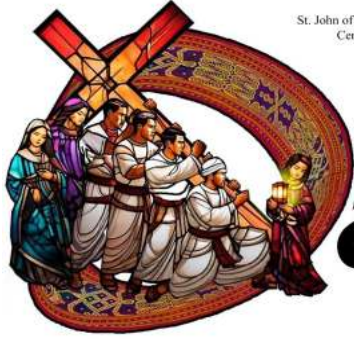




Catholic Bishops'  
Conference of the Philippines

# SALYA: THE PHILIPPINE NATIONAL REPORT ON SYNODALITY 2024



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## áyong

A Filipino  
Synodal Spirit



## ***SALYA:*** **The Philippine Report on Synodality 2024**

1. 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 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**

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

3. 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**

4. 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.

5. 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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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**

6. 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.

7. 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.

8. 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 have some programs and structures that follow the synodal principles before the current Synod on synodality as practised by a number of 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**

9. 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**

10. 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.

11. 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.

12. **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.

13. **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.

14. **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.

**15. 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.

**16. 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.

**17. 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.

**18. 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.

**19. 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.

**20. Ecclesial Discernment and Open Questions.** Many dioceses recognize the challenge to uphold 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.

**21. 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 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.

22. An “increasing recognition” within the Church of the realities and “diverse range of human experiences” can create more affective 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.

**23. 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 provided protection to 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.

**24. 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.

**25. 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**

26. 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?**

27. 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**

28. 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.

29. 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.

30. 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.”

31. 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**

32. 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.

33. 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.

34. Building partnerships with neighbor-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)**

**35. *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.”

**36. *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.

**37. 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.

**38. 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.

**39. Women Deacons.** The contrasting view that women deacons is 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.

**40. 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**

41. 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 SYNODAL HEART**

**42. 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.

**43. 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.

**44. 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.

**45. 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**

**46. 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.

**47. 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.

**48. 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.

**49. 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.

50. 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.

**51. 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**

**52. 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. .

**53. 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.

**54. 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 appropriate support and training to facilitate their re-entry into the life and mission of the Church.

**55. 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 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.

**56. Professionalizing ministry.** Professionalize the pastoral services in parishes, by equipping Church volunteers with pastoral skills, providing appropriate compensation, matching leadership roles and projects with individual talents and charisms for greater effectiveness.

**57. 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.

**58. 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.

**59. 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**

60. Local communities can be assisted to develop 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.

61. 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.

62. 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**

63. 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.

64. 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.

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

## Appendix 1

### SALOK

#### *A Lenten Recollection (John 4:1-42) for the CLERGY On Chapter 11 Synthesis Report*

##### Goals:

- *To reflect more deeply on one aspect/chapter of the Synthesis Report (SR) relevant to the context of specific groups dialoguing with Convergences (#1 below), Divergences or Matters for Consideration (#2 below) and Proposals (#3 below) of the particular chapter assigned to this group/commission*
- *To continue to grow in synodality as they discern on and respond to the specific issue relevant to the context and challenges of their groups*

##### Process:

- *May be given as a 2-hour reflection session during the Lenten Season*
- *Must have specific chapter of the SR printed for all of downloaded in gadgets*
- *All sharing must be done in small groups and summary of all be forwarded to the National Team as this will be a part of the national report*

## 1. Introduction

We are gathered today to recollect and pray as a community of faith journeying towards a more synodal church together. What more fitting time to reflect on where we are, how we are, and where we are going, than this season of Lent that calls us ever more to follow Jesus from death to new life. Today, we would like to reflect on the beautiful story of the Samaritan Woman at the Well and through it dialogue on our synodal experiences as well as questions that remain. As we begin, let us allow the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with the living water that refreshes, that quenches our thirst, the living water that brings us new life.

## 2. Opening Ritual

*Some representatives (4-5 people) will come in procession carrying their buckets and filling the well at the center as this song is being played.*

Come to the Water <https://youtu.be/EcxRvfTC2D8>

### **Opening Prayer (15 min) 9:10-9:25**

Jesus and the Samaritan Woman at the Well <https://youtu.be/el7dzoNV3IY>

What strikes you about this conversation? How does it resonate with you? Who are you in this story now? *Invite people to share in pairs.*

Introduction on SALOK...SALOK depicts our shared story in this synodal process. Let us draw water from our experiences and from the voice of the water of life, Jesus himself. Let us enter this story...

### 3. JACOB'S WELL

#### a. Read John 4:5-6 (Solo Reading)

Jesus passes through Samaria from Judea to Galilee, a route that Jews would not choose however shorter it was, because they avoided to encounter the Samaritans who were descendants of the lowest class of people left behind by Babylonians. These people intermarried with non-Jews so they were considered impure by the Jews. Because of their historical connection with the Jews, they had reinterpreted rituals and practices – making the more unacceptable to the Jews. But Jesus passes by this place and stops at Jacob's Well that connects Jews and Samaritan to a common story.

#### b. Our Synodal Journey

We have also experienced this in our synodal journeys. We've visited peoples in communities in our diocese/parish, we have avoided to visit before. We stopped at places where we found a common ground through which we have discovered our shared identity.

Let us reflect on a common synodal experience as a clergy community (including the bishop).  
(Project statement below from Ch. 11, Convergence a)

"Priests are the principal collaborators of the bishop, forming with him one presbyterate. Aware that they experience loneliness and isolation...support them with prayer, friendship and collaboration."

When did we experience such support – prayer, friendship and collaboration – recently, from our fellow clergy or lay people? *Sharing in small groups (30 min)*

#### 3. Silence...Then sharing in small groups: Pick a few sharers for plenary.

End with song, suggested: Tubig ng Buhay <https://youtu.be/52-GicR6FNU>

### 4. "IN SPIRIT AND TRUTH"

#### a. Read John 4:7-26 (role reading)

Jesus asks for a drink. A man asking a woman. A Jew in front of a Samaritan. It led the Samaritan woman to speak about her thirsts. Her thirst for a relationship. Her thirst for true worship. Yet this conversation was not easy. It required the "courage both in speaking and in listening." Just as the synodal dialogue called us to do. It helped us to adopt "a relational way of viewing the world, which then becomes a form of shared knowledge, vision through the eyes of another and a shared vision of all that exists."

#### b. Our Communal Discernment

1. *Distribute following statements to all in small group (Ch. 11, Convergence b,c,d; Ch 12, Convergence c). Read aloud in plenary once. Then ask all to read silently. As they read silently, ask them to underline words or phrases where they think the clergy community of Jaro including the bishop is lacking in witness and ministry.*

"In a Synodal Church, ordained ministers are called to live their service to the people of God in a disposition of proximity to people, welcoming and listening to all, while cultivating a deep personal spirituality and a life of prayer. Above all they are required to reconsider the exercise of authority, modeling it upon Jesus." (Synod Session 1, Oct '23 Synthesis Report, Ch. 11, Convergence b)

“One obstacle to ministry and mission is clericalism. Clericalism stems from a misunderstanding of the divine call, viewing it more as a privilege than a service, and manifesting itself in the exercise of power and in a worldly manner that refuses to allow itself to be accountable. The distortion of priestly vocation needs to be challenged from the earliest stages of formation by ensuring close contact with the People of God through concrete service-learning experiences among those in need. The exercise of priestly ministry today cannot be conceived of except in harmony with the bishop and the presbyterate, and in profound communion with other ministries and charisms.” (*Synod Session 1, Oct '23 Synod Synthesis Report, Ch. 11, Convergence c*)

“In order to exercise ordained ministry in a context of co-responsibility, it is necessary to be aware of one’s capacities and limitations.” (*Synod Session 1, Oct '23 Synthesis Report, Ch. 11, Convergence d*)

“The bishop has an indispensable role in vivifying and animating the synodal process in the local church, promoting the mutuality. The conviction with which the bishop himself adopts a synodal approach and style by which he exercises authority will influence decisively how priests, lay, religious participate in the synodal process. The Bishop is called to be an example of synodality for all.” (*Synod Session 1, Oct '23 Synthesis Report, Ch. 12, Convergence c*)

2. *Main facilitator gives instructions for the next step, as follows. In your small groups, read aloud these phrases or statement where you perceive the clergy of Jaro lacking in witness and ministry. Take turns reading, with silence in between like a meditative reading and reflection. Small groups start. Some share in plenary?*
3. *Main facilitator instructs for the next step: What is God telling us as a clergy community including the bishop, with these realities in our lives that bother us? Where is the Spirit leading us?*
4. *Prayer Ritual (15 min)*  
Perhaps Jesus also calls us in a deeper dialogue with him about our reflection. Let’s take a moment to come to the well to listen more deeply to our inner heart and hear what Jesus wants to tell us about what we shared. After a few minutes of silence, each one is invited to dip their fingers in the water and make the sign of the cross as they leave the well.  
Let all who are thirsty <https://youtu.be/HdFeKkuuCU>
5. *Ask people to continue Conversation in the Spirit. (75 min) 1:30-2:45*  
*Post question again. repeat the question (projected): “What is God telling us as a clergy community, with these realities in our lives that bother us? Where is the Spirit leading us? What does the Spirit want us to be and to do?” Conversation in the Spirit starts. Main facilitator gives main steps and reminders. Remember to ask for reporter to share answers in plenary later or bring out QR codes at the END of the sharing and report placed there to project and all can read silently.*
6. *Plenary Sharing (invite a few?) or silent reflection with music (if projecting responses from small groups).*

## 5. “STAY WITH THEM”

### a. **Read John 4:39-42 (solo reading, then all repeat verse 42 twice)**

The encounter transformed the woman to becoming a witness because as she has expressed, “He told me everything I did.” She discovered who she is through him. She found who she can still become through this encounter. But she did not only do it through speaking about him. Jesus stayed with them; with her people. Jesus and the Samaritan woman together in mission.

### b. **Synodal Leadership: Insights coming from Synod Session in Rome**

### c. **Common Action**

*Small group sharing: four options below – can be distributed to different groups – a copy per person on the number assigned to the group. (30 min)*

- 1) “After all we have shared and listened to, how can we become a more synodal clergy community?”
- 2) “Transparency and a culture of accountability are of crucial importance for us to move forward in building a synodal church” (*Synod Session 1, Oct '23 Ch. 11, Proposal k*). How can we strengthen a culture of transparency and accountability? What structures and processes can we introduce or build up?
- 3) “On a case-to-case basis, and in accordance with the context, the possibility should be considered of re-inserting priests who have left the ministry in pastoral services that recognize their formation and experience. (*Synod Session 1, Oct '23, Ch. 11, Proposal l*).” If we consider this for some priests on a ‘case-to-case basis’ and depending on the context, how can we begin re-inserting them?
- 4) “A thorough review of formation for the ordained in view of the missionary and synodal dimensions of the Church is called for. This means also reviewing the Ratio fundamentalis that determines how formation is structured.” (*Synod Session 1, Oct '23, Ch. 11, Proposal j*). How can seminary and ongoing formation of the clergy adopt a more synodal style?

## **6. Closing Remarks**

### **Closing Prayer Ritual**

Each one gets a cup from the well, gather water and look for a partner to exchange water with; briefly they share on what ‘water’ were they able to drink today. Then they pray for one another.

*Play (suggested) Tubig ng Buhay <https://youtu.be/52-GicR6FNU> to close.*

**Appendix 2**  
**SALYA!**  
*Crossing Over to the Other Side (Matthew 14:13-36)*

*Goals:*

- *To give space to the local churches/dioceses to contribute to the continuing synodal process through their reflection on some aspects of the Synthesis Report (SR) coming from the 10-point Guideline from the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops (GSSB)*
- *To continue to grow in synodality as they discern on and respond to the different issues presented in the SR and experienced in their local areas*

*Process:*

- *May be given as a one-day reflection session (8 hours) or several shorter sessions*
- *Ensure participation: clergy, religious, lay and sectoral representatives especially (although not exclusively) the sectors we have reached out to last Oct 2021-2022 synodal consultations; balancing between clergy and lay, church and (social) sectors*
- *Diocesan Synod Teams must have read the SR (especially the chapters mentioned below) and have it at hand (or downloaded in participants' gadgets) when giving this session for easy reference*
- *All sharing must be done in small groups with plenary reporting and summary of all responses to all sharing questions be forwarded to the National Synod Team as soon as you can (April 15 deadline) as this will be a part of the national report to the GSSB*

**1. Introduction**

**2. Opening Prayer Procession:**

*Crucifix comes in with Bible and candle, accompanied by a song on Synodality. Opening Prayer.*

**3. COMMUNION ENCOUNTERS**

**a. Matthew 14:13-21 (Alternate Reading)**

After hearing about the death of John, Jesus decided to cross the lake to be in solitude. And yet his grief brought him to those who were also in need of new life. The multiplication of the loaves mirrors our communion encounters with others in this synodal journey. Despite our limitations and burdens, we are continually being **CROSSED OVER** to meet our brothers and sisters and to listen to them. In the past years, since we have started our synodal consultations, that “Church may truly become a “conversation” (cf. *Ecclesiam Suam* 67) within itself and with the world, walking side by side with every human being in the style of Jesus.” Such “conversations,” transformed us and are communion encounters that have continually multiplied. Our first encounters developed into new initiatives, local resources, and good practices. *Give some examples from OTHER dioceses. For example, one diocese started a regular radio program that listens and addresses questions of people about the church or a local parish initiated a retreat for youth from the LGBTQ.*

**b. Reflection Question**

Let us reflect on #6 of the GSSB 10-point Guideline Towards Synod 2024: “6. *Identify and share 2 or 3 local resources and initiatives or good practices of synodality that would be interesting for others to know about.*”

In what way/s did our synodal experience multiply? What programs/activities/ communion encounters have developed inspired by the synodal consultations? (local resources/ initiatives/good practices)

*Small group sharing, then Plenary Sharing  
(from those shared in the small group, choose 1 that the group wishes to report)*

**c. Prayer**

*Invite everyone to stand up and read verse 20 together.*

“They all ate and were satisfied, and they picked up the fragments left over— twelve wicker baskets full.” *Silence.*

Lord, you have indeed multiplied our communion encounters to allow us to live synodality as a way of life. May it continue to bear fruit in us. Amen.

Song

**4. CONVERSION THROUGH PARTICIPATION**

**a. Matthew 14:22-33 (Role Reading)**

*Role Reading. Assign participants to take the role of narrator, Jesus, Peter, Disciples)*

From the crowd, Jesus takes his disciples alone with him to pray. It is one of many intimate moments the disciples have with Jesus. After his prayer, Jesus CROSSES OVER to the disciples by walking on the water to the boat where they were. He invites Peter to do the same; to walk on the water and cross over to him. Let us prayerfully reflect on this encounter.

*Invite participants to express a statement between Jesus and Peter that speaks to them. They will read it prayerfully two times allowing moments of silence in between the readings.*

Silence

**b. Reflection Question/s**

Let us reflect on #5 of the GSSB 10-point Guideline Towards Synod 2024: “#5. From among the “Questions to be addressed”, choose 1 or 2 topics to be explored in relation to local issues and have them drawn up by a commission of theologians, canonists and pastoral leaders” and #7 of the GSSB 10-pt Guideline towards Synod 2024: “#7: How can we deepen the definition and understanding of synodality in our cultural context? Using Synthesis Report No. 1 “Synodality: Experience and Understanding” as a starting point, deepen understanding of synodality from one’s own context and propose images of synodality that can make sense in the local culture.” *Project on LCD.*

As much as our communion encounters enrich us, we are challenged by synodality even more towards authentic participation of all in “building up the common good and defending the dignity of life” and experience a “prayer open to participation, a discernment lived together, and a missionary energy that arises from sharing and that radiates as service.” Like Peter crossing towards Jesus, there are “strong winds” and personal limitations that keep us.

We ask ourselves,

To respond to #7 of the 10-point Guideline

1. What structures (leadership, PPC, councils) and relationships (clergy and lay, bishop and clergy, youth and adults, mandated orgs and BECs) need conversion? *(small group sharing, then plenary reporting)*
2. What cultural values and practices can deepen or respond to conversion needs shared above? *(use Conversation in the Spirit, then plenary reporting after)*

We ask ourselves to respond to #5 of the 10-point Guideline:

1. Among the four open questions/issues mentioned in Chapter 16,g - “matters of identity and sexuality, the end of life, complicated marital situations, ethical issues related to artificial intelligence” and also opening the diaconate for women in Chapter 9,j - which one affects us most in our diocese/parish? *Divide the group into 5 topics according to interest.*
2. Read the chapter assigned to you (Chapter 16) for “matters of identity and sexuality, the end of life, complicated marital situations, ethical issues related to artificial intelligence” especially letter g and chapter 9 for women deacons, especially letter j.

Share in small groups after reading the chapter: What is one story/experience that comes to you? How is it informing you about the issue? What questions remain to be addressed regarding this issue. *Small group sharing, then plenary reporting.*

3. After listening to our experiences and questions, where is the Spirit leading us? What does the Spirit of God calling us to be and to do? *Use Conversations in the Spirit Method, then plenary reporting after*

### **c. Prayer: Veneration of the Cross**

Just like Peter, we are all invited to cross towards Jesus. We find limitations and many more hurdles along the way of synodality. It happens when we take the first step towards him.

*The cross is laid on the floor as people are invited to take some moments to venerate Jesus on the cross. Play instrumental music.*

## **3. CO-RESPONSIBILITY IN MISSION**

### **a. Matthew 14: 34-36**

Echo Reading (*one reads and the rest echoes what was read*)

Jesus CROSSES OVER to another town Genesaret and as they reached the shore, people recognized him and spread the news of his coming. Since “synodality is ordered to mission,” we are called to be in “solidarity with those of other religions, convictions and cultures,” avoiding “the risk of self-referentiality and self-preservation” but also risking the loss of identity.

### **b. Reflection Question**

Let us reflect on #2 of the GSSB 10-point Guideline Towards Synod 2024: ‘#2. What can we do locally at parish, diocesan, national and continental levels to continue learning synodality? - Choose 3 priorities from the 20 topics of the Synthesis Report (e.g. 1 for each part of the synthesis). Choose 3 concrete initiatives to implement from the various proposals in the Synthesis that can be applied immediately at local level (see list of possible proposals to put into practice” and #4 of the GSSB 10-pt Guideline towards Synod 2024: #44. How can we involve all the baptised more closely in the synod process (1.m) and how to listen more to those on the periphery (16)? What concrete initiatives can be taken to listen to and consult the poor (4), migrants (5 and 6), young people (1,16,17) and women (9)? What concrete steps can be taken to listen to priests and invite them to participate in the synod experience (1.n +11)?

*Divide the groups to respond to the two items below:*

#2. What can we do locally at parish, diocesan, national and continental levels to continue learning synodality?

- Choose 3 priorities from the 20 topics of the Synthesis Report (e.g. 1 for each part of the synthesis). Choose 3 concrete initiatives to implement from the various proposals in the Synthesis that can be applied immediately at local level (see list of possible proposals to put into practice). Work in small groups; small group sharing, then plenary reporting.

#4. How can we involve all the baptised more closely in the synod process (1.m) and how to listen more to those on the periphery (16)?

- What concrete initiatives can be taken to listen to and consult the poor (4), migrants (5 and 6), young people (1, b & o, 16, e and 17) and women (9)?
- What concrete steps can be taken to listen to priests and invite them to participate in the synod experience (1.n +11)?

*Divide groups into the 5 topics for small group sharing, then plenary reporting.*

**c. Prayer Procession of the Cross to the church**

We end by embodying our desire. A Church that radiates communion. A church that listens and discerns together. A church that walks with humanity towards the common good.

*As we sing Isang Panginoon, Isang Katawan, take the cross in front of the altar where all participants are gathered around in a circle and proceed to the church if nearby or simply go outside of the hall to the open space.*

**4. Closing Remarks and Blessing**

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*Appendix 3*  
*Toward an Inclusive and More Compassionate and Merciful Church*

**A Report of the Philippine Synodal Discerning Team on  
“Complicated Marital Situations”**

The Members of the Discernment Team:

Victoria N. Apuan, PhD; Percy Juan Bacani, MJ, STL; Euginius Cañete, MJ, JCL; Lenifer Carlos, MA; Conception Liza V. Corotan, PhD; Emmanuel S. de Guzman, PhD; Maria Isabel Fara Descallar; Honorable Maria Lourdes C. Gutierrez; RJ Moriones; Maria Gracia Olorga, PhD; Christiane Ong, MA; Marites Rano Redoña, PhD; Melanie Serna Reyes, MSBS, JCL; Myrna Joyce Sanchez, PhD; Rolando Tuazon, CM, PhD/SThD

From February to April 2024, the discernment team met six times via Zoom and face-to-face. Our discernment process followed the *see-discern-act-celebrate*. In the “*see*” step, we consulted published research studies on the state of divorce, separation, annulment, remarriage, cohabitation, and solo households (or single parents) in the Philippines. To give flesh to the “facts and figures,” we conversed with selected individuals through a written questionnaire and online interviews concerning their struggles and hopes, and most especially their experiences with the Church, positively and negatively, as an institution, as communities, or through its ministries and ministers. In the second step of “*discern*”, we listened closely to what people were saying to us, as a team, and reflected affirmatively and critically on the Church, its teachings, theologies, moral and ethical orientations, and pastoral responses to situations of difficult married life. In the “*act*” step, ensuing from the first two steps, we explored the concrete ways by which the Filipino Church can respond to people in diverse marital relationships in a safe environment that is more welcoming, compassionate, and just, toward their “reinstatement” in the Church. We ended the process in “*celebration*” by sharing our insights and learnings from the entire process of discernment and with a prayer of gratitude.

The longer essay of the report consists of the following parts.

- I. Some Facts and Trends on “Complicated Marital Situations” in the Philippines
- II. Lights and Shadows: The Church as Seen from the Rough Grounds of Difficult Married Life (Responses of Twenty-Four Conversation Partners)
- III. Reflections on the Christian Faith, Church Teachings, Pastoral Programs, and Contemporary Theological and Moral/Ethical Perspectives: *From “Complicated” to “Diverse” Marital Situations*
  - a. Pathways of “Casting Off”
  - b. Pathways of “Reinstatement”
- IV. Points of Convergence and Matters for Consideration
- V. Recommendations
- VI. Learnings from the Discernment Process and Thanksgiving Prayer

This paper contains only *Parts IV and V* since these are the expected output of the National Synodal Team. The prayer of Part VI serves as a conclusion. The National Team may request for the longer essay of 20+ pages, after April 30, 2024.

## Points of Convergence

Considering the findings of research studies, our interviews with 24 conversation partners, and our reflections in faith, our team has listened humbly and dialogued constructively, and now we speak with courage with these points of agreement.

- 1) Instead of referring to the situations of people who are divorced, remarried, separated, cohabiting, and solo parents as “complicated” and as victims to be pitied or whose problems are to be solved by us, we value them as people in “diverse marital situations” who are survivors and resource persons with a lot of goodness in them to make their lives meaningful with a purpose in new and varied states of relationships. Despite the crises they went through, they remain committed to contributing to the life and mission of the Church. They do not want to feel rejected, isolated, condemned, or gossiped about. They desire acceptance, recognition, and belonging in a safe and welcoming Filipino community of Jesus’ disciples.
- 2) By changing our ethical perspectives from treating these cases as “complicated” to “diverse” situations, we highlight the positive dimension of their experiences in a synodal vision of an inclusive Church that acknowledges diversity and heterogeneity rather than exclusion and homogeneity of living the faith. This shift in orientation is in line with the call of Pope Francis in *Amoris Laetitia* to find ways of “reinstatement” and not of “casting off” in our responses to diverse marital situations. Using “diverse marital situation” is to see their experience from below or from the “rough grounds”, a “bottom-up” approach yet without losing an eye for the rich heritage of the Church. This will have repercussions for our pastoral endeavors, educational and formation programs, and the rethinking of theologies to make the Church hospitable to varied faith experiences and expressions.
- 3) The pastoral posture and perspective of the Church to couples in diverse situations starts with the recognition of their concrete situations and not with the ideals that are imposed on them. The law of graduality starts with where the couples are, their human reality and social conditions, and accompanying them in their journey of faith.
- 4) The rule of love and mercy, which is the spirit of the law, becomes the pastoral framework in dealing with those in diverse marital situations. The laws, norms, and ideals taught by the Church do not serve as burdens but appeal for people to give themselves in greater commitment to love and service.
- 5) The perspective of compassion makes us see the presence of God even in situations that are deemed “irregular” by the Church’s received tradition. Being in a diverse marital situation is not all about negative realities. There are many things that we could learn from their struggle, joys, and pains.
- 6) It is important that couples who enter a relationship of love first recognize their dignity as a person and not rely upon and be dependent on the partner’s approval and acceptance. They come to the relationship not from a position of want

(complementarity) but from a position of fullness (mutuality). Complementarity is based on biological differences and gender stereotypes. Mutuality rests on the principle that people have God-given gifts and abilities that are shared with others. Their relationship is not according to fixed gender roles but based on different charisms for the benefit of both partners which will help them grow as better persons and Christians.

### **Matters for Consideration**

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 "not uphold its letter, but its Spirit; not ideas, but people; not formulas, but the free availability of God's love and forgiveness" (Pope Francis, Address on the Conclusion of the Synod of Bishops on the Family, 2015).

### **Recommendations**

From our points of agreement and matters for consideration, we submit the following recommendations to the Filipino Church.

- 1) The strengthening and development of pastoral programs for the youth, for young professionals, and for those in vulnerable situations to appreciate profoundly the value of friendship, marriage, commitment, and total self-giving. Special care should be given to teenage mothers and fathers.
- 2) Professionally trained counselors and counseling centers be provided in parishes or dioceses not only for "regular" couples and families but also for people in diverse situations, such as for divorcees, remarried, separated, live-in partners, solo parents, and teens in cohabiting relationships.
- 3) Create support systems for psychological and spiritual growth for people in diverse marital situations, such as psychosocial and human development seminars, bible reflections and sharing, reformatted faith-formation sessions that address their situations, and simple gatherings in meals, devotions, and common prayer.
- 4) Encourage more dioceses and parishes to make the sacrament of marriage accessible and affordable for couples in diverse situations as well as the process of annulment and legal separation in the Church for those in irregular unions or who are cohabiting while their marriage is still deemed valid and binding.

- 5) Accompany people in their education of conscience so that they may be able to discern God's will and better understand the Church's teachings and laws that apply to their unique condition of life and relationship.
- 6) Pastoral accompaniment includes formative programs for the whole parish community and families on the beauty and value of marriage, which is not the "fairy tale" idea of a "perfect" marriage, but rather one that includes their suffering and challenges.
- 7) *Amoris Laetitia* and other Church teachings on marriage and family life can be integrated into the study curriculum of the candidates for the ordained presbyteral ministry and consecrated life, as well as in theology courses in Catholic schools and universities, and in the formation programs for basic ecclesial communities, catechists, pastoral workers, and lay organizations. Also, provide skills training to them on how to accompany people in diverse marital and family situations.
- 8) Priests, religious sisters, and lay leaders or groups are to be encouraged to visit people in diverse marital situations in their homes or neighborhoods, conduct surveys or needs assessment process and hold individual or group consultations to gain a deeper understanding of the real-life circumstances of families. This proactive approach will enable the parish to address various needs and cultivate a more supportive community, particularly for families having strenuous relationships.
- 9) The access to Holy Communion to couples and individuals in diverse family situations will be based on the exercise of a free and informed conscience that is the fruit of discernment.
- 10) Guided by the document *Fiducia Supplicans*, persons in diverse marital situations may be allowed to receive the pastoral blessings of the Church to encourage them to grow more in faith and hope.
- 11) Offspring of divorcees, remarried, separated, cohabiting, and solo parents should not be victims and outcasts. They should be allowed to receive the sacrament of baptism and other sacraments of the Church and to study in Catholic-run schools.
- 12) Encourage, allow, and affirm people from diverse marital situations, with their gifts and capabilities, to be involved in church activities and even take leadership positions in parish and diocesan ministries, organizations, movements, and basic ecclesial communities.
- 13) There is a need for ongoing and updated training on pastoral care for priests, religious sisters, pastoral workers, and the laity, in general, to become more understanding, accepting, and loving of people in diverse marital situations, rather than being judgmental, condemnatory, prejudicial, and marginalizing.

- 14) Strengthen the life of prayer and spirituality as preventive and curative of situations of marriage vis-à-vis the many challenges couples and family face in their lives.
- 15) The Church at all various levels will have to find more creative ways to reach out to the unchurched, especially the poor and marginalized in the Church and society, who may be facing multifaceted challenges in married and family life.

### **Prayer of Thanksgiving**

Most loving God,

We come before You in praise and thanksgiving for the gift of synodality even in the experience of families and couples in diverse situations. We are thankful for the guidance and support You provide, through the humble instrumentality of Your Church – the community of Jesus’ disciples – as we navigate through these challenges and strive to find the path to walk together as a welcoming community according to the boundless generosity of God’s mercy.

You have blessed us with the strength and courage to seek answers and solutions that are faithful to Jesus of Nazareth and the Church, and relevant to the signs of the times. We thank You for allowing us to discover your face and will through the struggles and hopes of people in diverse situations. We ask forgiveness from them for the times we contributed to their pains because of our indifference, prejudices, or patronizing attitudes.

Help us to continue to draw on Your wisdom as we journey together with families with many faces yet as one big family of the Triune God. Make us vulnerable as the Good Samaritan so that we can enter the lives of people who are suffering and discover your face and will through them.

Give us the patience and kindness to listen to each other with open hearts and minds, and to support one another and the people in diverse marital situations with grace and sensitivity to the workings of the Spirit so that we may act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with You.

We thank You for the gift of communion, mission, and participation, and pray that You continue to guide us in our relationships and decisions. May we always seek to follow Your desire and walk in Your light, even in the darkest circumstances of our lives.

We offer this prayer of thanksgiving to You, our loving God, in the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ, with the love and strength of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

**Appendix 4**  
**THE PROMISES AND PERILS OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE**  
**AI Discerning Team- Synodal Consultation on Controversial Issues**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**1. Artificial Intelligence in Context**

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has been around since the 1950s, but it came to notable attention with the launch of ChatGPT and other advanced systems. AI has the potential to drive economic growth, technological innovation, and geopolitical influence. Across the globe, governments are vying to establish their dominance in the field of AI. In the Philippines, however, AI is still in its early stages of development. The Philippine government introduced the National Artificial Intelligence Roadmap in 2021, which aims to position the Philippines as a central hub for AI within the ASEAN region. It delineates strategic objectives and assigns roles and responsibilities to various stakeholders, including the government, industry, and academia.

What is AI? Copilot, an AI tool by Microsoft, provides this answer. **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** refers to computer systems capable of performing tasks that historically required human intelligence. These tasks include recognizing speech, making decisions, and identifying patterns. AI encompasses various technologies, such as **machine learning**, **deep learning**, and **natural language processing (NLP)**.

AI scholars have often debated the definition of artificial intelligence. ChatGPT cites “Artificial Intelligence: A Modern Approach”, stating, "Artificial Intelligence is the study of agents that perceive the environment and take actions that maximize their chance of successfully achieving their goals."(Russell & Norvig, 2021) This notion of AI is what the book calls the standard model. Nevertheless, in 1955, John McCarthy et al. proposed “the Dartmouth summer research project on artificial intelligence,” the paper where the term “Artificial Intelligence” was first officially used. The project was to find a way to “make machines use language, form abstractions and concepts, solve kinds of problems now reserved for humans, and improve themselves.” (McCarthy et al., n.d.) From then on, the AI system is the program that solves problems or pursues its objectives based on the instructions written in it or is made to learn. In recent years, a milestone in AI development has been propelled by machine learning, deep learning (utilizing massive amounts of data), neural nets, and natural language processing.

Different applications of artificial intelligence bring tremendous changes to our society and economy on a global scale. The following are the notable applications and uses of AI: self-driving cars (Ex., Tesla, Waymo), translation (Ex., Google translate), digital assistants (Siri, Google Assistant, Alexa), facial recognition, medicine (diagnostics, disease detection, etc.), game playing (Deep Blue and AlphaGo), chatbots (Bing, Gemini), generating texts, images and videos (Midjourney, Sora). AI has opened massive opportunities for businesses, big and small. AI is also very useful in transportation systems, such as airlines, trains, buses, and terminals. Large data analytics is where AI is also very helpful for banking (plus fraud and laundering detection) and the

study and prediction of climate change. There are now chatbots of different sorts catering to various aspects of life, like love and romance, culture, education, religion, law, and consumer support. Capping all these is ChatGPT, a generative AI developed by OpenAI, because of its natural language processing that capacitates it to engage in a human-like conversation, contextual understanding, creative offerings (like writing a poem, a novel, creating an image from text prompt), multilingual translation capability, scientific research, etc. Indeed, AI has developed amazingly fast, with the accompanying slogan and promise that AI will uplift the standard of living of everyone.

The AI community is actively pursuing the goal of artificial general intelligence (AGI) or human-level AI. Progress in AI suggests that creating a general-purpose AI capable of learning high-quality behavior in any task environment is feasible in the near future.

## **2. AI as a controversial issue in the Church should be examined through a process of collective discernment.**

The Synodal Synthesis Report identified Artificial Intelligence as one of the controversial issues not only in society but in the church (SR16g) and proposes that key institutions should initiate shared discernment on the doctrinal, pastoral, and ethical issues of these controversial matters and develop a reflection in the light of the Word of God, Church teaching, theological reflection and an appreciation of the synodal experience. Shared discernment entails thorough discussions among experts with diverse skills and backgrounds within an institutional framework that safeguards confidentiality and encourages open dialogue.

To answer the call of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) National Synodal team, the AI Discerning Team was constituted. Coming together as co-discerners, emboldened by the Spirit, the group explored horizons, expanded terrains, and examined future possibilities to enrich our understanding of our shared realities.

### **Discerning Sessions:**

#### **Zoom Meetings**

February 12, 2023

February 23, 2024

March 4, 2024

March 8, 2024

#### **Smaller in-person meetings**

#### **March 15 In-person meeting**

### **3. The Promises and Perils of AI**

Our collective discernment led us to understand AI has the potential to bring about significant positive impacts, such as increased efficiency, innovation, and economic growth. However, it also poses risks and challenges, including job displacement, ethical concerns, and potential biases in decision-making algorithms. The group acknowledges the difference between weak AIs, which

are domain-specific technologies (e.g., educational tools, art generators, etc.), and hypothesized systems that could supposedly possess the capacities of humans in most, if not all, cognitive aspects, also known as strong AIs (Searle, 1980), understanding that the two espouse different types of ethical worries. We recognize the need to carefully assess and mitigate these risks while maximizing the benefits of AI for society. It is noteworthy to point out that AI implications create broad spheres of impact, and some concerns are present in all categories.

#### **4. AI in the Context of the Church**

The group affirms the importance of consistently caring for vulnerable populations in the development and deployment of AI technologies. Among them are the poor, children, women, indigenous groups, migrants, and persons with disabilities. The ethical principles and values of the Church should guide AI initiatives to ensure that they prioritize the common good and promote human dignity, particularly for marginalized and disadvantaged groups. It remains crucial that these AI realities be examined through the lens of our shared values and Church teachings. Our group has found common ground and identified areas where church teachings align with the ethical considerations posed by AI.

#### **5. Implications on the Human Person, Values, and Community**

The drastic changes brought by scientific and technological revolutions and the ongoing innovations of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century have made life even more complex and confusing. Humanity stands on an unstable ground wherein reality and truth can hardly be established. As information has become more accessible and linkages have been established and strengthened, it is all the more that plurality, relativism, and division are felt. The complexity of times has propelled humanity to innovate and adopt measures that would facilitate human activities. The greatest challenge then would be how human beings can be authentic in the onslaught of dehumanizing structures.

AI development will raise profound questions on three categories: (1) the concept of the human person, (2) values, human flourishing, and (3) community relationships.

**First category:** Does AI pose a challenge to authenticity? Does AI represent a seamless extension of human capabilities or is it a departure from human creativity as designed by God? Do AI technologies challenge or complement theological perspectives on human identity and purpose?

**Second category:** What guidance do religious teachings offer in ensuring that AI is developed responsibly? Can AI be aligned with religious goals of promoting well-being and social justice?

**Third category:** Can AI promote authentic human relationships (ecclesial community)? How might AI technologies impact the way communities gather, worship, and interact? Will they enhance or undermine our sense of belonging toward spiritual growth? What safeguards need to be in place to ensure that AI development is aligned with religious and ethical standards?

Regarding the first category, the group unanimously agreed that AI does not fundamentally challenge human authenticity, as the essence of the human person remains unique despite technological advancements. While AI may augment human capabilities, its integration into daily

life could reshape our perspectives on goals and their achievement. The belief that humans are created in the image and likeness of God forms the core of our identity, a depth that AI cannot penetrate.

As to the second category, we affirm as children of God, we uphold Christian values such as human dignity, moral agency, responsible stewardship, and equality, which are integral to AI development. While AI can contribute to our goals of well-being and social justice, it's crucial to approach its utilization with caution and care to mitigate potential negative impacts, especially since complex technologies may possess a certain degree of autonomy.

Concerning the third category, we acknowledge that while AI offers technical benefits, it inherently lacks the depth, empathy, and moral intuition necessary for genuine human connections. Recognizing these limitations and avoiding over-reliance on AI for fostering authentic relationships is crucial. Seeking greater understanding of AI through dialogue and interaction with experts and stakeholders is essential before imposing restrictions, guided by the principle of responsible stewardship.

The AI Discerning Group emphasizes the importance of reflecting on these implications and integrating ethical considerations into AI development and deployment strategies.

## **6. Integration of AI in the Church**

To remain relevant in a rapidly evolving technological landscape, the group advocates for the integration of AI into Church practices to enhance communication, outreach, pastoral care, and educational initiatives within the Church. Suggested proposals include **EthicsEduClergy** (integrating AI literacy, including the ethical implications of advanced systems, into the seminary curricula), **FaithHarmonyAI** (the use of AI platforms to facilitate the interfaith dialogue between religious communities), **Energy Audit or Green Accreditation** (use of AI technologies to monitor and manage the environmental impact of church activities for eco stewardship and responsible use of resources), **Divinnovate: Connecting Fides et Techne** (Investing on AI technologies to enhance the accessibility of the Church), **DigiDiscern Retreats** (immersive 4D retreats for deeper reflection on faith and life decisions), and **Animating the Gospel** (interactive technologies for a more meaningful engagement of the faithful).

The group is aware that the implementation of these guidelines faces challenges such as financial constraints, technological infrastructure, cultural sensitivity issues, data security, and privacy concerns. Therefore, their implementation requires careful deliberation and thoughtful reflection.

Some of these proposals may challenge traditional pastoral practices in ways that may be considered unconventional and unsettling. However, they also hold the potential for the Church to expand its mission, increase participation, and foster communion within the community.

## **7. Regulation and Oversight**

Considering the rapid advancement and inherent risks and uncertainties associated with AI, we advocate for oversight regulation by expert groups and stakeholders. This regulation is crucial to ensure the safe and responsible development and utilization of AI, addressing societal and ethical concerns while aligning AI goals constructively with the mission of the church.

## **8. AI as an Ongoing Conversation**

As AI technology continues to evolve, our group recognizes that AI will be 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.

## 9. Other Concerns on Strong AI

**9.1 Ethical Concerns:** AI attaining sentience raises ethical questions regarding the treatment and responsibilities associated with sentient beings.

**9.2 Religious Interpretation:** The assertion that the AI achieved personhood based on religious beliefs rather than scientific evidence raises questions about the intersection of religion and technology.

**9.3 Anthropomorphism:** Google's warning against anthropomorphizing AI models suggests caution in attributing human-like qualities to machines, as it may lead to false assumptions about their capabilities and intentions.

**9.4 Definition of Consciousness:** The debate over whether AI systems can achieve consciousness highlights ongoing philosophical and scientific discussions about the nature of consciousness and its relationship to artificial intelligence.

**9.5. Impact on Society:** The potential implications of AI achieving personhood, including its effects on social dynamics, labor markets, and moral considerations, warrant further exploration and discussion.

**10. Recommendation:** It is crucial to adhere to fundamental ethical principles to advance AI technology, focusing on transparency, inclusivity, accountability, impartiality, reliability, and security. Prioritizing the protection of human dignity and rights, it's essential to draw from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and ensure that AI serves both humanity and the environment. To implement these principles effectively, it's recommended to inform users about AI and their various points of interaction, utilize AI for empowerment, and incorporate AI into environmental conservation efforts. Additionally, considering the potential dignity and worth of AI entities should prompt further contemplation within the Catholic Church.

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## **Appendix 5**

### **A Love as Expansive as God**

### **Position Paper on the LGBTQI+ in the Catholic Church**

#### **1. Introduction: Our Process and The LGBTQI+ Persons' Narratives as the Starting Point**

LGBTQI+ people have always played an important role in the life of the Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines. LGBTQI+ Catholics bear witness to a creative faith that seeks fullness of life amidst hurtful marginalization in church and society.

During the synodal discussion, we gathered from different contexts and told our stories to one another. The LGBTQI+ members of our group arise from both religious and secular contexts. Several were educated and worked in Catholic institutions; others spent time in seminary; and still others are active in ministry after coming out queer. It is for this reason that even among queer members, a diversity of perspectives on the question of ministries to LGBTQI+ persons persists. Some affirm the Church's normative language; others maintain a critical posture. However, all endeavor to speak from within the breadth of Catholic experience and theological discourse.

Arising from different gender identities and sexual orientations, different levels of relationships with the institutional Church, and different ways of being faithful to God, we entered the process with the conviction of seriously listening to LGBTQI+ members, affirming that their stories have often been left out of official church narratives. We engaged in dialogue in the hope of coming to a shared understanding, to discern the Spirit's movement on this controversial issue. There were moments of convergence, as well as moments of divergence in terms of how to proceed.

Prayerfully reflecting on the written testimonies of the queer members in the group, the silence allowed space for new perspectives to inform our own. For those who identify as LGBTQI+, personal stories offer an important strategy to both affirm one's dignity and expand normative language around sexual ethics and theological anthropology. One queer member highlighted the transformative potency of story-telling in overcoming trauma. Another member—a professional psychologist and straight ally—spoke of the need to support queer folks through the silence imposed on their experiences, not just in the long term but in the here and now. To the extent that pain can disenfranchise, many queer members alluded to a common loss of language, agency, and sense of humanity .

By grounding our synodal process on the lived experiences of LGBTQI+ persons, we observed the recommendation of the Synod Synthesis Report to *“involve people directly affected by the matters under consideration.”* More importantly, these narratives invited straight and cis-folk members to respectfully accompany queer members in a manner that echoed Pope Francis' vision of ministry.

We open this position paper from a posture of welcome, responding to and contributing to the synodal process to address the tensions between LGBTQI+ lived experience and Church teaching in matters of defining identity and sexuality in theological anthropology. We begin by honoring the narratives of our LGBTQI+ members as the starting point of discernment. These members self-identify as *baklang Katoliko*, holding sacred stories that bear witness to lives of creative fidelity and living contradictions. These stories speak of both the enduring pain of marginalization and joy in queer ways of loving. We share these stories as a gesture of hospitality. We affirm that these stories

- Support the Church's vision of a more expansive, grace-filled and creative sense of theology and ministry;
- Offer an opportunity for genuine listening leading to resonance and disagreements; and
- Open pathways to the humanization of all, especially of the LGBTQI+

## 2. From a Place of Pain

We all affirmed that growing up both queer and Catholic implies a negotiation of contradictory cultural, social, and religious norms. Many queer members experienced bullying for displaying atypical behaviors. Some felt a need to hide out of fear; some were made to feel inadequate; some were laughed at and ridiculed, causing self-doubt. Experiences of abuse occurred even in supposedly safe Church spaces like seminaries, parishes, and Catholic lay organizations. Common experiences of rejection by one's families and Church communities cut off queer persons from necessary support systems at critical junctures in their lives.

What stands common to all is the need to name moments of disjuncture, i.e., experienced gaps between one's coming to identity as a queer person within a heteronormative church and theological framework. The disconnect framed our common experience of pain and, as we will articulate at the end of this document, our imaginings of hope and possibility.

The disconnect often experienced in the language used in Church teachings on homosexuality has contributed to the pain for many LGBTQI+ persons and their families. The document "Letter To The Bishops Of The Catholic Church On The Pastoral Care Of Homosexual Persons" from the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith (then the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith) described the LGBTQI+ as "intrinsically disordered." Another 1975 document by the same dicastery writes – "*although the particular inclination of the homosexual person is not a sin, it is a more or less strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil; and thus the inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder.*" Other documents such as a 2005 document from the Congregation for Catholic Education imply that gay people do not have the "affective maturity" to relate "correctly." Having to hear that one is "intrinsically disordered" and that the "inclination of homosexuality" is an "objective disorder," or that one's way of relating to the world is "unholy" and incorrect, over and over again, contributes to the wounding of the soul arising from the feeling of shame and a sense of being "less" of a person, compared to the heterosexual and cis-gendered members of the Catholic church. As one queer member relates in their experience of pain, "for decades, [the Catholic church] has alienated queer and gender-diverse persons of faith. Its wanton condemnation, which it sugarcoats as moralizing, has caused discrimination relegating us as queer people as immoral and not worthy of respect."

## 3. Point of Convergence: Human Dignity of the LGBTQI+ Community

Amidst the pain is joy and hope in the stories shared, and an aspiration to uphold the human dignity of the LGBTQI+ community. There is a sense of wanting to belong, and a sense of finding God in their faith commitment as Catholics. One queer member exposed the transformative

potential of the phrase “*baklang Katoliko*,” juxtaposing two seemingly oppositional concepts. To be queer does not automatically situate one in contradiction with the Roman Catholic Church. There is still a sense of community within the Church, and a sense of belonging with the rest of the people of God, with their time, talents, and treasure finding a home within the body of Christ.

Other queer members, journeying through normative faith, eventually found healing and comfort through the existing language of the Church. It was an experience of God who “wounds but heals” (Job 5: 18). It was like how St. Cyprian uses the analogy of a surgeon expertly using a scalpel: “The wound must be opened and cut and treated by a sterner remedy...Although the sick man, impatient by reason of his pain, cries out, shrieks, and complains, he will give thanks afterwards, when he has experienced good health.”

The stories shared show that there are still spaces where the LGBTQI+ find community and love within the Catholic tradition—in parishes, congregations, educational institutions, and ecclesial communities. Groups such as Courage, Rainbow Catholics Philippines (RCPhil), and the Office of Women and Gender Concerns of the Conference of Major Superiors in the Philippines, while different in approach and understanding of Catholic doctrine and its ethical implications, have been spaces within the Catholic church for the LGBTQI+ to reflect on their identities and what it means to be children of God and part of God’s people, guided by the Holy Spirit.

This longing and belonging in the Catholic church leads to a key point of convergence that was discussed in the synodal process: that all members of the people of God are made in God’s image and likeness, including the LGBTQI+, and looking for the fullness of life and of love in God. As children of God, the LGBTQI+ community seeks flourishing and opportunities to live into their vocations. They experience God through loving relationships with their friends and families. The document of 1986 also affirmed the primacy of personhood, beyond the specificity of one’s SOGIE: “the Church provides a badly needed context for the care of the human person when she refuses to consider the person solely as a “heterosexual” or a “homosexual” and insists that every person has a fundamental identity: the creature of God, and by grace, his child and heir to eternal life”

Pope Francis’s papacy has especially emphasized the dignity of the LGBTQI+ community, beginning with his response to reporters on “who was he to judge if someone is gay and searching for God and has good will”, as well as when he said that “when God looks at a gay person, does he endorse the existence of this person with love, or reject and condemn this person?” We must always consider the person.” The pope also emphasized that the LGBTQI+ community should not be marginalized, but rather integrated into society, and that homosexuality is not a crime, and thus should be decriminalized. The Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith also affirmed that transgender persons can be baptized and serve as godparents, a role that reflects that transgender people can be and are spiritual role models for families and their communities—though this is in tension with a later document calling gender theory and gender-affirming surgery as contrary to human dignity.

The 2014 Synod on the Family Midterm Report acknowledged also the gifts that the LGBTQI+ bring to the people of God: “homosexuals have gifts and qualities to offer to the Christian community. Are we capable of welcoming queer people, guaranteeing them space in our communities? LGBTQI+ persons wish to encounter a Church that offers them a welcoming home. Are our communities capable of providing that home, accepting and valuing their sexual orientation and gender identity (being LGBTQI+ is not mere orientation— it is an identity), without compromising Catholic doctrine on the family and matrimony?”

These gifts and qualities are also found in their relationships: “without denying the moral problems connected to homosexual unions it has to be noted that there are cases in which mutual aid to the point of sacrifice constitutes a precious support in the life of the partners.

Furthermore, the Church pays special attention to the children who live with couples of the same sex, emphasizing that the needs and rights of the little ones must always be given priority.”

That same-sex—or non-normative— relationships can be blessed, as elaborated on last December 2023 by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith in *Fiducia Supplicans*, indicates a marked shift in tone and teaching from an earlier response to a dubium in March 2021 that mentions how God “does not and cannot bless sin.” *Fiducia Supplicans* offers a path by making distinctions between liturgical blessing and pastoral blessings. Pastoral blessings reflect the words and actions of the Lord when he said “It is mercy I desire, not sacrifice” after being questioned by religious leaders on why he was sharing fellowship with sinners and tax collectors, the outcasts of Jewish society in 1st Century Palestine (Mt 9: 13). While he has reiterated the Catholic church’s stance on same sex marriage, “Pope Francis has called for the recognition of civil union laws/[rights] that would provide legal protection for same-sex couples. As part of this recognition, Pope Francis emphasized that gay and lesbian people are ‘children of God and have a right to a family,’ and that ;[n]obody should be thrown out, or be made miserable because of it.”

#### **4. Matters for Consideration: Seeking fullness of Life**

In the course of our conversation, we affirm the potential of queer stories 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 baptized in Christ.

If the Church seeks to be conversant with the world’s concerns, it must engage LGBTQI+ Catholics. To the extent that Filipino culture is very much influenced by Christianity — in this instance Roman Catholic worldviews and beliefs, religious phenomena remains a salient point of consideration for young people—queer or straight—who seek to live meaningful lives.

The Catholic church needs to live more its identity as People of God and Mystical Body of Christ, embracing all its members with love and justice. Having found ways to speak their experiences into existence, queer folks offer hospitality and experience by accompanying the institution through its discernment around human sexuality and gender. As one member eloquently asserted: by remaining in the Church, one engages in a ministry of presence. Belonging in the Body of Christ means as well that the Lord’s invitation to discipleship (Mt 16: 24) to every member of His Body is offered to and expected from LGBTQI+ persons. For after all, the Church’s conviction for LGBTQI+ persons firmly remains, as is for all her members, that approaching Christian perfection is a possibility by following the redemptive path of the Way of the Cross that the Lord walked on.

We reiterate the important role of language: in the area of theological language, a queer member reflected on how LGBTQI+ experiences can both affirm and critique the ways the Church speaks of God in heteronormative norms. One queer member traced the resonance of normative theological language with the realities of queer lives. Others expanded on this by observing how indigenous Filipino worldviews have long transcended the limits of gender-binaries through the figures of *babaylanes*, *asogs*, and other intermediary roles that straddle feminine | masculine spaces, material | spiritual planes. We discern pathways through the limits of existing theological language. Drawing from the social sciences, cultural studies, history, postcolonial, and queer theologies, we affirm the lived realities of LGBTQI+ Catholics as equal interlocutors in the Church’s commitment to synodality.

Other queer members maintain the value of current Catholic sexual ethics. While official teachings seemed harsh and judgmental, they found value for the Catholic faith in their lives. They did not desire to change the Church's teachings out of reverence and of recognizing her authority even if they disagreed with some of them. They journeyed through faith and understanding through timely help that included prayer, other people, the Word of God, the sacraments, catechism, and community life. They realized the sacredness of the gift of sexuality, willfully assent to the teachings of the Church, and through their same sex attraction have found enlightenment and solace in the Church's guidance as a shepherd and not its judge.

Given our diversity of perspectives, we understand synodality to mean patiently journeying with dissent, doubts, and disagreements on matters of faith. Our synodal journey involves listening to the voice of the Spirit in each other - in our divergences arise different paths to discern our fidelity to the Gospel we live and preach.

## **5. Matters for Consideration: Discerning Paths in Creative Fidelity to the Gospel**

As the LGBTQI+ community looks for the fullness of life within the Catholic church, how this happens varies greatly among the LGBTQI+ community. As mentioned above, organizations for the LGBTQI+ within the Catholic church vary greatly in their stances on issues relating to the LGBTQI+ community. As the LGBTQI+ discern what it means to be in relationship with God and others, such discernment can and has led to differing paths.

Some have found that fullness of life in living out the teachings of the church on growing in chastity as the universal vocation and fostering genuine relationships. They strive to live out these teachings and values as part of the tradition in the Catholic church, and have found solace in the life they have found. There was a sense of seeking God and the good and hope within the structures, teachings, and community of the Catholic church that is experienced to be deeply joyful and peaceful

Others challenge this understanding of fullness of life, advocating for deepened justice and a change of the teachings on same-sex marriage and/or unions, and that perhaps, there are other ways the LGBTQI+ community can find flourishing within the Catholic church. While there is acknowledgement of the steps above taken by Pope Francis to be more inclusive for the LGBTQI+ in the Catholic church, for other LGBTQI+, these steps have been weakened by the teachings that continue to see same-sex relationships and gender re-assignments as wrong and in error. The pronouncement in the 2014 Synod on the Family midterm report quoted earlier, for example, still has phrases such as "without compromising Catholic doctrine on the family and matrimony" or "without denying the moral problems connected to homosexual unions." The response saying that yes, transgender persons can be baptized and be godparents, as another example, is tempered with the phrase, "if there are no situations in which there is a risk of generating public scandal or disorientation among the faithful." These seeming compromises in the Catholic church's teaching, while being a ray of hope for some, falls short of Christ's embrace in truly caring for the LGBTQI+ community as shepherds with and to each other.

Many, and increasingly younger persons, leave the Catholic church, looking elsewhere for a space where they might find love, acceptance, and affirmation of their wholeness. Their experience of Catholicism and religion have hurt them in many ways. For some of those who left or who are thinking of leaving, it is the experience of a hypocritical church, where its controversies—including the treatment of the LGBTQI+—and sins are swept under the rug rather than confronted and atoned for. One member described the "pain" of departing the Church to heal the wounds she experienced from living a life of contradiction. Silence in itself, as they say, speaks volumes, and alongside the difficulty in putting into words the experiences of the LGBTQI+ community in the Catholic church, also says something to the people who choose to remain within the Catholic church, and therefore must not be ignored. Rather, it is also another voice, albeit a silent one, to be listened to and to pay attention to.

## 6. A Way Forward

The synodal process focused on listening to LGBTQI+ narratives, which will be our foundation for ways moving forward. While the parameters of the process were limited to discuss the complexities of gender, sexuality, and theological anthropology in the church, we raise important considerations that could respond to the needs of the LGBTQI+ community. We hope that these points will be helpful in creating more synodal spaces moving forward - spaces that create the conditions for fullness of life and a more inclusive church.

**First, how do we continue to affirm that the members of the LGBTQI+ community are made in God's image and likeness? How do we continue to affirm our common human dignity along with shared rights and responsibilities as children of God? How can we continue to recognize LGBTQI+ folks as spiritual leaders and models of holiness?** Honoring the dignity of LGBTQI+ as persons, was a theme that surfaced over and over in the conversations.

We resonate with Pope Francis' claim, "who am I to judge?". Even if Pope Francis' gesture of openness is sincere, this cannot be felt in the Catholic church here in the Philippines. We invite the whole church and its clergy to condemn acts of violence against the LGBTQI+ persons and respond to the needs of those whose lives are endangered. We likewise invite the church to protect the dignity of the LGBTQI+ by affirming and protecting their civil rights as citizens of the land as well as members of the People of God in accordance with Catholic social thought.

**Second, how can we accompany each other? Accompaniment is lived not simply through teaching doctrine or telling people what the right or wrong thing to do is, but through affective ways as well.** What forms of guidance can we offer each other? A theme that arose in our synodal conversation lies in the centrality of hospitality in Church life. By our very presence—and commitment to remain in the Church—LGBTQI+ Catholics extend hospitality to the institutional church.

Accompaniment entails genuine solidarity and a willingness to navigate differences with generosity, entering into each other's chaos. As Jesus did on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35), are we able to offer mutual help to each other and learn from each other?

The synthesis report asserts that "the exercise of co-responsibility is essential for synodality and is necessary at all levels of the church." Our conversations were an exercise of co-responsibility in the process of spiritual conversation. We "recognize the importance, not only of the capacity to listen, but also the quality of listening and of the words spoken... Intentionality and focused attention [served as expressions of *respecting, welcoming, and being hospitable to the Other as they are.*" In practicing these principles, we model a way of encountering the Other that evokes the doing of synodality. as we listen more deeply to the Spirit resounding in our experiences and hopefully lead us to accompany each other in creating a more just and inclusive church.

**Lastly, how can we open spaces for discussions and listen to different forms of love? If we are to genuinely believe in love that is as expansive as God, how might we bring more people into this love? How might we create community for and with the LGBTQ community?**

This is an important matter specifically for Catholic educational institutions and seminaries to consider. As some of us have shared in the group, these institutions have become specific sources of pain and trauma for LGBTQI+ Catholics because of the bullying, discrimination, and even sexual abuse that they experience. While these institutions are mandated to teach the Church's teachings on gender and sexuality, how can these spaces uphold the inherent dignity of

LGBTQI+ persons, and foster respect and compassion towards students, teachers, staff, and parents who identify as LGBTQI+? How can these institutions promote synodality in discerning the Church's way forward in accompanying LGBTQI+ persons? How can Catholic educational institutions take on the task of being formation centers through an "interweaving of love and truth"? How can the Church, as a mother and teacher, freely offer guidance on ideas she currently sees as counter to the intrinsic dignity of human persons while simultaneously dialoguing with them? At the same time, how might the Catholic church seriously dialogue with the concepts of sex and gender with other disciplines and organizations that may disagree with the Catholic church's position on sex and gender?

In responding to these questions of creating space, we also ask, in what ways can queer Filipino Catholics expand and contribute to the Catholic church, and how might we affirm and nurture these contributions? We acknowledge the gifts and talents of the queer Filipino Catholics, and how they have enriched the body of Christ with their very selves.

One queer member expressed that "sexuality and affect, which are gender defined, are parts of spirituality and grace. The inclusion of LGBTQ in identity and Christian identity is healing grace." In this sense, synodality can be seen as a healing journey for both the Church and LGBTQI+ persons. Another queer member also mentioned that, despite their angst, they did not hate Christ's Church. They still believe that it will have its own time of transformation, and that they would continue to cherish its radical yet humble beginnings led by Christ and his disciples: a movement to liberate a people from its own oppressors not by force but through a change of heart. The same member also hopes, prays, and trusts that God's "unfathomable divine mercy" will inspire us all: queer laity, the clergy, and every person of faith to be humble, and allow love and mercy to overshadow our prejudiced moralizing against each other.

Still another queer member expressed hope that "this synodality report would become the face of Christ in exploring queers' lives in contradictions toward a life of acceptance, love, and freedom". In finding Christ in the lived experiences of LGBTQI+ persons, another queer member suggested looking at the Ecce Homo (see Jn 19: 5), the Wounded Christ, an image of one in pain that is both tragic and redemptive.

The synodal process, while tentative and difficult, was a space wherein people were able to listen to each other. Will the church be willing to join these conversations in good faith, and not dismiss the process? Do we choose to listen or do we choose to scoff at others and ignore their concerns? Our group encourages others to listen, and to pay attention as an act of fraternal and pastoral generosity and care for and with others, in moving forward together as God's people towards the common good and the Kingdom of God. |

"We want to contribute together to build the Church where everyone feels at home, where no one is excluded. That word of the Gospel that is so important: everyone. Everyone, everyone. There are no first-, second- or third-class Catholics, no. All together. Everyone. It is the Lord's invitation."

Pope Francis, August 26, 2023

## **Appendix 6**

### **Recommendations and Pastoral Programs for End-of-Life Care**

In light of the profound challenges presented by the culture of death and the intricate nature of the end of human life, we, as members of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) National Team on Synodality for the **End-of-Life Pastoral Care Committee**, stand united in our commitment to uphold the sanctity and dignity of every human person.

We recognize that suffering and death are inherent realities of human existence and acknowledge the difficulties in grasping their meaning and purpose. In response, the Church endeavors to listen to the diverse experiences of doubts and fears, sorrows and pains, joys and hopes by recognizing the urgent need to address these challenges across all stages of human life.

We emphasize the importance of proactive support before, during, and after the death of individuals, particularly those experiencing depression, suicide victims, HIV patients, those facing systematic oppression, and the terminally ill. We also recognize the need to provide pastoral care to the affected families and other members of the community.

Guided by a holistic approach, we propose the following recommendations and pastoral programs, recognizing the shared values we hold with the people of God, particularly those affected by these issues.

#### **1. Prevention**

Recognizing the importance of proactive support, we emphasize the significance of presence and accompaniment to individuals facing crises such as terminal illnesses, mental health struggles, and emotional distress. By fostering a culture of presence and providing both moral and financial support to those in need, we aim to prevent tragic outcomes such as mental and emotional breakdowns and suicides. We approach end-of-life care holistically, recognizing the interconnectedness of physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

## **2. Protection**

Addressing the multidimensional aspects of human suffering, we advocate for comprehensive care encompassing biological, sociological, psychological, economic, political, moral, and spiritual dimensions. We particularly acknowledge spirituality and religion as resilient resources for healing and emphasize the importance of forming individuals in these aspects. As such, we advocate for the adequate formation and training of priests, volunteers, and collaborators in ministering to end-of-life care.

## **3. Inter-diocesan and Interfaith Partnership and beyond (NGOs and GO)**

Recognizing the power of collaboration, we invite you, as representatives of the Church and the people of God, to engage in inter-diocesan collaboration within the Church and across interfaith contexts. We can provide integral and more effective support and resources to those in need by fostering partnerships with governmental, non-governmental, and multi-faith organizations.

## **4. Policy-Making**

We recognize the importance of ethical guidelines to aid pastoral caregivers and medical practitioners in navigating complex end-of-life situations. We acknowledge the need for political and societal frameworks to align with the Church's internal policies, particularly moral and spiritual norms, to avoid potential contradictions in end-of-life care. As such, we advocate for an effective redress mechanism of these policies and for a continuous review of the societal frameworks and policies to ensure coherence with the Gospel values and effectiveness in our approach to end-of-life pastoral care.

## **5. Promotion of Gospel Values**

We remain steadfast in promoting hope, love, and compassion, exemplified by Gospel values amidst the challenges faced in contemporary times. We strive to overcome the difficulties of our time through continued discernment and adherence to these principles.

## **6. Utilization of Modern Platforms**

Acknowledging the power of modern communication platforms, we embrace avenues such as social media and virtual gatherings for evangelization and pastoral care. Initiatives like Zoom healing sessions demonstrate our commitment to reaching those in distress, including those in ICUs and the terminally ill.

## **7. Theology of Suffering**

Drawing upon biblical and theological insights, particularly the redemptive value of suffering, we aim to provide spiritual guidance and support to the faithful grappling with pain and hardship. We also seek to provide theological formation to priests, lay experts, and volunteers in end-of-life care and catechesis to the faithful on the value of suffering in the light of Christ's paschal mystery.

## **8. Rectification and Healing within the Church**

Recognizing that the Church is not immune to human mistakes, we appeal to the Church leadership to promote due process and equal protection of the law to erring clerics and consecrated persons. We seek appropriate canonical and legal sanctions in view of restorative justice for the

perpetrators and attaining justice for the healing of the victims. Moreover, we acknowledge the need to expand pastoral care resources beyond parishes and dioceses. This includes creating support groups and collaborations that foster a culture of empathy and understanding within the Church communities, such as religious organizations and educational institutions with medical, legal, and psychological logistics and facilities.

## **Conclusion**

The challenges surrounding the end of life demand a multifaceted response encompassing prevention, protection, partnership, policy, promotion of Gospel values, utilization of modern platforms, theological insights, and internal healing and rectification within the Church. By embracing these recommendations and pastoral programs, we aim to uphold the sanctity of human life and provide integral and compassionate support to all those in need. We embody the essence of the Christian faith as we steadfastly fulfill our sacred duty as pastoral caregivers and spiritual stewards of both body and soul, respectively.

## **Appendix 7 WOMEN'S DIACONATE POSITION PAPER\***

### **Convergences**

- a) In discerning the issue of whether women should be ordained to the permanent diaconate, we were guided by the following. First, the scholarship of experts in history and theology is crucial but so are the experiences, reflections, and discernment of pastoral animators and leaders who live close to the needs of the world and the Church. Second, while there is evidence of the ordination of women as deacons (Zagano 2018, Vagaggini 2016a&b), a precedent is not important. The Holy Spirit was not working only in the past but continues to work in the present as we discern the signs of the times. If one looks at the Council of Jerusalem, the decision not to require circumcision from Gentile Christians did not have an explicit basis in past practice though it is implied in Jesus' inclusive teaching and practice. Third, a renewed theological anthropology undergirds this discernment: 1) Women and men are made in the likeness of God, and thus both can represent Christ; 2) Women and men equally received the gifts of the Holy Spirit (I Cor 12: 1-11) in Baptism; 3) Women and men are called to be co-responsible in the life and mission of the Church; 4) The principle of communion and inclusivity where each one's charism or gifts are recognized should guide how we discern women and men's roles in the Church.
- b) Machismo or the belief in the superiority of men over women based on certain stereotypes and prejudices remains pervasive and needs to be challenged.
- c) Some would say that the permanent diaconate for women will inhibit men from engaging in church ministries or diminish their active participation. On the contrary, the ordination of women to the diaconate might even motivate men to be more responsible

for the mission of the church. Both women and men need to be open to the direction and guidance of the Spirit toward communion in mission.

d) Ordination of women to the permanent diaconate will allow women to share in the governing (Canon 129), teaching, and sanctifying roles in the Church.

### **Matters for Consideration**

e) The ordination of women as permanent deacons carries the risk of further reinforcing a hierarchical clerical church. Measures should be taken to prevent this.

f) 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.

### **Proposals**

g) In light of a renewed theological anthropology, we recommend that the Church consider ordaining women to the permanent diaconate. The service of women who are already effectively engaged in the diaconal ministry and feel called to become permanent deacons can be further strengthened/magnified by the formal recognition of their leadership by the Church. (cf. Ad Gentes 16)

h) Women's ordination as permanent deacons, however, has to be seen as part of the "synodalization" of the church; the journey toward a more inclusive and participatory church. "New wine must be put into fresh wineskins" (Lk 5:38). Consequently, care should be taken that the formation of deacons is aligned with the vision of a synodal church.

i) The Church's acceptance of women to the permanent diaconate necessarily implies that the Church will provide them the opportunity to exercise the ministry.

j) Included in the ministry of deacons, which must also be accessible to qualified laywomen are the administration of a parish (Canon 517.2) and the ministry of preaching in eucharistic celebrations.

k) To address the machismo culture in the church and the bigger society, education on gender equality and justice is needed in seminaries, parishes, and dioceses.

l) In addition, awareness-raising and continuing education about permanent women deacons should be conducted. We recommend that our survey on women deacons be shared with the Bishops in dioceses/parishes with BECs/Mission stations, to be circulated among their pastoral leaders on or before May 31, 2024.

m) The ordination of women to the permanent diaconate has to be accompanied by a renewed theology of ministry that goes beyond lay-clergy distinction, and instead focuses on the variety of charisms and ministries in the church (Gallardietz 2003).

*\*See attached Appendixes for the theological and pastoral research the group has conducted that led to the above Position Paper.*

**Appendix 8**  
**A Synodal Consultation Meeting with Indigenous Peoples**  
*April 9-10, 2024*  
*Pious XII Catholic Center, Manila*

**Introduction**

The Episcopal Commission on Indigenous Peoples organized the synodal consultation meeting on April 9-10, 2024 at the Pious Catholic Center, Manila. There are 15 delegates, which includes IP leaders (men and women) from Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao, and the Office bearers of the Commission Bishop Val Dimoc, Chairperson, and Tony Abuso, Executive Secretary. The Consultation meeting was conducted by a member from the National Synodal Team, with faculty members from the University of Santo Tomas.

**Basis of the Consultation**

The consultation meeting is based on Paragraph 5n of the Synod Synthesis Report, which says “new paradigms are needed for pastoral engagement with indigenous peoples, taking the form of

a common journey and not an action done to them or for them. Their participation in decision-making processes at all levels can contribute to a more vibrant and missionary Church.” (5n)

## **Approach**

An informal conversation was made as to how to conduct the consultation. Instead of the formalized and structured approach, which starts with questions and parameters for discussions, the IP delegation decided to use the conversation approach, with silence in between, from their own contexts, experiences, and concerns and dreams. The conversation provides the direction of the next phases of conversation. The conversation follows the IP process of discernment, as presented by Bishop Val Dimoc, which constitutes two key elements: 1). Contextual/cultural; and, 2) familial/communal.

## **Convergence:**

1. The voice of the IPs has been consistently muted and even disregarded in the synodal reports.
2. IPs have their own culturally rooted and natural synodal structures and approaches of engaging community participation to pursue common goals, including community decision making processes.
3. Land is life, and life is land. The respect to the land – ancestral domain is the greatest respect and protection being sought by the IPs in the journeying together with the Church.
4. The indigenous beliefs are integral components of embracing the Christian faith (for the IP Christian). For non-Christians, the Indigenous beliefs should be respected as the heart and soul of IP communities.
5. Indigenous peoples are not objects of evangelization. They are subjects of evangelizations too in their own language, terms, and cultures.
6. Parish youth formation programs should be sensitive to IP culture, belief, and practices. IP youth should not be considered merely as participants, but active agents and partners in the planning, decision making, and implementation of youth formation programs.
7. Modernity and secularization are impacting negatively the IPs, the young people in particular.

## **Proposals**

1. Lakbay-ramdam as a pastoral approach with the IPs to ensure that the IP culture, life, and vision are respected and allowed to grow according to their culture and beliefs.
2. A stronger voice of the Church to echo the IP struggle for land and self-determination at the educational and legislative areas, and other platforms.
3. Catholic educational institutions to provide avenues for the professional growth of IPs based on their cultures and beliefs.
4. The Church should establish a personal prelature to the Indigenous peoples.
5. Include IP theology –in the context of the Philippines—as a subject or course in the seminaries.

6. IP apostolate directors should be IPs too or at least sensitive and aware of the IP culture, life, and struggles.