



SYNOD SYNTHESIS CEPAC CONFERENCE



Contributing Archdioceses/ Dioceses:

- Archdiocese of Agana
- Archdiocese of Papeete
- Archdiocese of Samoa – Apia
- Archdiocese of Suva
- Diocese of Chalan Kanoa
- Diocese of Rarotonga
- Diocese of Samoa - Pago Pago
- Diocese of Taiohae Ou Tefenuaenata (Marquises)
- Diocese of Tonga and Niue
- Missio Sui Iuris Funafuti et Tuvalu

We are conscious that the Pacific Ocean gives an identity to the various dioceses of CEPAC. We begin by expressing an appreciation of the Ocean in the creation story. It is our desire to protect this part of God's creation, as the well being of our people depends on the ocean in so many ways. In some of our countries the major threat is the ocean as changes in climate have drastic outcomes for the actual survival of these countries.

We are guided by the Laudato Si as proclaimed by Pope Francis:

GOD'S CREATION

- As previously mentioned, there is a great lack of spiritual feeding, and this is inclusive of having minimum accessibility to places/structures in order to not only hear but be able to calmly and comfortably accept the Holy Spirit (e.g. church facilities, and our environment)
- People tend to forget that our environment, created by God, is a part of the bigger picture. We are all connected, all living things and our surroundings, play a significant role in our spiritual feeding.
- Some of the issues in our church includes financial burdens. Global climate changes can affect our parishioners and their families. For example, the tsunami of 2019, these caused great financial strains within the families due to rebuilding not only their physical structures/homes, but also their faith, as an individual and as a Catholic. When destruction occurs it is normal to question our faith: Was this a punishment? Why didn't God turn the tsunami away from us?

WAYS TO CARE FOR GOD'S CREATION

- Within the Church, we need to be more active and well informed about the significance our global climate by ways of workshops and community outreach programs to educate the Church and community of how global climate changes can affect our way of living, physically, mentally and spiritually.
- Have the leaders and youth of our Diocese work together with government agencies to find ways not only to beautify our island but bring health to our environment by getting everyone involved to sponsor clean-up competitions, or even create ways to invite the community to build not only a healthy church but also a healthy environment.
- We need to ACT and become not only prayer warriors but also become protectors of our environment and our spiritual health. Appreciate God's Word and His Creations.

Care for our Ocean.

According to the material received, it is clear that individuals and groups are very much aware of the prime importance the ocean has played in the lives of our people. It is an understanding of mutual dependence and reciprocity, practiced and handed down from generation to generation. Our people's reliance and dependence on the ocean to provide for our sustenance has always been reflected in our understanding and practice to take only what is required and to give back from what was taken through individual and communal respect and care of the ocean. This understanding is shared by most people and is the platform from which individuals and groups have discussed and shared their views regarding the Care of the Ocean and for the environment.

Deep Sea Mining:

There is a resounding concern over the government favoring deep sea mining. This concern is in light of the understanding that government is heavily in favor of finding ways to revive and drive the economy from within and not have to depend solely on the financial lifeline of the nation, tourism, which collapsed due to the global pandemic, Covid-19. Our people understand and support the need for government to find other ways to stimulate and grow the local economy. Deep Sea Mining has come to the forefront more so within the last 10 years and government is clearly warming up towards it as the new 'golden egg' and answer to an already floundering economy. Everyone wants to see our economy healthy and not have to rely on financial aid from outside, which is what tourism really is, however the push by government towards Deep Sea Mining is bordering too close for comfort on what is crucial to our way of survival. The following are some of the comments shared with regards to Deep Sea Mining.

The summary of people's comments in this document is clearly in support of preservation and protection of our ocean with regards to deep sea mining. At the same time, they are also open to continued dialogue with government agencies and departments, NGO's and environmental experts to forge the best way forward. There is a call for the government to heed accountability and to not exclude or ignore the people when it comes to making big decisions. This generation is largely aware of its responsibility in ensuring future generations enjoy a healthy ocean that will continue to provide. Anything that has the potential to compromise or threaten this position should come under the scrutiny of the people because it's the only ocean we have and because there isn't another Pacific Ocean, as guardians of our ocean, there is a need to be prudent especially if it may result in unsustainability and irreversible damage to the ocean at large.

Commercial Fishing/Purse Seining.

The people have expressed their concern towards large scale fishing, more specifically Purse Seine fishing. This is a real concern because most, if not all inhabited islands outside of Rarotonga rely heavily on catching Tuna and other large ocean fish to supplement what little they have in order to survive. Many people feel that what is received in revenue generated from fishing licensing is grossly disproportionate to what is being taken from the ocean through overfishing or purse seining. There are many people who also disagree with the issuing of fishing licenses to large fishing vessels from other countries to fish in our waters. It would be safe to say that for all inhabited islands in the Pacific, these island communities rely mostly on what the ocean provides for their survival. Another concern is that large fishing vessels in our waters are taking far too much, resulting in fishermen having to risk travelling greater distances from land in the hope of catching enough fish.

Suggestions for what we as faith communities can do in attempting to alleviate the problem of less ocean fish being caught is to promote awareness through taking more seriously sustainable fishing methods and practices on and around the reef such as less use of fishing nets, encourage/revive spear fishing, greater respect and observance for "Reserves" etc.

Care of Nature

Nature and the environment obviously play a crucial role in our survival. Our responsibility in caring for the environment should always be at the forefront of how we exist, especially on our small islands. The Church could do better in bringing about more awareness of this issue through addressing it regularly in church/parish programs and by implementing programs with government agencies and environmental groups.

In conclusion:

We would like the Church to show more interest and support towards surveys of our resources, so that we have data to support the implementation of preservation and conservation policies that will help us care for these resources such as harvesting from land and sea.

For the Church to show more interest and support for the implementation of preservation and conservation policies and platforms. For the Church to promote awareness regarding issues such as pollution of lagoons and waterways and caring for the shoreline.

.....

We now focus on the life of the Church as synthesized from the reports received.

What are difficulties, obstacles, and wounds in the local Church?

There are a lot of difficulties, obstacles and wounds in the local Church, e.g. in general

- Many feel that they are outsiders and not part of the Church: e.g. **Gay and Lesbians**
- **The poor**, because they cannot afford decent clothes are also scorned.
- Some feel unwanted because they are **not members of the ruling clique in the parish**
- New people in the Church feel they cannot help in the Church as these are taken over by **selected families** e.g. the locking of Church doors etc.
- **Lack of priestly compassion** is also noted.
- **The Church needs to listen** to those people whose voices are never heard because they are outside the mainstream in the society
- **The Church should spend time to listen** to the cry of the poor, neglected women, and young. No matter how dull the person is, they have a story to tell. Yes, we have experienced prejudices especially if they belong to other tribes.
- **Persons who are left in the margins** are those very poor and handicapped. Those who are not active and having their own world. Those who are unbaptised, the non-practising, the separated couples, the torn families.

What are the obstacles and wounds in the local Church? What hinders the baptized from being active in mission?

- **Wounds:** Lack of: Spiritual Feeding / Spiritual Healing / More effective liturgies
- **Obstacles** in the Church/Hindrances to the mission: Discrimination based on matrimonial/relationship status, financial status, customs/traditions (gender and age status), and disability status.
- **Other obstacles** are: the lack of transparency and accountability on both local and diocesan levels, lack of understanding of the mission, feeling unwelcomed and uninvited

What area of mission are we neglecting?

- Need for more prayer and devotional organizations within the local Church
- Shortage of Clergy (Priests, Deacons, Nuns) – need laity dedication in becoming stewards in the Clerical Ministry

How are the laity listened to, especially women and youth?

- Through acknowledgement and recognition within different organizations such as in the youth, altar servers etc...)
- Meetings are conducted and listened to amongst laity and advice is sought from the Priests and Catechists for guidance and recommendations
- The community responses indicate that the Church and its members are in general, poor listeners. The culture of listening in the hierarchy of the Church is to listen to leaders and those in authority. There is a tendency to listen more to men in positions of leadership as compared to women. Women occupy a lower social status in society and may affect the respect people have to listen to them. Not enough listening goes for the youth, marginalized, minority groups and non-practising Catholics.
- Many are focused on their opinions and not open to other people's views. Sometimes the thinking is already structured before a meeting starts. Sometimes predetermined ideas and bias are already introduced at parish meetings and can influence the decisions made. There is limited room or openings to new insights from others if open listening is not encouraged.

The values carried by the Church are those of our profound humanity:

- Know how to welcome the other in his difference and be attentive to this difference,
- Let oneself be transfigured in contact with the other to accompany him in his suffering,
- Saying without fear of being judged and listening without judging are fundamental pillars of meetings to reassure and establish bonds of trust.

The shared priorities are:

- **To walk in the footsteps of Christ**, to taste and share God's love through the group and to live communion in order to respond to the prayer that Jesus himself addressed to his Father in (Jn17:21) "May all be one, like you, Father, you are in me, and I in you".
- **The reception of the most deprived** still needs to be improved (the disadvantaged, the sick, the elderly, the disabled, women and children, young people, those who have been disappointed by the Church's welcome).
- There is a real desire to **strengthen the spirit of tolerance and charity** towards these fragile populations who, neglected or resigned, tend to distance themselves from the Church.
- **Priests:** The People of God have spoken and shared their sentiments regarding their priests. Their discontents are sound and grounded in facts. Some have difficulty getting in touch with their pastor, or if ever they did, the pastor shows little or no concern. They are discouraged by priests' behaviour inside and outside of the Church.
- **Homilies** have turned boring and lacking in valuable content or have been reduced to an act of entertainment.
- Their (People's) desire is to witness a true pastor moulded in the heart of Christ. People cannot help but compare one priest to another based on these.
- **People cry for help**, and they come from all corners of the nation. They come in different forms: financial, emotional, to spiritual. Building our community means that we are to go to the peripheries and seek that voice that cries for help.

- **The Church's response** must be heard and felt.
- **The Diocesan Synod** creates in each one of us a mission-driven and mission-focused attitude and spirit. Mission is no longer a monopolized endeavour of the clerics and religious but a shared journey within all peoples.
- **This shared journey** implies sharing in the brokenness and woundedness of others. Thus, we allow ourselves to be vulnerable yet strong in the midst of these situations. We may feel uncomfortable and burdened at times, but this is the yoke that is worth taking, because this yoke belongs to our brother or sister.

What is the Holy Spirit asking of us?

- **To be more open and loving** to God's People and not to judge and look down of those less fortunate than us.
- **The Holy Spirit is asking us to love each other as one people of God.** To stop discrimination.
- **The Holy Spirit is asking us to further deepen the spiritual nourishment** that the Church should offer its members. To address the lack of knowledge of the faith that is so common.
- **To minister to all and not just those active in the Church.**
- The procedures we follow in discernment is we **allow the Holy Spirit to possess us** not our pride, not our personal ambitions to dominate us but the Good Spirit that unite us.
- **Through the Word of God** preached by Priests (also in different forms: evangelistic performances by the youth, worship songs).
- **Family prayers both mornings and evenings.** Church rituals – ringing of bells as a sign for Devotional Prayers in the morning, noon, and evening.
- **When we talk about listening to the Holy Spirit,** we first try and understand the role of the Holy Spirit and how we are guided to discern. The Church can hold retreats and small community meetings to learn more about the influence of the Holy Spirit in listening, discerning and journeying together.

Everyone is called to serve the Church on her own scale. Everyone's participation can be done in different ways:

- **Individually:** by putting at the service of the community its talents and skills, by seeking God through trainings and participating in mass, by living one's faith daily and in prayer.
- **In communion:** by joining a prayer group, by participating in activities of parish life, by accepting collective responsibilities, by supporting charitable actions.
- **In keeping with the Synodal journey** (October 2021 – 2023) and its theme
 “for a Synodal Church: **Communion, Participation, and Mission**” the communion of the saints
seeks to encourage the oneness of its believers just as the Father and the Son are one.
- It is the call to come together and be in communion with one another within the family, the community, the church and the nation at large.
- In this way **there is the strengthening of participation** and the attainment of its mission in the proclamation of the Good News. Significant in this is the application of the **context** to this act of communion that binds each and everyone in the uniqueness of our cultures and diversity.
- As a **community of believers** we are tasked to **proclaim the Good News of the Gospel** by living the life that Christ has shown us. We are all called to be his faithful servants and the synodal journey is our stepping stones to walking on this path. We are reminded of the Holy Trinity in their

holy communion of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit and so we are yet again mindful of our role as children of the Father and therefore we collectively come in prayerful union.

In our local Church, who are those who “walk together”? Who are those who seem further apart?

- **Those who walk together**
- are those who are **old members of the Church** and some of these judge new members and others and cause them to be further apart from the Church.
- Those **deeply rooted in their faith** and practising their baptismal calling (patience, sacrifices, generosity, equality and integrity).
- Those who **participate in church organizations** such as choir, youth, catechesis programs, registered members of the parish.
- The People of God, parishioners, believers, the baptized, families, different prayer groups, pastoral animation groups, the ecclesial body, children, young people, adults, the elderly.

- **Those who seem further apart**
- **Because of cultural background**, it is not easy to speak out with courage.
- It would be good to **invite those who does not attend church services** and get their feedback on what concerns they have.
- Those who feel neglected (or out of place) by society and church.
- Those with **financial burdens**.
- Those who have **conflicting views towards the teachings** of the Church (ex. Marriage/Divorce).
- There are also the marginalized, the drug addicted, the homeless, the "rejected from the church", the "excluded from the church", the poor, the cohabiting partners, the divorced, the unbaptized and non-believers, sinners, the sick of all kinds (physical, psychological, emotional), children, young people, women, and finally other religious denominations.

Everyone is in the journey;

- No one is left behind. It is an inclusive journey.
- Sometimes some people fall off the course; sometimes, some people become tired, but all in all, there is a sense that all are welcomed in the journey.
- The starting point of our journey is the **family** under the leadership of parents.
- The **collaboration between the pastors and their herds** cannot be overemphasized enough for this journey of companions to be successful and enjoyable. Any plans or tasks to be done and accomplished, the pastor and the parishioners must discuss and dialogue first and foremost. The pastor's authority must be utilized prudently.

How is God speaking to us through voices we sometimes ignore? How are the laity listened to, especially women and young people? What facilitates or inhibits our listening?

People feel that the Church are not doing enough to bring back those who have left the Church. The young admit the need for nurturing in the faith. It is felt that the Church is not listening to the cry of the young for more improvement and expanding of their CCD program not just for students preparing for the Sacraments.

There is a need to increase and the elders should be vocal to participate in discussions and works of evangelization.

- Visits to non-active members. Change our mind set, that we are the church.

"Listening is the first step, but requires having an open mind and heart, without prejudice."

- **The Church has set up various actions, activities and meetings** to offer listening to everyone, especially towards young people and women. Improvements are to be made because some feedback is not encouraging: young people do not always feel free of their actions and some women are not satisfied with these spaces.
- **Some young, marginalized, excluded and some of those "who are not in good standing with the Church"** are welcomed in choirs, prayer groups and catechesis as catechist assistants. Young people are listened to more today because there are more youth groups in parishes. Other activities (worship, gatherings, etc.) must be developed to attract them to church.
- People "who are not in good standing" are welcomed, heard and respected. Following these listens, they can follow catechesis and teachings. On the other hand, the reception and listening of the marginalized are still limited to a few associations. The excluded still occupy little space.
- **Part of the population** does not yet find a listening ear with the community. Some reports denounce the **lack of listening of the clergy to some parishioners**. In parishes where the faithful do not complain of a lack of listening, there is the presence of a parish priest who resides on the spot. This can attract neighboring parishioners who need these listening times. In some cases, some leaders and catechists have a listening training and can respond to requests.
- **The men and women religious involved and integrated into the diocese are few**. They are more involved in catechesis and Catholic teaching. Their participation with young people should be greater to provide spiritual support to young people and young adults.

In general, the reasons mentioned that stand in the way of good listening are

- resistance to change,
- lack of communication,
- intolerance, the rigidity of the Church, the lack of training on listening to improve the reception of populations and less involvement and presence of the clergy.

What needs to change?

- The Church needs a listening heart. It is invited to empty itself of its own agenda and be open to the new insights and challenges of journeying together.
- We need to free our hearts and minds from prejudices, bias, and stereotypes.
- We need to pray for the gift of discernment so that we can hear God in others.
- Active listening must adopt the principles of 'listen with the heart', listen with prayers and listen with the Holy Spirit so that everyone feels comfortable to voice their opinions and take part actively in parish and community activities.
- More listening to the quiet, the silent, minorities, marginalized, isolated and forgotten, women, youth, and children
- We also need to respond to issues we encounter, especially family issues including domestic violence, unemployment, care for the poor and the voiceless.
- More heart-to-heart listening with other groups, religious, catechists and lay people
- Listen to those who have professional knowledge and expertise to help as needed
- Strengthen the Small Christian community approach to engage families and communities in prayer and understanding the Word
- We pray for personal conversion by listening to the Holy Spirit

- Our attitude needs to change to respect that communication is a two-way process designed to bring out the benefits of listening and talking.

Some questions remain about the decisions taken to close certain centres, without prior consultation with the beneficiaries and about the lack of dialogue between some members of the clergy.

- Practical experience in social and cultural life is lived on the ground, paying special attention to those in need. Work is set up through the reception of political leaders, liturgical celebrations in the local language, commitments at the level of various cultural or social associations, collaboration with the social services of the municipality, firefighters or with local associations.

The youth formation is one of the priorities in our diocesan plan.

- Slowly and carefully, the youth commission goes out into the open to create activities that will reinvigorate our youth's fire to participate in the life of the church.
- In our conversation with some of them, they expressed their desire to participate in their parish life. However, they also expressed their disappointment for not being given enough trust, confidence, and room for inclusivity. Their ministry need not to be limited to serving at the Altar, or as a choir. We are hoping that this synod will bring to the attention of the older church family members that their younger members also have something to offer inside and outside of liturgical celebrations.

It takes courage to speak up

Speaking out in Church settings is restrained by the cultural norm of "speak only when necessary." In situations where the subject is sensitive or delicate (e.g., priests leaving the religious community) and where the events have great impact on the Church, communities shared these statements:

- The Church is silent about it
- No one is speaking out
- No one wants to talk about it, so let it be
- No one is talking as much as they should
- How do we explain to our children?

The Church is hesitant to speak out on contentious issues because it is culturally engrained that at times it is better that we remain quiet on these issues. There is fear that speaking out can victimize the group or individuals concerned and bring about stigma and shame in the Church.

How does the relationship with the local media work (not only Catholic media)? Who speaks on behalf of the Christian community, and how are they chosen?

"All are invited to speak with courage and outspokenness, that is, by combining freedom, truth and charity."

The community tries to foster a free and authentic style of communication, without hypocrisy or the pursuit of profit or power. Reflection is privileged, communication is non-violent and without judgment, tolerance and listening. A lack of communication from the hierarchy to the parish is noted, communication difficulties related to the age difference and a lack of knowledge of the groups of the parish by the young people. Young people communicate mainly through social networks (discussion groups). Speaking can be done during retreats, recollections, group meetings. It is possible when it is

encouraged, heard, free and welcomed. It becomes difficult, if not impossible, when it comes up against indifference, intolerance, mockery, lack of time and intergenerational differences.

The link with the Catholic media: coverage of diocesan and parish events. An excellent communication operation through Facebook posts provided to diocesan radio that contributes to a diffusion of catechesis on the airwaves.

The link with the media of the place: the link is poor and limited with some.

- These media are not interested in the truth and are more in search of "scoops". There is misinformation of facts. The press is not free. There are therefore few links between the Church and the media system, except for major ecumenical events (for the deceased of Covid 19 ...), major celebrations (Christmas Mass, Episcopal ordination ...) and during conflicts concerning the Church.
- Another part of the media, is to maintain good links with the Church and participate in the broadcasting of major celebrations (televised mass at Christmas, in the filming of music videos or solicit for religious issues.

Only the Bishop speaks on behalf of the diocese in the media. He may, however, appoint the Vicar General, the parish priest or a third person to represent him. These people are designated for their expressive abilities, skills, life experiences, knowledge.

How do prayer and liturgical celebrations actually inspire and guide our common life and mission in our community?

At its best, "Our church is like a family, welcoming and friendly; that's what makes our church a home." Many said that "It brings joy to be in church, to celebrate with our brothers and sisters." Even if we come from different backgrounds and islands, "we gather in one church in family and friendship." The word "welcoming" was used repeatedly to describe this feature of the church. This family spirit may be expressed in several ways: through the liturgical celebrations, but also through parish fiestas and seasonal activities such as the Easter egg hunt. But there are serious challenges, many noted.

We join women's day of prayer that the women normally join to celebrate. Church is normally invited to participate in government workshops in different topics. Sharing of rosary with other family members.

Our relations with other Christian denominations is to participate in the life cycle in community. We participate in weddings, funerals, and be friendly with them.

Our experience in dialogue with other denominations is that it enriches our understanding of our faith and able to respect others belief.

What hinders the baptized from being active in mission? What areas of mission are we neglecting?

A person whose marriage is not blessed in the church can be denied the request to serve as a godparent or even to have their own children baptized.

(also refer to question 1)

To what extent do diverse peoples in our community come together for dialogue?

What are the places and means of dialogue within our local Church?

“People see the Church as divided, political and confusing”

Many seemed to agree with the statement that “We’re going to have to start addressing the elephant in the room.” The single change proposed, then, is self-evident: our church will have to find a way to discuss those controversial topics that divide us and impair our ministry.

We are just maintaining our community and not growing. We look after people who are active in the Church and there are some baptized Catholics who are left behind. Dialogue is needed to include everyone and not just the active members.

Members engaged in public service (social, political, educational, human rights promotion and safeguarding of the Common House, etc.) are an integral part of the worshipping community. However, their support is very limited. A time of sharing with these members would be indicated for the coherence of the actions.

Actions are carried out to support humanitarian aid, the fight for environmental protection, etc. Training actions and meetings with people in need are organized. **One of the difficulties is related to resistance to change by people who are very attached to traditional values and practices.**

“Dialogue is a path that requires perseverance, and also involves moments of silence and suffering, but which is capable of gathering the experience of individuals and peoples.”

- Dialogue implies a common language, a concern for truth and an esteem for the right word. When community leaders use blatant doublespeak and lies, the very outline of a dialogue is unlikely. It cannot be dependent on religious, political, cultural or social affiliation. It must be true and based on trust.
- It is established in families, the first cells of the Society; parishes, hospitals, with the sick, in homes for the elderly; associative movements, parish activities, places of formation and within the Church.
- means are put in place to establish dialogue between the different parties depending on the gravity of the situation. A mediator (the priest, the deacon or a trained person) may be called upon to regulate larger conflicts. Some conflicts may be dealt with in small groups.
- Collaboration with neighboring countries is done through sharing, times of prayer and cultural exchange.

Collaboration with religious communities is a personal process.

With lay associations and movements, speaking groups could be set up for isolated people (widows, elderly, etc.), as well as activities such as sewing classes, cooking, etc.

The Association of Catholic Families: go to families, invite them, accompany them in different steps, organize a general assembly with different workshops, recreational days, etc

The voices of the people, who are on the peripheries, are the ones that are often neglected and unheard.

A: The elderly of society has always been well cared for with each member of the family pitching in to ensure their wellbeing.

- However, with changing trends and the pace of life quickening, people are finding it more and more difficult to keep up with everything, and sometimes for families caring for an elderly member, this can result in spending less and less time caring for them. The cost of living keeps increasing with many people having to hold down 2 or 3 jobs which means less or no time for the care of the elderly at home.
- **More young people are leaving to look for employment opportunities overseas** putting extra strain on available hands to care for the elderly. Parish communities can do better at helping out with the caring of elderly members by inviting prayer groups, volunteers and youth groups to include visitations to the elderly, property maintenance, offering to assist with shopping for necessities, house calls etc.

B: The LGBT community is becoming more verbal and gaining ongoing support both locally and abroad especially with regards to decriminalizing same-sex relationships. The local church still needs to address this reality as there are practicing Catholics who are members of the LGBT community.

Although there have been no issues within the church of late with regards to LGBT church members. If certain LGBT members of the local church are feeling more should be done, then the church needs to start addressing the issue. **Dialogue is most necessary.** Our church must be the last place for LGBT members of our faith to feel unwelcomed and unwanted.

How are divergences of vision, or conflicts and difficulties addressed? What particular issues in the Church and society do we need to pay more attention to?

We need **standard regulations and procedures throughout the region.** Rules need to be uniform and consistent. Issues on the youth, the lack of Priests doing pastoral work with the Parish, more involvement of the Church leaders in the Parishes, the discrimination of people in the Church, the transparency and the accountability of finances, the Church need to address and pay more attention to. Hearing of the cry of the poor.

In general, proposals were made to improve communication and to promote the participation of all in decision-making:

- **Improve the dissemination of information,**
- **Commitment** and real presence at the various meetings of the leaders,
- **Establish times of exchange** and formation for the various lay ministers, catechists, members of the committees, leaders of Rosary groups, altar servers, etc.
- **Establish a continuous formation in liturgy and catechesis**
- Officials must take into account the proposals submitted by its members.
- **Final decisions must be taken in the interest of community** life and promote unity.
- Discernment and decision-making must be key elements of a living and active structure.

The consultation that precedes the discernment stage is done with formal and informal bodies. Their advisory opinion serves to build a refined questioning to move to the phase of discernment.

To encourage transparency and accountability:

- The means of communication used: announcement at Masses, display on the panels of parish announcements, distribution of photocopies, information relayed to the leaders of the different sectors, social networks
- The clarity and transparency of accounting, fundraising, the use of these funds and the destination of these funds must be improved.

One overwhelming response to the dialogue was the feeling of **not being reached out to**. They feel inferior as they feel that people judge them for how they dress and how they are not able to drop anything in the collection basket.

It has also been expressed to have priests that speaks the local language, and pastors that have time to visit them. They see the need for incorporation and active participation although unable to do so due to a sense of “unworthiness” as they feel that they are minority. A cry for “relevance” not only in the priests’ and deacons’ homilies, but also in the fact that they too are members of the church and that regardless of how big or small they are as a community, or how much they put in the collection basket, or how they dress, they are to be seen as relevant and important members of the church.

Discrimination is a factor within the community. Immigrants feel, to some degree, that they are not welcome. They are hardworking and reliable people. They work in different fields varying from the medical, to domestic labours. The local church is their contribution both in the society and in the life of the church. However, immigrants see the need on the part of the church to educate the people to be more accepting and hospitable, inclusive and appreciative of them and their contributions.

In the previous topic ‘Communication and Awareness’ the tendency for some parish leaders (without a resident priest) leaning towards dictatorship lends concern towards poor transparency and accountability. The greater challenge is to do with **transparency for finances**. Some people from certain parishes feel that knowledge of parish finances are restricted only to those within parish councils and very little is being done with regards to accountability and transparency. Some feel that **parishes are being run like a business** with only the council members knowing the financials of the parish. There is a need for some parishes to work more closely together with a greater need to listen and make collective decisions as a parish. However, the majority of parish communities understand and function responsibly with transparency.

Sometimes parishioners are **denied the freedom to express their thoughts and ideas by** those in positions of leadership. There is a greater need **for leaders to be more open** and accepting correction when called for. Sometimes, parish leaders do not handle well when challenged or questioned by members of the parish community.

People have requested that whenever conferences for catechists/parish leaders are called, that parish leaders be reminded that their roles are for serving the community and not to confuse their roles as positions of privilege and power.

What relationships does our Church community have with members of other Christian traditions and denominations?

- **Many activities** are implemented in order to forge links with people of different faiths such as **ecumenical evenings**. The events of the year are often opportunities to reach out to non-believers:

- **Marian tours** and the animation of funeral vigils for non-believing families. A work of knowledge of the field by the "leader" is a powerful support for his fraternal meetings and often leads to common activities (time of welcome, sharing and listening).
- In other parishes, experiences with other denominations are very limited.
- The Church also **collaborates** with the various bodies of society when she is solicited, invited to express herself or to mark her presence.
- It contributes more actively in these different areas through **its presence** with the most deprived,
- **by officiating in local language** (cultural) Masses, **by relaying the health recommendations** of governments (COVID), by **disseminating messages of peace** (ecumenical prayer for Peace, during major disasters, war between Ukraine and Russia, etc.),
- **by participating in humanitarian aid** (food aid or other aid for countries that have suffered natural disasters),
- **by supporting the initiatives of the town hall** in favour of needy families (food baskets during the time of Lent).
- **It collaborates** with communal institutions and other religious denominations in the organization of sports activities for young people (construction of sports fields in neighborhoods).
- **Dialogue between Christians** of various confessions, united by a single Baptism, occupies a special place on the synodal path.
- **Relationship** with other Christian confessions, especially with Protestants, are: fraternal, respectful, complementary, friendly, cordial understanding, mutual support, can lead to solidarity work, time of common prayer, common concern for the search for the spiritual good, a reciprocal invitation for a time of reflection. Overall, the relationships are warm. They are normal, good, respectful and rather close to each other, as long as we do not talk about topics around religion. We can unite around the same social project and it happens rather good-natured. The words that are often expressed are: "**There is only one God.**"
- **Ecumenical prayer**, sharing the word of God, ecumenical gatherings (March 5: arrival of the Gospel), session, formation, common societal cause, culture, health, family, couple, marriage, debate on a theme, the synod. Religious gatherings, songs, ecumenical prayer times invited by the initiative of the political authorities, on festive occasions, national etc. If we want to intensify our journey towards unity, it will be necessary to find and propose spiritual ideas that unite and respect the paths undertaken by each confession.
- In some of our dioceses there is a National Council of Churches. Where such bodies exist Catholics are to be encouraged to be involved and visible. We would envisage this activity to include all those who are pastoral leaders starting with the bishop, his priests, deacons and catechists. And this has to reach beyond the well-established religions that we are familiar with, to dialogue with the sectors.
- **Synodality** means journeying and dialoging with other Christians, religions, and non-believers. Being Catholic (universal) means to be inclusive.

What can we do to improve our journey together with other Christians, denominations, and religions?

Creative ideas and interesting choice of words have been used to illustrate improvement on journeying together with other Christian denominations and religions. Ecumenical and interreligious dialogue have been ongoing since Vatican II. Communities discussed several ways, including the following:

- Organize ecumenical workshops and awareness of different faith groups outside the church complex to encourage acceptance and respect.
- Inviting other church groups to SCC and open our doors to others to participate in Catholic church funerals and weddings and working on community projects together.

- Dialogue with members of other denominations and religions but maintaining the Biblical Catholic truths to make the Catholic church more palatable to people of other religions.
- Churches should work together on common social issues whose impact challenges our Christian values, ethics, and teachings, such as defacto relationships, same sex relationships, drugs, prostitution among others.

How does our Church community identify the goals to be pursued, the way to reach them, and the steps to be taken? How is authority or governance exercised within our local Church?

1. **Education is vital.** Liturgy itself can be a “spiritual hug.” For many the greatest joy came from simply attending mass, but the music and participation of the congregation enhanced it.
2. **Learning through a good homily** is also a rich source of spiritual nourishment. The best homilies help listeners understand scripture while connecting our faith to our present-day life. Traditional religious ceremonies, such as those practiced during Holy Week, are also important ways of finding nourishment.
3. **Changes are called for**, not just to correct the problems mentioned above, but to further deepen the spiritual nourishment that the church should offer its members.
4. To address the lack of knowledge of the faith that is so common, many suggested that we provide an **adult education program**—one that might include study groups and open discussion on theological issues. After all, many do not read the Bible.
5. **Another suggestion** was that the church strengthen parish devotional groups by adding a yearly retreat and perhaps provide occasional talks.
6. As the Church is a minority in some places, she needs to listen to her people. Decisions should be made by the majority and not just some leaders and the Priest.
7. **The community’s response** indicates there are several things that need to happen if the laity is to truly participate in the governance-leadership of a parish. Training is a key element that has been identified. The laity needs to be trained so that they are more discerning and educated on their rights and duties so that they can take up roles in the church and are confident to co- participate in the affairs of the parish.
8. **There is a lack of confidence** among the laity because of their lack of knowledge of Church laws, Catholic Social teachings, and culture. There is a need for training so that they learn their roles and responsibilities within the church. Having more renewals and workshops will help the laity considerably. The formation of the laity and clergy and commission – we badly lack this. These renewals and workshops will empower parents to live their faith and provide the direction to and support for their children.
9. **Culture was identified** as a factor that challenges participation. Issues like respect for the elders, gender differences, age differences, fear of victimization are obstacles to meaningful participation in Church activities. These cultural inhibitions allow for the culture of silence to grow – we remain silent and hold back communication due to fear e.g., challenging priests because that goes against culture or respect. Being silent allows for a lot of issues kept hidden and not discussed e.g., financial mismanagement and lack of trust of those in authority within the parish.
10. **Good communication** was also identified as a key element and is an opportunity to better understand each other’s roles in showing respect and ready to help each other. This communication is between the clergy and the parishioners and amongst the parishioners so that each understands his role and with that understanding, there is room for dialogue and a mutual need to help each other. To understand what the laity is going through the clergy needs to make more house calls to their parishioners. The priests will understand the financial burdens and other social issues that parishioners carry if they visited them more frequently.

11. There is a pressing need for everyone in the parish to listen more to each other and to be honest with each other in their communication. Sometimes, priests are reluctant to allow the opinions of the laity to get through. Parishioners need to move away from the culture of silence and blind obedience which do not lead to any growth.

How do we promote participation in decision-making within hierarchical structures? Do our decision-making methods help us to listen to the whole People of God?

First and foremost, we must let go of the **hierarchical structures and start listening** to the People of God. Everyone must be allowed to be heard, not just some. People's voices need to be heard so decisions can be made fair and square.

How does our Church Community identify its goals and ways of reaching it?

- By conducting and having regular Diocesan/Parish council meetings
- Utilize the different organizations of the church (e.g. Youth, Choir, and etc.)
- Using modern technology for announcements, notifications & reminders.

How is authority or governance exercised within our local Church?

- In general, majority implement culture and traditions
- Some parishes do not discriminate, and encourage equality in authority

How do we promote participation in decision-making within hierarchical structures?

- Hierarchy remains same: Need for consistent dialogue amongst each level of authority and between Diocese and Parishes (e.g. encourage parish executives to convey Diocese reports to parishes and vice-a-versa).

Do our decision-making methods help us to listen to the whole People of God?

- Yes, but continuing the synod seminars more frequent in the local churches and maybe every 3-5 years as Diocese (church as a whole)

Renewal in our Church's Hierarchical/clerical monopoly of power.

- Sharing the administrative aspect of stewardship to the laity so that the priest can focus on the pastoral, spiritual, and sacramental aspect of ministry.

How can we (laity and clergy) – co-participate in the governance and leadership of the church?

- Clear communication is very important so that we can co-participate in the governance and leadership of the church. A parish culture shapes the parish's public action but also shapes the public value of individual participation within the parish. We should move away from an authoritarian style of leadership, instead we have to allow room for participation of everyone, not only the educated ones. When parishioners are asked to go forth and serve, they need to have that authority to be able to do that. The clergy and parishioners need to work together. There needs to be more flexibility and spaces in the church so that people speak out and this means moving away from the comfort zone of

'retreating into the culture of silence'. There is also the need to train our clergy in basic management skills – importance of accountability and transparency.

How can we use discernment processes in our Church decision making?

- Discernment process is a good tool to use in our Church decision making but as the different communities have indicated, this is a skill that needs training. To truly listen to each other takes years of practice to gain experience in the art of listening. This demands that those in leadership positions listen to the Holy Spirit and try to seek the will of God in affairs of the parish. Everyone is invited to give of themselves to God. It is asking that we build a stronger relationship with God. It is to realise that we are God's instruments, able to serve Him merely by being open to fulfilling His will. It asks that we live a prayerful life because it is humbling and empowering to realize we are God's instruments, able to serve Him merely by being open to fulfilling His will. Reporting social media and the parish priest having an open-door policy. To enhance one's skills in the art of listening means trying to attend more retreats, participate in shared faith and scriptural reflections through the Small Christian Community sharing.

In conclusion, the challenge from the grassroot level of our various dioceses is that we accept we are to walk together as a unified group and not to walk in single file. In CEPAC there is a strong desire to be more effective in our listening in all aspects of the church's ministry. When we achieve this we will be truly on Mission for the church. ***Pope Francis has reminded us "To hold a 'synod' means to walk together. I think this is truly the most wonderful experience we can have; to belong to a people walking, journeying through history together with their Lord who walks among us! We are not alone; we do not walk alone. We are part of the one flock of Christ that walks together."***



Bishop Paul Donoghue sm
(President of CEPAC Bishop's Conference)

14TH August, 2022