



Response to the Working Document for the Continental Stage

Prepared by the Synodal Committee of the University of Saint Joseph, Macao, on behalf of the Catholic Diocese of Macau

Background

The Vatican released the Working Document for the Continental Stage (DCS) of the Synod of Bishops 2023. The Federation of Asian Bishops Conference invites each diocese to write some reflections on the document. The Diocese, therefore, wishes to study the Document with particular attention to the three reflection topics in paragraph 106.

Our response to the three questions is as follows:

“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?”

First of all, we are very grateful for the foretaste of the preliminary fruit of the Diocesan Phase of the Synod, which happened in the Diocese of Macau. The process and the report are both very positive.

Here are some extracts that we believe are the intuitions that resonate most strongly with the lived experiences and realities of the Church in our Diocese:

- Rooted in the culturally diverse continent, we would accept the invitation of the DCS to “recognize the interconnectedness of social and environmental challenges” (#45).

- Our committee members agree to the possibility of finding “our deeper unity and the opportunity to cooperate with God’s grace” in the “embrace of an enriching diversity.” (#54)

- “Lay people, religious and clerics desire to put their talents and abilities at the disposal of the Church” (#59) and the “desire for co-responsibility” (#67).

- We acknowledge “the need for these bodies to be not only consultative but places where decisions are made based on processes of communal discernment” (#78).

- It is important that “When we do this, others feel welcomed, not judged, free to share their own spiritual journey” and that one is not judged when one expresses one’s ideas.

- We sincerely hope that “*the dialogue efforts*” will not draw “*only a handful of elites and remained as cerebral exercises limited to the realms of ideas rather than becoming a moment of the masses*” (#49).

- Item 3.2 on “Synodality takes shape” is the essence of synodality which includes:

- dynamic of co-responsibility (#78);

- transparency (*learning* transparency; this is a challenging, long-term, also

spiritual process!) (#79);

- involvement of the participation of all members in the life of the community

(#81)

- need for formation (in listening and dialogue) (#82 & #83)

- welcoming difference (#85)

At the same time, there is also something new or illuminating to us. We found that the rethinking of women's participation (#60-65) sheds some light on us and reminds us of the importance of women since the time of the Old Testament and Jesus' time. The cherishing of the value of transparency and accountability is also shown in the negative feedback on the Synod, which was presented and not hidden (c.f. #18, #71, and #79).

It is found that "similarities between continents regarding those who are perceived as excluded (in society) and Christian Community (migrants, the poor, etc.)" (#40) that we need to be aware of it.

On the other hand, we were surprised by the quote that "*Some expressed doubts about the outcome of the synodal process due to their perception of the Church as a rigid institution unwilling to change and modernize itself, or due a suspicion that the synodal outcome had been predetermined*" (EC Canada) and "distrusting the synod, further wounding the church"

(#18), though what was mentioned in the above quotes is not the case in our Diocese.

“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?” “Enlarge the space of your tent” (Is 54:2).

The possible substantial tensions or divergences that emerge are:

- difficulty in listening deeply (#31)
- meager presence of the voice of young people (#35)
- the cry of the poor and that of the earth (care for the environment, for biodiversity; learning to be much more sensible in dealing with energy, resources, and waste, as it affects us all; this “ecological conversion” (*LS* 5; 216; 217; 220), pertains to each individual, to families, and especially to parish communities, which should emerge as positive role models in view of facing climate change and other serious environmental challenges) (#45)
- weakness of deep ecumenical engagement; “enlarging the tent” has profound ecumenical implications; (#47)
- the desire for better-formed, better-accompanied, and less isolated priests (the challenge for priests learn to become authentic sharers and communicators of life and faith experiences) (#58)
- Gender inequality: many women participate in the Church but more men make the decision (c.f. #61)

The Committee would like to suggest some possible questions or issues that could be addressed and considered in the next steps of the process:’

1. That synodality can be expressed in a continual process that requires commitment, dedication, and motivation to walk together.
2. How can synodality be a sustainable process?
3. How can different parties commit or dedicate themselves to the synodal process?

“Looking at what emerges from the previous two questions, what are the priorities, recurring themes, and calls to action that can be shared with other local Churches around the world and discussed during the First Session of the Synodal Assembly in October 2023?”

Among all the themes, we have selected three recurring themes that call us to action:

1) The Synodal is a continual process that requires commitment, dedication, and motivation to walk together. It needs prayer and openness to the Holy Spirit, who alone can guide any constructive synodal process in Church History.

A rediscovering of God the Holy Spirit (the Third Person of the Holy Trinity) is crucial for the whole future journey of the global church and her development; The Holy Spirit, as the “lifegiving force”, the “bridge-builder, the “Love of God” has to be rediscovered in our individual and communal (parish/diocese) spirituality and daily Christian practice; The Holy Spirit can guide the Church to address and solve difficult challenges, as happened at the First Synod in Jerusalem A.D. 51 (Acts 15). The Holy Spirit and the community prioritized addressing serious tensions and finding solutions (Act 15:28: “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and us...”. This is the synodal method.

2) The importance of listening and formation required in paying true attention to the underlying realities.

“Listening requires that we recognize others as subjects of their own journey” (#32), and many may experience “difficulty in listening deeply” (#31). The DCS highlighted “the lack of communal processes of listening and discernment and called for more training in this area” (#33), “the need for formation in listening and dialogue,” for instance, “in small groups that regularly share life and faith” (#82 & 83).

For the process to continue, “a change of mindset and renewal of existing structures are needed, i.e., to avoid reducing the reality to technical organizational issues; the focus should be more on the spiritual level of renewal and authentic witness” (#94).

An example in 3.1 Listening that becomes welcoming can be the Welcome Service in the U.S. In the U.S. parishes, there is often a welcome service, meaning the parish council appoints some faithful (ushers) who are waiting at church doors (entrances) before Sunday mass. They are attentive to the newcomers, and they welcome them in the name of the parish family. In some parishes, one of our committee members even experienced that the priest officially welcomes the newcomers and guests after the mass begins if the guests agree.

Often, our parish communities are instead “closed shops.”

3) Foster the participation of young people and women

As there is a global concern about “meagre presence of the voice of young people in the synodal process” (#35), some Committee members proposed to foster the option for and participation of young people both in the parish and diocesan levels.

Women are another group of the population on which the dioceses and episcopal conferences should focus more. Rethinking women’s participation (#60 - #65) is stressed in the document with six paragraphs. Those quotes from the report from the Superiors of Institutes of Consecrated Life were identified and should be considered.