

SALYA: THE PHILIPPINE REPORT ON SYNODALITY 2024¹

CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF THE PHILIPPINES PHILIPPINE NATIONAL SYNODAL TEAM

INTRODUCTION

The local churches in the Philippines have pursued with enthusiasm their journey with the universal Church towards synodal renewal. At their January 2024 plenary assembly, the Conference of Philippine Bishops had Cardinal Mario Grech, president of the General Secretariat of the Synodal of Bishops (GSSB), as a special guest. It was then that Cardinal Grech formally communicated his invitation for the Philippine Church to participate in the continuing synodal dialogue, in response to the 41-page Synthesis Report on Synodality. It was in response to this invitation that the National Synodal Team designed two sessions entitled *Salok* and *Salya*, to put into a prayerful reflection the GSSB's 10-point consultation guideline. *Salok* (the act of fetching water) reflects on John 4, the Samaritan woman at the well; *Salya* (to cross-over, the popular forward movement of the devotees of Jesus Nazareno) takes Matthew 14 where Jesus is crossing over from one place to the next (to a place of communion, a place of encounter, a place of mission). Since the Lenten Season was coming, *Salok* and *Salya* were recommended as modules for Lenten recollection exercises.

Journey into Easter

Eighty-four percent of the dioceses (72 out of 86) facilitated the second round of synodal consultations. The bishops

¹ The original full manuscript is 50 pages. Only the main text of the report is published here. The Appendix can be found in the original manuscript. See: <https://cbcnews.net/cbcnews/salya-the-philippine-national-report-on-synodality-2024/>

spearheaded the initial meetings of the Diocesan Synodal Teams. The Diocesan Synodal Teams in turn called on the Parish Synodal Team members and started studying the GSSB's 10-point guideline, the whole Synthesis Report, and the session flow of the Salok and Salya Reflection Guides. Aside from planning and training facilitators and notetakers, there was an additional training for those who will facilitate the Conversation in the Spirit which was used as the main method of prayerful sharing and reflection in all the sessions.

Most of the dioceses chose specific chapters from the Synthesis Report that are relevant to their discipleship journeys, some chose three chapters while others chose more than five chapters. The most chosen chapters were: Chapter 8 – Church is Mission (31 dioceses); Chapter 18 – Structures of Participation (29 dioceses); Chapter 4 – the Poor as Protagonists (23 dioceses); Chapter 16 – a Listening and Accompanying Church (19 dioceses) and Chapter 17 – Digital Missionaries (14 dioceses). One diocese in the South reflected on all the 20 chapters of the Synthesis Report! This shows that mission is uppermost in the concerns of the dioceses since four out of five of these chapters refer to mission, and as important also would be the structures that would support such mission direction. The dioceses that dialogued with the different themes/chapters of the Synthesis Report followed the Convergences-Matters for Consideration- Proposals as the flow of reporting. Moreover, about a dozen dioceses used the GSSB's 10-point guideline and came up with a thematic report of their reflections.

Local Church Alive with the Synodal Spirit

Reflection sessions Salok and Salya were facilitated at the parish and diocesan levels, most of them although not exclusively, inviting the participants of the first consultation in 2021. It was also commendable that the parish and diocesan teams made efforts to reach out to the different sectors they consulted last 2021, again not exclusively – reaching out to the poor members of the community, farmers, fisherfolks, daily wage earners, Persons with Disabilities (PWDs), Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs), children and youth,

LGBTQ+, families of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), senior citizens, business people, local government, to mention a few. Most dioceses reported reaching hundreds of people, with some reaching thousands (Diocese of Novaliches - 1,200 people, Diocese of San Carlos - 5,200 people), with reflection sessions running from four to eight hours. Salok and Salya sessions used small group and plenary dynamics, the conversation in the spirit for deeper reflection and internalizing rituals coming from the Bible texts of Salok and Salya. Most of the dioceses translated into their local languages the concepts of Salok and Salya, as well as the main points of the Synthesis Report, their extra efforts manifesting a growing ownership of the synodal renewal process.

It was interesting to note that the dioceses integrated this second round of synodal consultation sessions (October 2021 being the first round) into their own diocesan local church development. A lot of dioceses used the reflection sessions in line with their diocesan synodal pastoral planning, dialoguing with their pastoral priorities and pathways. Other dioceses went back to the results of the 2021 consultation and continued on the themes and priorities they had set back then. A few dioceses are having their Diocesan Pastoral Assemblies and made the consultations an important part of their communal gathering for direction-setting. One used the consultation session also as an opportunity for the “Promulgation of the Acts and Decrees of the 2nd Synod” of their diocese. One will have its first diocesan Synod in 2026 and the results of the two consultations (2021 and 2024) will be the ground and base of their decision-making and action planning.

Listening to Other Voices

The National Synodal Team also coordinated a more in-depth reflection on the controversial issues or open questions mentioned in Chapter 15 - sexual identity, couples in irregular unions, end of life, Artificial Intelligence, and its ethical responsibility. With the consent of the permanent council of the CBCP, the topic of women deacons was also included. The National Synodal Team chose experts from different parts of the country - theologians, social scientists, practitioners, and people living in

such situations - to discern a particular topic through online and face-to-face reflection days. The National Synodal Team made sure that the participants for these challenging reflections would be coming from different voices – those who support, those who oppose, and those with a critical stance. It was edifying how they respected each other’s stories and experiences and came up with a reflection paper (attached). Around ten dioceses also reflected on these controversial issues. The National Synodal Team also called on the National Synodal Council composed of clergy, religious and lay sectoral representatives at the Bishops’ Conference level to enjoin them to facilitate reflections organized during the synodal consultations in 2021 to ensure representation from different national church bodies. There were also separate sessions at a national level for the youth and some lay associations, as well as from Indigenous Peoples, facilitated by the coordinators at the Bishops’ Conference level.

In writing this report, the National Synodal Team went through cycles of reflection: first, grouping the dioceses into larger metropolitan divisions to have a regional perspective on local synodal renewal processes. Secondly, the diocesan reflections were separated per chapter of the Synodal Report to see a national picture of the important principles of synodal living that need to be emphasized. After several reading and reflecting sessions, themes were allowed to emerge.

This report has two parts. The first part is **Salok: Drinking from the Wells of our Synodal Experiences** which reflects on the noteworthy experiences of synodality in our local churches. It was edifying to realize that local churches already had some programs and structures that followed the synodal principles before the current Synod on synodality as practiced by several dioceses. Moreover, some specific areas of synodal lifestyle were introduced and strengthened, however, there remain some areas that are challenging and would require renewal of minds and hearts, programs and structures. The second part is **Salya: Crossing over to a Deeper Praxis of a Synodal Church**. Realizing the strengths and weaknesses of our local churches, and noting the need for very important shifts in cultures and structures, the second part explores the different proposals and pathways to cross over to a more

authentic living out of a more synodal Church in mission.

SALOK: DRINKING FROM THE WELLS OF OUR SYNODAL EXPERIENCES

Like the Samaritan woman who drank from the well of her encounter with Jesus, the Living Water, dioceses shared their transforming encounters and spirit-filled mission which are seeds of synodality offering new life to individuals and communities.

Convergences

Although synodality in its “newness” remains vague, confusing, and attracting cynicism among some members, those who have been engaged in the processes and have been allowed to speak out, speak up, and listen, have grown to embrace the richness of its vision. To many, it is affirming to discover that it is not really new as local churches in the Philippines have already been synodal in various ways. To some, ‘synodal and synodality’ has become an overused adjective implying that it is already part of people’s consciousness. But it may also lose its meaning if it is taken out of context.

Many are open to seeing what needs to be renewed in our ways of relating and living together even as there are different levels of understanding regarding synodality. Some dioceses integrated Filipino synodal values and used cultural expressions, practices, and traditions in their synodal framework and processes. “*Maraming nagbabalik-bayan; umuuwi sa tahanan.*” (There are many homecomings taking place; people returning home). Some dioceses reported that the enthusiastic spirit brought about by the synodal process has increased people’s participation in church programs and activities. Some are “returning home” to the parish experiencing “a new sense of hope, healing, reconciliation, and restoration of trust.” “*Malayo na, pero malayo pa.. Marami na, pero marami pa...*” (We have come a long way, but there is still a long way to go...There are many of us, but there are many more out there). Although good things have emerged from the processes, many agree that much still needs to happen. The synodal process awakened all

to the realization that though there are many Catholics who are engaged, many more are out there waiting, wandering, and seeking an encounter with the Divine amid their daily questions and challenges.

1. **BEC (Basic Ecclesial Community) as a locus of synodality.** Many dioceses mentioned the resurgence of BECs as an avenue to deepen the faith and to experience and live out synodality. It is the space where sharing and caring are most felt and where the Christian faith is lived through mission. Dioceses also acknowledge the potential of BECs in reaching out to the “others” and reintegrating them into the church. BECs serving the Basic Human Communities (BHCs) reflect the holistic approach to the church’s mission, emphasizing the integral well-being of individuals and communities.
2. **Focus on the marginalized.** Synodality challenges the Church’s understanding of poverty and the need to listen ever more to people living in poverty. In some dioceses, the first consultations gave birth to new initiatives and programs of reaching out to the poor indicating a listening to the real needs and connection to realities on the ground. Transformed by “reading the signs of the time,” dioceses have renewed their understanding of living with and for the poor through an inclusive mindset and through living out the cultural values of *kapwa* (neighbor) and *Bayanihan* (solidarity). Creative initiatives for the economically poor (*Kindness Stations, Unboxing Happiness, Housing for the Poor*) as well as those who are mentally and physically challenged (*Radio Catechism, Catechism for the Deaf and Mute*) are being implemented successfully through the collaboration of different entities. Through a determined step to listen and walk with them, the church is also led to face multi-faceted poverty from which their cries are rooted; “poverty of morals, poverty of communion, and poverty of spirituality towards mission” that needs renewal and transformation of all from within.
3. **Learning and embracing cultures.** Dialogue of life and faith among people of neighbor religions, and ethnicities transforms

our understanding of synodality. It is also through such sacred spaces that synodal values in action are imparted. For instance, Indigenous People's communal resource sharing, dispute resolution through consensus, and the central roles of elders and leaders in guiding the community may inform ecclesial practices.

4. **Co-Responsibility in Mission.** Synodality has inspired an expanded and dynamic understanding of mission. From being a mission local church to becoming a missionary local church, “walking together” in a true synodal church indicates the reality of a “co-responsibility” of laity and clergy which means that pastors and lay people, without superiority of one over the other, carry together the life and mission of the Church. Various innovative initiatives in missioning to the poor in one diocese not only respond to the needs of the poor but also facilitate connection with the poor and the sharing of Good News in a very creative way; bringing out the natural missionary spirit among the baptized. Collaborative practices have emerged from ecological concerns such as partnerships with government entities to establish a Material Recovery Facility for waste management and income generation, community gardening in exchange for the construction or renovation of mission chapels, holding forums to discuss challenges towards effective collaborative engagement, etc.
5. **Women as heart and feet.** A synodal church is a feminine church: loving, caring, compassionate, kind, and forgiving. Comprising the biggest number of church workers and volunteers, women play various roles in the life and mission of the church. There are more women than men who go out for missionary work like catechism and hold leadership positions in various participatory bodies and organizations. Many dioceses acknowledge their importance in the church and their crucial role in decision-making. Likewise, they recognize the need for women to be empowered through education to engage in evangelization, catechesis, and other ministries confidently and authoritatively. However, some dioceses do not consider diaconal ministry for them but stress their contribution to priestly formation.

6. **Synodality as Charism - Consecrated Life and Lay Associations.** As the synodal processes affirmed the synodal lifestyle of many religious communities and lay associations, it has also challenged them towards a more determined and intentional walking with the local church. From routine or ritualistic practices, synodality calls them towards a more vibrant and God-centered lifestyle that is more inclusive and relational, and attentive to the signs of the times. With this, comes the necessity for ongoing spiritual and professional development as well as ‘updating’ on current issues such as ecology and ecumenism.
7. **Priests as a key mover of synodality.** While the laity still reserves high regard for priests, many find it important for the priestly formation to undergo a thorough review given the synodal vision. Many express how priests need to be more relational, immersed, open, and humble. But they also wish that bishops would prioritize open communication with their priests to understand their unvoiced needs as well as foster a culture of care and support for them to continually carry out their ministry effectively.
8. **Formation towards Synodality as a lifestyle.** All dioceses recognize the value of a synodal approach to formation that enables all the ordained and the laity to cultivate synodality as a lifestyle – personally and communally. A synodal community is rooted in the Word of God which is celebrated in liturgies and shared in families, BECs, and ministries. A synodal community is also formed towards a consciousness of one’s *kapwa* – upholding their honor and dignity as people of God and their capacity to dream and share the vision of the Church. Many dioceses see the significance of strengthening the place of the family as a “pillar of mission” believing that synodality is best caught and taught in the family. Aside from accompanying parents and children in creating their homes as havens of synodality, there is a need to intensify home visitation that offers spiritual support, counseling, and practical assistance as needed.
9. **Ecclesial Discernment and Open Questions.** Many dioceses recognize the challenge of upholding love and truth in the hot-

button issues mentioned. Among the issues, many can relate to complicated marital situations as well as issues regarding identity and sexuality. Conversation in the spirit has been much appreciated as a method for collective discernment.

10. **Listening and Accompanying.** A synodal church is a listening and accompanying church. It signifies a shift towards a more compassionate, open, and understanding approach to ministry. By emphasizing the importance of listening attentively and accompanying others in their spiritual and life journeys, some dioceses seek to cultivate a culture of empathy, solidarity, and mutual respect within the faith community. Some Catholic lay associations, believing that listening is the core value of synodality, assessed their listening practices in prayer, in community life, and in their various apostolates. By doing so, they realize areas where they need to improve. This encourages a deeper connection with individuals, fostering authentic relationships and creating spaces for healing, growth, and understanding. An “increasing recognition” within the Church of the realities and a “diverse range of human experiences” can create more effective and effective programs considerate of all. At the same time, there is a need to let go of traditional categories that look at membership in church organizations as a criterion for one’s Catholicity.
11. **Borderless Church in the Digital Environment.** There is a recognition of the digital space as a distinct area of mission. As a “borderless church,” it provides “wide-reach pastoral care.” Opening new pathways to celebrate liturgy and receive faith formation, the digital space has also protected youth at risk. However, there is a need to address the adverse impact of the rapid digitization of ministries to senior citizens, the poor, and rural pastoral volunteers.
12. **Cultures and Structures of Participation.** Participatory bodies (Parish Pastoral Council, Parish Finance Council, and WESTY - Worship, Education, Social Action, Temporalities, Youth) and BECs that engage the “most common and ordinary lay faithful,” enable participation and develop lay leadership. However, the synodal process manifests the need for these bodies for monitoring and evaluation. Cultural values can be

integrated into these structures like the concept of “one for all, all for one” which reflects a deep sense of communal solidarity and interconnectedness.

13. **Inclusive Diocesan Pastoral Plan.** As a result of the synodal process, there is a growing desire to involve all in discernment and decision-making. Likewise, formation programs, celebrations, and ministry activities in many dioceses encourage greater participation and collaboration among groups and entities. The Eucharist is seen as the greatest manifestation and model of participation and co-responsibility. Thus, a culture of participation begins through “a policy of wider participation in the liturgy” and the involvement of sectors like LGBTQ, PWDs, and those in the existential peripheries.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION

In the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, Jesus did not only enter into an unfamiliar territory, but he also wanted to reach out to someone who was outside the existential periphery. In their conversation, Jesus invited the Samaritan woman to engage in a discernment process by listening to each other’s opinions without judging each other. The following are the conversations among the different dioceses regarding some concerns and challenges that require further reflection, consultation, and communal discernment.

A Church of the Poor?

Despite our vision of becoming a Church of the Poor, the people continue to see it as a Church of the Privileged. Synodality challenges the Church's structure, programs, and mission at various levels to take the poor, marginalized, and oppressed as its utmost priority, yet they are not represented in Church bodies, and to review and change her policies that alienate them. At the same time, there is a need to address the passivity and indifference of the poor and the need for their active involvement in the life of the Church. There is also a need to break away from the

perspective of 'bringing the poor to the church' and to go where the poor are and engage them; the lack of a social conscience is also acknowledged.

Church Governance

Some dioceses mentioned the difficulty in continuing programs during the 'change of guards', because of *Bagong Pari*, *Bagong Hari* (New Priest, New King). The lack of common vision and structure leads to ministries managed according to the interest of the leader/priest/bishop. Such concern goes up to the diocesan level, with new bishops bringing in their "unique priorities and charisms" that are distinct from the former.

The collective decision of the People of God arrived at through consultation takes priority over the decision and authority of the council leader and priest/bishop. Church goods are owned by the faith community; hence the use of the temporal goods requires the collective concurrence of the community.

Collaboration and co-responsibility between religious congregations and the local church can only grow as long as both are open to listening and dialogue. As much as the local church vision should provide spaces for charisms to grow, religious communities can also reinterpret their charisms in the context of the changing times. While many recognize the contribution of religious communities and lay associations in witnessing a Church of the Poor, some point out inconsistencies in lifestyle and attitudes towards the poor. On the other hand, some remark that "lay organizations are sought for fundraising but not for decision-making."

Some dioceses support the inclusion of LGBTQ+, couples in irregular unions, etc. in church organizations, even to the point of making them ministry leaders. They said that it is not gender but the heart that serves God. What they are expecting from all leaders are the synodal attitudes of welcome and compassion, integrity, and maturity in the faith. Having said that, what they want to consider is how such acceptance will affect young people in their search for 'truth'.

Dialogue with Society and Cultures

There is a need to discern how to balance prophetic condemnation of injustice and diplomatic efforts to influence policymakers for the common good. On the one hand, we need to explore in depth the meaning and practices of synodality; and also confront fears that synodality would change the teachings of the church.

One of the primary problems in evangelizing online is the sheer volume of information and voices competing for attention. The internet is a vast marketplace of ideas, beliefs, and opinions, and amidst this cacophony, it can be challenging for religious messages to stand out. Moreover, individuals are bombarded with so much content that it can be difficult for them to discern what is authentic and meaningful, true and false, good and evil.

Building partnerships with neighboring religions and other Christian denominations while respecting their beliefs and practices needs to be strengthened. There is a need to pursue the partnership from common action to dialogue of beliefs/theologies to deepen friendship and mutual respect.

Grappling with Open Questions (Chapter 15)

1. **Complicated Marital Situations.** The norms, laws, values, and principles of the Church might be devalued because of an affirming and accommodating attitude of the Church towards couples in diverse situations. With this, there is a need to study further how to balance the people's concrete situations and the Church's teachings. We must remember though that we do not "sit in the chair of Moses and judge, sometimes with superiority and superficiality, difficult cases and wounded families." To be "true defenders of doctrine, we do "not uphold its letter, but its Spirit; not ideas, but people; not formulas, but the free availability of God's love and forgiveness."
2. **Artificial Intelligence (AI).** As AI technology continues to evolve, the Church should recognize that AI is an ongoing conversation. For one, important ethical and societal concerns become more apparent as these systems become more and more

autonomous. Collective discernment on AI issues is imperative to navigate its complexities, address ethical dilemmas, mitigate risks, and ensure that AI development aligns with societal values and goals, and the teachings of the Church. It is essential to remain vigilant, engage in continuous dialogue, and adapt regulatory frameworks and ethical guidelines to address emerging challenges and concerns. We invite questions or insights as we collectively navigate this crucial intersection between technology and faith.

3. **Identity and Sexuality.** Queer stories have the potential in expanding the Church's understanding of the human condition. Several queer members who work in theology asserted the value of reorienting our language around "belonging" for LGBTQI+ Catholics. Rather than merely being grateful for institutional acceptance—or worse, the "tolerance" of *baklang Katoliko*—queer folks must claim their space and dignity as full human beings and be baptized in Christ. If the Church seeks to be conversant with the world's concerns, it must engage LGBTQI+ Catholics. To the extent that Christianity very much influences Filipino culture—in this instance, Roman Catholic worldviews and beliefs, religious phenomena remain a salient point of consideration for young people—queer or straight—who seek to live meaningful lives.
4. **End of Life.** Suffering and death are inherent realities of human existence and some people have difficulties in grasping their meaning and purpose. In these situations, the Church finds herself sometimes in the complex and intricate relation of listening to the diverse experiences of doubts and fears, sorrows and pains, joys and hopes vis-à-vis its moral and theological teachings. It is important that in this complexity, the sanctity of human life and the compassionate support to all those in need define our Christian response.
5. **Women Deacons.** The contrasting view that women deacons are counter-cultural and pastorally delicate and the realization that the Holy Spirit is leading the Church to enhance the responsibilities of the women in the Church. The ordination of women to the permanent diaconate will allow women to share in the governing (Canon 129), teaching, and sanctifying

roles in the Church. The ordination of women as permanent deacons carries the risk of further reinforcing a hierarchical clerical church. Measures should be taken to prevent this. On the one hand, the ordination of women to the permanent diaconate can be used as a way of specifying the limits of the service of women in the church. On the other hand, it can be a way to open up a path to women's priesthood.

- 6. Indigenous People.** It is a painful experience that the Church has consistently neglected the voices of the Indigenous Peoples, and even silenced their voices in the synodal report. IPs say that they understand the Church but the Church does not understand them. Indigenization is the recognition of the tribal rites and rituals as authentic expressions of the Catholic faith in the indigenous communities. More than mere appreciation and use of their cultural expressions, the Church should serve as the companion of the Indigenous Peoples in the preservation of its cultures, and restoration of its self-determination through respect and protection of their ancestral domain. This is also the process of healing the wounds of division and cultural alienation brought about by a colonial missionary approach.

SALYA: CROSSING OVER TO A DEEPER PRAXIS OF A SYNODAL CHURCH

Our devotees to the Black Nazarene would shout "*Salya!*" when they were ready to move in unison during the annual procession in Manila. Just like Jesus, who crossed over to give food to the multitude, to challenge Peter and the disciples to 'have faith', and to bring healing to the sick, we commit to carry on with our synodal journey through these various proposals:

Formation of A Synodial Heart

- 1. Rootedness in the Word of God and Communal discernment.** A synodal church is founded in hearts converted through the Word of God. Bible sharing and communal prayer should be part of every group and ministry life. By doing so, one learns to listen and to dialogue as well as listen to the spirit alive in each

one. Communal discernment through methods such as the conversation in the spirit ought to be a staple practice for the local church.

2. **Discipleship and Leadership Development.** Prioritize the spiritual growth and leadership development of our faithful. This involves teaching them to view their everyday lives as opportunities for mission and equipping them with the skills to share their faith and serve others. Investing in regular training, mentoring, and leadership opportunities ensures a sustainable and adaptable mission, empowering the faithful to take active roles in the Church's mission efforts.
3. **Critiquing Formation.** There is a need to take a more critical review of regular formation programs, especially for the children and youth, for the families and BECs looking deeply into the reasons such groups fall into passivity and stagnancy. In synodal spirit, engage the stakeholders themselves instead of just allowing the priests and catechists or theologians to design and manage formation. An interdisciplinary perspective (psychological, sociological, spiritual) needs to be applied in analyzing to have more realistic and effective interventions.
4. **Synodal Approach in all Formation.** Designing catechesis for authentic understanding and living of synodality is very much needed for ongoing clergy as well as bishops' formation, renewal of seminary formation, formation for lay leadership, and the permanent diaconate. Note the need for intergenerational, multisectoral, joint formation using new approaches, responding to emerging realities, and facilitating encounters with Christ.

Church in Mission

1. **Holistic and Contextual Mission.** To integrate evangelization with social action, addressing social injustices, poverty, and environmental issues alongside preaching the gospel. Adapting mission strategies based on the cultural and social contexts of the communities it serves ensures that the gospel is relevant and accessible, fostering meaningful relationships and effectively communicating its message, especially to the poor and the

marginalized in the existential peripheries.

2. **Community Partnerships and Engagement.** To actively seek partnerships with local organizations like LGUs, businesses, and government agencies to enhance its mission efforts. These collaborations can provide additional resources and expertise, enabling the Church to serve the faithful more effectively through development projects, educational programs, and healthcare initiatives. Engaging with the wider community through these partnerships makes the Church's mission more inclusive and impactful.
3. **Youth as Heralds of Synodality.** The presence of youth power was evident in the synodal consultations. The youth claim this is their era hence a need for the Church to empower them, enabling them as heralds of synodality especially evangelization. Aside from encouraging their involvement in the ministries of the Church, special concern should be given to developing their leadership. Promoting synodality in schools and other educational settings can help integrate young people into the broader mission of the Church. Training programs for youth in Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) should be established to build their leadership skills and deepen their involvement in church activities.
4. **Women in Leadership.** Advocate for the greater inclusion of women in leadership roles and decision-making bodies within the Church. Ensure that women's voices are heard and valued in pastoral planning, governance, and ministry, overcoming cultural resistance and structural barriers which is essential to promote gender inclusivity and elevate the status of women both within the Church and in society. Support ongoing theological and pastoral research on the possibility of opening the diaconate to women. Encourage dialogue and consultation among theologians, pastoral leaders, and the faithful to deepen understanding and discern the next steps. This continued research and discernment will help in making informed decisions about women's roles in ecclesial ministries. The service of women who are already effectively engaged in parish ministries can be further strengthened and magnified by the formal recognition of their leadership by the Church through

their inclusion into the permanent diaconate in the future.

5. **Digital Evangelization and Community Building.** The Church is now in the digital age hence should actively engage in online digital evangelization to reach a broader audience, particularly involving digital natives, digital migrants, and digital tourists. This includes creating conscious, systematic, and participative content and offering digital opportunities, including priests, to use modern technology effectively. The Church should also focus on building online communities and continuing spiritual and pastoral activities in the digital space, ensuring that both outreach and internal operations are enhanced through technological proficiency.

Structures for Participation

1. **Families as seedbed of synodality.** Families are acknowledged as the first venue for synodal formation where all learn to accept, to listen, and to serve. It is also everyone's first training on how to relate to others, especially to the poor and marginalized. Building up families in catechesis and service and journeying with other families in their neighborhood provides a strong foundation for a Synodal Church.
2. **BECs for Synodal Renewal.** Strengthening the BECs, a community of families in a neighborhood, as the most effective synodal path has been mentioned time and again in all the diocesan reports. It is important to create better structures to link the BECs with other BECs, to the parish council and the parish priest, and to serve the basic human community. Representation of BECs in decision-making bodies needs to be ensured. As a nationwide movement, sharing best practices and benchmarking with other BEC models may enable it to be adaptive to the changing times.
3. **Deacons and Former Priests.** Implement the CBCP program for permanent deacons as part of the original charism of the Church. De-stigmatize and explore possibilities of reintegrating former clergy into pastoral ministries in the Church and provide them with appropriate support and training to facilitate their re-entry into the life and mission of the Church.

4. **Establishment and Strengthening of Councils and Committees.** More active participation of the laity in decision-making processes within the diocese through the Diocesan Council of the Laity and the Parish Pastoral Council (PPC). Strengthen and align the structures and statutes of the parish and diocese to foster a better synodal spirit towards the mission. Implement comprehensive formation programs and regular assemblies for lay leaders, and create better links between BECs, the PPC, and the parish priest. Another proposal is to create a Parish Sectoral Council which will allow voices of the marginalized and the different social sectors in discernment and decision-making.
5. **Professionalizing ministry.** Professionalize the pastoral services in parishes, by equipping Church volunteers with pastoral skills, providing appropriate compensation, and matching leadership roles and projects with individual talents and charisms for greater effectiveness.
6. **Catholic Social Teachings as Principles and Practices for Effective Governance.** Support marginalized groups, inform decision-making with subsidiarity, encourage participation at all levels, and prioritize transparency in financial and administrative matters. Implement systems and measures to ensure transparency and accountability in all aspects of Church governance and resource management. This includes maintaining clear communication, creating grievance committees and safe spaces, and fostering trust-building relationships at all levels.
7. **Formation and Accountability Systems.** There is a need to conduct servant leadership formation programs for our priests and lay leaders and strengthen transparency and accountability of parish resources using current technologies. Establish regular audits and evaluations of clergy performance, and ensure systems for monitoring and aligning pastoral plans and programs are in place.
8. **Ministry to Particular Sectors.** Create initiatives aimed at empowering the neglected sectors of the parish communities, especially members of the LGBTQ+, irregular couples, and other parishioners “outside the aquarium” to address their own

needs and challenges, harnessing their giftedness and providing them an atmosphere of a welcoming Church where they are appreciated as individuals away from the stigma of the society.

The Church of the Poor

Local communities can be assisted in developing their own solutions, focusing on capacity-building and skills development. This approach fosters a sense of ownership and agency among the faithful, enabling them to take charge of their lives. Collaborating with local government units (LGUs) and other organizations for community projects further amplifies this support, ensuring that the Church maintains its prophetic role in advocating for justice and support for the least, the last, and the lost.

Several parishes and dioceses are proposing the abolition of the *arancel* system in administering the sacraments which continues to be problematic, particularly for the impoverished and disenfranchised. The Church should emphasize the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity in all its activities, ensuring robust support for the neglected sectors and promoting decision-making at the most local level.

The Church is encouraged to use the *lakbay-ramdam* (*journeying with the heart*) as a pastoral approach to accompany the IPs in ensuring the respect, protection, promotion, and development of their culture, ancestral domain, and self-determination. Similarly, it is important to highlight the value of popular devotional practices in listening, understanding, and accompanying the poor in their daily life.

CONCLUSION

As the Church looks to the future, it does so with hope and confidence, knowing that the Holy Spirit continues to guide and inspire its journey. In the face of uncertainty and adversity, the Church remains a beacon of light, shining forth the love and mercy of Christ to all who seek refuge in its embrace.

Across the dioceses of the Philippines, the Church's mission unfolds and evolves, a testament to the enduring power of

faith and community. In synodality, prayer, and service, the faithful find strength and purpose, united in their shared journey of discipleship, and as they walk together, hand in hand, they bear witness to the transformative power of God's love in the world.

We entrust this synodal pilgrimage of the Filipino people unto the intercession and prayers of Mary, the icon of the synodal Church.