

TOWARDS OCTOBER 2024

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

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

PART THREE

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BISHOP'S CONFERENCE OF INDONESIA

Dioceses' Resume for the Second Session of the Synodal
Assembly October 2024

GROWING WITHIN A MORE SYNODAL CHURCH ON THE MISSION

Preface

1. It is worthy to be grateful that since the founding of the Catholic Church in Indonesia, the early missionaries realized that the growth in the number of priests was not commensurate with the size of the land of mission and the rapid growth as well as the need of the people for services of priests. This situation encouraged early missionaries to emphasize the importance of people's "sense of belonging" and "participation" in the Church. This "sense of belonging" and "participation" are values that are rooted and grow in Indonesian culture: community, deliberation for consensus, and mutual cooperation. The early missionaries established the Church by forming lay apostles, who knew and lived the local culture, and engaged in strategic areas of community life such as education, health and social affairs.
2. These reflections of dioceses indicate that the Synod's dynamics on synodality have confirmed the good practices that have been developing in dioceses and parishes in Indonesia. This confirmation gives us a sense of gratitude and joy due to the fact that the synodal journey of the Church in Indonesia is truly in the right direction, growing together with the universal Church while still having Indonesian characteristics.
3. Aside from that, the Synod's journey on synodality is also a remarkable opportunity for the Church in Indonesia to thoroughly evaluate the life and ministries of the Church, improve and look for new paths, which requires a willingness to carry out heart, spiritual and pastoral conversion accompanied by an increase in human quality and the professional abilities of clergy, religious and lay people.

4. The Church's life and ministries need active participations of the faithful due to the huge gap between the number of priestly vocations and the development of the people in Indonesia as well as the vast areas of service and mission. All Christians, not only priests, are responsible for the life and ministries of the Church. These recognition and understanding are increasingly growing. This understanding greatly influences not only the way of life of the Church (*modus vivendi*), but also the way of carrying out her pastoral works (*modus operandi*) as well as the way of making decisions (*modus procedendi*).

Structure and Dynamics of Church Life which is increasingly Synodal

5. The structure of the Indonesian Church has the characteristics and nuances of a community. A Parish consists of community Churches living and developing Christian basic community. This Christian basic community consists of a fellowship of families (20-60 heads of families) who live close together and gather regularly in prayer, Bible study, family visits, Lent and Advent catechesis, taking part in parish Church duties, togetherness activities and social solidarity. These religious activities are held by taking turn from a house to another of congregations or in the local chapels. The Christian basic community lives their faith in active and dynamic ways. These religious activities are commonly coordinated by the chairperson/coordinator of the community (the elder in the community). The basic community leader/coordinator routinely greets the basic community and pays attention to their lives, both in the matter of faith and even daily life. They are acting as if they are heads of large families.
6. The coordinator/chairman of a Christian basic community also contribute at the parish level together with members of the Plenary Pastoral Council of the Parish to jointly design, coordinate, monitor and evaluate the service needs of the people. Community members are actively involved in the parish in various activities, such as social service, liturgy (coordination, order, lector, altar arranger, etc.). The Parish Pastoral Council is responsible for types of ministries, namely

kerygma, liturgy, koinonia, diakonia, and martyria. Lay people take part in the ministry as a team, which is also responsible for the Church life of the parish under coordination with the parish priest and vicar priest. The dynamics of Church life and pastoral care are driven by the laity. Parish Pastoral Council meetings regularly occur at least twice in plenary, and during this period each sector holds meetings in coordination with the priests. Pastoral collaboration also occurs across parishes in an Apostolic Vicariate or deanery which regularly holds pastoral meetings, involving pastors, religious and lay people as well as communities of believers. The meeting makes strategic decisions of pastoral ministries.

7. The diocesan structure also involves many lay people, members of consecrated life and religious Brothers and Sisters, both in the pastoral council, financial council and in the management of ecclesiastical institutions. The diocese regularly holds meetings with the congregation, pastoral deliberation meetings, pastoral work meetings, which are opportunities for all members of the Church to take part in overseeing the dynamics of Church life. The diocese also provides opportunities for people to build categorical communities of people and provide spiritual companions or moderators, both in ecclesiastical communities and societies. Each diocese has Basic Directions which serve as a guide for the life and pastoral work of the diocese.
8. Thanks to God that priests in Indonesia have no difficulty to involve congregations in the pastoral care of the Church. The lay people willingly and happily take part in carrying the responsibility of shepherding the Church under the leadership of priests. Making pastoral decisions at the parish and diocesan level always involves considerations from many people which are formulated by: sitting together, talking together, deciding together and implementing together.
9. However, in some places we can still find these things:

- There is still a *pastor-centric mentality* where people hand over the dynamics of Church life to the priest and depend on him. In this mentality, priests become the makers of pastoral initiatives and decisions and even the implementation of pastoral programs. This mentality arises from the understanding that the Church comes from a foreign area and the one who brings it is the priest, so the Church belongs to the priest.
- There are still *sectoral egos*. This appears in line with the growth of communities/groups of people. Each group/community wants to develop its own pastoral characteristics and interests. Each wants to be prioritized. Sectoral ego does not only occur in categorical communities, but also in the activities of sections within the parish council or diocesan commission.

Formation on Synodality

10. Apart from being reflected in the structure and dynamics of Church life in Indonesia, synodality is also visible in personal life and way of life. Basically, synodality concerns the spirituality and way of life of the individuals within the structure of Church's ministries.
11. First of all, priests must become model on synodality. It should be clear in the priest's willingness to listen wisely, embracing everyone, spiritual friendship with the congregation, involvement of priests in activity units as well as ease and willingness to be met. Priests are the 'fathers' of the people of God. They have close relationships and carry out pastoral care with heart. Synodality formation is increasingly becoming an inseparable part of the formation process for prospective priests.
12. Synodality is also developed through close collaboration between the hierarchy and the religious community through meetings between the bishop and congregational leaders, or meetings between the bishop and members of religious congregations in the diocese. The religious, in accordance with the charism and spirituality typical of nyta, take part in the

dynamics of Church life in the diocese, which are formulated in the basic directions of the diocese.

13. Synodality is also developed together with various communities of people which are very diverse in terms of fields and scopes. Synodality means sharing charism and overcoming sectoral egos and conflicts that disrupt the Church's collective life. In order to build this synodality, the diocese or Apostolic Vicariate usually provides spiritual mentors to this diverse community to take part and be actively involved in the movement of Church life in the diocese. Routinely in the diocese or Apostolic Vicariate there are meetings of categorical communities which have the same field of service.
14. Synodality is also developed through the development of pastoral officers of dioceses, vicarages, deaneries, parishes or wards. The formation of pastoral officers is intended to build militancy of faith, embrace those who are weak and have the courage to move outward, building cooperation with many groups.
15. Synodality is also developed in community meetings in the environment, through special themes, especially those developed during this synod process, namely through spiritual dialogue. In an integrated manner, synodality is developed through tiered faith formation: from the children's community, youth community, youth community and adult and senior communities. What is emphasized is building a solid life of faith and taking part in the life and mission of the Church. Therefore, there are several activities that are developing: missionary children, evangelization courses, interfaith youth, missionary families, etc.

They need to be more addressed, involved and facilitated

16. The journey of the Synod, post the Covid-19 pandemic, has become a valuable lesson for the Indonesian Church to embrace and pay attention to those who are less visible and less cared for. From several reflections of dioceses, individuals were found who needed to be addressed, involved and

facilitated. They can be categorized as not coming or being involved in the life of the Church because of various conditions.

17. With the development of digital media, digital communities and activists have also developed, most of which are dominated by young people. This digital community extends across boundaries of place, space and time. The Church enters and walks with them in the jungle of digital media to provide the truth of the faith, defense of the faith and important information related to faith and Church life. Given the power of digital social media, the Church is also increasingly present in digital media, through parish-diocesan programs, or by embracing and involving media activists in creating and disseminating dignified and educational content. Catholic media activists have been proving that social media can become valuable tools for evangelization.
18. In 2025, Indonesia will experience a demographic bonus, where the number of people of productive age will be abundant. The Indonesian Church is committed to continuing to greet young people and provide space and roles for them in the dynamics of Church life from the Christian basic community to the diocesan level. The event of World Youth Day which was followed by Indonesian Youth Day was a valuable moment that had a positive impact on the emergence of enthusiastic, critical, creative and dynamic young people in the life of faith and society. The Church continues to greet and facilitate them to grow in faith, brotherhood, and become an inspiration and driving force for Church life according to their language. Not a few youth communities have been formed, each of which has its own character. They also need guidance and journeying companions.
19. Responding to the safeguarding of minors, several dioceses are also developing child-friendly parishes. The activities are holistic: there are spiritual activities (mass, worship, prayer, pilgrimage, catechesis, etc.), and social activities for the society (literacy development, improving children's nutrition and sanitation of the living environment of families, economic

development of families, provision of clean drinking water in parishes included in child-friendly parishes, and of course birth certificate services for children from disadvantaged families). In many parishes, safe guarding systems are also being developed to ensure the safety of children. In its implementation so far, this pastoral for safeguarding of minors has had a positive impact both in the development of the spiritual life of families and children, as well as in the development of health, education, literacy and socio-economic development of the people.

20. Cultural and linguistic diversity characterizes Indonesian Church more than other characteristics. With the development of modernism, righteous values and cultural heritages may fade and disappear. The Church's efforts to mobilize inclusion are not only limited to worship and outward arrangements, but also to the appreciation of faith that "touches the senses and moves the heart." The Christian tradition is friendly towards culture, and consider it as an integral part of living the faith. The Church always embraces cultural activists to preserve local culture.
21. The involvement of women in Church life is truly appreciated in Indonesia. It can even be said that women are active in Church life from the neighborhood level to the diocesan level. In several dioceses, women's communities are developing which are active in the political, social, humanitarian and family support fields. The Church is one of the promoters of gender equality and women's empowerment as well as promoting a culture of non-violence.
22. Together with the community's concern for those with disability, the Church is developing herself to become "disabled-friendly" mother. The methods being pursued are:
 - a. providing infrastructure and facilities within the Church so that they can enjoy their rights in public and private worship,

- b. providing opportunities for people with disabilities to be involved in the Church's apostolic work according to their abilities,
- c. involving them in ecclesiastical deliberations and decision making (consultations, discussion groups, or appointment of representatives of disabled people in ecclesiastical committees or councils),
- d. accompanying families of disabled people with the provision of accompanying resources, counseling support, and special programs designed to meet their needs ,
- e. providing space and place for them to carry out their liturgical duties, as well as share testimonies about their joy and enthusiasm for life,
- f. educating the congregation as a whole about the needs and potential of people with disabilities. This effort can be carried out in the form of seminars, training, or coaching programs that teach about inclusion and services for people with disabilities.

The Church is increasingly realizing the need and importance of producing apostles from and for disabled people to minister and develop those with disabilities. The Diocesan Church also needs to formulate pastoral guidelines for integral ministry to people with mental or psychological disabilities, especially for participation in public worship and reception of the sacraments of the Church.

23. Environmental issues have become one of the main focuses of attention of the Church in Indonesia. Laudato Si' movements developed in many dioceses and parishes. In its implementation, ecological pastoralism is realized by developing ecological catechesis and worship as well as the environmental movement in the form of reforestation, the 3R (reduce, reuse and recycle) movement, organic farming, the use of eco enzymes, and the use of idle land. The laudato si movement developed by the Church apparently provided inspiration for colleagues from other religions and beliefs, and became an attraction for them to join and get involved in it.

24. There is hope that the Church will dare to take real steps 'out of the box' from this habit to enter new areas that have not been touched at this time, as new fields of apostolic work (missions) that prepare people and the younger generation to live in the new world Later.

Inter-Diocesan Synodality

25. Cooperation between dioceses is reflected in solidarity among dioceses in the form of human resources, funds and pastoral assistance. Assemblies held by the Indonesian Catholic Bishops' Conference always provide moments for bishops to talk heart to heart to build solidarity. This spirit of heart-to-heart synodality perfects the agreements or joint decisions made in the session of the Indonesian Catholic Bishops' Conference.
26. Meetings at the Ecclesiastical Provincial or Regional level, either by bishops or commissions, are a good means of determining local pastoral policies, developing distinctive pastoral care and helping each other in pastoral work.

Synodality in Interreligious and other believers' Dialogue and Cooperation

27. Despite minority in term of number, the Indonesian Church has a good cooperation with adherents of other religions and beliefs. These good relations dan cooperations have been increasingly established from time to time. This closeness is marked by lively interfaith gatherings to celebrate religious holidays and important events for related religious institutions. Involvement of religious leaders in responding to cases of religious intolerance and responding to the developing socio-political situation. This habit of friendship, inviting each other and communicating is a testimony of living together. This togetherness is also visible in government and community institutions that were formed to respond to and discuss certain themes, such as stunting, ecology, health, gender-based violence, mental health, etc. This dialogue and cooperation is built at the national, diocesan, parish level and even at the neighborhood/community level.

Synodality in promoting human dignity and social justice

28. Social Organizations of the faithful are also emerging in Indonesia. They are also developing in the social and political field. In collaboration with the Commission of Apostolate of the Laity and the Commission for Peace and Justice, this Catholic social organization proactively responds to the developing situation and voices a prophetic voice regarding national and state life as well as providing advocacy to victims regarding issues of violence, human trafficking and migrants as well as political life.
29. It is recorded in the Indonesian history that there have been a series of political figures and Catholic community figures and even Catholic heroes who were actively involved and characterized the long journey of the Indonesian nation. The Church, through its motto 100% Catholic, 100% Indonesian, invites all believers to recognize that the Church is an integral part of Indonesian society. The Church realizes the importance and urgency of young political cadres and the importance of politics to build civilized humanity and social justice.

Conclusion

30. Synodality is the Church's way of life and work. Synodality stands inwards, meaning it continues to grow in the *modus vivendi*, *modus operandi* and *modus procedendi* of the Church from the basic community level to the diocesan level. Church synodality also has the characteristic of being inclusive, meaning that it works together with various communities outside the Church, presenting the face of the Church before the hardship of people's lives. From the reflections of dioceses, it appears that synodality is controlled through several things:
 - a. There is a Basic Direction for the Diocese which provides the pastoral focus and guidelines of the diocese at a certain time. This is a reference for parishes and categorical communities, as well as commissions, institutions, communities to build more effective program collaboration and overcome the emergence of sectoral egos.

- b. The structures, pastoral methods and decision-making methods that have been developing in Indonesia have slowly and steadily increasingly placed lay people in carrying out the responsibility for pastoral care and the mission of the Church.
- c. The Church in Indonesia is becoming more courageous in its presence, responsive, and able to bear witness to the situation of people's social life, becoming the salt and leaven of Christ for Indonesian society.

These are some of the points that can be summarized from the diocesan reports. Hopefully this Synod on Synodality will truly become a practice and way of life for the Indonesian Church.

Catholic Church in Cambodia

Towards October 2024

MAY 30, 2024 / SIHANOUKVILLE

How can we be a synodal Church in mission?

INTRODUCTION

As we enter into the final phase of the Synod on Synodality, the results of this process have already been felt by the Church in Cambodia. It has raised awareness and concern among Catholics, as well as it has allowed us to come back together after the difficult years of the pandemic. We can now look forward together and reflect on what makes the specificity of synodality in a mission where Catholics are a micro-minority. While many interior battles need to be fought on the model of David and Goliath in a direct confrontation with evil, it appears that the synodal way in Cambodia goes forward through a theology of alliance based on the four great biblical alliances between God and humanity (Jean Cadier, *“Les alliances de Dieu”, Études théologiques et religieuses*, 1956): the first, that of the flood (Kataclysm), to Noah, in the arc (the rainbow); the second to Abraham in the sign of circumcision; the third, that of the law, to Moses; the fourth, that of the Gospel, by our Lord Jesus Christ. We should look at the alliances in a reverse order, so that our synodal way goes from the path less traveled, that of Catholics, to other religions, to all Cambodians, to one that includes all of creation.

FIRST ALLIANCE: WALKING TOGETHER IN MISSION AS CHURCH OF ALLIANCE

Synodality as an opportunity to start over

1. After long years of pandemic, the synodal process was a great opportunity for the Catholic Church in Cambodia to launch its pastoral work anew. Many youth groups and even churches needed to come back together. While ‘base communities’ helped the Church survive through the darkest years of Cambodian history, the return of the Catholic hierarchy in the 1990’s has tended to centralize Church activity in Phnom Penh, rather than in the communities. Many parishes have used this

opportunity to bring back together parish councils which had often been disbanded. The same spirit appears during group meetings and assemblies when the Synthesis Report on « Synodal Church in Mission » was presented to the local churches particularly by the East Asian Pastoral Institute to the leaders of Battambang Prefecture and by the local leaders for the Vicariate of Phnom Penh. The members – lay faithful, ordained ministers and religious men and women - expressed so much enthusiasm and willingness to answer the call for participation and co-responsibility in the church.

2. This synodal process was an opportunity to realize the absence of many consultative bodies within Church hierarchy and which still need to be better implemented in Cambodia.
3. The youth was most active in this synodal process in Cambodia. Synodal encounters were successfully organized across youth centers and parishes of Cambodia. Many have expressed not only the desire to be heard but also to be trained. As part of the process, the Saint Justin School of Faith in Phnom Penh as well as the Borromeo Center in Battambang have launched new formation programs.

Synodality as a challenge for the Church

4. While the idea of Synodality and its practice are slowly getting into the consciousness of the leaders of the local church, there needs more and sustained effort among the Bishops, priests, and leaders of parish councils and organizations to explain the elements of synodality and initiate by themselves new ways of being Church through strengthening of structures of responsibility, and engaging in prayerful group listening and discernment, common work, and feed-back giving.
5. The Church in Cambodia is walking together toward the house of the Lord. While the Church is not plagued by liturgical tensions or divisions, it still struggles to find the means to come together in prayer. The translation of the Roman missal is still experimental, the Khmer Roman breviary is not yet adopted as most prefer to pray in their mother tongue or in Latin while many traditional Khmer songs composed in the refugee camps

are now being replaced by more “pop” worship. How can our worship of the Lord be more synodal? A relative surge in local vocations is an encouraging sign that local Christians may take a more active participation in the liturgy.

6. Synodality has also revealed itself as a challenge for Cambodia. The ethnical divide is lesser than during the war, but it remains present. How can we overcome it? We have leaders, men and women who have exhibited great efforts at bringing ethnic groups together and work at deeper understanding and reconciliation of groups through common goals and we need to magnify these efforts and spirit into the daily life of the church. Nationalism and prejudice tend to polarize our communities while the extreme diversity of nationalities among the missionaries hinder synodality as communication and missionary styles are different. How can we make these differences an opportunity for synodality where all are included once again?
7. Another challenge for synodality comes from a certain inequality, in education and finances. How can we travel together if some use the highway while others walk on the dirt road? How can we be more careful not to buy out or crush the voice of the poor? Education and financial independence of the local Church are vital for its participation in the synodal process.

SECOND ALLIANCE: WALKING TOGETHER IN MISSION AS A NATION

Synodality as an opportunity for Cambodia

8. The Church in Cambodia is a micro-minority but it is part of a people called by God to redemption. The nation of Cambodia has come out from darkness and is heading towards a brighter future, thanks also to the leadership of the Church. From Father Francois Ponchaud’s prophetic mission since “Year Zero” to the work of the Jesuit Refugee Service and other groups since the camps, the Church has been at the forefront of social issues in proclaiming a kingdom of justice.

9. The nation of Cambodia has recognized the valuable contribution of the local Church by signing various MOUs with Catholic organizations (Don Bosco, Caritas, ...) as well as awarding medals and prizes, and even citizenship to priests and missionaries.

Walking forward with the Khmer people

10. There is however a major challenge to be walking in a nation where many problems still remain, which are common places in developing countries. Corruption, difficult access to health care, school dropout, new orphans coming from family breakdowns, are major matters of concern. The collaboration with the local authorities can be a challenge to overcome if we want to continue this social and prophetic work.
11. The Committee for Charity set up in various churches has allowed all the Christians involved in social work to come together more regularly. Greater friendships and collaboration between these organizations in a synodal Church will be a way to come together with a united message.
12. The Hebrew people are made by a law in common. Catholics in Cambodia have long lived outside any legal framework, whether civil or canonical. While the situation of human rights has greatly improved over the years in Cambodia, public advocacy is maybe more difficult than it was before, especially for a Church with mostly foreign leadership. While the Church needs to defend and apply its own right, a form of Concordat rather than many cumulative MOUs could clarify this situation and guarantee that the Church in Cambodia could walk along with the whole Khmer nation, a free Church in a free State.

THIRD ALLIANCE: WALKING TOGETHER IN MISSION AS A HUMAN BROTHERS

Synodality as an opportunity for interreligious dialogue

13. As His Holiness Pope Francis said to a Cambodian delegation of Buddhists and Christians in January 2023, Buddhists and Christians can start walking together. How far or how long, God only knows, but the Holy Spirit can guide us as we

support each other on the paths of the world where our humanity finds similar joys and similar struggles.

14. In recent years, deep bonds of friendship have been tied between religious leaders in Cambodia and the Catholic Church. These friendships are developed not only at the level of intellectuals, particularly at the Buddhist University of Battambang, but also at the local level, with the reciprocal wishes of Christmas and Vissak becoming a tradition of mutual respect in Cambodia.

Synodality as a challenge for interreligious dialogue

15. This possibility of walking together comes under criticism as well. Some attitudes may spread a certain sense of confusion. What is the proper attitude of Christians and even priests towards monks? What is merely a civil attitude of respect and what is interpreted as a religious attitude? Walking together can be a bumpy road and criticism can be rife.
16. While Catholics try to walk along with Buddhists, they should not estrange their Christians brother particularly Evangelicals, who are apparently more numerous than Catholics in Cambodia, and definitely more present in sports and culture. How can we all be brothers? While the Catholic Church has integrated many aspects of Cambodian cultures such as smot, Khmer weddings rites, and even sand mountains, Evangelicals and even some Catholics have felt uncomfortable about it as Khmer Catholicism struggles to find its identity, both local and universal.

FOURTH ALLIANCE: WALKING TOGETHER IN MISSION AS A CREATURES IN CREATION

Synodality as an opportunity for defending the environment in Cambodia

17. The Catholic Church in Cambodia has listened to the call of Pope Francis in Laudato Si. Care for creation has been a good way for Catholics to work together with all peoples and walk together in a synodal way. Youth from our Catholic Student Centers advocate and reflect the Church's desire to be publicly

engaged for the urgent cause of our environment, starting for example, from a campaign for Green Diocese.

18. Catholic scout movements and Children's groups are also developing fast across the country educating the youth to a greater respect for creation.
19. Catholic NGO's have led the way in carrying out larger scale programs and actions in favor of the environment in Cambodia, showing a fruitful collaboration with the Ministry of Ecology, civil society and local communities.

Synodality as a challenge for defending the environment in Cambodia

20. Major challenges cannot be ignored either. Deforestation in Cambodia is a matter of concern for all with rising temperatures and record highs in 2024. The initiatives of some priests need more support. Beyond speeches and photo-ops, long term commitment is needed to work together for our common planet.
21. Catholics are actually more involved in this field than the Church media portrays. The frugality of Khmer people and their simple livelihoods are a model of environmentalism that is rarely exalted. What's more, many of our Christians have opened "green businesses" especially focusing on recycling. This economically sustainable approach to environmentalism is often disregarded as those leading are more practical than political.
22. Another aspect which could be given more appraisal is the fruitful collaboration of Christians and Buddhists in this field, particularly the advocacies for common good, peace, and care for environment done jointly by Buddhist monks, priests, bishops and catholic lay people. A common reflection as to what it means to protect the environment and why we do it will help to encourage and inspire more to work together for our common home will have to be done and activities towards common care of creation needs to be strengthened.

CONCLUSION

While much more could be said about the missionary opportunities which the synodal process has opened for the Church in Cambodia, it appears that the important paradigmatic shift that it is encouraging is seeing mission no longer as a confrontation of peoples, religions, world visions, but rather an alliance with God who so loved the world that he sent his only Son to redeem us that we may have life and have it to the full. The icon of this alliance is Mary, Mother of God, and Mother of the Church, to whom the oldest standing Catholic church of Cambodia was recently rededicated in May 2024 for the greater glory of God.

Summary from the Church in Malaysia

2. Gathered and Sent by the Trinity

The text discusses the implementation and importance of the Conversation in the Spirit method as a form of listening and discernment within the Synodal Process in Sarawak.

Key points highlighted include:

1. **Training and Facilitation:** Leaders and facilitators are trained to use the Conversation in the Spirit method in their meetings. Trainers are selected based on their existing knowledge and skills in facilitation. It's emphasized that everyone should be encouraged to learn and use this method to listen to others and the Spirit effectively.
2. **Introduction and Implementation:** The Conversation in the Spirit method was introduced at the beginning of the Synodal Process and used in consultations within parishes and ministerial groups. It was specifically utilized during the Sibü Pastoral Assembly and will continue to be used at the regional level. The method fosters the realization of the importance of each person's contribution and the potential guidance of the Holy Spirit.
3. **Facilitators and Consultation:** Facilitators were trained to conduct meetings using the Conversation in the Spirit method during the period of consultation for the Synod. They were briefed before conducting engagement sessions with various groups.
4. **Challenges in Parish Meetings:** Parish meetings often focus solely on organizational details without considering the broader objectives and purpose of events or activities. There's a lack of discernment in determining the merits of activities, and prayers are included merely as a customary practice. The text stresses the importance of incorporating opportunities for participants to offer input, listen to one another, and engage with the Spirit during all parish-related meetings.

Overall, the text emphasizes the significance of the Conversation in the Spirit method in promoting active listening, discernment, and engagement with the Spirit in the context of parish activities and the Synodal Process.

1. Synodality: Experience and Understanding

16. Towards A listening and an Accompanying Church

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

5. A Church "out of every tribe, tongue, people & nation"

9. Women in the Life and Mission of the Church

11. Deacons and Priests in a Synodal Church

The text provided discusses various strategies and approaches for fostering greater participation and inclusivity within the Church community, particularly focusing on engaging marginalized groups such as migrants and the poor. Here's a summary and analysis:

1. **Encouraging Participation:** The Church aims to involve all baptized members in parish activities and ministries. Strategies include organizing open days, formation sessions, and celebrations in different languages to cater to diverse communities. Personal invitations and small-scale events are emphasized for effective engagement.
2. **Engaging Marginalized Groups:** Special attention is given to marginalized groups such as the poor and migrants. Efforts include listening to their needs, visiting them personally, providing livelihood opportunities, and incorporating their cultural elements into parish events. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul (SSVP) is highlighted as a care group for addressing their grievances.
3. **Addressing Language Barriers:** To accommodate migrants, efforts are made to communicate in languages they understand, incorporate their cultural practices into parish activities, and provide legal assistance when needed.

4. **Digital Engagement and Group Dynamics:** The importance of digitalization in facilitating communication and providing anonymity for expressing thoughts is acknowledged. Small group discussions, particularly in Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs), are advocated for including voices from the periphery. Youth groups are encouraged to make decisions related to their activities.
5. **Involving Priests and Parishioners:** Priests are encouraged to actively participate in the synodal process and engage in spiritual conversations with parishioners. There's a call for a more inclusive approach from priests and active parish members to welcome newcomers and avoid a condescending attitude.
6. **Focus on Mission and Marginalized:** While parish groups often focus on internal activities, there's a call to prioritize outreach to marginalized groups. All parish groups are urged to include the marginalized in their planning and initiatives.

Overall, the text underscores the importance of inclusivity, active engagement, and understanding in building a vibrant and welcoming Church community. It emphasizes the need to listen to marginalized voices, accommodate diverse needs, and foster a sense of belonging for all members.

3. Entering the Community of Faith: Christian Initiation

This comprehensive text provides an overview of various aspects of church life, particularly focusing on the structure, practices, and challenges faced in different regions. Here's a summary:

1. Overview of Church Life:

- Emphasis on the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as the foundation of the Church.
- Training programs like the Life in the Spirit Seminar and Formation focus on enhancing communication with the Holy Spirit and discernment skills.
- Parishioners are encouraged to lead and facilitate various ministries, meetings, and assemblies.

- The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) is highlighted as a journey involving the entire church community, with a focus on catechesis, accompaniment, and integration into parish life.
- Suggestions are made to improve understanding and participation in the liturgy, including ongoing explanations of the Mass and incorporating moments of reflection.

2. Challenges and Solutions:

- Hindrances to lay participation include top-down management, communication issues, time constraints, and resistance to change.
- Overworked priests and the burden on a small group of individuals highlight the need for balance and prioritizing a relationship with God.
- Suggestions for improvement include introducing pastoral education programs, sharing personal stories with newcomers, and fostering a sense of active mission rather than passive task completion.

3. Regional Perspectives:

- Various regions in Malaysia, offer insights into local practices and challenges.
- Common themes include the need for inclusive decision-making structures, recognition of charisms for church growth, and promoting active participation in the mission of the Church.

Overall, the text emphasizes the importance of fostering a sense of community, participation, and mission within the Church while addressing specific challenges faced in different contexts. It advocates for inclusive decision-making processes, ongoing education and formation, and a deeper understanding of the liturgy to enrich the spiritual life of believers.

10. Consecrated Life and Lay Associations and Movements: A Charismatic Sign

The text discusses various structures and practices aimed at promoting synodality within a religious context, particularly within the Catholic Church. It mentions existing practices such as the PPC (Pastoral Planning Council), PPA (Parish Pastoral Assembly), PMPC (Parish Ministry Planning Council), and emphasizes the need for input and participation from parishioners to promote synodality effectively.

- It highlights the importance of inclusive gatherings, such as Christmas and Easter events organized by the Association of Churches, which bring together people from diverse backgrounds without discrimination. These events serve as opportunities to foster unity among different cultural and ethnic groups.
- Additionally, the text mentions the practices within Basic Christian Communities, where members come together regularly for Gospel sharing and discussion, ensuring that everyone has a chance to speak and be heard. It emphasizes the importance of inclusivity and openness to newcomers within these communities.
- Furthermore, it suggests incorporating the "Conversation in the Spirit" method during council meetings to ensure equitable participation and decision-making. It emphasizes the need for clear communication of council objectives and decisions, including providing virtual attendance options for those unable to attend physically.
- The text also highlights the importance of informing parishioners about larger assemblies, such as the Diocesan Pastoral Assembly, through various communication channels, including social media. It advocates for the inclusion of all members, regardless of rank or position, in deliberations during such assemblies, following a synodal process to ensure everyone's voices are heard.

Overall, the text underscores the importance of inclusive practices, open communication, and participatory decision-making processes in promoting synodality within religious communities.

1. Synodality: Experience and Understanding

The text discusses efforts to promote synodality within a parish context, particularly focusing on inclusivity across generations and cultures. Here's a summary:

- The parish aims to embrace a synodal culture, encouraging intergenerational dialogue where young people can freely express themselves alongside their families and friends, including the priest. This inclusivity extends to ministries led by women, fostering an environment free from gender discrimination. The church actively engages parishioners, incorporating different cultures into its activities such as celebrations and traditional practices.
- Efforts are made to familiarize the community with synodality through initiatives like spiritual conversations during meetings. Clergy involvement is emphasized, highlighting the need for them to understand and actively participate in synodality. Involving young people is considered vital, with initiatives like youth ministries and social media engagement. Images from local cultures, like a boat and Mount Kinabalu, symbolize unity and diversity within the community.
- Challenges to synodality include misunderstandings, cultural differences, and reluctance, which leaders aim to address by reaching out to marginalized groups and using social media platforms for communication. Despite challenges, there are ongoing attempts to implement synodality in meetings and involve clergy and youth in decision-making processes. Images such as the Nasi Lemak from Semenanjung, longhouse and Tuai from Sarawak's culture evoke the spirit of synodality, emphasizing communal gathering and unity.

3. Entering the Common Faith: Christian initiation

The texts provided highlight various liturgical practices and cultural traditions that can enhance synodality at the local level within Catholic communities. Here's a summarized analysis:

1. Liturgical Practices Enhancing Synodality:

- Emphasis on cultural diversity in liturgical celebrations such as Cultural Day Mass, Parish Day novena, and celebrations for various cultural feasts.
- Incorporation of communal practices like procession and adoration during important feast days such as the Feast of the Assumption and the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ.
- Utilization of different languages during Mass to promote inclusivity and unity among diverse cultural groups.
- Encouragement of active participation and involvement of all faithful, including marginalized groups, in the liturgical ministries.

2. Inclusion of Popular Devotions:

- Integration of popular devotions like Stations of the Cross and Marian Devotions into synod prayers, Holy Hour, and Prayer of the Faithful, in multiple languages to foster a sense of unity and solidarity.

3. Incorporating Cultural Practices into Liturgy:

- Integration of cultural practices such as Kaamatan, Gawai, Chinese New Year celebrations, and specific liturgical celebrations for migrants into liturgical events.
- Inclusion of cultural elements like traditional dress, dances, music, and offerings during Mass to enrich the worship experience and express the unity amidst cultural diversity.
- Special gestures such as blessing and distributing oranges during the Chinese New Year Mass and leading processions with traditional dancers during the Gawai Mass.

Overall, these practices aim to deepen spirituality, promote unity, and foster a sense of belonging and participation among the faithful within the framework of synodality. They emphasize the importance of cultural inclusivity, active engagement, and communal worship in enriching the Catholic liturgical experience at the local level.

18. Structures In Participation

The text discusses the presence and functionality of councils at the parish and diocesan levels, particularly in promoting synodality and ensuring representation of various communities, including the young and marginalized.

- There are existing councils like the Diocesan Pastoral Council and Parish Pastoral Council aimed at fostering participation and involvement in decision-making processes. These councils comprise clergy, religious, and laity, including young people and marginalized individuals, albeit with some hindrances due to unclear guidelines.
- However, challenges persist in achieving synodality and adequate representation within councils. Many leaders exhibit scepticism and lack motivation, viewing efforts towards synodality as futile. The composition of councils often lacks diversity, with a predominant presence of men, and there's a tendency for priests to hold authoritative roles without consulting the laity effectively. Furthermore, there's a need for proper formation and commitment among leaders, along with resource allocation to meet objectives effectively.
- In terms of representation, while there are lay members in councils, they may not necessarily represent marginalized groups directly. For example, committees like the migrant workers committee may include members from other groups rather than migrants themselves. There's a call for more shared responsibility and delegation of tasks within councils, with efforts to encourage young members despite their relative inexperience.

Overall, the text highlights the importance of fostering synodality and ensuring diverse representation within councils, along with addressing challenges such as scepticism, lack of proper formation, and unequal delegation of responsibilities.

14. A synodal Approach to Formation

The text delves into the state of formation initiatives regarding synodality at both parish and diocesan levels, as well as the openness of clergy and religious to changes associated with synodality.

- There are ongoing efforts to promote synodality through various commissions, lay apostolates, and movements within the Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu. Formations are gradually introducing synodality concepts, particularly through Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs).
- Clergy and religious are engaged in understanding the synodal process, with some being receptive to changes aligning with the Pope's directions.
- There's a lack of concrete formation programs for synodality at parish or diocesan levels. While synodality is practiced through dialogue and community engagement in ministries, there's a need for more structured formation initiatives. Some priests and religious are supportive of synodality, but challenges remain in disseminating information and garnering interest among clergy.
- Moving forward, there's a call for focused formation addressing aspects such as participation, communion, and mission within the understanding of being Church. It's suggested that ongoing formations should include diverse perspectives and emphasize the personal touch in community outreach. Attention to family life issues and fostering a welcoming community are also highlighted as essential elements for a more synodal approach.

Overall, the text underscores the importance of structured formation programs to promote synodality and the need for clergy and religious to embrace changes conducive to a synodal Church.

**General Worksheet on Continuing the Synodal Journey
In Preparation of the Second Session of the XVI Ordinary
General Assembly
of the Synod of Bishops (October 2024)**

Contributions from the Archdiocese of Singapore

- 1. Steps that can be taken in order to: 1) convey the experience of the October assembly; 2) publicize and work on the Synthesis Report; 3) widely disseminate the *Letter to the People of God***

Various efforts were made to that end.

First, upon return from the October assembly in 2023, Cardinal William Goh, Archbishop of Singapore immediately shared his experience with all priests of the diocese at the November meeting of the Presbyterium, calling for synodality to be embraced at every level of the diocese. The documents were also disseminated to all priests in the Archdiocese.

Second, Cardinal William shared with the laity his experience of the Synod, and continues to exhort a more synodal Church. This is done through articles in the Archdiocese's newspaper Catholic News, and through videos on various digital media platforms.

Third, the *Synthesis Report* and *Letter to the People of God* were disseminated to the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council (APC); the contents of which continue to guide their work even to today. The APC now acts as champions of synodality in the Archdiocese.

- 2. What can we do locally at parish, diocesan, national and continental levels to continue learning synodality?**

Choose 3 priorities from the 20 topics of the Synthesis Report (e.g. 1 for each part of the synthesis).

- i. From Part I: Gathered and Sent by the Trinity.** This priority encourages the practice of Conversations in the Spirit. Cardinal William has given instructions for the practice to be implemented across the Archdiocese. Workshops will be held to form both clergy and laity

to implement the practice at various levels: Presbyterium meetings, Parish Pastoral Councils, and within Ministries.

- ii. **From Part II: Church is Mission.** Many themes mentioned in this section are being taken up by APC: the church's missionary key, the family, and co-responsibility of clergy and laity. The APC has been given the mandate of drafting a pastoral plan, which has adopted the theme of "With Christ, building the Kingdom of God".
- iii. **From Part III: Towards a Listening and Accompanying Church.** Over 2024, the Archbishop's Communications Office is slated to hold 5 sessions of open dialogue titled "Heart to Heart." Topics include: diversity and relevance, youth, hurt by the Church, evangelisation and discipleship, co-responsibility and synodality.

Choose 3 concrete initiatives to implement from the various proposals in the Synthesis that can be applied immediately at local level (see list of possible proposals to put into practice).

- i. **Proposal (4n): increase practise of Catholic Social Doctrine.** The Archdiocese's Investment Sub-Committee is adopting a framework to manage investments according to the Catholic Social Teaching. It used the document *Mensuram Bonam* as a guide.
- ii. **Proposal (8n): creativity in establishing ministries according to local needs.** This will be done through 2 main channels. First, the APC is identifying gaps in pastoral ministries, and will facilitate their establishment in the Pastoral Plan. Second, Cardinal William has issued open calls for more innovative and creative ministries to be established under the umbrellas of Caritas and Catholic Family Life.
- iii. **Proposal (17l): forming digital missionaries.** The Archdiocese's Communications Office has set up a

digital communicators' network to bring together, recognise, form, and accompany digital missionaries across the diocese.

3. What proposals can be made to concretely experiment with the synodal method of conversation in the Spirit in the various meetings and assemblies (in parishes, movements, communities, dioceses, etc.), participatory bodies? (2.j)

The APC is the body appointed to own and drive this task through various approaches.

- i. Having gone through the synodal process beginning with the Archdiocesan Assembly in 2022, the APC is in the process of drafting a Schema, and eventually, an Instrumentum Laboris, that will go towards discerning a Pastoral Plan for the diocese.
 - ii. There are plans for a programme on synodality to be curated for the local context, using Boston College School of Theology and Ministry's course: Towards A Constitutively Synodal Church.
 - iii. Parishes: between May and June 2024, synodal champions from 5 parishes will be formed to facilitate Conversations in the Spirit. They will then go on to conduct Conversations in the Spirit in their parishes, to discern the contents of the Schema. This process will carry on until all 32 parishes in the Archdiocese are covered.
- 4. How can we involve all the baptised more closely in the synod process (1.m) and how to listen more to those on the periphery (16)?**

What concrete initiatives can be taken to listen to and consult the

- i. **Poor (4).** Include Caritas and their member organisations more intentionally in the APC's Schema engagement work.
- ii. **Migrants (5 and 6).** Include ACMI more intentionally in the APC's Schema engagement work.

- iii. **Young people.** Work with the Office for Young People to engage young people more intentionally on the Schema.
- iv. **Women (6).** Women are actively included in all levels of discussion and consultation. To further include women's perspectives, religious congregations of consecrated women can be included in the APC's Schema engagement work more intentionally.

What concrete steps can be taken to listen to priests and invite them to participate in the synod experience (1.n +11)?

Cardinal William has expressed his desire for Conversations in the Spirit to be the default format for Presbyterium meetings. This will ensure that all priests will have a chance to voice their reflections, and that all will be heard.

- 5. **From among the "Questions to be addressed", choose 1 or 2 topics to be explored in relation to local issues and have them drawn up by a commission of theologians, canonists and pastoral leaders.**

The APC is exploring 32 topics specific to the local context of our diocese. These topics emerged through the synodal process, beginning with the Synodal Conversations and Archdiocesan Assembly in 2022. Each topic is being written into a paper by groups comprising clergy and lay leaders.

#	Topic
Discipleship	
1	Discipleship Journey of Catholics in Singapore
2	Communities and Companionship
3	Catechesis of Children, Youth, and Adults
4	Formation of Priests, Lay Leaders, Ministry Members
Youths, families, and communities	
5	Catholics Who No Longer Practice
6	Marriage & Families
7	Children & Youth in Schools
8	Youth & Young Adults
9	Single Adults
10	Seniors (60 and above)
Evangelisation and mission	
11	RCIA & Catechesis
12	Transforming Parishes
13	Supporting Families, Schools and Workplaces
14	Catholic Church in Singapore and the World

#	Topic
Structures and support	
15	Org Composition of S'pore Archdiocese
16	Governance of Archdiocese
17	Scope of Diocesan Organisations
18	Co-Responsibility of Clergy & Laity
19	Parish Organisation and Governance
20	Parish Pastoral Councils
21	Parish Relationships with Curia
22	Religious Congregations' Relationship with Curia
23	Int'l Lay Organisations' Relationship with Curia
24	Archdiocese Support Organisations
25	Permanent Deacons
26	Female Altar Servers
27	Feedback & Conflict Resolution
28	Care for Clergy
29	Staff
30	Volunteers
31	Shared Services & Co-Working
32	Cultural Change

6. **Identify and share 2 or 3 local resources and initiatives or good practices of synodality that would be interesting for others to know about and send them to the synod secretariat for the website of the General Secretariat of the Synod [synoderessources.org](https://www.catholic.sg/synod/).**

- i. **Dedicated microsite on Synodality on the Archdiocese's website.** The Archdiocese has a dedicated microsite on Synodality in general, and on the Synod 2021-2024 specifically. This is to educate the faithful on synodality, the developments at the Synod, and the on-going synodal efforts locally in the diocese. It includes testimonies of people who have participated in and contributed to the synodal process. The microsite is a dynamic document that is frequently updated based on related developments. It can be found here: <https://www.catholic.sg/synod/>

- ii. **Implementation of Conversations in the Spirit at all levels of the diocese.** As mentioned above, Cardinal William has expressed his desire for Conversations in the Spirit to be implemented at all levels across the diocese, including at the Presbyteral Council and Presbyterium, Parish Pastoral Councils, etc. Leading by example, the Archbishop's Office has adopted the practice as the default format for its community meetings.

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

Using Synthesis Report No. 1 "Synodality: Experience and Understanding" as a starting point, deepen understanding of synodality from one's own context and propose images of synodality that can make sense in the local culture.

- i. **Healing of the paralytic at Capernaum (Mark 2:1-12).** The Synthesis Report exhorts us to be a Church that is "closer to the lives of her people, ... more relational (1b)," and "walking together as a community (1l)." The group of friends mentioned in Mark 2 were exactly that: to do what they did for their paralytic friend, they

had to be close to each others' lives, intimately relational, and walking closely together. Most importantly, their closeness and journeying culminated in an encounter with Jesus Christ, spiritual conversion, and the arrival at faith in Him. Similarly, fraternal closeness forged through synodality must ultimately arrive at the person of Jesus Christ and deepen our faith in Him.

- ii. **Wedding banquet with round tables.** In many Asian cultures, wedding banquets adopt the format of round tables of about 10 people per table. In such a format, the round table encourages conversation amongst everyone at the table, and everyone engages as an equal, as there are no places of honour or preference at round tables. Most importantly, the climax of such banquets occurs when the bride and groom make their rounds to each table, to greet guests and have their photograph taken. Similarly, synodality needs to afford people equal opportunities to contribute to the discernment at hand. Most importantly, it needs to culminate in an encounter with the bridegroom Jesus Christ, at whose invitation we are participating in the banquet of the synodal process.

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

- i. **Develop proposals for spiritual exercises related to the theme of synodality.** Conversations in the Spirit is the primary spiritual exercise that will enable synodality. The APC is developing a formation programme for clergy and laity to facilitate Conversations in the Spirit. This will be rolled out at multiple levels across the diocese from May / June 2024.
- ii. **Develop approaches to synodality in places of popular piety.** In our diocese, the parish remains the primary place of popular piety. Parish Pastoral Councils and other champions – both clergy and lay –

will be equipped to facilitate the synodal process in parishes, through Conversations in the Spirit.

- iii. **Encourage people to pray for the synod by developing spiritual proposals, particularly during Lent and Easter.** The APC continues to hold intercessory prayers at parishes to pray for the diocese's efforts to embrace a synodal way of proceeding. The APC will continue to encourage the faithful to pray for the upcoming Synod in October 2024.

9. Involve the various participatory bodies (councils) (18) in receiving the Synthesis and in the discernments to be made in preparation for the next session. Reread the way synodality is concretely lived (especially the dimension of participation and authority) in these bodies in the light of the Synthesis Report (12.k).

- i. The convening of the APC in 2022 is the most significant step. The APC goes about its work in dialogue with the Synthesis Report, and will continue to do so going forward.
- ii. The APC will also own the agenda of facilitating dialogues – in other words, the synodal process – throughout the diocese, to support the Archbishop in his preparations for the next session of the Synod in 2024.
- iii. This will be done through collaboration with other participatory bodies, most notably the Presbyteral Council and Presbyterium, and the various Parish Pastoral Councils.

10. With formation centers and theological faculties.

- i. **Implement concrete initiatives for formation in synodality (14.)** As mentioned above, a formation programme on synodality and Conversations in the Spirit is being curated by the APC. It will be made available to clergy and laity from May / June 2024.

- ii. **Organise a consultation of those responsible for initial and continuing formation (14.o).** Theologians, pastoral formators, and colleagues from the Catholic Theological Institute of Singapore (CTIS) will be consulted in shaping the above programme. The possibility of offering the programme as a course at CTIS will also be explored.
- iii. **Work on the issues to be investigated and prepare contributions to be proposed to the Bishops' Conferences.** Should the Conference desire to explore any of the issues, initiatives or ideas mentioned above, please do not hesitate to get in touch with the APC or the Archbishop's Office.

What can be done in the Apostolic Vicariate in Brunei Darussalam to be a Synodal Church in mission?

Introduction

In solidarity with the universal church, the Apostolic Vicariate in Brunei Darussalam embarked with the universal church on the synodal journey with a Mass on 17th October 2021. A survey was conducted and a joint assembly of the three Catholic churches' Parish Pastoral Council in Brunei was held on 19th April 2022 to come up with the Brunei Synthesis Document for the Synod. Following that, the three local churches subsequently embarked on its own synodal journey on 15th July 2022 to look at the current realities in their own parish and to enter deeper into "What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our "journeying together"? The output from one of this assembly produces several action points for: Myself, My Family, and My Parish in 2023.

The Virtual Parish Meeting with the Federation of Asian Bishops conference and a parish in Laos, held on World Mission Sunday, October 23rd 2022, enabled the parish "to become aware of the current and emerging realities and challenges confronting Asia and the Church" and encouraging us not to give up despite the many challenges in being a relatively small Christian community in Brunei and operating without a bishop.

Upon the release of the *Working Document for the Continental Stage* in October 2022, the synodal team from the three parishes gathered once again to identify our respond to DCS 106. The outcome of our discussion is summarized as follows: *"The church needs to play a more proactive and relevant role in their daily lives, beyond just a faith that is exercised every Sunday. The youth of today are hungry for much more than that. The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic has caused many of our youth to pause, reflect and re-evaluate their lives, sometimes calling into question their reason and purpose in their lives that until recently have been driven mostly unquestioned through a road, fashioned by the latest electronic devices, apparels, shoes and other highly sought-after consumer items. The Synodal Assembly should review at a higher level, areas brought up in this DCS that would resonate with our youth. This would not mean simply making cosmetic changes to the Church but at a much deeper level, show that it is serious in making these changes."*

The following action points for the renewal of the universal Catholic church was put forward by Brunei to the First Session of the Synodal Assembly in October 2023:

1. To effectively deal with clericalism (though this is less so in our region).
2. To build greater transparency and accountability at all levels of the Church hierarchy.
3. To inculcate a more forgiving, listening and inclusive Church that is substantiated through clear actions.
4. Greater and direct involvement at all levels in caring for the environment and in dealing with climate change challenges.
5. Demonstrate a genuine willingness to discuss challenging topics such as gender, sexuality in an open setting without fear of judgment or reprisals.
6. Re-examine the call to vocational life – which includes providing more options which could enable seminarian candidates to experience the initial flavour of vocational life prior to making a full answer to their calling.

To encourage every individual and parish groups to use the Conversation in the Spirit discernment method, the church of Our Lady of Immaculate Conception took the opportunity to train its parishioners on this method of prayer and discernment during the PPC Assembly in October 2023. With the release of the document *Instrumentum Laboris* (First Session) in June 2023, two parishes uses the Conversation in the Spirit discernment method during their annual assembly on 6 of the 15 worksheets in IL.

When the first session *Synthesis Report* was published at the end of October 2023, St. John's parish took the opportunity to use this report to conduct their annual PPC assembly at the beginning of 2024. Of the twenty topics, they selected four priority topics for further study and discussion:

1. Entering the Community of Faith: Christian Initiation
2. Church in Mission
3. A Synodal Approach to Formation

4. Towards a Listening and Accompanying Church

Topic 3: Entering the Community of Faith: Christian Initiation

RCIA is the primary means in which adults are introduced to the Catholic faith and drawn into the Catholic Church. While the RCIA process is very comprehensive, the fruits at the end of the day have not been very encouraging. Many newly baptized still do not have a strong connection to the church, nor attend Sunday Masses regularly, nor play an active role after their initiation into the Catholic church. Much work needs to be done to integrate them into the Catholic church, without which vocations and active participation will not arise. The role of godparents needs to be further strengthened and be selected carefully. The numbers of Inquirers vary each year and even though there are always people entering the church each year on Easter Vigil, the quality and numbers are small. Many enter the Church as a family due to encouragement from Catholic relatives and friends. However, they tend to remain within their own ethnic/cultural group after Initiation and seldom mix with other parishioners and get involved in other parish groups / ministries. Training in discipleship, parish life and evangelization is needed and to include more practical exposure to ministry, so that it will also stir up more vocations, renewal and succession for the church.

There is also an unfortunate reduction in the number of infant baptism due to parents choosing to have fewer children. Formation in family planning during marriage preparation and post marriage need to be reviewed, although the catechumenal way / path may not be suitable for our young couples. It may even discourage them from marrying in church. Family Mass encourages children to attend Mass and to participate in liturgical ministry. Perhaps the Family Mass is also the opportunity for the priest to talk directly to parents about having more children. With less children, the number of children entering into the Catholic schools at KG level are also affected.

To stimulate greater participation of everyone at Mass and outside of the liturgy we need to look at how to incorporate more cultural elements into our local language Masses and parish activities. Currently prayers for the death at homes, devotional prayers and

novenas are very popular way of getting people from different parish groups together.

Topic 8: Church in Mission

The Church in the Apostolic Vicariate in Brunei Darussalam has remained relatively small and have not grown beyond to three parishes, three “Catholic” schools and one mission center. Although we still have our own our mission schools, the Christian religion is not allowed to be taught in any schools in Brunei. Learning the Islamic religion and way of life are mandatory for all students, as part of the curriculum enforced by the Ministry of Education for all schools in Brunei. Catechism classes for children are thus conducted outside of school hours on Sunday and/or Friday in the parish.

The first recorded Catholic missionaries arrived in Brunei in 1587, in the form of two Spanish Franciscan priests. However, it was not until 1855 that Brunei became part of the Apostolic Prefecture of Labuan and North Borneo. In 1858, a priest from the Milan Foreign Missionaries (now known as PIME) built the first church and dedicated it to Our Lady of Every Grace. This Church has long ceased to exist, and its exact location is also not known. When the Mill Hill Missionaries arrive in Brunei in 1881, they established themselves in three of the four districts and set up the four Catholic schools in Brunei. St. John’s school was built in 1930, St. George’s School in 1937. The boys only schools St. Michael’s School (which closes at the end of 2006) was established in 1955 and the girls only school St. Angela’s School was established by the sisters of St Joseph in 1959 and became co-ed in 2007. The three existing churches in Brunei are: Our Lady of Immaculate Conception in Seria (built in 1955), the church of Our Lady of Assumption in Bandar Seri Begawan (built in 1968), and St. John’s Church in Kuala Belait (officially opened in 1972). There are no further churches or schools being built after 1972. When the 2013 Syariah Penal Code Order came into force, additional restrictions were imposed on non-Islamic institutions. When Brunei became independent in 1984, all foreign missionaries were forced to leave and not allowed to work as religious in Brunei. The Catholic Church in Brunei has been part of several ecclesiastical

circumscription, finally becoming the Apostolic Vicariate on 20th October 2004. There are currently only three local priests, two seminarians studying in Singapore and one FSIC sister under formation in Sabah.

Operating under the above conditions, lay Catholics have been playing a big role in the churches in Brunei. Due to its small size, the Apostolic Vicariate in Brunei Darussalam does not even have its own chancery nor offices for the various ministries / commissions. The responsibilities of the various ministries / commissions are divided among the three local priests. Since the passing of our bishop (Cornelius Cardinal Sim) on 29th May 2021, the Apostolic Vicariate has also been operating without a bishop. We are thankful that we belong to the bishops' conference of Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei (CBCMSB) in which the regional bishops have been very supportive to us.

Moving forward, the Apostolic Vicariate in Brunei Darussalam see the need to further encourage lay faithful to commit themselves even more to help in the growth and mission of the church. The lack of theologians and formators, trained religious educators, qualified spiritual animators, qualified lay people means that formation and utilization of the lay faithful to manage the various ministries / commissions and roles will have to play a bigger part in the coming years. I foresee the need to establish new structure and formal offices with qualified personnel to support the work of the Vicariate. We will also need to find ways in which foreign expertise can be stationed here to train our local catechists, family life and youth ministry's leaders and to help in the growth and renewal of the Vicariate. Parents too will have to be trained and play a greater role in every family unit to stir the faith of their children. More young people will need to be exposed to missionary animation and send on mission to encourage vocations in consecrated life and to the priesthood. Due to the shortage of priest, the use of lay ministers for Sunday Celebration in the absence of a Priest may have to be re-introduced and reconsidered as a temporary solution. It may also encourage vocation to the priesthood.

Topic 14: A Synodal Approach to Formation

We noticed that lots of good fruits comes when the faithful work (and eat) together. The various initiatives in the past and in the present to form the faithful in discipleship bear abundant fruits when individual talents and resources are recognized and their participation encouraged. More can be achieved when we pull our resources together. Encouraging every faithful to think of the poor and make offerings for the needy and for the church has help the church to be mission oriented and to care for the poor in Brunei and beyond. We saw very good (Synodal) support from the laity during the covid-19 pandemic. Many people (including Catholics) whom we have never seen asked help during that time and the respond from the faith community was very positive, with everyone trying to do their part. We saw how God's providence work during times of need. Our solidarity with those in need during that period was very well supported. It gives those struggling an experience of God's love, and for some, of Christ reaching out to them without judgment for the first time. When they are happy, all of us are also encouraged to do more.

Formation in Synodality thus have to be encouraged more. Very often conflicts in the church and in the families or between spouses are caused by selfish, individualistic, "me-only important" attitude. Formation on Common Good, Co-responsibility, Consensus building, listening, discernment in the Spirit, and conflict resolution will help reduce many of the conflicts we have. The entire People of God must be formed together, not just the formator or parish leaders. The "delegation" mindset or mentality that exists widely in today's society must cease. If we continue in such an individualistic mindset, the community will suffer and will not be able to grow, since the Church activities and mission will be held back by such individuals. We know that none of us is perfect or know everything and so all have something to learn from each other and must be willing to be formed and be formed to the mindset of Christ.

Since we lack qualified formators in many areas, we will need to invite neighbouring or regional trainers and formators to conduct the trainings we need in Brunei for us. Although it is possible for

us to attend online training, it does not have the same effect or benefit as on-site formation. Going abroad for training will incur more cost and only less people will be able to go.

Ongoing formation for priest is just as important as for the laity as none of the clergy have been able to go away for formal training / update for extended time. One priest will be going for Pastoral Leadership formation in 2024 and another due to take his sabbatical in 2024/2025 as part of his 25th sacerdotal anniversary. Formation of clergy for any extended period is always difficult as someone will to replace them while there are away.

Topic 16: Towards a Listening and Accompanying Church

The challenge of a synodal church is to become a more listening and accompanying church, listening to all and judging none while accompanying all towards Christ. Living in a predominantly Muslim country with all its many restrictions necessarily mean some people will automatically be excluded from direct evangelization. As a conservative Islamic nation, we do not have interfaith dialogue within Brunei. Even ecumenical dialogue with our other Christian brethren is limited in opportunities. Thankfully we are still able to have ecumenical prayer services on two occasions each year, during Christian Unity week and the week of National Day. We are also able to have joint churches Christmas Carol service with the Anglican churches but not with other Christian denominations. Christian shares a common Christian burial ground and jointly managed the burial ground. Even though ecumenical and interfaith dialogues are minimal or non-existent, the practice of non-interference and respect for each other is observed.

When we conducted the Synod survey from 30th November 2021 to 28th February 2022, we tried to include / listen to those outside our faith circle but only a few close associates gave their response as expected. We did try to reach out to some lapse Catholics but have not been successful with them too. We received plenty of negative voices even from our own church going Catholics. Their respond to the survey was helpful in gauging the state of the Catholics and the Church in Brunei. What is left to do is to return to those issues and try to address some of them as guided by the

Holy Spirit. The Church recognizes its own limitations to address all concerns and so will prioritize them accordingly. Many issues will not be able to be resolved in the short term. We hope formation in synodality will address some of the personal concerns and preferences once we know each other and understand the Church teachings better. The Church will always need to guard its teaching as handed on to us by Christ and his successors.

We must always try to accompany and listen to the different voices, especially those who felt excluded, marginalized, and judged. The church in the Vicariate however is limited in its ability to cater for anyone with special needs and will need more the lay faithful help in this area. While those in irregular relationships are still welcome to participate in all activities and service, access to Holy Eucharist are unfortunately, still not possible. As the People of God, we will continue to accompany them in their spiritual journey towards our common goal: holiness. Perhaps the formation of special Christian community to support and journey with them will be needed. Much work is still needed by all to accompany the elderly, the sick and the poor. The People of God are reminded to practice the spiritual and corporal works of mercy as a sign and witness of who we are.

Summary

Formation of both the laity and the clergy will have to take on a higher priority in the coming years and will focus on the renewal of the entire People of God in the Apostolic Vicariate in Brunei Darussalam to be more mission and welcoming oriented church after the image and likeness of Christ. This will reflect more like the synodal church when the Church first started, when all believers *“were together and had all things in common”* (Acts 2:44). *“Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people (Acts 2:46-47).”* The day when all of us are committed to work and put our talent and resources together, we will inspire our younger members also to a greater love for the church and to become more active in the life and mission of Vicariate, not only in Brunei but also beyond its borders.

Concrete initiatives that can be applied immediately at the local level are:

- Formation in Synodality thus have to be encouraged more as well as liturgical formation, training in Conversation in the Spirit, Listening and Discernment, environmental protection, discipleship, parish life and evangelization, ongoing formation for priest;
- More recollections, retreats, training of volunteers & facilitators, and combined family prayer meeting;
- We need to encourage and form the Youth to be involved in all levels and ministries and in mission work, integrate our RCIA catechumens into the parish life/ministries much earlier, promote family, and encourage lay faithful to commit themselves even more in the various ministries and commissions including accompanying those in irregular relationship, elderly, sick and those with special need;
- More open anonymous sessions, suggestion box, to listen more from those on the periphery, and regular Q&A sessions with the congregation;
- Promote Good News through social media, prayer meeting and house visits.

By promoting vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life, we create opportunities for our younger generation to experience vocational and mission life and hopefully, this will produce more priests and active laity for the Vicariate. We want to become a more caring and listening Church, listening not only to one another but also to the Holy Spirit promptings and welcoming all. We know that none of us will be able to get to heaven by ourselves and so, we must always help and accompany each other in this journey to holiness. Through the various formations and activities, we hope it will inculcate a more forgiving, listening, and inclusive Church, willing to discuss challenging topics without judging and condemning each other, and that will motivate each other to bear witness to Christ in words and in actions for the glory of God.

Catholic Bishops' Conference of Myanmar

RESPONSE TO A SYNODAL CHURCH IN MISSION

SYNODAL SYNTHESIS REPORT BY THE XVI ORDINARY

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS, FIRST

SESSION

October 4-29, 2023 Vatican City

**I. APPRECIATION AND GRATITUDE FOR THE
SYNTHESIS REPORT**

The Catholic Church in Myanmar appreciates the leadership of the Holy Father, the General Secretariat of the Synod, the staff, laity, religious, clergy and all the people of God who in one way or another contributed to the Synod of Bishops in order to produce the Synthesis Report.

After the careful reading of the Synodal Church in Mission: Synthesis Report of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, the Catholic Church in Myanmar realizes that all the Topics, except No. 6. The Eastern Churches and Latin Church Tradition, are very much essential, inspiring and relevant to the local Church for more Communion, Participation and Mission.

The Synthesis Report being the fruit of the discussion and discernment of all the people composed of the laity, Religious and Clergy, is very rich in order to understand the nature of the Synodal Church and her mission in local and universal Church.

II. THREE TOPICS

Following the proper instruction of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Myanmar, after the prayerful discernment of the current situation of the country, the representatives of the 16 Arch/dioceses had chosen the following three important topics.

- People in Poverty: Protagonists in the Church Journey
- A Synodal Approach to Formation
- Mission in the Digital Environment

1. PEOPLE IN POVERTY: PROTAGONISTS IN THE CHURCH'S JOURNEY

Reasons for choosing the topic

In Myanmar, the extreme natural events, economic, political, and social crises, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic shock, and the February 2021 military coup, have posed serious challenges to growth and poverty reduction. By September 2021, the United Nations was warning of a human rights 'catastrophe' in the country, arising from a mix of widespread violence, food insecurity and rapidly rising poverty.

Since the coup, Myanmar's economy has been in a downward spiral, with major international investors fleeing the country, banks barely functioning and inflation rising amid daily clashes between regime troops and anti-junta forces across the country. The military regime has aggravated the situation by imposing foreign currency and trade regulations, wreaking havoc on import and export markets, and sparking fuel shortages, even in the major commercial centers of Yangon and Mandalay.

According to the People's Pulse Survey 2023 (PPS) conducted by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) between June and October 2023, many households are experiencing a rise in inflation due to factors such as increasing money supply, depreciation of the kyat, and global commodity price increases. These factors are causing a decline in real incomes for many households.

Moreover, not only are there more poor people today, but they are also more deeply poor. The poverty gap - a measure of the average income shortfall of all those who are poor - stands at 24.4 percent. This compares to 18.5 percent in 2022 and 5.2 percent in 2017, an increase of over 6 percentage points since 2022. Poverty is deepening faster.

Based on the facts mentioned above, the Catholic Church in Myanmar has chosen the topic, "people in poverty: protagonists in the church's journey".

Response to the Synthesis Report

Poverty manifests in myriad forms—physical, psychological, social, and spiritual. Many individuals endure the fallout of war, violence, sexual abuse, natural disasters, human trafficking, exploitation, political persecution, gender discrimination, social abandonment, and loneliness. These experiences echo the tragic reality that modern-day slavery persists well into the 21st century.

Migration is ceaseless, with families seeking better lives and asylum from conflict or persecution. This often results in migrants facing exploitative conditions and legal precarity, particularly women who frequently receive inadequate protection and remuneration. The Church must listen to the cries of the impoverished and show compassion and solidarity by partnering with organizations dedicated to helping the needy.

In Myanmar, ongoing conflict has created a surge of 'new poor', with vulnerable groups—such as children, pregnant women, and the disabled—bearing the brunt of poverty. Synodality underscores a divine call to accompany humanity collectively, especially those on society's fringes who feel neglected by the Church.

The synodal Church is committed to being a welcoming home for everyone, embracing individuals from all walks of life, from whom we can learn for the better Church. The challenge is substantial, yet fundamental, for the Church to embrace every person of God and all individuals, regardless of their circumstances.

To enhance differentiated co-responsibility in the mission of all members of the people of God, it is crucial to lead by example through life witness, listening, and respect for the poor. Addressing not only material needs but also the holistic well-being of individuals, irrespective of religious, racial, or gender distinctions, is essential for building inclusive communities.

Fostering self-awareness and personal reflection among Church leaders, conducting regular meetings, evaluations, and retreats, and cultivating a community spirit and culture of service

are vital aspects of promoting co-responsibility. Acknowledging and appreciating the efforts and sacrifices of others and encouraging a spirit of initiative and engagement are also crucial.

Regular dialogue and collaboration with local organizations and governmental bodies can facilitate a more integrated approach to addressing poverty and social injustices. Based on the Church's social doctrine, engaging in advocacy and policy-making that prioritize the needs of the poor and vulnerable can have a significant impact on systemic change.

The Church's journey towards inclusivity and solidarity with the poor requires concerted efforts at all levels. By recognizing the diverse forms of poverty and actively promoting co-responsibility in its mission, the Church can become a beacon of hope and support for all individuals, particularly those marginalized and impoverished. Through innovative ministries, collaborative initiatives, and advocacy efforts, the Church can embody its commitment to walk together with the whole human family, fostering compassion, dignity, and justice for all.

Proposals

- To introduce Emergency Response Teams in every diocese, such as the Diocesan Emergency Response Team (DERT). These teams provide essential services like education, healthcare, and social welfare without discrimination.
- To introduce Psycho-Social Support Services (PPSS) to aid those traumatized by war or disasters, offering crucial emotional and psychological support.
- To give a humanitarian assistance in collaboration with people of other faiths and organization
- To use the Papal document "Laudato Si'" effectively for ecological conversion

General Comments

The Catholic Church in Myanmar totally agrees with the Convergences, Matters for Consideration and the proposals of the Synthesis Report on People in Poverty.

A SYNODAL APPROACH TO FORMATION

Reasons for choosing the topic

According to the ancient tradition in Myanmar, it took three years at least in order to study the attitude, honesty and sincere love of the fiancée before the marriage. But now, many people do not have enough time to properly learn the guidelines and catechism of the Church with regard to the responsibility of the married persons and family life because of the demands of the job and civil wars going on. Due to the invention of mass media, the people study each other virtually rather than in reality which makes them more difficult to understand and know one another. Such situation threatens the proper formation and stability of the *family* affecting the proper formation of the children as a consequence.

Whenever animation and formation programs for children and Adolescents are organized, we help awaken missionary conscience in children so as to lead them to sharing of spiritual and material resources with children in difficult areas in the country. The benefits they gain from the animation programs are countless, with both immediate and indirect effects. The strong sense of faith in God helps our young people sustain their hope and resilience in the face of many challenges arisen from the conflict-affected areas. Unfortunately, due to the current civil wars, there are so many internally displaced *families* and *children* who are in need of proper formation. *Many young people* join the people defense forces and some are forced to leave the country because of the forced military service, poor economic and education. These situations also directly affect the formation of our young people.

Though we try our level best in the areas of *religious* and *priestly* formation, we are aware of our weaknesses. Our major weaknesses in formation in the context of Myanmar are that there are no sufficient formed formators, the selection of them, proper screening of the candidates, and ways of educating the candidates lacking in critical thinking. Ongoing formation of the clergy is one of the major areas that needs to be strengthened. There is no consistency in the process of formation programmes: Minor seminary, Intermediate seminary, Philosophy department,

Spiritual year and Theology department. As a result, our candidates have no capacity of reflection on the subject and critical approach to what they have been studying. Maybe that is one of the reasons we can see how poor some young priests' intellectual capacity is in their way of preaching on Sunday Masses, organizing the people in the parish, pastoral administration, etc. We have many talented *religious women* who are qualified to teach and accompany the seminarians as spiritual directors and counselors but due to the male dominant culture, their possible services are neglected and less appreciated.

Based on the facts mentioned above, the Church in Myanmar is in urgent need of the proper formation in every areas and the topic of the Synthesis Report: "A Synodal Approach to Formation" was chosen.

Response to the Synthesis Report

We believe that *everyone* who has been baptized must follow the *example of Christ* and carry his own cross along the journey of life. In response to the blessings of God, they are called to take care of how they live their lives and use the talents they have received to obtain the fruits of God's grace and use those fruits in the service of others. To participate in the journeying together mission; a new and up-to-date guidance must be used in the training of lay people and of religious ministers, for raising children and young people. Jesus' upbringing of great disciples is *a model* we should follow.

Formation begins in the *family*. It is the parents who must share the primary responsibility of bringing up well-behaved Christian children in order to strengthen their faith and receive their calling. An atmosphere of love, understanding and acceptance must be fostered within the family. Children must be formed and assisted by family members to go to church and worship together, praying together and by active participation in service and charity. Parents play very important role to make their children have good morals, social relations and *personal encounter with God*. They must be accountable and especially the mother who is always in touch with her children must cooperate together in teaching the word of God.

In teaching *Catechism*, children, young people and all believers must be taught God's word with teaching materials and interesting and active activities. Catholic teachings and rituals must be taught in an age-appropriate manner. In teaching the word of God, they must be taught social relationship and sex education in accordance with the Catholic aspects to support the call to a life of vocation and vowed chastity. The Catholic Church emphasizes the importance of *gender equality* and must teach and guide the acceptance of individuality. It is appropriate to use social communication as a learning support network in teaching guidance.

In *today's digital development*, the Church must use digital platforms such as Facebook to establish a social communication community that includes not only young people but also all religions. Articles related to Catholic teaching; direct question-and-answer *sessions should be held with clergymen, religious, catechists or knowledgeable people from the community*. Catholic youth to connect with each other; to share their faith journey and to develop an online faith community that supports the *discernment* of calling and the faith journey of believers. *Young people* must be allowed to choose their own calling. A wide range of people should be included for the formation of religious and priestly ministry. While studying; students should be encouraged to study social and religious studies in Catholic schools and Boarders. Influence of digital usage, material possessions and worldly desires should be avoided and God-centered living should be encouraged. There must be obedience, sacrifice and humility and they must be brought up to be humble and have good morals.

In other words, vocation begins in family. Therefore, children are trained in the family so that they can grow to love God and find their own calling. Online Youth Catechism and Youth Discussions should be conducted according to Parish/Diocesan level, which are effective for living morally and for today's digital communication. In service, only when someone has love can she/he loves God above all else and serve those close to her/him. Therefore, we must always listen to God's word in order for love to flourish in our lives. Humbly obedient to the Church, they will

try to practice their apostolic work through their own calling. Everyone should be encouraged and guided to participate in the Eucharistic Celebration and other worship services, to participate in volunteer work and service apostolic work.

What is mandatory in the Christian life is mission, in other words, being zealous in apostolic work. Maidens/bachelors and those who have lost their spouses will be called together to participate in the apostolic work of the church in purity. True faith and good news of the Catholic Church are shared to those who are far from God. Since Evangelization and social development go hand in hand, participation of Christians in social development activities (health, education, care and related activities) are strengthened. Catholics will work together in apostolic work and social activities with the members of the Christian denominations.

By carrying out such formation in a systematic way, every believer will become close to God and become strong in faith. Through the formation of parishioners, they will know Christ more and become familiar with Him. Understanding the Church more and obeying with love; there will be ministers of sacrifice and humility. Children, youth, and ordinary lay people such as parents and religious will also become more active in the apostolic work of the church. Working together in noble works with other brothers and sisters, we can share the fruits of God's grace with each other and invite them to journey together.

Proposals

- To have program for the ongoing formation of the laity (married life), religious and priestly ministries
- To have a proper and qualified training program for the formators
- To share human resources in the formation programs

General Comments

The Catholic Church in Myanmar agrees with all the convergences, matters for consideration and proposals of the Synthesis Report on “A Synodal Approach to Formation”.

2. MISSION IN THE DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

Reasons for choosing the topic

Since the Covid 19 pandemic, the Catholic Church in Myanmar is familiar with the digital mission especially online Mass, reflections and homilies, pastoral and psychological counselling, catechism, education and meetings. After the military coup in 2021, people and families are scattered into the different directions within and outside of the country which makes the online communication and ministries more essential and important for the ministries, information and services of the Church.

The population of Myanmar stood at **54.78 million** in January 2024. There were **24.11 million internet users** in Myanmar in January 2024. Myanmar's internet penetration rate stood at **44.0 percent** of the total population at the start of 2024.

Data published in Meta's advertising resources indicates that Facebook had **18.50 million users** in Myanmar in early 2024.

Numbers published in Meta's advertising tools indicate that Instagram had **1.75 million users** in Myanmar in early 2024.

Figures published in ByteDance's advertising resources indicate that TikTok had **16.65 million users** aged 18 and above in Myanmar in early 2024.

Because of the above mentioned situation and used of internet, the Catholic Church in Myanmar decided to select the topic: "Mission in the Digital Environment".

Response to the Synthesis Report

The five (5) convergences, six points (6) for consideration and two proposals (2) from the pastoral point of view on the topic of **Mission in the Digital Environment** are truly apt in the current circumstances. When we reflect a little deeper on the six matters for consideration, we discover some encouraging possibilities for the mission.

Digital culture holds special significance in a Synodal Church. It is true. An evidence for this is that the Radio Veritas

Asia (RVA), the radio shortwaves that dominated the airspace of the whole Asian continent, was renowned for proclaiming the Truth of the Gospel for five to six decades. As digital technology develops fast and wide among the people as a channel and powerful means of communication, the RVA is also obliged to avail of the digital culture (cell phones and tablets) as its more effective means of spreading the Gospel.

People in general, especially the elderly as well as the clergy and religious, may view online space as a danger from religious and moral points of view, thus they caution their young of their negative influences and impacts. We can observe hate speeches, vulgar languages, violence and sexual exploitations in daily bases online communication (within) Myanmar context. Therefore, the local churches need to embark on a deeper study to have a better understanding of how Christian life and Christian values are being influenced by this situation.

It is important to provide the young people, young priests, young consecrated men and women with proper training, accompaniment and opportunities for peer-to-peer discussion and collaboration. For church personnel such as clergy, religious, catechists and missionaries, it is mandatory to learn latest media education in order to effectively inform, train and guide Christian families. Dioceses in Myanmar local church should encourage the RVA by drawing up or renovating the existing programs in holistic approach in such a way that the faithful especially the young people may come to love and appreciate them.

It is undeniable that hate speeches, vulgar languages, violence and sexual exploitations are prevalent among people online on daily bases. We often observe the neglect and wonton violation of media rules and ethics. Church media missionaries should take their utmost precaution in their manners of delivering messages of the Gospel to build up the hearers; avoid and prevent negative approaches; hate speeches in religious or ethnic issues. Christians are always to promote dialogues and to advocate for reconciliation towards lasting peace.

The current situation and circumstances in whole Myanmar indicate a high time to avail of digital advancement

more effectively for the National Peace Building plans and programs. People of good will are always ready for dialogues, intercession, advocacy and reconciliation towards achieving authentic and lasting peace.

For Myanmar local church context, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Myanmar should provide a practical and meaningful guidance for the church's digital mission work especially for the Social Communication commissions, RVA programs that consist of Myanmar, Kachin ethnic clans, Karens etc.

A recent transfer of the digital program management for eleven (11) language sections for Myanmar from the Philippines to CBCM in Yangon, Myanmar is a strong evidence of an enormous daring leadership of Myanmar Bishops. We are filled with joy as we foresee the greater success in digital evangelization in the near future.

Bishops and Priests who are main missionaries and evangelizers should pay greater attention, give time to learn and make avail of this God-given powerful tools of digital evangelization to reach out to millions.

It is hearty to be aware of the continuation of TV Masses on Sundays, daily reflections and meditation by a few dioceses which are well appreciated and benefitted by the faithful throughout the country and even beyond geographic and language barriers. Likewise, teaching catechism to children and young people by means of digital aids boost a new energy in a new form of mission.

Myanmar faithful especially from China, India, Thai, other countries and from remote areas, families of mixed marriages, longs for listening and learning their faith for themselves and for their family members. They regularly and close listen to and view RVA programs for preservation and deepening of their faith as well as development of their social and family lives. Therefore, the Catholic evangelization media is to be more creative and resourceful. The local church, the diocese and the CBCM should be prepared to give an all-out support for this mission.

Myanmar local churches still enjoy bouncing participation of young people in their church liturgy and religious activities. Young people are keen to contribute their talents in public worship with new, inspiring and touching hymns and songs. They like to share the beauty of their participation their zeal and love for the church with others through media. The faithful (Kachin, Burmese, Karens etc.,) in diaspora a way from one's native land, soldiers in frontlines and in actions, are assisted by allowing them to have soft copies of church hymnals, catechism program for the Missionary Childhood and prayer books in their phones and electronic devices, phones and tablets in order for them to conveniently make use of them in liturgies. National and diocesan mission plans should include activities and support for this digital mission.

RVA-Myanmar which includes several ethic languages such as Myanmar, Kachin, Karen, Chin etc., is appreciated by non-Catholics. Likewise, secular radio, TV programs also have network and collaboration with the RVA program. There are also individuals, priests, Sisters, Catechists and even young people who are carrying out the proclamation of the Gospels via digital evangelization, sharing and witnessing their faith with others though some can be off bound and leaning to negative and aggressive approach. The local churches, by all means, have to recognize and appreciate their zeal and enthusiasm for proclamation of the Good News; on the other hand, we have to provide and assist them with proper faith formation and accompanying them with love as collaborators.

There are so many non-Catholic websites in the country; each religious group or denomination has its own website to proclaim the Gospel and mission – the KBC Mu-Na, the Anglican, the Church of Christ, the Assemblies of God, the Seventh Day Adventist, the Evangelical and Pentecostal churches etc. There are a few TV stations and websites run by the local government such as Laiza FM, with so many individual networks.

Proposal

- To arrange the digital evangelization collaboratively among different Christian denominations from ecumenical aspect

General comments

The Catholic Church in Myanmar totally agrees with the convergences, matters for consideration and proposals of the Synthesis Report on “Mission on the Digital Environment”.

III. CONCLUSION AND COMMITMENTS

The Catholic Church in Myanmar will follow the direction and guidance of the Synthesis Report of the Synod in consideration of the local context.

In collaboration with the people of other faiths, NGOs, CSOs and other Christian denominations, the Catholic Church in Myanmar is committed to do the deduction of the poverty.

The Catholic Church in Myanmar will arrange the programs for the training of formators, proper formation in all aspects of life and ongoing formation program.

The Catholic Church in Myanmar will arrange the program for the young people, young priests, and young consecrated men and women to carry out the Church’s mission in the digital environment, as well as to accompany the rest of the community, including pastors, in becoming more familiar with its dynamics.

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