

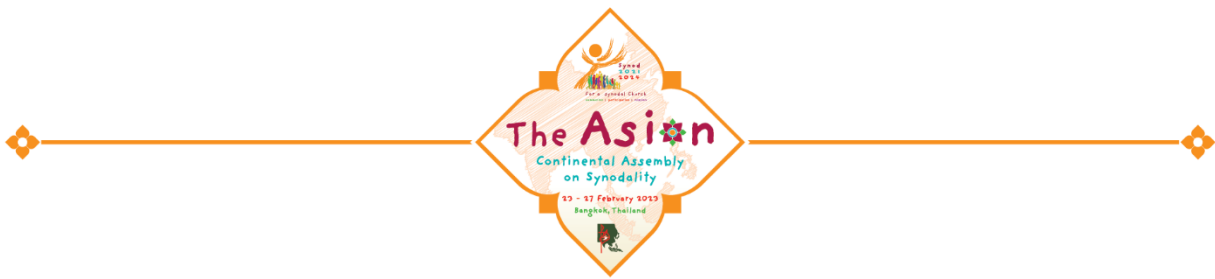
THE FINAL COUNT DOWN PRESS NOTE 1 – FEBRUARY 23, 2023

Baan Phu Waan (The Sower's House), the magnificent Pastoral Training Centre of the Bangkok Archdiocese, is host to the Asian Continental Assembly on Synodality, from February 24 to February 26, 2023. The participating delegates consist of representatives of 17 Conferences of Bishops and 2 Synods of Bishops, representing the 29 countries that constitute the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC). Discerning together on this Synodal journey are 6 cardinals, 5 archbishops, 18 bishops, 28 priests, 4 sisters and 19 lay persons.

Asia, the largest and most populated continent, is blessed with diverse cultures, languages, ethnicities and religions. While Christianity remains a very small minority in most parts of Asia, the vibrancy and richness of the individual cultures bring joy to the life of the Church. Though the systems of beliefs, values and symbols differ from place to place, the interconnectedness of the human community draws Asian people together. The Asian value of being relational - with God, self, neighbour, and the cosmos - brings with it, the unity of the human family and the unity of the people of Asia.

Despite the challenges, the Synodal journey has been considered a moment of grace and healing for the church. The image of the 'church as tent' projects it to be a place of refuge that can be expanded to all in a spirit of inclusivity. It also expresses that God can pitch His tent wherever the Spirit of God blows, including places of violence, unrest, and suffering. Most importantly, in the tent, there is room for everyone; no one is excluded, for it is a home to everyone. In this process, those who in the past felt 'left out' now realize that they have a home in this tent - a sacred and safe space.

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The image of the tent also reminds us that Jesus pitched His tent among us through the incarnation, and therefore the tent also is a place of encounter with God and one another. The tent, now seen as the common home, also has rekindled a sense of belonging and sharing in the common baptism. The Synodal process has brought about a more significant awareness of the importance of walking together as a communion of communities, bringing about an organic growth of the Church.

A draft framework, an open-ended working paper, has been drawn up to help the delegates journey together through prayer to discern, discuss and deliberate. Over the next three days the delegates will share their experience of Joy, of Walking Together, the Experience of Wounds, and the Call to Embrace New Pathways. They will also focus on the tensions that plague Asia - Living Synodality, Decision-Making, Priestly Vocations, Youth, Poor, Religious Conflicts and Clericalism.

The Opening Mass, the Mass of the Holy Spirit, will be presided over by Archbishop Tarcisio Isao Kikuchi, SVD, Archbishop of Tokyo, Japan and Secretary General of the FABC. This will be followed by an orientation introducing the delegates to the topics of deliberation and discernment. The draft of the final document will also be shared for the participants to express their thoughts.

The hope is to journey together as people of the vast and diverse continent of Asia.

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