



Catholic Bishops Conference of Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei (CBCMSB)

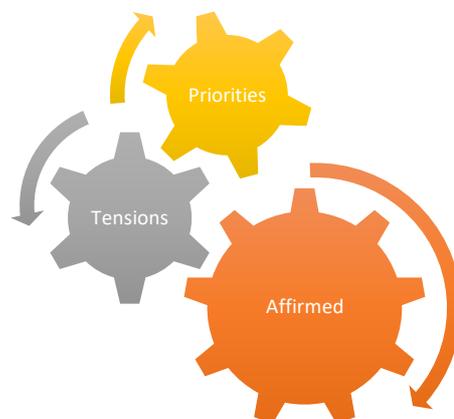
The Report for the Continental phase of the Synod

The Document for the Continental phase of the Synod (DCS) is the privileged instrument through which the dialogue of the local churches among themselves and with the universal church can take place during the continental stage. To pursue this process of listening, dialogue and discernment, the reflection will focus on three questions:

- “After having read and prayed with the DCS, which **intuitions** resonate most strongly with the lived experiences and realities of the Church in your continent? Which experiences are new, or illuminating to you?”
- “After having read and prayed with the DCS, what substantial tensions or divergences emerge as particularly important in your continent’s perspective? Consequently, what are the **questions or issues** that should be addressed and considered in the next steps of the process?”
- “Looking at what emerges from the previous two questions, what are the **priorities, recurring themes and calls to action** that can be shared with other local Churches around the world and discussed during the First Session of the Synodal Assembly in October 2023?”

Introduction

This document summarises the reports on the continental phase of the synod from the 11 dioceses and vicariates of the Conference. Three clusters or grouping of points emerge around each question above – like a core and petals – and the three inter-act to generate our way of being church today. The sub-titles reflect these key points, about five per grouping. Below is a summary of the reflections raised:



(A) The Lived Experiences

1. **A Horizon of Hope and Joy** – The experience of synods and journeying in synodality may not be new to all dioceses and have been lived sporadically at various assemblies and moments. Yet the current experience of synodality which is well articulated, and with its encouragement to honest open-hearted dialogue and listening, has begun to bear some valuable fruits:

- It opens a horizon of hope for us as the church in Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei, which is reflected in,
- The joy of coming together, walking together, listening and learning to speak freely has been an enthralling journey (cf. EG 5).
- This strengthens the sense of belonging as church, and the desire to build a welcoming church for all by recognizing the common dignity of all as God’s children worthy of being loved.
- The pedagogy of accompaniment begins with listening. Listening is tied to a discipleship of welcome, creating a culture of trust and hospitality that makes communities safe for all to share their anxieties and hopes.
- We are called to be a welcoming church to all including the disabled, the elderly, and all those with different sexual orientations.



2. **The dynamic nature of the Church** – *“Enlarge the spaces of your tent!” (Isaiah 54:2)*

- The church as a tent is a powerful and appealing image. Understanding the functioning of each facet of the Tent, provides us with a scriptural image of a church in the journey of synodality (DCS#11):
 - as a space for communion, to create meaningful spiritual spaces of welcome and listening with & for our contemporaries
 - as a place for participation, acknowledge and encourage the charisms found in the people so the church and her ministries can become a force for transformation
 - as a foundation for mission, expressing the ever dynamic nature of the church to be open and ready to move into new areas

- There is a deep link between deepening communion (meeting, listening, dialogue, reflection, discernment) and strengthening mission (pushing to go beyond ourselves, and our communities to carry out the mission.)
 - We have the task of transforming an inward looking, individualised & polarized approach to spiritual life towards a more missionary, communitarian and integrated approach.
3. **Re-igniting our baptismal fire** – Our “common dignity and vocation of all baptised” flows from Christ the cornerstone who gathers all around him, as the tabernacle in the tent, and pours out the various charisms, vocations, ministries through His Spirit.
- Many Catholics do not have sufficient understanding nor the conviction of their baptismal call to be *priest, prophet and king*, or the *tria munera* of Jesus Christ in which we all participate as People of God.
 - There is an urgency to re-evangelise all Catholics, to educate our people – inclusive of clergy, religious, laity – so that we can fully embrace our common baptismal dignity (DCS #22-24)
 - It is not just about an organizational way of allocating roles and powers but co-responsibility for the life and mission of the church. The responsibility for the synodal life of the church is not delegated but shared by all in response to the gifts the Spirit bestows on all the faithful. This calls for recognising and encouraging the charisms found in the community.
4. **Church as an organic body & systems thinking** – through the synodal journey, we begin to have a holistic look upon the church, where we can contemplate that every part and action is inter-connected.
- It reminds one of the principle of Pope Francis, that “*The whole is greater than the part, but it is also greater than the sum of its parts*” (EG 234-235).
 - There is need for cohesiveness in our approach, or whole ‘systems thinking’. Piecemeal efforts and working in silos are no longer effective to address real issues and root causes.
 - As an organic and living body, the various parts and ministries can reach out across offices and ministries to think together for more creative and effective responses.
 - This must also flow into our way of seeing church – the church is a whole. As one diocese said, the “Church is so much more than listening to the Word and receiving and sacraments...” She is also a force for social change.
 - The Gospel presents “*the fullness of life and the fullness of the Kingdom of God not as two separate spheres but as intertwined*”

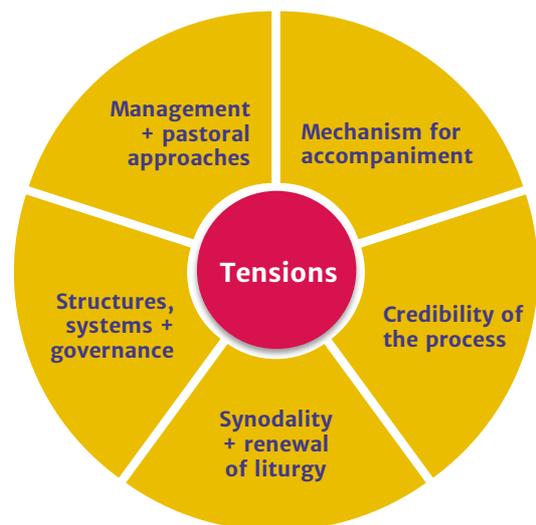
movements with the goal of making Christ's presence felt in the midst of His People... (DCS#41).

5. **A call to reform towards mission** – “We hear the dream of “a global and synodal Church that lives unity in diversity... God is preparing something new, and we must collaborate” (DCS#29).
- The excitement and hope which synodality generates, impels inwardly the many who participated sincerely, to believe once again that the church of Christ – with her pastors, leaders and people – are capable of change and growth, towards being more a church of *communion, participation and mission*.
 - In the various assemblies and consultations indicate there is a unanimous call to reform which the church needs to address in all areas.
 - This includes programmes of formation, spirituality, mission, administrative structures, forms of authority and leadership – clergy, religious, lay – who can be relational and collaborative, capable of generating life, solidarity and co-responsibility. (DC#58-59).
 - Situating the role of women and youth and their vocation as baptised and equal members of the People of God, gives them a key role in sharing co-responsibility for the governance of the church.

(B) Tensions or Divergences that emerges:

6. **Credibility of the process** – As power is vested in the ordained, therefore no change can happen without their approval. There is fear that the Synod will culminate in mere shop talk with no concrete plan in sight.

- There is a passive and sceptical view from a good section of laity, because of the scandal of abuses; and the perceived lack of response to the findings from pervious processes, assemblies, etc. (DCS#18)
- Clericalism and the resistance to changes and synodality remains a tension. Clericalism and sexism (discrimination against women) still exist in the church and pose a great threat to the synodal way of being church. (DCS#19).



- In some parishes and communities there is a lack of journeying together by the clergy with the community. This alienates the faithful and lends to people treating the parish as a 'service provider' and being consumers of spiritual goods. (DCS#19-21)
- The perception of separation between priests and the people of God, that all power is still with the clergy, does not encourage people to engage. Decisions are made by the clergy alone.
- The call to synodality for the majority of the people of God seem a formidable task and huge challenge for the church. What is practised is different from what is preached.
- Asian cultures also contribute towards the passivity of laity when it does not encourage speaking up against parents, elders, superiors or the hierarchy.
- *"It is necessary for all of us in the Church to enter into a process of conversion in order to respond to this need [above], which would imply proposing the kerygma as the fundamental proclamation and listening to Christ crucified and risen for us. [...]" (DCS#41)*

7. Renewal of Liturgy & Synodality – The liturgy is the source and summit of the church's synodal dynamism; and liturgy needs to evolve to the felt needs of various groups.

- The over focus on sacraments has made the church inward looking and irrelevant for the rest of society. This prevents her from recognising the existence of marginalised groups (even) within the church community.
- There has been a reluctance to change liturgy due to traditionalism. Traditionalism has led to a church that is not open and thus not welcoming.
- Rigidity in liturgy has led to the formation of a rigid community and passive laity. The church in Asia aspires for spirit-filled communities but lack the fundamentals for building such communities.
- There is a need for a synodal style of Liturgy that allows for the active participation of all the faithful, in welcoming differences, valuing all ministries and charisms.
- Never correct anyone publicly during the liturgy or from the pulpit. It only shames and alienates them.
- The church is not welcoming but has become too legalistic.

8. Structures, systems and governance – We have the opportunity to rediscover the pedagogy of Jesus through the Synod on synodality.

- Clarify the Synodal style of governance, what co-responsibility means in terms of participating in the power of governance with the ordained.
- As the juridical head and leader, nothing relating to the parish can be carried out without the knowledge and permission of the parish priest.

An unintended consequence, is that the majority of the laity refrain from taking any initiative and it has created a passive laity.

- We have placed too many rights and responsibility on the bishops and priests, which has become a burden to them, while creating in turn a passive and subservient laity.
- Address the culture of silence and autocratic tendencies within our church and institutions. The institution and its practices instils fear, and is often times oppressive.
- *“The wounds of the church are intimately connected to those of the world.”* The structures of sin give importance to the rich and educated or those of a particular group or race over others. The poor and marginalised do not feel welcomed. This prejudice and discrimination in the church needs to be addressed. (DCS#44)

9. **Management and Pastoral approaches** – These too need to be humanised again in Jesus Christ. Have we been pastoral and Christ-like enough in our approach?

- Our inclination to efficiency over relationship building, management and control over cultivating the fruit of the Spirit as a community of disciples, hinders the blossoming of lives and charisms.
- Ministry are places or nodes where synodality happens in the church. To some extent, serving in a ministry has taken on an impersonal fulfilment of corporate outputs.
- The church lacks tools to constantly evolve with the times, while practicing the values of God.
 - (Surprisingly, the secular and corporate world has gone ahead of the church in many areas such as mechanisms for healthy decision making, team retreats, balance of life, etc.)
- We often rush out “solutions” to address the “realities” (usually associated as being problems or issues to be resolved), foregoing the step to listen and understand the situation or people at hand. The result is that we come up with something that may not necessarily get to the heart of the matter or be sufficiently reflective of the ecclesial nature of the church.
- The church must reform the styles of leadership that it can give life, generate communion and co-responsibility in the church.
- Even though the church claims to operate on a non-racial basis, there is still an underlying bias and prejudice towards the indigenous people as well as the migrants within the church community.
- Certain mindsets are difficult to change when it comes to gender roles and status in society.
 - The question is how far will the church allow cultural nuances to affect or influence her perspective on gender roles, participation

and mission? How can we create a multicultural church community without the underlying biases and prejudices?

10. Mechanisms for accompaniment – Some of the social issues affecting our peoples include demographic changes, religious nationalism, poverty, digitalisation & social media. There is still a great need to reach out to those on the margin such as the re-marriages, divorced, single parents, marriages not blessed, those with various disabilities, the poor, etc.

- If we continually go back to the people on the fringes without any answers to their hurts, further invitations to listen may give rise to the notion that the church is merely paying them lip service.
- How can the wounded find healing in a church whose teachings, structures and processes continue to hurt them, and is perceived to perpetuate their alienation?
- What is striking in the DCS report is the acknowledgement of the lack of appropriate structures and ways to accompany people living on the margins of society.
- There is a tension between doing more to reach out to absentee Catholics or intra church needs than expending resources to go out in mission to new areas and needs. We fall into a circle of being inward looking and unending catholic consumerism or dependency.
- We can resist the temptation to maintenance, status quo and conservation and rediscover the missionary impulse at the heart of all things (EG).
- There is a deep causal link between deepening communion (meeting, listening, dialogue, reflection, discernment) and strengthening mission (pushing to go beyond ourselves and our communities to carry out the mission).
- Here too we must recall that the laity are co-responsible for the mission by nature of their baptism. They are sent forth in mission to the world.

(C) Priorities, Recurring themes and Calls to action:

11. Formation for synodality – There is an urgent need to formulate a comprehensive formation program on ‘Living Synodality as Church’, at all levels. The basis of such a formation should be the common discipleship of the People of God (FABC).



- The formation programmes should NOT be just an academic exercise, but it must have the primary goal to bring each person to: “A deep personal Encounter with Jesus Christ.” (EG, 1).
- The young people must be able to ‘participate’ in their formation and such programmes must not be top-down.
- Ministries must also be places of growth in communion and deepening in the grace of salvation in Jesus Christ, for both pastors and people.
- Seminarians, pastors and all those who assume leadership roles need to work at their on-going human maturity and transformation, that they will not be obstacles but effective instruments in the hands of the Lord.
 - Very often the psycho-socio-emotional ‘baggages’ have not been attended to.
 - We must provide the space and methods for such tools and processes within the ministry programmes and services
- It is vital to re-view at and improve the seminarians' formation to better prepare them to be priests at this time (Digitalization / Millennials). The wider community must be involved in the formation of their future priests.
- Continue to empower and support lay leaders through formation that can enhance their knowledge and leadership to be on mission alongside bishops, priests and religious.
- The how, why and what of pastoral accompaniment can and should be clearly articulated and catechized across the universal church.
- Take an informed approach to issues. Research and understand the root cause of persons inclined towards different sexual orientations (such as LGBTQI), and how the church can assist and journey with them spiritually.

12. Mapping the pathway - We need to guard against seeing the Synod on Synodality as a means of solving all the problems we have in the church today. Rather, we have to appreciate that this Synod returns the church to see and embrace itself as a People of God called by God to walk together in mission. The responsibility for the Synodal life of the church must be embraced by everyone (DCS#66).

- How can the church ensure that ‘synodality’ will continuously be lived out as a way of life for the church, well beyond the Synod time frame? What steps is the spirit inviting us to take to grow in synodality in the following areas?
- Spirituality – *“It is necessary for all of us in the church to enter into a process of conversion...”* (DCS#41). Chart a pathway for universal reform about building a welcoming church.
- Pastoral care – We need to broaden our pastoral care towards the divorced and remarried and all those who feel excluded from the church. The various restrictions and prohibitions on access to Holy Communion

need to be re-visited in prayer and discernment. The individual should be formed to make the judgement call. "The church must be a place of mercy that is freely given, where everyone can feel accepted, loved, forgiven and supported to live the good life of the Gospel." (EG 114).

- Leadership – The leaders of the church (Bishop, Priest, and Lay leaders) must go down to the grass-root, continue to dialogue and listen to the people / parishioners to better grasp the perspective of the life of the people, spiritually and physically.
- Communities – Design suitable methodologies and processes for use to form communities, be they from within or without the parishes. The fruit of such listening and journeying will surely be the pastoral conversion of our parish communities at the service of the church's evangelising mission (DCS#38).
- Discernment – At all levels of the church, there is a need to promote personal and communal discernment and integrate these into ministries. The proper use of the tool on spiritual conversations will be helpful.
- Formation – In Seminaries for priestly formation, On-going formation & annual retreats of priests, formation and pastoral updating for bishops under FABC, formation for Religious, Lay Leaders, Families, Youth, etc.
- Mentoring – continuous coaching and mentoring of leaders is needed to strengthen the synodal culture and for cross-fertilisation of pastoral reflexes.
- Ministry – Ordinary lay people are also able to contribute solutions to the church based on their own life experiences. Best practices can and should be shared so that more people in the church can benefit from the wisdom of many.
- Discipleship – A culture of listening in the church is integral to discerning God's mission and being a disciple of Christ (DCS #11).
- Structures – Is the present structure ready for a lived synodality? A huge task ahead is to develop structures and mechanisms within the church to allow the participation and involvement of the whole community, not only in menial roles but also in leadership positions.
- BEC's – A structure that encourages synodality is the various forms of small Christian community, including the BECs (Basic Ecclesial Community). More needs to be done to encourage the formation, growth and development of BECs, especially in relation to being more missionary in nature.

13. Reform of the institution – We need to look at re-structuring and re-organising the decision-making bodies of the parish and diocese to include the lay, women, the youth and others. Instead of merely focusing on the 'what' of the matter, we should really move on to the question of 'how' to bring about synodality within the church.

- Encourage the establishment of pastoral councils, transparency in their selection and work, and propose methods and tools for its work.
- Clericalism as an attitude of superiority and high-handedness needs to be addressed. The response to clericalism may come from outside of the clergy, from the larger People of God. The clergy need to rediscover their reciprocal relation with the community or People of God.
- Abuse from a spiritual, sexual, economic, authority and conscience perspective needs to be spelt out for awareness of the people and leaders and mechanisms need to be put in place to prevent it.
- Cultivate the art of *parrhesia* and engage one another in necessary and honest dialogues, no matter how difficult or controversial the subject matter is.
- Grow in sincere harmony by creating bonds necessary to walk together, recognising that we are all part of the One Body of Christ.
- Clarify the dignity and vocation of laity in the church. What is co-responsibility in mission and Canon Law? How is the responsibility of the baptised articulated with that of the clergy and religious, in relation to the whole community? The affirmation of common dignity in Christ is the basis for renewal of life and service in the church.
 - In *Praedicate Evangelium* (PE), Pope Francis says that responsibility does not rely on ordination; and the dicasteries in Rome exercise the vicariate power of the Holy Father.
- If we do not dialogue and listen, we may foster “autocratic tendencies” and “the clerical and individualistic culture that isolates individuals and fragments relationships between priests and laity” (DCS#33).

14. Cry of the earth, Cry of the Poor – *“The reports invite us to recognize the inter-connectedness of social and environmental challenges and to respond to them by collaborating and forming alliances with other Christian confessions, believers of other religions and all people of good will.”* (DCS#45)

- The leaders of the church (bishops, priest, and lay) must go down to the grass-roots and realities, research root causes in efforts to provide holistic solutions.
- We have to address the relational crises at the root of social-environmental issues – the rupture with the creator, creation and fellow beings.
- We are challenged to respect and treat them as persons, and provide assistance as a community without discrimination.
- indigenous peoples have a place and role among us. They are not only recipients of our assistance but their wisdom, spirituality and worldviews can be resources for helping us build a new and better way of life.

- Through the issues and crises of our times, we are invited to encounter or touch the “tender living flesh of Jesus” in the poor and suffering of the world.

15. Inculturation and dialogue – *“The church fulfills its mission of proclaiming the Gospel within specific cultural contexts ... In this context, Christians are called to offer their own contribution starting from their own vision of faith in order to enculturate it in the new cultural contexts [...]. This diversity of approaches should be seen as the implementation of a model of interculturality,..”* (DCS#55)

- Asia is the continent of ancient civilisations and cultures, with its rich heritage. Evangelisation in Asia means telling the story of Jesus in Asia or whispering to the soul of Asia our living experiences of Him.
 - The Asian church can offer to the universal church our experience in presenting Christ (Ecclesia in Asia).
 - Inculturation or evangelization in the context of local culture is a great opportunity to build the Kingdom of God.
 - People express the desire to promote local culture, integrate it with faith, and incorporate it into the liturgy.
 - Careful adaptation of inculturating the faith and liturgy is of particular importance in the Asian context, with its rich and diverse cultures.
 - *Sectarianism, tribalism, ethno-nationalisms – differently expressed and experienced in diverse places - share the same characteristic threat: to narrow the church’s expression of its catholicity.”* (DCS#50).
 - It is important that we walk together with “the whole human family in the exchanges of everyday life and common living.” (DCS#43).
 - How do we journey with Catholics in these situations of mixed or inter-faith marriages and upbringing of their children in the catholic faith?
-