

Monday 17 July 23

New Leadership Helms the Conference

by Charles Bertille

It was a significant week at the 112th Plenary Assembly of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei (CBCMSB) gathered at Majodi from the 9-14 July 2023 – working on a variety of subjects and making decisions that will bear an impact on all our local churches the coming years.

The highlight of the week was the election of the new office bearers for the Conference as well as for all the Commissions. In this next phase, the bishops discerned and decided to elect Abp Julian Leow of Kuala Lumpur as the President of the CBCMSB and Abp Simon Poh of Kuching as President of the Malaysian Bishops to helm the Conference. Cardinal William Goh remains as Vice President of the Conference. The list of office bearers can be viewed below. The term of office for office bearers and commissions is 2 years' renewable.

The preceding week saw the announcement of the official delegates from our Conference to the Synod in Rome this October. Cardinal William Goh of Singapore is the elected official delegate of the Bishops Conference, and together with him there would be Ms Anna Amandus from Sandakan, Fr Clarence Devadass from Kuala Lumpur, and Prof Christina Kheng from Singapore as an expert or resource person. Four from a small Conference, including from Sabah – it's indeed a blessing.

On Sunday night as the bishops arrived, we heard the proclamation that Bishop Sebastian Francis of Penang, the outgoing president of the Conference, will be elevated Cardinal in the coming consistory of September. The Holy Father must have had in mind the kaleidoscope of faiths and cultures represented by the region and the opportunity it holds for dialogue, evangelisation of cultures & inculturation of faith.

Monday was dedicated to working on communication skills for bishops, with their spokespersons and social communication teams. The significant takeaway was to be prepared for any crises, courage to encounter the media, and the good preparation that is needed. Augustine Anthuvan, the media professional and trainer from Singapore closed with a powerful quote, "A good bishop or leader will not surround himself with yes-men but those who are willing to tell the hard truths to church leadership – and in that process help you to develop your own leadership."

Tuesday morning, His Excellency Abp Wojciech Zaluski, the Apostolic Nuncio to Malaysia and Timur Leste, and Apostolic Delegate to Brunei Darussalam met and addressed the bishops on a wide range of topics. He gave importance to the Synod process and Safeguarding – protection of minors from abuse, and all the efforts being put into these areas.

Election of Office Bearers

The Executive Secretary of the Conference explained the rationale for the elections as per the Constitution. The term of office comes to an end for all Office Bearers and Episcopal commissions. The election of the main office bearers was held by secret ballot administered

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by the Executive Secretary, with Cardinal William Goh assisting to check and read out the ballot responses.

The newly elected Office bearers and heads of episcopal commission are as follows:

President, CBCMSB	– Archbishop Julian Leow
Vice President	– Cardinal William Goh
Episcopal Secretary	– Bishop Richard Ng
Treasurer	– Bishop Bernard Paul
President, Catholic Bishops of Malaysia	– Archbishop Simon Poh

Episcopal Commission Heads:

Biblical Commission	– Bishop Richard Ng
Consecrated Life	– Bishop Sebastian Francis
Diocesan Priests and Seminaries	– Bishop Richard Ng
Ecumenism and Inter-Religious	– Archbishop Julian Leow. Assisted by Archbishop Simon Poh
Family, Laity and Life	– Archbishop John Wong
Youth-Campus Ministry	– Archbishop Simon Poh
Liturgy	– Cardinal William Goh
New Evangelisation (incl. PMS)	– Bishop Julius Gitom
Pastoral Healthcare	– Bishop Cornelius Piong
Migrants, Itinerants & Victims of Trafficking	– Bishop Bernard Paul
Integral Human Development	– Bishop Bernard Paul
Creation Justice	– Bishop Joseph Hii
Social Communications	– Bishop Sebastian Francis
Malaysian Catechetical Commission	– Bishop Joseph Hii
Malaysian Catholic Education Council	– Bishop Sebastian Francis

Please note the following:

- CHARIS is now integrated into Family, Laity & Life Commission. There will be only one bishop president for the entire commission.
- The Commission on Caritas Malaysia is re-named as the Commission for Integral Human Development. Caritas Malaysia will continue to be the vehicle for promoting the social mission of the church.
- The Commission on Ecumenism & Inter-Faith is renamed as Ecumenism & Inter-Religious.
- The transition from the previous to the new office bearers will take place beginning Merdeka Day 31st August and the cut-off date is on Malaysia Day September 16, 2023.

The bishops continued on their own from Tuesday to Thursday listening to various commission reports and discussing matters around the Liturgy and the translation of materials, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) survey on Synodal Formation efforts at Diocese and Conference level, the Malaysian Religious Assembly that was held successfully in June, the feedback to the Universal Guidelines Framework sent out by the Commission on Safeguarding of Minors from Rome. Next was the Seminary Charter and efforts to develop a vision as Malaysian seminary, the formation among seminary

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formators, Finance matters, Caritas Malaysia, Migrants, Catechetical, Catholic education, Inter-faith, Ecumenism, Laity & Family, Health, Creation Justice, Young People, and a follow-up of all the correspondences by the Executive Secretary.

The journey as one Malaysian church will culminate in the Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026. It will bring together all the local synodal processes from 2022 to 2024, the parish & diocese assemblies of 2023, the regional assemblies in 2024, the journey of the “Salib Malaysia” in 2025 by the Young People, to the national encounter from 9 – 13 August 2026.

It was a week rich with all the events and renewed encounters, dense with the workload and decisions taken. The Conference of Bishops is also a community of faith, with a generosity of spirit and responsibilities to bear. So much is placed on the shoulders of each one – that only the living Spirit of God enables and assists us to carry forward. We are all “earthenware vessels carrying treasures of God.” (cf. 2 Cor 4:7).