflective of the age of the children who responded being young (aged 8 to 12) or that it was reflective of the situation at a time where children were not able to go to Mass due to the COVID-19 restrictions.

A more comprehensive set of observations of the Church's current synodal journey is detailed below:

1. **Strong church presence with a thriving and relatively united community** that looks to the church. As a church consisting largely of migrants and expatriates and locals, it is seen as a melting pot of different races and cultures. There is a commendation for the strong "spiritual sense of community worship" that was "palpable when compared to that of the Catholic Churches in the West that have become somewhat passive. This unity benefits the Church as it creates its own identity as a Bruneian Catholic.

The Church community makes itself felt particularly in the smaller parish churches where the Church serves both as a place of worship for all Catholics, as well as a center for where the small Catholic community can gather and thrive.

The clergy and the laity in the Church of Brunei, journey together as a community joined together by the faith is largely moving in a united direction, although not to be taken for granted.

Nevertheless, there have been pockets of criticism that highlighted that people tended to stick to their groups and clique. A specific mention made was that the Bahasa and Chinese speaking communities are largely ignored given they are small minorities of the Church community. Possible reasons for this may be the language barrier.

2. And that although the Church in most parts of the world has become estranged from its community (for a variety of reasons), the **local Church here in Brunei continues to have the pulse of its parishioners** and ensure that they stay strong in their faith and belief. There have been wishes laid out in the survey that greater co-operation across the three parishes has improved especially in the organizing of Vicariate events.

3. Even though the three remaining clergies continue being good shepherds to the flock even after the passing of the late Cornelius Cardinal Sim, the Vicariate seems to be in a holding pattern. **We look forward to the nomination of our next Bishop by the Vatican.**
4. **Faith of an individual supported by the faith of the Community** – most respondents have a life-altering event such as an illness or death of a loved one that brings them closer to the realization of their limits and the need for God. They find strength in their daily faith and the Sacraments, through the Holy Eucharist, Reconciliation, devotions such as the recitation of the Rosary, Novenas, and their quiet service to God and man.

Some Catholics said they did not have an “Aha” moment in their lives but have been fortunate not to have deviated from the straight and narrow path due to strong family values and upbringing within the Catholic faith. There are also those that follow on from this, who choose to continue to live good and simple Christian lives serving as an example to their families and friends by serving in the Church and the community at large. They believe in the constant closeness of God in their midst and the underlying trust that He is always with them, and ready to welcome them back even if they should stray. They also act as beacons to encourage and inspire others within their social and family circles with the hope of bringing others (back) to the faith.

However, for most, especially amongst the young, there is a hunger for this to be supported by faith in action by being part of a community in action, either by joining groups or ministries that does good works of charity, be it in helping the needy, the elderly and even in helping not only Church people but those beyond. Cognizant that the church’s charitable actions have been always intentionally low key in the past, the recent assistance of food and necessities to over 1,900 individuals and families from the onslaught of Covid-19 affecting numerous migrant workers’ livelihoods have brought a profound sense of pride in the Church community in being able to channel and give back their *time, treasure and talent* for God’s greater glory. In the current state of the Church here, it seems we need a catalyst of the right time or environment to give our time and talents more willingly and generously.

5. **Church Leadership** – this refers to the lay people that help support the clergy. Most respondents believe that the Church leaders are well organized and listen to the people and have the best interests of the Church at heart. However, there is a small group of respondents who believe that the leaders only listen when it is convenient for them, or that they listen but there is no action after that. Some go so far as to allege that some only serve their agenda, ignore suggestions, try to poach parishioners from other ministries to join theirs, are arrogant and lead double lives and should be catechized again and driving away Catholics and therefore burdening the priests although they provided no evidence to support their comment.

There was one specific comment by a mother who cited that she had a daughter who was “*kicked out from a group/ministry... made me feel so discouraged to go to church. I question the sincerity of those serving the Lord by victimizing the weakness of my daughter to be bullied and insulted in front of others*”

There have been a lot of recommendations to have suggestion boxes in place although the transparency on how these suggestions were being looked into was a mixed bag, some going so far

as the Church leaders having to explain why certain suggestions are not being adopted. Some cited this entire synod process as a step in the right direction to enable the faithful to state their views.

6. **Youth** –The Church here in Brunei is *spiritually active*. The late Cornelius Cardinal Sim had prioritized the importance of spiritual growth for the Youth Community through many faith formations and Catholic identity programs, intended to create and shape the future generation, whilst keeping them active in serving the church as much as possible. The church does indeed give a wealth of avenues and resources for faith formation as well as spiritual discovery and devotion programs.

## **What steps does the Spirit invite us to take to grow in our journeying together?**

As a whole, the Spirit could be asking us to take a look at the following areas to grow in synodality in our journey together in the Church here in Brunei Darussalam

### **1. Activities Mentioned During The Listening Process**

- Bring back Retreats / Seminars to renew the spiritual hunger of the community. Specific retreat topics include marriage enrichment, Singles, for Fathers, Mothers, Women, and Men. Another topic suggested was to go back to what makes a Catholic and not water down the “stuff”.
- Provide training in evangelization efforts to bring the lapsed Catholics back to the Church and those living on the margins by overcoming isolation, individualism and by rebuilding tight knit communities that are welcoming and non-judgmental.
- Counseling opportunities –especially in dealing with mental health etc.
- Vocation and overseas missionary work opportunities. Possible collaboration with Missionary Community for Corpus Christi.
- Charity / Almsgiving - helping the needy and the sick. They would like to see more involvement of the community to help instead. This charity or Works of Mercy reaches out to people who are in need where it can either be within our parish or outside the church community (i.e., non-profit or government organization).
- Review the scope and breadth of Bible study - simple vs in-depth. Scheduling it on Sundays would enable more people to join.
- Faith Formation Activities- to conduct any related works of organizing more faith formation activities for the young and adults (family-based) that are interesting so that we could build up more community togetherness as well as boost up our spiritual growth.
- Fellowships with one another - to have more community growth through church fellowships with both locals and migrant parishioners. This could provide opportunities for parishioners to share their life experiences to inspire and change the mindset by putting on the mind of Christ.

### **2. Children**

- For children’s Sunday School activities, it may be too focused on the dos and don’ts, as opposed to teaching them how to form a better relationship with Jesus.

- Find opportunities for the children to participate in church ministries and groups as a large percentage only go to mass and no other Church activity apart from Sunday School. This could take the share of Children's Bible Study or Children's Mass.

### **3. Suggested Areas For Further Improvement**

- Suggestion box for feedback. Having a church lay leadership that listens and provides feedback where appropriate too. The suggestions have encouraged the regular use of online surveys such as the Synod one conducted on specific topics/areas in the Church at the parish level instead of at the Vicariate level.
- Whilst it is understood that not all suggestions are feasible, parishioners would still like to see Church Leaders acknowledge that they have been heard and possibly explain why these suggestions cannot take place.
- Review the music in the Church - There have also been requests to practice the Church hymns before masses begin to increase community bonding in the mass.

### **4. Greater Reaching Out To The Community**

- Community events - sports, music events, traditional and cultural events, Friendship Day.
- Focus on social media - social media as a tool to increase outreach. Can leverage off existing speakers online and put talks and lessons online and instill greater online presence.
- Greater involvement of the lay people to build the Church subject to right training beyond being just pillars of faith in their families but in their communities.
- Reach out to different Christian denominations – be willing to compromise with other Christian denominations to reach out them for a dialogue of faith and events where we could come together for one purpose that is to share the love that God has shown us and to help one another for a good purpose. In addition to conducting Christmas Caroling Service every year, it was suggested to do an event where we would work together to support a cause. Other suggestions include Ecumenical Praise and Worship sessions and/or Prayer Meetings, concerts or simply just visiting each other's Churches or religious groups – thus learning to be united through diversity, perhaps once or twice a year.

### **5. Foster A Culture of Diversity & Inclusiveness.**

- Respect each other's beliefs - by setting a good example to others by respecting each other's beliefs or a person's way of life. Encouraging oneself not to judge, be bossy, and criticize our fellow church members as there are times where parishioners would encounter criticisms that they would leave the church.
- Listen to people's needs - leaders of the church (priests, Parish Pastoral Councils, and ministries) to be open towards suggestions and feedback from parishioners. Allow yourself to understand them not just their spiritual needs but also emotional needs; be in one's shoes and think on their behalf. The act of humility, unconditional commitment, spirit of cooperation, in obedience to the Holy Spirit, needs to take into consideration welcoming the lost and those who want to come back to church.
- Healthy communication with one another - allowing two-way communication between church leaders and their parishioners by looking at all groups of life (i.e., the wealthy and the poor, not being biased).

- Review the Church Groups - to see if they are better in their current structure which can lead to silos or to combine them into larger groups to build greater unity within the Church. There are instances mentioned of Church parishioners that are only courteous to members of their group and not outside.
- Respect for the Aged – don't discount the old and the aged as being old-fashioned and out of touch with the current. Their wisdom and perspective could still be of much value in a period of fast-paced change.
- Organize family events each month – consisting of parishioners with families from different ministries and language groups meeting over coffee and cake with Bible Sharing as an example. This was suggested from parishioners in the smaller sized parishes.

## 6. Talent

- The offering of talents and gifts - make use of people who have the skills to help in contributing to church services (i.e., choir, reading, logistics, supporting groups). Through scouting the members within our church and not relying upon our circles of people.
- Hold Road Shows After Mass to invite People to Join A Ministry – a lot of responses have said they can volunteer more but are not sure of whom to approach.

## 7. Youth

- Youth building - open dialogue to burning but generally taboo subjects like sexual orientation, sex before marriage, etc. Greater guidance of the youth especially in helping them to focus on the challenges they face is wanted. There was an instance in the survey of an individual who left the Church because of his/her sexual orientation as he/she felt guilty about going to Church and receiving Holy Communion.
- Vicariate Youth events to have a comeback - allowing Vicariate Youth events to be brought back into the parish events (i.e., LifeNite, Famine, Festival of Praise, camps, retreats, praise & worships) as part of continuous spiritual growth for the Youth community.
- Engage the younger generation in service - encouraging more of the young community to help and serve the church as not many to be seen around the church. If possible, to personally reach out and allow them to express their effort.

## **CONCLUSION**

As cited in the *Preparatory Document* for this Synod, we recall the purpose of the Synod and therefore of this consultation is not to produce documents but to “plant dreams, draw forth prophecies and visions, allow hope to flourish, inspire trust, bind up wounds, weave together relationships, awaken a dawn of hope, learn from one another and create a bright resourcefulness that will enlighten minds, warm hearts, give strength to our hands”. It is with this hope that through the Spirit’s discernment, we identify the following areas for further reflection and action:

From the synodal journey taken thus far in the Vicariate of Brunei Darussalam, there is a palpable sense of unity in our small but thriving Catholic community that comprises of a melting pot of different races and cultures. Given that it is frequently considered a '*migrant church*', there is a constant infusion of parishioners that feel a strong sense of belonging to the Church community here. This is manifested broadly across the feedback during the Consultation Process.

Since the passing of the late Cornelius Cardinal Sim in 2021, the three remaining clergy serving in the Vicariate have continued to shepherd the flock well and there is a sincere appreciation and realization of this by the Community. Most of the faithful in the Community find strength in their individual faith by drawing on the Sacraments of the Holy Eucharist and Reconciliation, along with other devotions in the form of the Rosary, Novenas and Bible Studies to fortify their respective individual faith.

Yet there is still a wanting for spiritual '*boost ups*' conducted through programs or seminars targeted for all groups of people from family, marriage enrichment, vocation, singles. This will enable their spiritual thirst for knowledge and wisdom to be quenched, especially when addressing topics that are highly relatable and applicable in the daily faith and journey and not just addressing theological viewpoints. Cognizant of the resources available in house, some of these talks can be hosted online by other priests or subject matter experts (e.g.: marriage and youth counsellors) coordinated via a physical get together from an audience perspective (if circumstances permit). There has also been a recognition to make a concerted and coherent approach to bringing back lapsed Catholic family members back to the Church. With 13% of the responses addressing lapsed Catholic questions, there is tangible desire by family members to bring back their lapsed Catholic members back into the Church community.

From a church administration and leadership angle, whilst there is broad appreciation that the church leaders listen with consideration for the parishioners, there is a need for some leaders to be more selfless, humble and to listen more attentively to the parishioners. There should be opportunities to train the lay leadership – with the frequent mention of suggestion boxes be created and encouraged to enable constructive propositions to feedback into the system as part of the listening process. This could take the form of regular use of online surveys conducted on specific topics or areas in the Church at the parish level instead of at the Vicariate level. There have been frequent requests for seminars and talks during the Consultation Process and as such, conducting an online poll with suggested topics would resonate with the parishioners more and inspire trust and transparency in the assurance that the Church is a church that listens.

With regard to the numerous groups within the Church, there is a question if having numerous Parish Prayer Groups actually fosters greater unity within the Church or creates silos whilst ostracizing minority groups. There are instances mentioned of Church parishioners being only courteous to members of their own groups and not beyond. Specific mention was also made of Chinese and Bahasa speaking groups that feel largely ignored given they make up a minority of the Church community. An example to foster greater church inclusiveness is to have family days, which can take the form of an outdoor sports day or a quiet

Bible afternoon for the family or combined Praise & Worship sessions. This would notably require further time to pray and discern the call of the Holy Spirit. This may be one area by which the Church could encourage family members to bring back their lapsed Catholic family members slowly but surely into the Church.

The last but perhaps the most important area that the Church should focus on is on the Youth of the Vicariate. There were specific responses from the Youth Confirmation group during the Consultation Process that indicates their high level of engagement and wanting to be heard in this synodal process.

As part of the Vicariate's vision, we need to look at the Youth who are to form the future pillars of the Church here in Brunei Darussalam, whilst ensuring that they continue to stay with the Church and not be easily deterred away from the faith. We believe that more time and investment can be put into building a stronger Catholic Youth identity through engaging in open communication about the Catholic faith with them especially as they embark on their journey through life as teenagers into young adulthood. The Youth are searching for a faith that is relatable and current to them, and this may include addressing sensitive and difficult topics such as sexual orientation, pre-marital sex, etc. If we facilitate the needs of the Youth in this case, it could help to guide them and reduce their need to look elsewhere for acceptance, answers or external validation.

In concluding, the Vicariate Synod Drafting Team together with the Vicariate Synod Working Team hope that the fruits of the Holy Spirit discerned through this Consultation Process will lay the ground work for the Church here in Brunei Darussalam to achieve greater synodality. The journey together has already been taking place but the listening phase during this Consultation Process has drawn upon the collective wisdom of the Holy Spirit in the hope of guiding the Church here with ideas in ensuring this journey continues with greater unity, peace and harmony.

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