

Synod on Synodality
Further consultation on the diocesan level
Catholic Diocese of Macau
8-page Summary
13th May 2024

The Diocesan Synodal Team convened on 17th February 2024 with the participation of representatives of various Catholic bodies and communities in Macau. At the Bishop's behest, we all studied the synopsis of the letters and directives provided by the General Secretariat of the Synod. What follows are summaries of responses by a number of groups that focused on the two questions posed for reflection by the Synod organisers:

- a) *At the level of each local Church: HOW can we enhance the differentiated co-responsibility in the mission of all the members of the People of God? What ways of relating, structures, processes of discernment and decision-making with regard to mission make it possible to recognise, shape, and promote co-responsibility? What ministries and participatory bodies can be renewed or introduced to better express this co-responsibility? Within the Synthesis Report, reference can be made more specifically to Chapters 8-12, 16 and 18.*
- b) *At the level of relations between Churches, between groupings of Churches at different levels and with the Bishop of Rome: HOW can these relations be creatively articulated in order to find "a dynamic balance between the dimension of the Church as a whole and its local roots" (Synthesis Report chap. 5, lett. g)? Here reference can be made above all to Chapters 13, 19 and 20 of the Synthesis Report*

Members present have also been encouraged to reflect on the best practice which they experienced or adopted during the ongoing synodal process.

One major religious community believes that the 2022 Diocesan Synthesis offers valuable reflections and suggestions for a more synodal Diocese. Their response emphasizes four areas: dialogue among clergy, lay, and religious communities; spiritual formation and empowerment of lay-leadership; interaction and learning among different ethnic and cultural communities; and interaction between the Catholic community and other groups in Macau society. The community suggests using the upcoming 450-year celebration of the Diocese to renew it under the Spirit's guidance. They propose organizing spaces for further elaboration of these suggestions through sharing, discussion, and discerning. They emphasize deepening experiences, such as sharing a variety of experiences, skills, charisms, and ministries within the People of God. They suggest celebrating a Diocesan Synod every ten years, promoting synodality in basic learning and education, increasing interaction of different ethnic and cultural communities, and emboldening lay leadership in environmental care. They also propose expanding the experience of collegiality or synodality, including the use of spiritual conversation to discern and make decisions.

One female religious congregation emphasizes the importance of becoming a synodal church and outlines its priorities: listening, accompanying, and co-responsibly fulfilling the mission. Listening involves not only hearing others but also providing guidance through counseling, spiritual dialogue, and faith literature. For those still troubled after these services, referrals are made to various church and social organizations. Accompaniment is categorized into one-time, short-term, and long-term. One-time accompaniment involves introducing Macau Catholic culture to local and foreign visitors. Short-term accompaniment, usually over 6-12 months, helps individuals gradually recognize their needs through faith publications. Long-term accompaniment involves welcoming and serving transgender church members,

accompanying non-church members who do not wish to continue with the “Catholic Doctrine” in the catechism class, and spiritual companionship. The expansion of synodal experiences and the co-responsible fulfillment of the mission includes long-term volunteers who are usually retirees wishing to spend their time meaningfully, the assistance of the broader religious family, and cooperation with diocesan institutions.

Another religious female community discusses the role of women in the Church, suggesting that both consecrated and lay women could have more participatory roles, which could address issues like power abuse and enrich the Church. However, it questions the necessity of women being part of the diaconate, suggesting that women can serve the Church and society as lay women, utilizing their unique capacities and talents. It also emphasizes the need for religious vocations and the role of women in religious life. Their reflection suggests addressing clericalism through education and promoting awareness of religious vocation. It also highlights the importance of educating children about sex to protect themselves. In practical terms, it discusses the roles of women in the Church, such as being lectors in Mass, and emphasizes the importance of family care. It suggests that women with theological or philosophical education can help in the formation and teaching of seminarians. It also discusses the value of domestic work and the importance of teaching girls home skills and virtues.

The Diocese Education Committee collected opinions on two issues. Firstly, on deepening the church’s synodality, it was suggested that all disciples should be missionaries as Jesus hoped. They should form communities for synodality, not cliques, with cooperation and inclusivity. Leaders should listen openly and wisely. The Diocese should encourage all parish groups to provide an equal and open environment, encouraging members to express their opinions and participate in discussions and decision-making processes. Secondly, on expanding the church’s synodality, the

committee noted that in Macau, most of the people living in poverty and on the margins of society are new immigrants and foreign workers. They often feel lonely and helpless, and faith is particularly important to them in unstable living conditions. It was suggested that care groups should be established to focus on the needs of these marginalized people. The groups can regularly communicate with the marginalized, provide support, friendship, and resources. They can become the support network for the marginalized in the church, understand their personal or family needs and backgrounds, establish sincere relationships with them under the respect of their privacy, and lead them to participate in church activities or further participate in catechumen classes.

The Diocesan Commission for Catechetical Formation proposes strengthening and deepening the formation of the laity in Bible study, understanding of faith, and awareness of the liturgy. This formation should be lifelong and extend to different levels and situations of the laity. The proposal also highlights the distinct roles and gifts of the clergy and the laity in the Church, and the need for cooperation and division of duties in pastoral planning and evangelization strategies. The proposal advocates for an “outreach-oriented Church” that proactively reaches out to those who have not yet been part of the process, particularly those living in poverty and marginalized conditions. The Church should also pay attention to organizations such as Caritas or the Good Shepherd Sisters, listening to their service experiences regularly and supporting them.

The Diocese Life Commission works in line with Pope Francis’s call to care for societal quality of life, environmental protection, medical ethics, and culture of respect for the human body. The Commission’s Medical Technology Ethics Group held a series of “Life Protection Activities” and launched the “Love at the Beginning of Man” school tour exhibition. The MTEG established the “Macau Catholic Health Service Personnel

Association” (MCHSPA) which aims to promote professional exchanges between Catholic health service personnel in Macau and around the world, study and discuss life ethics issues, and establish diversified service items, including medical services, to respect and protect life.

The Focolare Movement in Macau has formed a Core Group to integrate the spirit of synodality, with Jesus as the core and teacher. The group includes members from different branches, volunteers, family representatives, youth, and focolarine. A survey conducted in June 2023 helped understand the needs of the new generations and strategize their work. The Synod aims to expand experiences of synodality, promoting initiatives to grow as a synodal church on a mission, involving those untouched by the process so far, including marginalized groups and people of other religions. The Focolare Movement collaborated with the preparation of the Ecumenical Prayer Meeting, inviting members to share their experiences of loving God and the neighbor. They also shared good practices such as sharing concrete experiences based on the Gospel, seeking help in times of need, and consulting others in decision-making.

One pious association offered their reflections on ‘deepening’ the differentiated co-responsibility of all God’s people in the missionary mission, calling for further consultation by local churches, involving parish priests, participating groups, and synodal teams expressing various experiences, skills, graces, duties, and personal and group perspectives. Neophytes and catechumens may lack regular or self-disciplined faith cultivation. For faith to take root, it is suggested to hold long-term catechesis classes for new church members to strengthen their faith foundation and shoulder the mission of evangelization in the future. Their second reflection discusses ‘expanding’ the experience of synodality: continuing or promoting new initiatives to become a synodal church of the mission. Through training and listening experiences, those who

have not yet been touched by the process, those living in poverty and on the margins of society, as well as Christians of different denominations and people of other religions are also to be involved, and collect and share testimonies and transmit best practice models. The public's life is inseparable from mobile apps. The diocese and parishes can set up a dedicated mobile app "Macau Diocese One-Stop" based on existing website and social media information. Through the push messages of the app, it can more effectively push/update the courses, news, and information of different institutions and societies of the church, becoming a publicity point for church activities.

Another pious association has been using "Spiritual Conversations" for group meetings since 2018, enhancing both group and individual spiritual growth. These conversations are deep dialogues aimed at building spiritual bridges between people, helping faith groups perceive and experience God's presence. The key point is the belief that God actively participates in our lives and His divinity can be discovered within each of us. Preparation is needed for these conversations, including understanding the topic to be discussed and opening our hearts through prayer and reflection. Participants need to be willing to share their experiences and feelings sincerely, and have a humble and open attitude to listen actively to God's Holy Spirit speaking through others. "Spiritual Conversations" are not just dialogues, but a way to reshape our relationship with God, allowing us to understand more deeply how He operates in our lives. Group members assist in guiding participants to conduct "Spiritual Conversations" during Jesuit school activities or other faith gatherings. The group will continue to use "Spiritual Conversations" for meetings and is willing to promote it to other parish groups, hoping that different groups can benefit from this method.

The Catholic Family Association reflects on its synodal work of support for married couples and families in Macau. In response to societal disregard for marriage

and family and the economic downturn in Macau due to the pandemic, the association has launched grief counseling training courses. The association believes in the importance of prevention and puts effort into community-level prevention. It intervenes in services with shared responsibility, conducting parenting lectures and nurturing groups for couples. The association has established four development groups, allowing members of the committee, frontline staff, and volunteers to participate together. The association listens to and absorbs the needs of families or service users, collecting opinions through various surveys. The results of the 2021 survey showed that the stages of adolescence and empty nest are most in need of attention. The association provides counseling services for individuals, couples, and families to respond to their needs in different matters such as parenting education, marital relations, emotional stress, and bereavement experiences.

The Diocese of Macau, in preparation for the 450th anniversary of its founding in 2026, is actively engaging in a Synod on Synodality. Various Catholic bodies and communities in Macau are participating, focusing on enhancing co-responsibility in the mission of all members of the People of God and creatively articulating relations between different sectors of society. The Diocese is exploring ways to deepen and expand experiences of synodality, involving those untouched by the process so far, including marginalized groups and people of other religions.

As the Diocese moves towards its 450th anniversary, it aspires to become a more synodal church, deepening its relationship with God, and understanding more deeply how He operates in our lives. The Diocese hopes to celebrate this milestone by renewing itself under the Spirit's guidance, promoting synodality in basic learning and education, increasing interaction of different ethnic and cultural communities, and emboldening lay leadership in environmental care. The aspiration is for the Catholic

Diocese of Macau to continue to grow and deepen its faith, serving as a beacon of God's love and grace for all, no less in the spirit of evangelizing pioneers such as St Francis Xavier, Matteo Ricci, and many more dedicated missionaries and laity of the last century who laid the foundation of the Church's educational and charitable apostolates firmly in modern Macau society.