

A light red map of the Asian continent is positioned on the left side of the page, extending from the top to the bottom. The map shows the outlines of the major landmasses of Asia, including the Indian subcontinent, Southeast Asia, and East Asia. The text is centered over the map.

FINAL DOCUMENT OF THE CONTINENTAL STAGE IN ASIA

“Finally, it offers us the opportunity to become a Church of closeness. Let us keep going back to God’s own “style”, which is closeness, compassion and tender love. God has always operated that way.”

(Pope Francis)

1. The Asian context

1. Asia, blessed with diverse cultures, religions, languages, and ethnicities, is the largest continent in terms of both geographical area and population. It has a landmass of 44.6 million square kilometres, about 30% of the total surface. Asia is home to approximately 4.6 billion people with over 2,300 languages spoken across Asia. It is also considered the birthplace and cradle of major world religions like Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Taoism, Confucianism and several others. Islam is the most prominent religion and is practised by 1.2 billion people, followed by Hinduism with 900 million people.

2. Though the systems of beliefs, values, and symbols vary from place to place, the interconnectedness of the human community draws the Asian peoples together. The Asian value of being relational (with God, self, other human beings, and the cosmos) brings with it the unity of the human family and the unity of the peoples of Asia.

3. Asia holds the dubious distinction of having the most billionaires in the world on one hand, while on the other, it has 320 million people that are extremely poor, living below the poverty line, according to the World Bank Report. The recent pandemic has further exasperated the inequality and economic divide between the haves and the have-nots.

4. Politically too, we see diverse systems of governance that include parliamentary democracies, military dictatorial regimes, communist rulers, constitutional monarchies, and presidential forms of government.

5. Despite the benefits that unity and diversity bring to Asia, it is also entrenched with many challenges that directly affect the Church and the lives of the people of Asia. Some of the challenges are the widespread poverty across Asia, the ecological threat that has brought disequilibrium in the lives of people, the challenges of systemic corruption, the waves of economic migration in search of better lives, the political instability that causes internal disruption to peace and harmony, and much more. All of these have a direct impact on the Church as she seeks to reach out to all peoples.

6. While Christianity remains a very small minority in most parts of Asia, the vibrancy and richness of the individual cultures bring joy to the life of the Church. The Asian continent is vast and is divided into four recognizable regions, namely Central, East, South and Southeast Asia.

7. Founded on our common baptismal dignity, this synodal journey is indeed an expression of the universal Church and the local Churches walking together as one. The positive effects of bringing people from all walks of life, both within and outside the Church into a process of praying with one another, listening to one another, and discerning the voice of the Holy Spirit bring forth in them a new experience of vitality and dynamism to the life of the Church.

8. Among the 4 billion people living in Asia, the Catholic Church comprises only 3.31% of the total population, yet it contributes greatly to the fields of education, healthcare, social welfare and reaching out to the poor and marginalised groups in society.

9. In a pluralistic Asian society, the Catholic Church continues to spread the message of love by empowering those on the margins through quality education and integrating them into the mainstream of society.

10. Thousands of priests, consecrated men and women, along with lay missionaries and catechists are involved in faith formation and catering to the spiritual and pastoral needs of the Catholic community across Asia.

11. The Synod process

Pre-Synodal Phase: FABC 50 General Conference

11. Popecall for the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops came while the Federation of Asian Conferences (FABC) was preparing for a General Conference - patterned after those of the Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano y Caribeño (CELAM) - to highlight the contribution of the Church in Asia to the wider Church. With the approach of the 50th anniversary of the Asian Meeting that was held during Pope St. Paul visit to Manila in 1970, the General Conference was first set for November 2020. The coronavirus disease pandemic, however, forced the FABC to postpone the General Conference to October 2022.

12. The coincidence of both movements was considered providential: the General Conference process was bringing to the fore the current situation and challenges of the peoples of Asia as well as the contemporary mission of the Churches in Asia, while the synodal process was providing the methodology and sometimes even creating the listening mechanisms for conducting the General Conference consultations.

13. The fruits of the General Conference will be most evident in the section on below. These represent the concerns and priorities that were recognized during the General Conference but were not extensively covered in the Asian responses to the Document for the Continental Stage.

14. As Pope Francis remarked at the beginning of the FABC General Conference, Paul VI encountered in Asia a Church of the poor, a Church of the young and a Church in dialogue. Fifty years later, the Church of the poor is a Church that cares for our common home, the Church of the young is now navigating and evangelising the digital continent, and the Church in dialogue is called to build bridges between cultures, religions and peoples.

First Phase: Churches of Asia in the FABC

15. The Federation of Asian Conferences (FABC) comprises 17 Episcopal Conferences,¹ 2 Synods of Oriental Churches², and 3 Associate Members.³ There are 29 territories included in the FABC membership.⁴ There is the hope to welcome the Church in mainland China in the FABC membership.

16. As the General Conference was ending the Document for the Continental Stage (DCS) was released. Copies were printed and ready on 28 October and distributed to all of the participants on 29 October 2022. The Asian Task Force was formed and approved by the Central Committee at a meeting during the General Conference. The Task Force was to coordinate the entire Asian Synodal process.

17. The Task Force met via Zoom on 7 November 2022. A letter was sent describing the process along with the DCS and other information from the Synod Secretariat on the methodology for the Continental Stage including the FAQ. The dates for the Asian Continental Assembly on Synodality were set for 24-26 February 2023.

18. All 22 FABC members were requested to respond in 10 pages to the DCS on or before 15 January 2023. The Task Force would then send to the members a draft framework of the Asian Final Document on or before 15 February 2023. 21 out of 22 responses were received. The draft framework¹ was sent out as scheduled on 15 February.

19. Most found that there was very little time to do this as it overlapped with advent and Christmas. It took time for the needed translations given the diversity of languages in Asia. Each conference chose its manner of responding to the DCS. This included using the existing synodal teams at the deanery, diocesan and national levels. In some places, online meetings were held. Small group meetings were utilized, focus groups, assemblies where possible and bishops and priests' councils.

Second Phase: Discernment and Writing Team

20. The second phase is the writing of the draft framework of the summary of the Episcopal Conferences' reports. It was held at the Camillian Pastoral Care Centre, Bangkok, Thailand from 31 January 4 February 2023. The FABC Central Committee appointed the Asian Task Force to be the Discernment and Writing Team and to

¹ Catholic Conference of Bangladesh (CBCB), Catholic Conference of Central Asia [Conferenza Episcopale Cattolica dell'Asia Centrale] (CECAC), Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI), Catholic Conference of India (CBCI), Catholic Conference of Indonesia [Konferensi Waligereja Indonesia] (KWI), Catholic Conference of Japan (CBCJ), Catholic Conference of Korea (CBCK), Catholic Conference of Laos and Cambodia [Conférence Episcopale du Laos et du Cambodge] (CELAC), Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei (CBCMSB), Catholic Conference of Myanmar (CBCM), Pakistan Catholic Conference (PCBC), Catholic Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), Catholic Conference of Sri Lanka (CBCSL), Chinese Regional Conference (CRBC) [Taiwan], Catholic Conference of Thailand (CBCT), Conferencia Episcopal Timorese (CET), Catholic Conference of Vietnam (CBCV).

² Syro-Malabar Synod (India), Syro-Malankara Catholic Church (India).

³ Diocese of Hong Kong, Diocese of Macau, Apostolic Vicariate of Nepal.

⁴ Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Brunei, Cambodia, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Kazakhstan, Korea, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Macau, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Tajikistan, Thailand, Thailand, Timor Leste, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Vietnam.

accomplish the task of drawing up a draft framework. The team was expanded and was composed of 9 individuals: 2 lay people (1 female and 1 male), 1 consecrated female, and 6 priests, with the FABC Secretary General overseeing the process, representing the four FABC regions, namely South Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia, and Central Asia.

21. For four days, the team devoted themselves to praying, sharing and conversations, listening, discerning, and writing the draft framework in the atmosphere and spirit of synodality. The team was divided into 3 groups reading 7 country reports. Each team discerned the common themes, context, and peculiarities in answering the 3 questions from the DCS, namely Resonances, Tensions, and Priorities using the spiritual conversation methodology.

22. The team came into a plenary to further reflect and discuss their insights and wrote the draft framework. They would again pray, reflect, and discern as they continued to revise, improve, and develop the draft framework. The draft framework document was sent to all the Episcopal Conferences and Associate Members on 15 February 2023.

23. The team also planned the programme for the Asian Continental Assembly. The four days' experience enriched them so much that they proposed the same discernment process in the Asian assembly. The programme was submitted to the FABC Central Leadership for their comments and approval.

Third Phase: Asian Continental Assembly

24. By the procedure outlined during the FABC 50 General Conference, each Episcopal Conference was asked to send three delegates and each Associate Member could send two delegates to the Asian Continental Assembly on Synodality, which was held from 24-26 February 2023. It was further determined that these delegations should consist of the bishop president or his delegate and two others chosen based on the DCS 108 and 109. Delegates were sent information about the meeting in advance along with instructions for preparation for this event.

25. On 23 February, participants arrived at Baan Phu Waan Pastoral Training Center in Bangkok, Thailand. Delegates from 17 Episcopal Conferences, 2 Synods of Oriental Rites, and 3 Associate Members of the FABC were joined by members of the General Secretariat for Synod, the Relator General for the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops and several other guests. The number of Asian participants at the Assembly was: 6 Cardinals, 5 Archbishops, 18 Bishops, 28 priests, 5 consecrated women, 7 laymen and 11 women.

26. Before the beginning of the sessions, the participants were provided with the following materials as a resource for discernment and discussion: The Continental Stage Document (DCS), a copy of the Draft Framework for the Final Document (FD) prepared by the Discernment and Writing Team, and a compilation of Pope Francis'

Catechesis on Discernment.

27. In our endeavour to compose a draft of the Final Document that is to be submitted to the FABC Central Committee after “validation and approval” from this body, which will then be forwarded to the General Secretariat, the Asian Continental Assembly included the following elements: spiritual conversation; input from brief presentations; common and individual prayer periods; general as well as small group discussion, review and reworking of versions of the draft (which was created using a framework text proposed by the Discernment and Writing Team); and a forum during plenary sessions for interventions from participants.

28. Groups were intentionally designed to consist of a mix of people from various conferences and different states of life (i.e., clergy, consecrated persons, lay, etc.). Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology assisted in the process of compilation of input derived from the group work.

29. The responses of the groups to the discernment sessions that looked more deeply into the different parts of the draft document were slowly integrated day by day into the working draft as the Team met at the end of each day. Moreover, it added two more steps for participants to contribute to the writing of the draft: firstly, bringing back the edited draft to all in the small groups, the team asked what they would want to amend, and what would they want to add. Secondly, after the Team integrated amendments and additions from the small groups, it again asked all the participants to read the whole text and reflect as a group on what the Team missed significantly.

30. The working sessions concluded with an expression of unanimous affirmation of the draft document by the various groups of participants. Following this, the assembly members discussed the following two questions: (1) Which ecclesial structures need to be changed or created to enhance the synodality of the Church in Asia? (2) What do you wish to see happen between the October 2023 session and the October 2024 session of the Synod on Synodality?

31. Cardinal Charles Bo, president of the FABC, presided at the closing Liturgy of the Assembly, during which representatives from the Assembly presented a provisional draft of the Final Document from the Asian Continental Assembly of Synodality.

Fourth Phase: Discernment and Writing Team

32. The Discernment and Writing Team was entrusted with finalising the final document. They met from 27-28 February 2023 to incorporate the amendments as suggested by the delegates of the Asian Assembly. The team also participated actively in the assembly by joining in the groups in the discussions, spiritual conversations, and communal discernment. Listening to all and feeling the pulse of the participants aided the discernment process in the writing of the Final Document.

33. The final editing of the document was done in a spirit of communal writing, warm companionship, and prayerful discernment. The Team then forwarded its work to the FABC Central Committee for and “validation and approval.”

Fifth Phase: FABC Central Committee

34. The Final Document of the Asian Continental Assembly on Synodality was presented to the FABC Central Committee at their online meeting on 3 March 2023. This was for the Bishop-Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences to validate and approve the Final Document of the Asian Continental Assembly, ensuring that it was the fruit of an authentically synodal journey, guarding the unity of the Church that can never degenerate into uniformity or polarization.

35. After having deliberated on the draft final document, the FABC Central Committee, on 3 March 2023 validate and approved the final document with some very minor changes to be incorporated indicating that it should be further edited and then be sent to the Synod Secretariat as the Final Document for the Asian Continental Assembly on the Synod.

III. General sentiments to the process

36. Despite the challenges, the synodal journey is not a democratic process but it's a moment of grace and healing for the Church. The image of the Church as tent projects it to be a place of refuge that can be expanded to all in a spirit of inclusivity. It also expresses that God can pitch His tent wherever the Spirit of God blows, including in places where there is violence, unrest, and suffering.

37. Most importantly, in the tent, there is room for everyone, with no one being excluded because it is a home to everyone. In this process, those who in the past felt “left out” now realised that they have a home in this tent, a sacred and safe space. Most of the respondents responded positively to the image of the tent.

38. The image of the tent also reminds us that Jesus pitched His tent among us through the incarnation and therefore the tent is also a place of encounter with God and one another. The tent, now seen as the common home, has also rekindled a sense of belonging and sharing in the common baptism. The synodal process has brought about a greater awareness of the importance of walking together in the Church as a communion of communities for the organic growth of the Church.

39. The continental consultation in the respective countries took varied forms. Some countries were able to involve many people from different walks of life while others were only able to gather smaller groups of people. As mentioned earlier, the challenges of time and language became an obstacle for some countries. Nevertheless,

those who took part in this process of reflecting on the DCS contributed constructively through a spirit of prayer and discernment for the betterment of the Church.

40. The involvement of such a vast number of people in the synodal process has revealed a profound love for the Church despite the shortcomings and weaknesses of the Church as an institution.

41. The inability to translate the DCS into the many vernacular languages was another limitation experienced by the Churches in Asia. However, the FABC 50 General Conference that was held in October 2022 was indeed a blessing in preparing for this stage of the synodal process.

42. Many of the conversations that were held before and during the FABC General Conference already provided indications regarding the context of the Church and Asia. In “listening” to the reports, it has been noted that on the horizon, there remains a sense of hope and joy for the Church to move forward because of the love of God for His people. We are convinced that the Holy Spirit neither stops nor fails in inspiring the people of God to move in the direction of personal, communal, and structural conversion.

43. We also acknowledge that the process of having the synodal conversations as requested has sometimes been painful and unsettling, while at the same time, making us vulnerable to each other.

44. The DCS in a succinct way has been able to capture the hopes, aspirations, desolations, and challenges of the people in a way that opens the door for a greater renewal in the life of the Church. The invitation to listen to people from all walks of life demonstrates openness to one another and the spirit of dialogue facilitates moving together as one unit: this encounter and dialogue is the meaning of the synodal journey (DCS, 6).

45. What the DCS has been able to do is be the catalyst for more profound spiritual conversations. In many places, it was indeed experienced as a moment of living synodality in the Church through a process of shared identity and shared responsibility.

46. The general sense of concern for the Church as demonstrated in the participation of all in this process reflects a natural or organic inclination to authentic synodality. In some countries, the of itself was not new because there were already mechanisms to implement pastoral plans of local Churches and communities at a variety of levels which brought about synergy and convergence with the spirit of synodality.

47. The FABC itself has been playing a vital role in living synodality between Episcopal Conferences. This indeed captures the sense of walking together as members of the Body of Christ towards the reign of God and in that process, being

able to widen our experiences and enlarge the tent.

48. Considering these general observations that have provided not only the *locus* for the Church in Asia to reflect on the DCS, we also acknowledge the vast diversity of views and experiences across Asia has made it challenging to synthesize every single opportunity and challenge raised by the different countries. Guided by the Holy Spirit, the following paragraphs provide insights into the resonances, tensions, and priorities as articulated by the Churches in Asia.

49. The Discernment and Writing Team has also taken the liberty to identify some of the gaps (*lacuna*) that we felt were either absent or not sufficiently treated in the reports sent by the Episcopal Conferences but were key points of discussion at the FABC 50 General Conference. It is our prayer and hope that the following insights are faithful to the mind and heart of the respective processes undertaken by the countries in Asia.

IV. Asian resonances

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?

50. The resonances that the Churches in Asia sensed while reflecting on the DCS are underlined by the fact, as already mentioned earlier, that there is a deep love for the Church. In that deep love for the Church resides varied emotions like joy, sadness, vulnerability, and woundedness.

51. Despite this potpourri of emotions and the diversity of Asia which encompasses ethnicity, race, culture, language, and religion, the spirit of synodality as called for by the Church, challenges us (Church) to have the courage to despite some resistance within the Church, the lack of appreciation for the rich spirituality in Asia, and also the loss of a sense of sin.

52. Although the process has been well received and facilitated throughout the countries in Asia, a few reports mentioned that the process of consultation and listening brought about by the synodal journey could cause some disenchantment and disappointment due to an absence of clear explanation and acceptance of the goal of gathering and listening. The temptation to engage in this process could be described as a more political or, even, ideological (i.e., as resembling more a forum for parliamentary-type discussion) rather than as a truly synodal endeavour from a Catholic-Christian perspective. Some faithful are sceptical regarding the purpose and the prospective outcome of such a synodal process.

53. Some dioceses maintain this lingering doubt if the voices of those living in minority settings and traditional Christian communities would have equal influence on the synodal process and even its outcomes. It was also mentioned that listening is a difficult task because many people would prefer to be praised rather than be criticised or commented on. Those who dared to speak up were sometimes considered to be antagonists by certain sections of the community because their comments and opinions were seen to be not of mainstream thought or could negatively impact the Church as a whole.

The Experience of Joy

54. It must be noted that the synodal process called for by the universal Church is both a spiritual experience and a spiritual journey. For this reason, it is necessary to put our egos aside, empty ourselves, and listen to God so that we can constantly be renewed under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and go deeper in the spirit of synodality.

55. The dynamics of listening as widely as possible which is entrenched in the synodal process, have indeed motivated the Church to listen more intently and discern wisely where the Holy Spirit is leading us toward embracing and becoming a more synodal Church.

56. This journey that we have initiated helps us realise the true nature of the Church and the ability to see the situation of the Church. The experience of joy is heightened because the synod process is certainly a place of grace, encounter, and transfiguration.

The Experience of Walking Together

57. The process of walking together brings forth to the local Churches a greater awareness of their unique contexts and rich cultures across Asia, including that of the indigenous communities that are often neglected and forgotten. This wealth needs to be nurtured through communion and dialogue as an experience of walking together.

58. As Catholics in Asia living in diversity, we seek to enhance the quality of our friendship with one another by listening to, respecting, and caring for each other, so that we can be a good mother and an example to bring peace and unity to the world. Faith formation that is founded on the living word of God, is foundational to synodal spirituality.

59. In walking together, the synodal journey has gathered us at the table of the Lord, so that through Him, in Him and with Him, we have realised our natural and organic inclination to synodality and are inspired and strengthened to traverse and discover new pathways for the Church in Asia.

60. It is heartening to read repeatedly of the profound love for the Church from so many local Churches across the world. This love and commitment to the faith resounds

throughout the DCS and certainly reflects the almost universal sense expressed by Catholics throughout the world.

61. The experience of walking together is also marred by external threats that make living the faith challenging. It has been noted that in several countries across Asia, there are still many Christians who suffer from various threats because of keeping their faith.

62. Despite these new forms of many still are faithful to the faith and are even willing to give up their life for it. In some areas, threats and violence against Christians have been noted while in other areas there are other ways in which Christians are discriminated against for their beliefs.

The Experience of Wounds

63. The reports also resonated with the vulnerabilities and wounds of the Churches in Asia emphasising the need for healing. Among the many wounds of the Church are abuses related to finance, jurisdiction, conscience, authority, and sex. These would have certainly portrayed the Church negatively, which has led to some leaving the Church because of the lack of credibility. At the level of governance too, the lack of transparency and accountability has led to a crisis of credibility in the Church.

64. The reports also point to the fact that due to these abuses, there is growing intolerance, resentment, and negativism against the Church. These are expressed through social and print media, and other public domains. Responsibility for the Church must belong to all and therefore everyone should be allowed to participate actively in the process of making decisions through communal discernment.

65. There is also a deep concern on the lack of sufficient inclusion of women in governance and decision-making processes in the Church. Women in consecrated life, despite being committed to the various ministries of the Church, experience a sense of alienation and whose voices are not often heard sufficiently in the policy decisions of the Church. They are actively involved and their committed services are very much evident.

66. The synodal conversations have called for a rethinking of women's participation in the life of the Church given that women played an important role in the Bible. There is a need in the Church for a renewal of governance structures that will allow the meaningful participation of women in all aspects of the Church.

67. The reports acknowledge the Church lack of understating and failure in providing sufficient pastoral care to some groups of people who are part of the Church but are often struggling to feel welcomed. Among them are single parents, people in irregular marriage situations, mixed marriages, people who identify themselves as LGBTQIA+, as well as migrants and others.

68. Several reports raised grave concerns about the absence of the youth in many Churches and especially in the decision-making process. At the same time, the young people continue to inspire and challenge the whole Church to have the courage to take risks and make changes.

69. Very sporadically some reports make a passing mention of the plight of the indigenous peoples. It has also been noted that many of their aspirations and voices were not sufficiently highlighted in the DCS.

70. At the same time, listening to the cry of the poor and the earth were issues that were not treated adequately given that these are grave concerns for the peoples of Asia. It must be the role of the Church to listen to vulnerable communities and work towards protecting them and their environment, rights, and privileges.

71. Some of the wounds experienced in the Churches were brought about by the infiltration of ideologies such as individualism, consumerism, and materialism, that is caused by the rapid economic growth and freedom of access to social media. Though much of these may have brought about development in many parts of Asia, the Church is also influenced by its various side effects.

72. The voice of the Church has been silenced by oppressive regimes to an extent that it has not been possible for the Church to play its prophetic role. The silence has also led to passive complacency compounded by fear and sometimes even apathy. The need for Churches across Asia to support Churches under oppressive regimes in ways that do not threaten or jeopardise their existence.

The Call to Embrace New Pathways

73. The experience of joys and wounds across Asia can only be seen as opportunities to explore new pathways toward a synodal Church. Standing together as a united Body of Christ calls for a new vision in the pastoral mission of a “new Church”, a synodal Church.

74. The Church must begin in a spirit of inclusion where everyone feels both welcomed and a sense of belonging inside the tent. As a people of God, no one should be excluded; even if they are frail and weak, inclusivism within the Church is a must for the synodal Church.

75. The diversity of religions in Asia makes it almost compelling to engage in ecumenical and interreligious dialogue as a way of building peace, reconciliation, and harmony. Many reports speak of fruitful engagement with other Christians and persons of other religions. Despite the diversity of religions and cultures across Asia, there are still limitations in matters concerning ecumenical and interreligious dialogue.

76. In some places, this push for dialogue has been the initiative only of the Catholic Church and there are times when reciprocity is not forthcoming. It has also

been seen as the “work” of the clergy rather than of the laity.

77. Some expressed reservations about these dialogues for various reasons including mistrust and suspicion regarding the motives for such dialogues. The Church plays a significant role in building bridges for peace, reconciliation, justice, and freedom.

78. Though very little is mentioned about safeguarding (minors and the vulnerable) in the Asian reports, there is a need to develop and nurture the environment of a culture of safeguarding in the Church, at all levels.

79. The synodal process has called for widespread listening to one another to bring about transformation at all levels of the Church. Together with the laity and consecrated women and men who have been saying that they have not been heard or given a voice in the Church, some priests felt that they were not sufficiently heard, even to a point of feeling neglected.

80. Reading the reports, there is a strong sense of an inward-looking Church that must cast its nets further and wider. The mission *ad-extra* must be at the core of the Churches in Asia. We have the task of transforming an inward-looking, individualised and polarised approach to spiritual life towards a more missionary, communitarian and integrated approach.

81. The tent needs to be expanded in ways best known to the respective Churches in Asia so that we can move in promising ways that fulfil our mission as a Church.

82. The Churches in Asia have been able to relate and resonate with much of what has been said in the DCS. This only indicates that there are many similarities with the Churches in other countries and continents, for which we give thanks to God that we are all on this journey together.

83. We also recognize that some of these issues may be peculiar to certain regions, but we take consolation that as we walk together, there can be a renewal in the Church and the expansion of the reign of God.

V. Asian tensions

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?

84. Having prayed, studied, and read the different reports, we are filled with

hope that this synodal journey will bear fruit in not only “extending the tent” but also recognizing the work of the Holy Spirit in Churches throughout Asia.

85. In reading the DCS, the Churches in Asia also recognized some universal tensions and some that are particular to the context of Asia. Keeping in mind that some of these tensions are far more intricate than they seem, our task is not to seek solutions at this time, but rather to acknowledge these tensions and divergences and to further reflect on what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church in Asia.

Tensions in Living Synodality

86. The Church is composed of people from all states of life (clergy, consecrated, and laity); yet there seems to be a kind of “divide” within the Church - between the clergy and laity, bishops and priests/religious congregations, ecclesial groups and movements, dioceses, and conferences and even outside between the Church and political authorities and even between religions, as indicated in many of the reports. In the spirit of a participatory Church, the experience of leadership in the “servant model” needs greater attention for living synodality.

87. The challenge to become more participatory is often hindered by leadership styles that prevent (sometimes even exclude) others from living out their baptismal call to be authentic disciples. The servant model of leadership is hindered and sometimes counter-witnessing when priests tend to dominate and even come across as imposing, domineering, and authoritative over the laity. Reconfiguring the role of the laity includes expanding spaces for possible lay ministry through a variety of charisms, including counselling and employment guidance for the youth, care for the sick, education, and protection of children.

88. We recognize, too, the work of catechists in Asia who are not only teachers of faith but also leaders of the community in their own right. For centuries, they have been preparing the faithful for the sacraments and accompanying them in living the faith. We affirm, therefore, Pope Francis directive that Episcopal Conferences... render effective the ministry of Catechist (cf. *Antiquum Ministerium*, n. 9).

89. Acknowledging the tensions between clergy, religious men and women, and the laity, the theme of co-responsibility of all in the life and mission of the Church has been raised time and again in the reports. Many problems arise when the exercise of power is divorced from accountability and transparency.

Tensions in Decision-Making

90. It was noted that in some places, collaborative responsibility in the discernment and decision-making process was lacking; often left to only priests or bishops. The voices of the minority and even the laity are not considered in this process. At times, there is superficial dialogue and lack of consultation even in those structures recommended or prescribed by the Canon Law like the pastoral council and the finance council. Some Churches consider this a form of clericalism because it

is dominated by the clergy.

91. The lack of accountability and transparency in decision-making and financial matters in the Church has led to a further divide in walking together in the spirit of a synodal Church. Those who question these matters are sometimes excluded from the Church. The authoritative and domineering styles of leadership do not only exist among the clergy but there are also leaders among the laity that exhibit such traits. This tension continues to hinder the journey towards being a participatory Church in a synodal way.

92. In the Asian context where respect for leaders is an inherent value, there are times when the laity are overly deferential to the clergy and there is a high possibility that this respect can be abused, and power and control become the *modus operandi*. This further undermines the co-responsible in the mission of the Church, as well as with its governance.

Tensions in Priestly Vocations

93. It was also noted that the excessive critical view of the clergy has contributed to the decrease in vocations to the priesthood in some parts of Asia. There are areas in Asia where there is a growing need for priests to serve and for the faith to continually grow. The need for priests is real and for the spread of the Gospel. Scandals by priests and the unhealthy attitudes and behaviour displayed by the priests are also causing the decrease in vocations.

94. Together with this, some reports also acknowledged the influence of a secular and materialist culture on priests and even lay leaders. This often challenges the witnessing of Gospel values in the mission of the Church.

Tensions in Women's Involvement

95. In many of the Churches of Asia, the participation of women in the everyday life of the Church is significant. However, there is a lack of the presence of women in leadership roles. In some societies, their voices are hardly heard.

96. Some attribute this to the cultural differences and the traditional patriarchal structures of Asian societies. In some places, women in leadership roles are not very welcome due to their cultural mindset. It would seem that men make decisions or lead the group and the women simply implement the decisions or work under the guidance of men. The role of women is considered secondary or simply discarded as being an assistant to men, this includes women in consecrated life.

97. However, some countries report that the men are not in the Church, and in these circumstances, it is the women who take on leadership roles effectively.

Tensions about the Youth

98. A common phenomenon noted in the reports is the absence of youth in our

Churches. Given that they form a significant number in our population (approx. 65%), they are relatively absent in the life of the Church. Though some are present in the life of the Church, there is a need for faith formation, accompaniment and greater inclusion in leadership roles and decision-making processes.

99. Amid the generational gap between the old and the young, the Church as a needs to extend her loving embrace around the youth and reach out to those who are lost, confused, and have disconnected themselves from the Church. Though the reports state the youth are missing in the Church, perhaps a point to ponder is that the youth are possibly saying that the Church is missing in their lives.

100. While the youth are more tech-savvy in parts of Asia where digital access is more easily accessible, the reports also call for greater investment in the fields of media and social communications to be able to reach out to them for evangelization and proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, there remains the challenge of engaging with the youth in the dialogue between the virtual world and the real world.

101. Gifted with a large population of young people, the Church in Asia could envision herself as a “digital tent” to be where the youth are and minister to them effectively. Synodality with the youth also means experiencing the tensions they are bearing in the fast-changing world today.

102. Notwithstanding the benefits of the digital world, the negative impact of social media was also highlighted - people spending more time with gadgets than with people; how it is used to spread hatred, prejudice, and fear in society; some say social media is swaying people away from the faith.

Tensions of the Poor

103. Like a mother in a poor Asian family with many children who struggle and at times not adequately cared for, the Church in Asia also struggles and painfully embraces a great number of poor and marginalised people who need special accompaniment in this process of synodality.

104. Various are the faces of the poor in Asia: the materially poor such as the minority ethnics, the migrant workers, urban slum dwellers, fleeing refugees, etc.; the socially poor, those often neglected by the Church and society, such as the uneducated, the indifferent youth, the persons with disabilities, persons deprived of liberty, those from lower castes, divorced and remarried, single mothers, elderly and infirmed, HIV positive persons, substance dependents, persons who identify as LGBTQIA+, etc.

105. We recognize however that the term poverty is relative, one can be materially poor but rich in culture, spirituality, and hospitality.

106. Despite some cultural barriers that may exist, the Church in Asia must desire to courageously direct her eyes on the faces of the poor, to lovingly recognize, acknowledge, and welcome everyone as children who now deserve our attention. We recognize the tensions to be inclusive and yet be faithful to the Gospel values and the moral faithfulness to the ways of the Church perhaps even a scandal if they are welcomed in the Church.

107. The Church must strive to find ways to incorporate the poor into her life and mission, so that, being healed, nurtured, and formed in *sensus fidelium* within the framework of our apostolic tradition and Catholic identity, they could be equal partners and respected companions with everyone else in the Church. As mentioned by several of the reports, some of these changes will require canonical revisions that would facilitate the inclusiveness of the Church towards the poor.

108. The Church must also be the voice of the poor. There are times when the Church remains silent about the plight and cry of the Dalits, tribals, indigenous people, and the poor. The tension of not wanting to cause trouble with the authorities or being silenced, the Church may have alienated these people and turned a deaf ear to the voice of the Church must defend the voiceless and powerless.

Tensions of Religious Conflicts

109. Even though there is a diversity of religions across Asia, there are also growing religious conflicts and even persecution (subtle and direct) in some areas. The worsening of the culture of violence across Asia, partly due to the lack of recourse to a functioning justice system, is also unsettling. The politicisation of religions has made it difficult to practise the faith of minorities. Among the challenges include political oppression, dictatorial governments, corruption, and unjust laws.

110. The Churches in Asia are always having to walk this tightrope of balancing between being faithful to the Gospel and yet not putting the Christians in a position of being threatened. Even what is taken for granted in many places like giving a child a Christian name is sometimes an obstacle in another place.

111. There are times in situations such as these, what is required is patience and hope that things will change. The Church in Asia constantly deals with such tensions and there is a need for mutual support in walking together with courage and love.

Tensions of Clericalism

112. Clericalism, like in many parts of the world, is also a concern in Asia. Many of the responses indicate clericalism as a tension in their regions and some also state it as one of the causes of a lack of synodality in the Church in Asia.

113. However, it has been noted that clericalism means different things to different people. The word clericalism seems to cover a wide range of issues, while at the same time, some regions are more specific. Among the expressions of clericalism are the

lack of consultation in administrative matters, domineering attitudes and sense of entitlement shown by those in authority especially priests, overexertion of power on the people, etc.

114. Some root causes of clericalism were identified, e.g., the individual character or psychological immaturity, some hint at more systemic causes, and others point out the subculture of silence and impunity. Proper formation of bishops, clergy, and laity for a synodal Church may thus be among the primary responses to such abuses.

115. On the other hand, the clergy feel overly criticised by the laity so much so that some feel lonely, isolated, and scrutinised all the time. This further leads to demotivation among the priests and apprehension among young men who might be considering and discerning a vocation to the priesthood. Some attribute the lack of vocation due to the unreasonable demands that are being made by the people.

VI. Asian realities and divergence

116. Being aware that Christianity is a minority in Asia (it is estimated that Catholics are approximately 3.31% of the Asian population and in several places less than 1%), there is a great sense of love for Jesus and His Church. The joy of journeying together in this synodal renewal is palpable. Our faith energises our relationships not only among Christians but also with peoples of neighbouring faiths in our quest for harmonious living through a process of bridge-building. In places where discrimination and violence are more pronounced than in other places, faith in the Risen Jesus keeps us strong and hopeful amidst these adversities.

117. Asian spirituality, characterised by contemplation and respect for nature, is interwoven with a deep sense of piety and popular devotion. These devotions at times animate the faith and draw people to the Church, Catholics and non-Catholics alike.

118. Our embodied expressions of worship and prayer encompassing the human senses, dance, art, poetry, and silence sometimes find tension in the formal manner of celebrating the sacraments. Several reports pointed out the need to creatively rediscover the essence of the liturgy, that is, to draw people to God with Asian expressions of worship.

119. It was also noted that in some places, Catholics were more engaged in popular devotions rather than reflecting on the word of God, spiritual discernment, or personal prayer. Overall, the need for liturgies to be more alive and relatable - text they can understand, the music they can sing, and rituals they can relate to, were expressed in a variety of ways in the reports.

120. We recognize that the Asian *ethos* that has long been part of its peoples (for

example, reliance on God, communal interaction, relationality with God, self, other human beings, and the cosmos, etc.) is now being eroded by the globalised cultures of individualism, secularism, and relativism.

121. We are aware that tension exists between Asian cultures and our faith expressions in terms of languages, images and even concepts about authority and power.

122. There is a growing tension between traditional (spiritual) values and modernity even among the clergy, the religious, and the families. Some of the effects seen due to this global invasion are that faith is relativized, priests are drawn to a materialistic and individualistic way of living, and a lack of credible witnessing, which is among the reasons for the erosion of the spiritual life. In the end, the number of people not practising any religion will increase due to modernism, materialism, and secularism.

123. Family (nuclear and extended) is very important in many Asian societies. Filial allegiance extends to the point where many will make generous sacrifices for the sake of family unity and peace. The role of families in the synodal renewal of the Church and its witness to societies is therefore very important. They will be the first formation space for the synodal renewal that we are envisioning.

124. Several reports cite their concern for marriages and family life today domestic violence, unwed mothers, single parents, delayed marriages due to the dowry system, divorce and nullity, etc. Christian families break up due to a lack of awareness about the faith and anxieties brought about by poverty and economic conditions.

125. The contemporary tendency to excessive individualism further exacerbates this crisis in vocation, along with various economic trends that render embracing family life as undesirable for many. There are also tensions about belonging to the Church and their family relationships.

126. Amid such a vast array of challenges, the Church in Asia needs, more now than ever, to hear the voices of families, especially of interreligious-intercultural families that are becoming more of a norm than the exception in many places across Asia.

127. Coming from our communal *ethos*, the common life in Asian communities and neighbourhoods is the locus where the joys and struggles are lived. The common spaces are opportunities for informal dialogues and convivial living (dialogue of life). Fraught with socio-political, economic, and ecological challenges, we not only survive but there are situations where we thrive in the strength of this relationality at the grassroots.

128. In recent times, we also see a growing division among the peoples of Asia people divided based on caste, language, ethnicity, and socio-economic status, and

a growing intolerance within this divide.

129. Even if we are community-oriented people, the rapid economic growth resulting from material abundance has also resulted in more people suffering from emotional, spiritual, and mental impoverishment. In some Asian societies, the secular appearance and lifestyle in Church leadership also cause tension as it is opposed to evangelical poverty and a mission to be the Church of the poor in Asia.

130. In a continent as diverse as Asia, interreligious dialogue remains an integral characteristic of the Church in Asia. Despite bridge-building efforts, we noted that religious and social intolerance was on the increase, which leads ultimately to persecution and the worsening conditions of the lives of the people, especially religious minorities. In extreme situations, false blasphemy accusations and terror are the main issues faced by Christians.

131. The breakdown in democratic structures, including militarization and political oppression, challenges the lives of many people in certain countries.

VII. Gaps identified in the Asian responses

132. The FABC 50 General Conference in its Guide Document and Final Message had identified some concerns that were either not captured in the country's responses to the DCS or not given sufficient consideration. Studying all these documents side-by-side, we have taken the liberty to include the gaps that were identified and have included them in this report in the sure hope that these will be considered the 2023/24 Synod Assemblies.

Care for our Common Home

133. Ecological crisis always has an impact on vulnerable communities and the Asian continent is one of the places where the impact of climate change is alarming. Despite the possibility that Asia could lead the way in advocating care for the common home, the Asian responses did not sufficiently capture the intensity of the ecological crisis in this region.

134. There is a great need to listen more intently and profoundly to the cry of our land and our people, especially among the poorest who are most affected and to preserve the environment.

Sharing of Resources

135. Many countries in our continent with poor resources mostly depend on international financial assistance from donors and financial institutes. This surely

encourages the socio-economic uplift of the poor segment of society. However, the Asian Churches also need to be aware of the need to share our resources (even if it is limited) with sister Churches/countries in the region.

136. By sharing our resources, not only do we share our material gifts but also the spiritual gifts that we receive from one another which enrich us, e.g., the animation of Basic Ecclesial Communities and the charisms of ecclesial movements. We stand together, as a synodal Church, with one another as peoples of Asia.

Youth for the Present

137. The youth are often spoken of as the future, but the youth are also the present. Our *preferential option* for the young should include personal experience of love within the Church, holistic formation, vocation discernment, and accompaniment. The youth look for authentic and credible witnesses within the Church they need a synodal community to walk together.

138. By knowing who they are in front of God through their hopes, dreams, realities, struggles, and limitations that they face in life, they experience that they are supported and not alone in their path and can also encourage others to walk together in the journey of life.

139. The problems faced by the youth such as drug, gambling, and online addictions, breakdown of families, and mental health issues, were not sufficiently addressed. The are not able to contribute to this synodal journey. For this reason, a synodal Church must learn how to accompany these youth for their healing, growth, and discernment of vocation.

Family and Marriage

140. The family is the domestic Church that nurtures the life of society, and the family is also the of because it is here that the character is formed. However, the new challenges facing families include the breakdown of families, a lack of commitment to promoting life, fear of marriage and decreasing birth rates due to economic difficulties and ideological conditioning, and much more is shaping the family units today in Asia.

141. In some countries, abortion is masquerading as a “women’s rights issue”. In others, abortion is promoted as a means of population control and eugenics. There is also a disastrous culture of silence in cases of domestic violence, incest, honour killing etc. A need to promote the spirituality of family life to reflect its call as a holy sanctuary.

142. In some parts of Asia where communities are ageing, the care for the elderly must also be given consideration.

143. The rising number of marriages in Asia that are interfaith and intercultural

calls for greater pastoral attention as this can be both challenging and also an opportunity to grow in respect for other religions and cultures. Interfaith families can be the first school of interreligious dialogue.

Poverty, Corruption, and Conflict

144. Poverty across Asia is a major problem (World Bank estimates more than 320 million people in Asia live in extreme poverty). The Church has been at the forefront of working tirelessly among the poor and for their upliftment. Yet there is little mention of the growing poverty across Asia and how that impacts being a synodal Church.

145. We also recognize that unsustainable urbanization and systemic corruption are major problems in Asia and are somewhat connected to the poverty of the Asian people. This systemic corruption at all levels of society affects the lives of ordinary citizens. The responses to the DCS have not given this much consideration.

146. The Church in Asia is a demographic, socioeconomic, cultural, and political minority and therefore, we are becoming more vulnerable to progressively oppressive or fundamentalist regimes as well as to political conflicts. In such situations, what does it mean to be a synodal Church?

147. The disconnect between religiosity and morality is indeed concerning. Despite the connectedness of Asian people with a form of religiosity or spirituality, moral lives are sometimes not transformed by religious experiences. For example, one may be religious but corrupt at the same time.

Indigenous Peoples

148. Nearly 60% of the indigenous peoples, call Asia their home. Bearers of traditions that are rooted for thousands of years, the indigenous peoples manifest how humanity can live in harmony with creation. We acknowledge that many indigenous peoples have embraced the Christian faith, yet even in the Church wounded by tribalism and prejudice they struggle to be respected as fellow agents of evangelisation. Despite the large populations of indigenous peoples in Asia, very little is spoken about them in the responses.

Church in the World

149. The Church exists in the world and for the world. Yet many of the responses have been very insular looking within the Church only. A level of comfort that has left the Church to be only comfortable in addressing her affairs may have led to a lack of reference to how the Church transforms the world (Asia) so that all people will enjoy the fruits of the kingdom of God. The Church in Asia must constantly keep asking how can the *missio ad gentes* be recognized and lived in a synodal manner as one way of enlarging the space of our tent.

150. The Church cannot be self-referential and therefore must seek to engage in

renewing the world. One of the ways is the building of Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC) to bring about social transformation - care for the common home, and interreligious dialogue. The culture of dialogue with religions and encounter with cultures must be integrated into the life of the Church. The Church must move towards greater networking with others (organisations and institutions) for the common good of all.

Migrants, Refugees, and Displaced Peoples

151. The issues related to migrants, refugees, displaced people as well as human trafficking, etc. are fast growing in the Asian regions. The primary drivers for the movement of such large numbers of people include conflict, the desire for better economic opportunities, environmental destruction, victims of exploitation, etc.

152. The political instability in some parts of Asia has made people become refugees and asylum seekers. How does the Church become a to these people who seek peace, security, and harmony? In many of these places, they become missionaries of the gospel as they bring not only their lived experiences but also their faith. The migrants, refugees, and displaced people also give vibrancy to the life of the local Churches through their presence. The Church must seek to integrate and accompany them on this journey as the new evangelizers.

Peacebuilding

153. In countries where there are internal conflicts due to oppressive and dictatorial regimes, the Church must play an integral role in the work of peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Among the many other roles of the Church, the peace and harmony of all citizens must be among its pastoral priorities.

154. Working towards peace and reconciliation could be among the new forms of evangelization. Apart from seeing the Church as a tent of inclusivity, the Church must also be a work of peace and reconciliation.

Safeguarding

155. The protection of minors and the vulnerable is a concern for the Church in Asia. Despite the low rate in the number of cases being reported (partly due to cultural reasons), it is a major concern. There is very little mention in the responses to the DCS on this matter. However, this must be prioritised in terms of training all Church personnel.

156. The Church in Asia must hear, watch over, protect, and care for the abused, exploited and forgotten children, wherever they are by creating safe environments and implementing protective procedures.

Role of Bishops

157. For obvious reasons, Bishops play an irreplaceable role in animating the synodal process in the local Church. As the primary pastor of the people of God, the

level of zeal and sincerity in which he embraces the synodal approach in his manner of leadership to a large extent sets the tone of the endeavour to rediscover this vital Christian practice among the clergy and laity whom he is called to serve.

158. His responsibility to affirm the authentic tradition of the Christian community is inspired by a willingness to witness a radical trust in the Spirit's life-giving activity in the life of this community: "synod is doing evangelization" (Pope Francis). Imitating the Good Shepherd in encouraging the flock to continual growth and conversion through desiring and knowing the Way and the Truth alone leads to life true life, life in abundance, life eternal.

159. In this manner, he remains faithful to his role and calling in the context of sustaining and strengthening Catholic identity, while charging others to engage in three of the essential aspects of Christian reality: *communion, participation, and mission*.

160. In joyfully accepting the authority of the leaders of the community, clergy, consecrated, and laity are strengthened in their vocations to know God, to love and serve Him in others. *Listening* to God in His Word, through His Church, and in dialogue with others, all members of the community share the responsibility of serving according to their baptismal character.

161. Bishops today can attest to the words of the early Christian pastor, St. John Chrysostom, who claimed that "Church and Synod are synonymous". These bishops lead God's people and are in turn encouraged, accompanied, and informed by the promptings of the Holy Spirit as expressed in the lives of all in the community.

162. No one is exempt or excluded from the responsibility to discern and embrace this common, baptismal call and it is Christ's will that no one is left unaided by that grace through which life is made more abundant and the world in which we live reconciled and sanctified.

163. In all the above gaps, the synodal way must permeate when addressing these gaps and the synodal journey must be at the heart of the life and mission of the Church.

VIII. Priorities from the Asian responses

164. The Asian responses were varied and diverse, encapsulating a variety of issues and challenges, each peculiar to region. However, there are some commonalities that we see in the responses, all of which point to a need for authentic prophetic servant-leadership that is dependent upon and leads to continuous conversion. It is evident that, to a large extent, the synodal journey is made more possible with the

awareness and willingness of the people of God to embrace this reality.

165. The following are 6 priorities that have been identified through a process of prayer and discernment with the hope that they reflect the desires of Asian hearts.

Formation

166. For a synodal Church, there needs to be an initial and ongoing formation at all levels, for all people, beginning with the families and Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs).

167. Seminarians, priests, bishops, and consecrated men and women must be formed to live synodal leadership styles, communal discernment, and decision-making the promotion of a culture of synodality that entails renewal of training of seminary formators, professors of theology, and the present seminary programme needs to be more life-ministry oriented.

168. The laity needs to be formed to take active roles, according to their baptismal call, to serve with generosity to God and a love for the Church and its people. Formation for a synodal spirituality must be at the heart of the Church mission and vision.

Inclusivity & Hospitality

169. The women, youth, and those marginalised or excluded, with special attention to the abandoned (e.g., street children and elderly), also significant pastoral care should be provided to divorced, remarried, single parents, broken families, persons with disabilities (PWDs), prisoners, persons who identify as LGBTQIA+, the elderly, substance dependents, commercial sex workers, etc.) the wounded and victimised, fractured families and those struggling with gender identity, the displaced and the persecuted, and a whole spectrum of many others must find their place in this tent (Church).

170. Structures may need to be revisited so that everyone feels a sense of belonging in the Church and each person becomes an ambassador of Christ, an ambassador of inclusivity and hospitality.

Missionary Disciples

171. In the context of Asia, we must learn how to prophetically witness and the Gospel to one another, which, first and foremost, entails actively living out one's faith founded on personal encounters and personal experiences with Jesus and contributing to the community of the Church as a communion of communities.

172. While recognizing that Christians are a minority in Asia, the incomparable witness of Asian martyrs provides a challenge and source of encouragement.

173. We must also learn to grow in dialogue, consultation, and communal

discernment. At the same time, respecting the sensitivities of other Asian peoples must also be at the heart of the Church. Interfaith families are becoming a common sight and therefore how do we bring Christ to others? We need to embrace a culture of encounter and bridge-building to bring Christ to the world.

174. In this post-pandemic era, the hybridization of the Church life (onsite and online) is a reality that we must embrace and maximise opportunities to evangelise, including the wider and more discerning use of technology in this endeavour, as our Christian mandate.

Accountability and Transparency

175. The call to be accountable and transparent not only in financial matters but also in decision-making processes and governance. This may necessitate the revision of some provisions of Canon Law. Those in leadership roles - whether clergy or lay, are also accountable for the formation of the laity and the youth.

176. A spirit of collaboration and co-responsibility must be promoted with each embracing the vocation and state of life and the manifold charisms in the Church.

Prayer and Worship

177. Our prayer and worship must reflect and touch the hearts of the Asian people. Liturgical celebrations must be more (participatory, inculturated, relatable, and convivial) so that everyone can find a sacred and safe space to worship God. The integration of culture in the life and worship of the Church must also animate the lives of the faithful.

Environment

178. In the care for the common home, the Church must be at the forefront in not only protecting Mother Earth but also healing her. As Jesus came to redeem and reconcile all things, the Church must seek to renew the face of the earth.

179. As members of the one Body of Christ, we are called to become a green Church and live in solidarity and respect, protect, defend, and nurture the oneness of all of God's Creation. Environmental concern is not merely ecological but also has a spiritual and social dimension as it affects everyone, the poor the most.

IX. "Taking off our shoes": the Asian Synodal journey

180. It is a common practice among Asians to take off our shoes when we enter houses or temples. It is a beautiful sign of respect; of how we are conscious of the others whose lives we are entering into. Moreover, it is also an expression of our deep

awareness of the holy.

181. It reminds us of what God told Moses (Exodus 3:5): Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground. More importantly, off our shoes makes us aware of the earth we are all called to protect and care for.

182. "Taking off our shoes" is also a beautiful symbol of our synodal journey as the Church in Asia. Characterised by diversity in cultures and religions, it reminds us to respect all as we listen and converse, discern and decide. It also means in authentic listening; we leave behind our prejudices and biases to welcome the other.

183. Shoes could be a symbol of status and by taking them off, we recognize that we are equal as human beings. Barefoot, we become aware and also identify ourselves with the poorest among us.

184. "Taking off our shoes" makes us also very conscious of the soil, the ground we are stepping on. The socio-political context of Asia is very challenging and how the Church moves in this context is of paramount importance in journeying with humanity. It makes us feel closer to the ground realities of the people of Asia.

185. "Taking off our shoes" as a synodal ecclesial image articulates our experience of the Church as relational, contextual and missional, journeying together in humility and hope.

X. Conclusion

186. The synodal journey that began in October 2021 is not a process that was new to the Churches in Asia. In many countries, there were already opportunities for listening and discernment to develop pastoral plans. However, these were only at the parish, diocesan or national levels. There have been both successes and challenges at these levels.

187. The synodal journey gave Catholics who participated in this process a better regional and universal understanding of the consolations and concerns of the different Churches. There was an acknowledgement that the consolations and challenges were not only unique to the different regions but also complex in their ways.

188. The process of discernment to a large extent invigorated the life of the Church through the active participation of many Catholics whose experience before this may have been on the periphery. For many people, seeds of hope were sown through this process while at the same time, we acknowledge that some were sceptical for various reasons.

189. This is a process that needs to filter into every level of the life of the Church. The process of synodality, that is, discernment and spiritual conversations, must be part of the life and ministry of the Church henceforth. Some Churches across Asia have already started implementing the fruits of having listened during the earlier phase of the synodal process.

190. While the change of structures is important to implementing the synodal changes, the aspects of relationality must not be forgotten on this journey as an integral part of being a synodal Church.

191. At the Asian Continental Assembly (24-26 Feb 2023), it was suggested that the *relatio finalis* from the Synod in October 2023 be released the soonest as possible so that conferences, dioceses, and parishes can begin to work on suggestions that may arise at the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.

192. Given the diversity of languages across Asia, it will be beneficial that a summarised form of the *relatio finalis* be published too so that countries could work on the various translations, and this is disseminated to as many people as possible.

193. There should be sub-regional synodal conversations after the Synod gathering in October 2023. These gatherings can be a means for ongoing listening and discernment for the Churches in Asia and perhaps even an Ecclesial Synod in 2024.

As we offer this Final Document, the fruit of our listening and discerning, we implore the maternal protection and intercession of Mary, the Mother of Asia, in this synodal pilgrimage together with the rest of humanity.