

**Catholic Diocese of Macau**  
**Synod of Bishops 2021-2023**  
**Diocesan Synthesis**  
 15<sup>th</sup> August 2022

**Process of the consultation**

On 16<sup>th</sup> October 2021, the Catholic Diocese of Macau launched the diocesan consultation phase of the Synod of Bishops 2021-2023. A well-attended Eucharistic celebration took place at the Cathedral Church. Immediately following the Mass, all parish priests and representatives of commissions, institutes, schools, service units, etc. gathered for a preliminary meeting for an introduction to the themes, method of listening, and procedural matters of the diocesan phase consultation.

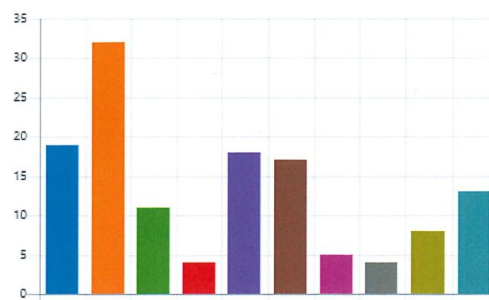
Representatives of each body were given the Ten Thematic Nuclei to be Explored as provided by the Synod General Secretariat. Each body was invited to engage in a discerning process as to which of the ten themes concern them most, selecting at least three themes to focus on. By the end of October, all units provided their chosen themes. The preponderant choice is the very core of the synodal process, which is Listening, as reflected in the statistics below:



以下為有待探討的十個核心主題，請各團體從以下十個主題選擇三個作集中考慮。

The following are the Ten Thematic Nuclei to be explored. Please choose 3 out of the following 10 topics for consideration.

- 1. 同行伴侶 / The Journeying ... 19
- 2. 聆聽 / Listening 32
- 3. 勇於發言 / Speaking Out 11
- 4. 慶祝 / Celebrating 4
- 5. 共負責任地履行使命 / Co-R... 18
- 6. 在教會與社會中的交談 / Dia... 17
- 7. 與其他的基督教宗派 / With ... 5
- 8. 權柄和參與 / Authority and ... 4
- 9. 分辨與決定 / Discerning an... 8
- 10. 培育我們的共議精神 / For... 13



The reason for inviting the units to make their selection of themes was to gauge the immediate relevance of these ten thematic reflections to the lives and interests of the faithful of the diocese. A case in point would be the relatively low figure in the choice of speaking about the relationship with other Christian denominations. This is consistent with the reality in Macau where traditionally Catholicism plays a more influential role and that interaction between Catholics and non-Catholic Christians has not been something often brought to the fore. No attempt, of course, was made to try to “balance” or “equalise” the choices, as it were, as if this is an exercise whereby all ten themes are

to be covered equally and adequately. Rather, the choices speak for themselves.

All participating units then “fanned out”, as it were, to engage the faithful in various ways during the local synodal process. Some held open forums, some made online surveys and questionnaires, some conducted team-led interviews, while some adopted the more prayerful form of retreats and reflection sessions.

By the middle of February 2022, basically all units sent in the documented results of their activities to the diocesan curia.

Originally a conference was scheduled to take place at the end of February 2022 to share with all concerned the results of the consultative process, but the decision was made to reschedule the said conference to the summer. Taking advantage also of the postponement of the diocesan phase consultation announced by the Synod General Secretariat, some local parishes carried on with the process by holding open discussion forums to gather more input from those interested.

Unfortunately, since the end of June 2022 up to the very moment of the composition of the present synthesis, the surge of coronavirus cases led to the suspension of social activities, including church gatherings. Therefore, the proposed concluding conference has to be put on hold until the relaxation of the social distancing rules.

Basically all 9 parishes, diocesan commissions, Catholic schools (in the form of school associations and one university), some religious congregations and other social services units participated in the process, and they represent almost the entirety of the Catholic population in Macau. Agencies caring for those dependent on various kinds of social assistance were closest to hearing the voice of those living in the peripheries.

The engagement of members of the diocesan commissions is particularly noteworthy, as these tend to be active young to close-to-middle-aged working adults whose employment in the service of the diocese give them the extra drive to contribute to the process.

Although it is not statistically possible to state how many Catholics did not take part in the process, the principal reasons that account for that absence would be the lack of interests, failure in communicating the means of participation, or a combination of both. Perhaps some ways were needed to be devised to better incentivise the inactive portion of the Catholic population.

### **Significance of the consultation experience**

In the living memory of the faithful, the Diocese of Macau has never had held diocesan synodal meetings of such scale. Hence the high point of the process is that it has given the leaders of communities a mandate to engage with and consult each other in an ecclesial framework derived from a direct call coming from the Holy Father. The faithful at large are made aware, for the first time, in a concrete way, that the universal Church listens, and that the Church in Macau is also galvanised by this horizon opening up to sharing meaningful reflections together. In sum this is a fresh experience.

There are several religious congregations that collectively embraced the experience with

mature and enthusiastic sentiments.

Individual personal criticisms of ecclesiastical leadership have been recorded, but opinions of these sort were not supported with indications of the causes of or incidents leading to the dissatisfaction. Overall, there were not widely contradictory views over diocesan policies, pastoral directions, developmental visions, range of activities, or personnel appointments.

The fruits of the Holy Spirit through this experience are: a novel opportunity for the people of God in Macau to be united in a common effort at responding to the call of the Holy Father; that each person who participated has exercised the virtue of prudence, charity, and honesty in putting forward their views and wishes on matters dear to them; fostered a sense of sharing and communion in a free manner; that there opened up a fresh approach for pastors and the flock to make their voices heard on both the personal and institutional levels.

Catholic schools take up the largest sector of the local population that the Church serves. The fact that the Catholic percentage among parents, teachers, staff, and students is low did not pose significant challenge in eliciting good response from this category. One interesting statistic is, from the 658 questionnaires received from six diocesan Catholic schools, over 70 per cent (488 respondents) said “I have never expressed opinions to the Church.” This shows that the commencement of the synodal path has indeed been a novel experience for many.

### **Highlights of feedback received**

#### **THE JOURNEYING COMPANIONS**

Some non-Catholics, and lapsed Catholics, do not seem to regard the Church as their journey companion. Identifying our companions: people of different religions and races, church members exercising different ministries, co-workers, family friends, marginal groups, the physically and mentally challenged, ex-prisoners, victims of domestic violence, the homeless, stranded migrants, those hungry for the word, disaster-hit communities beyond our country. The economic downturn aggravated by the epidemic means expanded service to the jobless, especially foreign workers, with increasing needs for financial/emotional/psychological adjustments. Children and adolescents in poor families need friends and mentors as models with positive outlook in life. The spiritually poor, too, are desperately crying for help, as tension, conflict, and suicidal symptoms abound.

For non-Catholics, the mounting pressure of daily lives in society and the lack of a secure future for the youth make people wonder how religion helps with raising their sense of hope. Non-Catholic colleagues in Catholic care homes show less interest in church worship or beliefs while “some who feel they are church members and have all the rights need to be converted in their heart first and be approachable to the new comers.” There are cases where some adults are motivated to seek faith and peace of mind because of the social/political climate and the waves of emigration among friends and associates.

Catholics tend to be more passive and less keen in taking the initiatives to reach out and to listen when compared with Protestant Christians. Some parents themselves fail to be the primary

companions of their children on the journey of faith. The sick and elderly who cannot come to Church feel gradually distanced. Bad examples among the clergy, over-politicised comments, lack of unity, etc., led to disappointment towards the Church. Some of the faithful do not seem to know how to seek pastoral assistance with things like anointing, funerals, etc., which further erode their sense of belonging. Some local faithful are discouraged by not being able to fully comprehend the homilies of some priests whose native tongue is not Cantonese. Some are disappointed by the example of the faithful who are often late for Mass and of those who discourteously occupy seats at church for latecomers. Some Catholics lapsed because they learnt about Catholicism and were baptised in school but they lapsed because of the lack of invitation to participate in any other church activities other than Mass.

Suggestions for improvement should be based on a clear discernment of the benefits of all. Suggestions to make the parish community more like our home: communication platforms, display boards, parish retreats, guidelines for caring for church facilities, outing, accompanying the sick for medical checkup, improve end-of-life pastoral care, strengthen the role of parish secretaries and staff as facilitators, better use of electronic media for catechesis, increased cooperation between parishes and catholic schools, etc.

The image of the local Church being a provider of necessities to refugees and the distraught of the 50s and 60s is fading. It has been suggested that “practical teams” focused on public relationship and marketing can be set up to better identify the needs of the locals of today.

There is a need to re-anchor the common baptismal identity of Christians beyond the barriers of being locals, migrants, gender, age, etc. Dignity and respect are key to making this journey work according to God’s creative plan.

“The synergy in journeying together of the Religious and the Diocese is yet to be explored to its full potential.” “Accompaniment with the Church in China could be more seriously explored.”

“Clericalism, which considers that priests and religious are the only leaders of the church,” disempowers “many potential lay leaders” and weakens “the richness and diversity of our ecclesial experience of being companions on the Journey.”

One educational institution highlighted the need to pay attention to the psychological and social effects of COVID 19 and to prisoners.

Caritas Macau has been the face of Catholic social relief, serving the least brothers and sisters, accompanying the most fragile, helpless and abandoned.

## **LISTENING**

Listening is the fundamental step to ameliorate the impression that the Church is out of touch with the modern world. Taking into account the voices of the wider public enhances adaptability, especially to remove structural or psychological barriers discouraging the younger generation from the Catholic Church. The cry of the poorest, most deprived youth lacks adult listeners. The Church needs to provide space for them to gather and be evangelised, and to help them understand the

pros/cons and value-systems connected with the use of cyberspace. "Education on social grace seems to be neglected...too many homework and tutoring make them feel stressed and lack time to spend quality time with family members." Youths should be encouraged to become leaders and to discover their own talents through service. Some parishioners are organising the "missionary childhood" project to instil the sense of belonging and leadership.

Appreciation of the use of the internet and diocesan broadcast channels, especially when it helps bring across messages of a devotional and pastoral nature. Reaching out and offering spiritual guidance to introverts by calling them or chatting through video-conferencing. But ways still need to be devised to create a forum beyond just a means of one-way communication. Examples suggested include family retreats, excursions, sports gala, workshop on parental skills, discussion/reflection groups, mailboxes, voice mail, counselling programmes, help desk, social intervention, "where people can express their doubts of ideas anonymously." An environment of trust is hoped for so that people would not be "afraid to speak up and make mistakes." "In my opinion it should be a more open church without fear of young people questioning the mistakes of the church itself...the church to act as a facilitator of dialogue." "Leaders need to know more about public relations and be more visible in/closer to the community." There are also instances where some faithful feel the best chance of communicating with their pastors is during confession.

The responses reflect on the one hand the typical phenomenon when some faithful simply did not have any opinions to air out. Usual Sunday Mass attendance is all that suffice, without the urge for interaction of any kind afterwards. Among the worries or feelings of sadness identified by some respondents in the parishes include isolation, "passivity of people," language barrier, ingratitude, lack of union, etc.

There are others, on the other hand, who enjoy the experience of sharing their thoughts during catechesis, bible classes, and other small groups in the parishes. Some observed that although the pastors listen, suggestions sometimes do not get adopted. Speculation arises as to whether the pastors had better ideas. While the faithful would gladly follow and do not insist on enforcing their opinions, it would be better if pastors explain their judgment or decisions, so as to avoid the impression of pastors being selective in their listening or acting aloof.

The contributions of consecrated men and women should be integrated into the pastoral agenda. Wisdom of schools of spirituality can be applied to the faith-formation of especially the neophytes on how to balance the active/contemplative dimensions of Christian life. Training in Ignatian spiritual exercise would be helpful.

We must not forget to listen to those in difficult situations, such as victims of domestic violence, human trafficking, single mothers, former prison inmates, people awaiting repatriation, victims of the entertainment establishments, people of other religions, those from broken families, people suffering from depression, pressure at work, LGBT people, the bereaved, long-term patients, and those who have gone astray.

Cases of suicide and attempted suicide are too many for a small city community as Macau. We

need to “be alert in identifying people who are experiencing difficulties in life and take time to listen to them.” Pro-life programmes and non-violent communication workshops are much in need. “In listening, the other person can sense that we can understand their sufferings.”

“Most of the resources in our diocese are mainly oriented to the local Cantonese speaking community. For this reason, we think it is important to promote, at the diocesan level, more services that attend [to] the needs of minorities and reinforce those that are already present.” Spaces and platforms to listen to the voices of the minorities, the young, and women. “Our church could hold training courses for women...and promote women’s participation in social activities that would make the voice of the church be present.” The Catholic Marriage Council has plans to send staff to station at different parishes to organise teams caring couples. It would be good to have translation in sign-language during Mass broadcast, too.

In one survey conducted among catechists and religious education teachers, more than 70 per cent of the respondents said that it is mostly during the homilies and in small groups with priests present that they get to listen to their parish clergy’s personal thoughts. More than 70 per cent said they listen to their students most before, during, and after Sunday schools. 70 per cent among the same respondents said bureaucracy is the chief obstacle between themselves and the Church. The majority of the respondents also said they would normally turn to their Catholic friends when they are having doubts in faith.

Extend the mystagogical phase of RCIA programme as a form of accompaniment.

“Real listening” is not easily perceived or achieved. It does not work when the diocese is perceived to be too formal and “very off-the-ground.” Humility, patience, and willingness to consider others’ points of view are necessary conditions for the free encounter with others. Listening is not to gather information or to achieve a target. Rather, it is God’s way of relating with his people.

Educators especially need to be aware of their reticence to open up to students, colleagues and parents if they only focus on what they believe to be necessary or important.

The 24-hour Life Hope Hotline of Caritas Macau has proven to be a key channel for people in distress, suffering from depression, emotionally challenged, to reach out in times of crisis.

## **SPEAKING OUT**

Fear of “speaking out against the diocese” is present when there is a perception that the criticisms would “not be respected and valued” or “will be questioned and discriminated against or suppressed.”

In one survey, when asked “if you do not feel willing or able to speak up openly to the local Church, this is because...”, 37 out of 105 said they believe that voicing out will not make any difference/impact, 25 said they do not know the channel to voice out, 18 are too afraid or shy, another 18 do not feel being part of the Church. Additional comments suggested that leaders have to learn to listen more attentively before making decisions, overcome discrimination, and educate the faithful to know about their obligation to speak

up in serious matters (CIC 212, §3).

“Apart from traditional pedagogy and psychological inferiority complex, social construct can also be a cause to the observation that students in Macao tend not to express themselves. When the social norm does not welcome individual opinions, and when parents anticipate schools to provide integral formation that covers overly diversified subjects, all stakeholders in the education system can only view “time” in an industrialised manner and seek nothing but efficiency. No time can then be spared for accommodating free expression of speech.” Schools should encourage more project-based learning, with support and drive from top management to set up an ongoing momentum of inquiring and answering each other that brings about better interaction between teachers and learners.

Caritas Macau plays a vital role in different government advisory committees to speak out on behalf of those who seem to have “no voice” in society. Periodically meetings with families of members living in Catholic social facilities also help all learn to be more attentive to the livelihood or needs of the residents.

Religious sponsored organisations supporting women and children suffering abuse “engage the help of the Catholic and general communication (radio, television, newspaper, media and posters, flyers) in order to have the cause we are advocating to be disseminated and be heard by the public.”

## **CELEBRATING**

Synodality should be founded on the common sharing of the Divine Word and the Eucharistic Sacrifice. The Eucharist helps us to be together, to know each other and to help each other. The Word of God is the living word that should inspire us when we make important decisions. The sacraments must be taken more seriously.

Hospitality (Luke 24:15): ushers can interact with Mass attendants in an interactive way to build up the sense of belonging to the parish.

Incensing: if possible, arrangements should be made so that incense is used at each Eucharistic celebration on the Lord’s Day to highlight the moment of sanctification of the entire liturgical assembly.

Offertory: more faithful should be encouraged to volunteer to take part in the offertory procession.

Music in the liturgy can be better selected and prepared. Children’s choir should be encouraged. Recording of songs typically used can be shared on parish websites or Facebook for all to listen.

Youngsters can be trained to become parish tour guides. Other creative media/apps can be used to arouse interests in learning about ritual gestures and other liturgical topics.

Tighter coordination between altar servers and Sunday School tutors/teachers.

Upgrade of sound systems and other audio-visual aids in church buildings can

promote better participation.

Spaces for migrant communities to gather after Sunday Mass seem highly inadequate. There are also not enough time allotted between Masses for prayer and meditation.

Liturgical celebrations should flow into contributing to serving social needs. For example, the Diocese has been promoting the culture of chastity and theology of the body in schools and among the faithful, which is rooted in our faith in the corporeality and mystery of communion of the Eucharistic sacrifice.

In one socially and racially mixed group survey consisting of 105 respondents, over half expressed room for improvement when it comes to the level of engagement and participation in parish activities and liturgies.

### **CO-RESPONSIBLE IN THE MISSION**

There is a view that even “though during the Vatican II the concept of sharing, co-responsibility etc. was frequently used, the plain truth is that things have not changed. That is the reason why...this Synod has been convoked.”

“The current activities and arrangements of the Church are ineffective at promoting the need on the sharing of responsibilities among Catholics,” one commented. This view is supported by the trend of decreased participation in church activities. It takes time for the faithful to discern and grow in their mission and sense of belonging in parochial communities. Pastors need to accompany and support the faithful on these prolonged journeys. But the ageing of the clergy and religious, which is a particularly serious issue in Macau, compounds the need of forming successors to enliven the Christian communities. The dissipating numbers of religious sisters of different Congregations and lack of new vocations makes it “hard for them to attend to different outside activities”, and it also “makes things difficult to change.”

The faithful need to be emboldened to commit themselves to social service to care for “our Common home” beyond the limited means of preaching and individual approaches.

“To build up the image of the Church,” we could utilize the professional and industrial skillsets of the faithful by considering grouping them along “some models of the third order.”

It appears to some that investing in the use of internet, and other technological means and “in the Metaverse” in the work of evangelization is a pressing need.

Concerns were raised among some faithful about political influences in society and in the schools. Question has been raised as to whether the Church is aware of the social and educational problems among the organisations under its care. How can faith-based bodies lead people to encounter Christ and to “find out what their mission is.”

Some commented that there should be “more unified approaches instead of segregating based on nationalities or language.”



## **DIALOGUE IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY**

Seek common grounds with other local social organisations and religious communities as a means of mutual enrichment and evangelization.

The poor are those who most critically face the problems that plague societies. Through listening and support, we Christians help meet their needs with the hope of them seeing the Christian mission in our actions.

Raising the level of self-awareness also helps broaden the horizon of our social and world view amidst cultural differences. We need to reflect on questions such as “whether our religious faith causes us to see things prejudicially.”

The study of religions, learning from the rituals and belief systems of other religions, allows us to better grasp the significance of many cultural elements in our society.

The diocese is a multicultural community. Dialogue between the different communities (e.g. Chinese, Filipino, Portuguese, Vietnamese, Indonesian, etc.) can be further developed. Ecumenical or inter-religious dialogue and collaboration can be raised to the level of the entire ecclesial community as it desires “to grow through this kind of dialogue.” Dialogue with and within the society “following the spirit of *Laudato Si* needs to be further developed.”

Dialogue with the government “seems to be more responsive or passive than proactive or conducive to create new ways to enrich and challenge the Macau society (e.g. to enrich our understanding of how to develop the one country two systems).”

Christianising society – how can the Church be more vocal on her positions on controversial topics in society, such as same-sex marriage, abortion, and cyber bullying. The various diocesan commissions and services, such as marriage counsel, are playing a vital role in interacting with different sectors of the society. It would be ideal if marriage preparation can be extended to serve non-Catholic couples as well. The format of hospital ministry can be diversified to include longer individual counselling sessions, even for non-Catholics. With caution, the Church can also take advantage of the wisdom of the commercial world by partnering with IT companies or marketing teams.

Evangelisation through online videos, church tours, summer recreational classes, and propagate prayer intentions related to public events, e.g. winter Olympics in Beijing.

Catholic social service organisations can learn from other parallel agencies, especially other Christian organisations excelling in drug rehabilitation and prison ministry.

The local Church need not reinvent the wheels at each instance. It should consider making good use of existing resources produced by other organisations or neighboring dioceses.

Mental and physical health can be woven into faith, prayer and spirituality.

Proposal has been made to the Diocese to set up academies of sacred art to nurture more artists to cater to the public’s interest in art appreciation and resource sharing.

Catholic schools have a major role to play. There could be study groups that include Catholic and non-Catholic teachers to review the DOCAT, encyclicals and other papal documents, which then would form basis for disseminating the teachings and stance in social doctrine and other Catholic values to students and parents.

## **WITH THE OTHER CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS**

Among the difficulties encountered:

“Difficulties in evangelization. There are many different ways to evangelise, but not much opportunity to evangelise together.”

“It may not be easy to extend the invitation of the Christian Unity Prayer Meeting to more church denominations as some conservative Christians might not be willing to pray together with the Catholic Church. “

“The negative experiences of the fellows that they have heard the consecrated people of the Catholic Church talked negatively about the Christian Churches.”

Ways to enhance our experience:

“Young people in the church are willing to support Christian prayer meetings, but need clear instructions.”

“It is recommended to have regular meetings among the pastoral staff.”

*Via pulchritudinis* – the way of beauty: artists, musicians, photographers, sculptors can discover the Christian messages through cultural artefacts and artistic expressions.

## **AUTHORITY AND PARTICIPATION**

Human resources is key to synodality. Personnel should be trained to “observe→raise questions→give and take mutual feedback,” which helps to strengthen our good will to understand others, rather than to exert our seemingly infallible take on things.

Appreciation and praise are very much lacking in our skills in understanding each other. Discovering the positive talents in others is also a form of self-training that contribute to enhancing our perception of the Church. Lack of communication is one of the causes of people choosing competition over cooperation. Harmony in ecclesial communities would be better promoted if there are sincere discussions over the “distribution of interests.” Accept those who have different aims and agenda. Our conscious choice to cooperate with each other necessitates embracing varying views, trusting that the others are able to understand you.

Prioritization of duties and clear aims are important for smooth “horizontal leadership.”

“As the pastor of the local church, a Bishop empowers and entrust his priests in the service of his diocese, and priests, in turn, should empower and entrust his lay collaborators.”

Some expressed the need for the “practice of prudence by those in authority” and

“more presence and visibility in schools and universities.”

## **DISCERNING AND DECIDING**

There is not in place a regular system in the local and neighbouring dioceses to gather the opinions of the faithful. Much depends on the personal style and modus operandi of the parish priests. The diocese may consider establishing an effective and transparent mechanism for the purpose of consultation as the basis discernment and decision-making.

It seems that the Church is not ready to delineate the areas of subject matters open for discussion by the faithful. Apostolic tradition and established practice serve as the basis of determining which are the core contents that must be preserved. For example, there has been discussions about the possibility of selecting bishops by majority vote. But such matter goes against apostolic tradition. Collegial responsibility of the Pope and bishops should remain the bedrock for issues on faith and morals. In assisting students to reflect on societal issues, Catholic schools should rely on the foundation of the Ten Commandments. Traditional Confucian values of rigorous discernment and balanced thinking are also pertinent points of reference.

The process of discerning and deciding “presupposes individual and community prayer and the regular practice of spiritual conversation among our community members.”

One religious congregation states that “we don’t know much about the mechanisms and methods that the diocese uses to make decisions.”

## **FORMING OURSELVES IN SYNODALITY**

There is a sense among some of the Chinese faithful that traditional cultural sentiments of the people, which tend to be more passive, discourage taking up matters with those “in authority.” Obeisance prevents those exercising authority to become journey companions. “At present, the Catholics in Macao are comparatively traditional and conservative.” Beyond baptism, long-term formation, such as liturgical catechesis, understanding of signs and symbols are desired.

Organising joint activities such as parish annual mission outreach (Christmas carols, processions), “multi-lingual Mass”, home visits, ethnic music appreciation, etc., are some of the concrete ways suggested in fostering synodality. “It is necessary to give opportunities to newcomers.”

One diocesan commission conducted a useful field trip study comparing the operation, time, target and faith components of after mass gatherings at several parishes. “The parish café could be a platform to exchange views and encourage communication, so as to work towards the synodal spirit.”

## **General Conclusion**

We must give thanks to God for showering the local Church with the necessary graces to embark on this synodal journey amidst the disruptions to regular life of the faithful in the Diocese caused by Covid-19, especially to the routine of worship, formation, exchanges, family and work relations, and missionary appointments due to border control. It has to be acknowledged that this consultation process is the first step towards achieving more concrete results. These dialogues can be better geared towards the effort at consolidating current structures (pastoral councils, diocesan commissions, associations) and pooling resources (finances, manpower) to meet pastoral developments. The reconstruction of the iconic Centro Católico in the city centre and plans for new parishes are two chief projects that require total participation. These positive movements and reflections for improvements should better equip the Christian faithful of Macau to go forward as we prepare for the celebration of the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of the Diocese in 2026.