

# **PILGRIMS OF HOPE:**

## **Discerning the Synodal Path**

*... "for we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor 5:7)*

**36th Plenary Assembly**



Conference of Catholic Bishops of India

# **PILGRIMS OF HOPE:**

## Discerning the Synodal Path

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## FOREWORD

In response to the call of Pope Francis, we embarked on a three-year synodal process (2021–2024), culminating in two Synodal gatherings in Rome -- the first in October 2023 and the second, a year later, in October 2024. The overarching theme was: *"For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission."*

For the Church in India, this process offered a precious opportunity to listen to the voices of the people from every corner of our vast and diverse country. This listening phase led to the collation of reports from 130 dioceses, which were synthesized into the CCBI's *National Synthesis*, following a national consultation (August 2022).

At the continental stage, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) marked its Golden Jubilee with a time of prayerful discernment, bringing together representative Bishops from across Asia. This discernment culminated in the publication of the FABC Bangkok 50 Document: *Journeying Together as Peoples of Asia ... "and they went a different way"* (Matt 2:12) in March 2023.

Building on this momentum, the CCBI engaged in an extensive consultation involving nearly 5,000 people, leading to the formulation and release of the Pastoral Plan: *Journeying Towards a Synodal Church - MISSION 2033* in September 2024.

Taking into account the fruits of the synodal journey and the ongoing work related to the Pastoral Plan, the Office Bearers of the CCBI, in consultation with the Executive Committee, began the preparations for the 36th Plenary Assembly. The theme was: *"Discerning Synodal Pathways for Mission."*

To ensure a meaningful engagement at the Plenary, a Core Team was appointed to draft a *Preparatory Document*, drawing inspiration from the Bangkok 50 Document. This document was widely circulated, accompanied by a worksheet, to all Bishops, Major Superiors and lay representatives. The overwhelming responses were carefully compiled to create a *Working Document*, which was shared with the Bishops before the Plenary Assembly. This document served as the framework for the spiritual conversation method employed during the Assembly. It was heartening to receive an extremely positive feedback on the spiritual conversation methodology, affirming its value in fostering deep listening, meaningful dialogue and collective discernment.

During the Plenary Assembly, the Bishops prayerfully reflected, discerned and charted a course for the future of the Church in India. The profound experience of prayerful conversations in the Spirit was carefully gathered and synthesized by the Core Team into the document: *Pilgrims of Hope: Discerning the Synodal Path ... "for we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor 5:7).*

Through attentive listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit and to one another, the Bishops identified sixteen key themes to guide the future mission of the Church in India. These themes, which complement and reinforce the *Pastoral Plan*, provide direction and open vistas in certain areas where no formal Commission or Apostolate currently exists, while also pointing to new paths for mission and ministry.

The themes presented in this document are offered with deep hope for the Church in India and for the realisation of our synodal journey in the years ahead. This document should be read alongside the *Pastoral Plan*, which provides detailed strategies and plans for Proclamation, Bible, Ecumenism, Education, Healthcare, Media and Social Development. After careful reflection, the *Pastoral Plan*, *Journeying Towards a Synodal Church: MISSION 2033*, and *Pilgrims of Hope: Discerning the Synodal Path* are to be implemented thoughtfully within each local context.

As we celebrate the Jubilee Year, may this be a grace-filled time of transformation that leads us to become a Synodal Church. May Mary, Mother of the Church, who walks with us on our pilgrimage, guide and inspire us to embrace our mission with renewed zeal as Pilgrims of Hope.

Given on March 19, 2025, on the Feast of St. Joseph,  
Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Patron of the Universal Church.

**Filipe Neri Cardinal Ferrão**  
President, Conference of Catholic Bishops of India  
Archbishop of Goa and Daman

## I. Introduction

The Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI) held its 36<sup>th</sup> Plenary Assembly at the Xavier Institute of Management (XIM) University, Bhubaneswar, Odisha, bringing together 145 Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops from 132 Dioceses. About 55 clergy and consecrated persons also joined. Centred on the theme "*Discerning Synodal Pathways for Mission*," the Assembly reaffirmed that synodality is about embracing the Church's identity as the People of God, journeying together in today's world.

At the heart of synodality is living the gift of faith - a relationship with Jesus of Nazareth - which translates as communion and participation with one another for the mission of the Church. The People of God derive their identity from Baptism, which calls them to holiness and mission. The missionary synodal Church flows from Baptism, where Christ clothes believers in Himself (cf. Gal 3:27) and grants new life in the Spirit (cf. Jn 3:5-6). Christian life finds its source and fulfilment in the mystery of the Trinity, which inspires faith, hope and love. The call to synodality is to embrace this fullness of life. It is an ongoing renewal by listening, dialogue and shared discernment, ensuring we are all collaborators in the Church's mission.

## II. The Journey

The Church in India embarked upon three journeys towards a Synodal Church. First, at the universal level, in response to Pope Francis' call for a synodal Church, the Conference initiated a massive consultation process from October 2021 to July 2022, culminating in the collation of reports from 130 Dioceses into the CCBI's *National Synthesis* (August 2022). Secondly, at the Asian level, representative Bishop-members of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), marking the Federation's Golden Jubilee, undertook a prayerful discernment, culminating in the FABC Bangkok 50 Document: *Journeying Together as Peoples of Asia ... "and they went a different way"* (Mt 2:12) (March 2023). Finally, the CCBI engaged in an extensive consultation process involving close to 5,000 people, culminating in the Pastoral Plan - *Journeying Towards a Synodal Church: MISSION 2033* (September 2024).

## III. The Process

### 1. The *Preparatory Document*

Preparation for the 36<sup>th</sup> Plenary Assembly began with identifying key themes for reflection, prayer and discernment, to guide the Church on its synodal journey. Inspired by the FABC Bangkok Document, *Journeying Together as Peoples of Asia*, a preparatory document was developed, which highlighted nine key priorities.

The *Preparatory Document* was sent to all Dioceses, inviting Bishops to discuss its themes. A worksheet accompanied it to gather feedback through consultation. Dioceses were asked to identify three key priorities, address challenges, suggest ways to enhance inclusivity, explore storytelling as a form of proclamation and propose additional priorities. Responses from 78 Dioceses, several religious provinces and individuals, besides 741 submissions received through Google, highlighted essential priorities for fostering true synodality in the Church.

## 2. *The Working Document*

The responses to the *Preparatory Document*, combined with insights from the three key sources mentioned earlier, formed the *Working Document* -- a comprehensive framework for reflection and discernment at the Plenary Assembly.

The *Working Document* identified ten key themes for discernment: (i). Faith Formation and a Synodal Way of Life; (ii). Children and Family; (iii). Youth, Digital Technology, and Social Media; (iv). The Laity and Public Engagement; (v). Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs); (vi). Poverty and Equitable Economy; (vii). Ecology, Climate Stewardship and Justice; (viii). Migrants, Refugees, Indigenous Peoples and Dalits; (ix). Women and Gender Justice; (x). Ecumenism, Interreligious Dialogue and Peacebuilding.

## 3. *Spiritual Conversations during the Plenary Assembly*

Mirroring the General Assembly of the Synod for a synodal Church, the Spiritual Conversation Methodology was adopted. The Bishops dedicated the first three days to prayerful reflection, one theme at a time, seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit, listening to one another and discerning what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church today. They were divided into 16 groups, each consisting of nine Bishops. Clergy and consecrated persons worked with the groups as facilitators and secretaries, and all of them participated in the plenary sessions.

Two days before the Plenary Assembly, forty-five members, including the CCBI secretaries, regional deputy secretaries and two religious sisters, underwent training on how to facilitate conversations and capture the promptings of the Spirit. The fruits of these spiritual conversations were compiled and subsequently discussed in the Plenary Assembly, to arrive at a consensus.

Through their spiritual conversations, the Bishops expanded the 10 themes identified in the *Working Document* into sixteen themes. A few of these themes extend into areas where the Commissions, Departments and Apostolates of the CCBI do not yet exist. The sixteen themes identified for focus in the coming years include: Faith Formation



and Word of God, Children, Family, Youth, Laity, Basic Ecclesial Communities, Migrants and Refugees, Dalits, Tribals/Adivasis/Indigenous Peoples, Socially Excluded People, Women and Gender Justice, Poverty and Equitable Economy, Digital Technology and Social Media, Ecology and Climate Stewardship, Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue, and Peacebuilding.

#### *4. The Final Document of the 36th Plenary Assembly*

In the following pages, each of these sixteen themes is addressed separately. First, there is a brief introduction, followed by a description of the realities and challenges. Next, drawing from the fruits of the spiritual conversations and consensus at the Plenary, we highlight the synodal pathways and their connection to the *Pastoral Plan*. The next section outlines strategies and plans for implementing the desired changes. Finally, we present the vision of the transformed reality that the CCBI would like to witness in the future, followed by a short transformative narrative for some of the themes.

This *Final Document* is not merely another addition to a list of documents; it marks a step forward in our generous response to God's call as pilgrims of hope. The mission of the Church grows increasingly complex each day. The *Pastoral Plan* has provided roadmaps and strategies for the existing Commissions, Departments and Apostolates of the CCBI. Yet, we are continually called to discern how best the Church in India must respond to emerging challenges. This document builds on the Pastoral Plan *Journeying towards a Synodal Church: MISSION 2033* and goes a step forward.

### **IV. New Synodal Orientations for the Church in India**

1. Being rooted in our shared baptismal identity and imbibing and living shared responsibility in mission.
2. Grounding ourselves in Synodality, we are called to conversion through listening and conversation, including dissenting voices, with empathy and solidarity, guided by the Holy Spirit.
3. Introducing the Spiritual Conversation methodology in all participative structures, from the Parish to the Diocesan and National levels.
4. Consciously building an inclusive and participatory Church, promoting transparency, accountability and participation of all in the decision-making processes.

5. Embracing inclusion, diversity and the rich heritage of Asian spirituality, and living in peaceful coexistence in a multi-religious and multi-cultural context *Pastoral Plan [henceforth referred to as PP], Mandates, p. 28).*
6. Enabling the laity, women and youth to participate more fully by providing a clear pastoral framework and optimising the use of their gifts and charisms (*PP, Mission, p. 26).*
7. Fostering a culture of discernment, especially discernment in common, in working and governing at all levels, while promoting collaboration and networking as key approaches for engaging in mission (*PP, Mandates, p. 28).*
8. Recognising that the future of the Church relies on the active participation and contribution of the laity, women, youth and children, the CCBI is committed to investing in their capacity building to include them as integral partners in the shared mission (*PP, Key Shifts, pp. 28-29).*
9. Embracing the principle of inclusion, the CCBI will reach out to Dalits, Adivasis/Tribals/Indigenous peoples, minorities, LGBTQIA+ individuals, single mothers, widows, persons with disabilities, those with special needs, informal workers, migrants and the most vulnerable, with pastoral sensitivity and compassion (*PP, Key Shifts, pp. 28-29).*
10. Aligning available human, material and spiritual resources across Dioceses, Religious Congregations and Lay Associations and exploring new opportunities, especially the use of technology (*PP, Mission, p. 26).*
11. Adopting the collaborative leadership model to build synergies across Commissions, Institutions, Congregations, Dioceses and Regions (*PP, Key Shifts, pp. 28-29).*
12. Enhancing cordial relationships among the Bishops, Clergy and Religious, respecting and valuing the charisms and contribution of one another and journeying in a synodal way, underlining that all are collaborators in the mission.

### **I was privileged to experience the Synodal Path**

When I embarked on this journey in September 2021, I knew nothing. However, I was intrigued by the mandate of the Holy Father. I attended orientations led by the National and Diocesan Teams. What struck us most was the depth and the length of the process, the profound vision articulated by the Pope and the Synod Secretariat, and the renewed sense of hope the Pope instilled in the Church. What moved me most was the honesty and openness of the laypeople. Many were consulted for the

very first time and they were deeply touched by the Pope's invitation. The Synod affirmed their voices count. As months unfolded, we gained profound insights into the aspirations, hopes and struggles of ordinary laypeople in our Church communities. Their unwavering faith humbled me. Engaging in conversations with various groups --- laypeople, religious and clergy --- was one of the most meaningful and enlightening experiences of my journey. It reassured me that despite the challenges, our Church remained rooted in faith and love.

My participation in the National Synod in Bangalore (August 26-28, 2022) was a time of deep prayer, thoughtful dialogue and theological reflection. In September 2023, I had the privilege of joining an international group of lay pastoral workers in Rome. My most recent engagement with the Synod is through my M.Th. dissertation (December 2024), titled 'Reclaiming Synodality for Lay Theology.' I know that the journey I began in 2021 is far from over. My prayer is that synodality becomes not just an event but a way of life --- one of continual listening, discernment and openness to the Spirit.

*Ms. Grace David, Delhi*

## **V. Themes and Plans arisen from the Spiritual Conversations**

The *Working Document* had 10 themes. The Spiritual Conversation process led the Bishops to identify and articulate plans for 16 themes, realising that some themes would require the creation of commissions, spaces or platforms to be effective in the mission.

- 5.1 Faith Formation and Word of God
- 5.2 Children
- 5.3 Family
- 5.4 Youth
- 5.5 Laity
- 5.6 Basic Ecclesial Communities
- 5.7 Migrants and Refugees
- 5.8 Dalits
- 5.9 Tribals/Adivasis/Indigenous Peoples
- 5.10 Socially Excluded People
- 5.11 Women and Gender Justice

5.12 Poverty and Equitable Economy

5.13 Digital Technology and Social Media

5.14 Ecology and Climate Stewardship

5.15 Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue

5.16 Peacebuilding

The themes presented in this document are offered with deep hope for the Church in India and the realisation of our synodal journey in the years ahead. This document should be read alongside the *Pastoral Plan*, which provides detailed strategies and plans for Proclamation, Bible, Ecumenism, Education, Healthcare, Media, and Social Development. After careful reflection, the Pastoral Plan, *Journeying Towards a Synodal Church: MISSION 2033*, and *Pilgrims of Hope: Discerning the Synodal Path* are to be implemented thoughtfully within each local context.

## 5.1 Faith Formation and Word of God

### a. Introduction

Faith formation is a lifelong journey of growing in faith through the Word of God. It deepens our relationship with Christ and strengthens our mission in the Church. Rootedness in the Word of God, personal faith in the Risen Lord and reawakening the mystic within us are the foundations of faith formation. It has three key dimensions: (i) Formation in and for faith – guided by Bishops, priests, religious, catechists and educators. (ii) Faith as a personal call – personal openness and response to God's call. (iii) Faith in action – living and witnessing the faith in family, parish, workplace and society. Together, these dimensions shape believers to live as true disciples of Christ.

### b. Realities and Challenges

1. **Spaces of faith formation:** Families, parishes and other institutions, which serve as spaces of faith formation, strive hard to accompany all in their faith journey. Spaces for accompanying them to mature faith in adulthood are weak or underutilised and often the programmes are fragmented and unattractive.
2. **Need for interiorisation of faith:** Many face challenges in deepening personal faith and personal encounters with Jesus and the Word of God, due to secular influences, materialistic lifestyles and scarcity of resources.

3. **Faith formation through witnessing and action:** The witness of Bishops, priests, religious and laity in their daily lives is a powerful means of evangelization. However, on many occasions, there is a dichotomy between what we believe and how we live. The focus seems to be on rituals rather than actively living out one's faith in society.

### c. Synodal Pathways

1. **Revisiting and strengthening priestly formation:** Pastoral orientation must be the core of priestly formation, prioritising witnessing life, family visits, accompaniment of the faithful and relational ministry. The training of candidates for the priesthood and religious life should begin at the parish level, ensuring a strong foundation in faith, and it must be continued with an ongoing formation of the Clergy (*PP, VSCR, Goal 1, p. 124; and p. 134*).
2. **Strengthening faith formation through community engagement:** Faith formation can be effective as a collective responsibility of the parish and community. Lay leaders, families, pious associations and Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) need to be actively involved in offering systematic and relevant faith formation programmes (*PP, Basic Ecclesial Communities, Goal 2, p. 34*).
3. **Faith Formation must be synodal:** A synodal approach to faith formation fosters listening, collaborating and involving the whole People of God. Integrating catechized families, mentoring others and peer-led youth catechesis would help develop a deeper understanding of prayers and rituals and connect faith with daily life (*PP, Faith Formation, Goal 2, p. 61*).

### d. Strategies and Plans

1. **Organise reflection sessions:** Organise formal and informal reflection sessions in the parishes or villages to interface Biblical narratives with concrete life realities (*PP, Bible, Goal 2, Objective 3, p. 47*).
2. **Form resource teams:** Form and train resource teams at the National level and prepare resource materials (*PP, Faith Formation, Goal 1, Objective 1, p. 60*).
3. **Train catechetical collaborators:** Form and train catechetical collaborators at the Diocesan level (*PP, Faith Formation, Goal 1, Objective 2, p. 60*).
4. **Prepare guidelines and modules:** Prepare catechetical guidelines and modules (*PP, Faith Formation, Goal 1, Objective 3, p. 60*) and arrange holiday

catechesis and online programmes, and incorporate creative approaches, like arts and digital media and retreats specific to various phases of life.

5. **Visit families:** Strengthen the spiritual growth of Families through family visits and encouragement of family prayers (*PP, Family, Goal 1, Objective 1, p. 78*).
6. **Catechesis in and toward liturgy:** Towards a meaningful and relevant celebration of liturgy, go beyond the ritual aspects and link it with everyday life, decisions, relationships and actions (*PP, Liturgy, Programmatic Strategy, Long Term, 2, p. 92*).
7. **Train trainers:** Implement systematic faith formation programmes through Training of Trainers (ToT) sessions for catechists, youth-led faith initiatives, mentorship programmes, post-marital faith formation and family-based catechesis, following the mission-oriented approach exemplified by the Jesus Youth Movement.
8. **Encourage innovative prayers:** Encourage different forms of prayer, spontaneous prayer, journaling, meditation, spiritual conversation method and contemplative practices.
9. **Cultivate communities:** Nurture a sense of belonging where individuals can share their experiences with prayer and ritual, learn from each other and support one another's spiritual growth.

#### **e. Changes that the CCBI would like to witness**

1. The faithful open themselves as witnesses in the public sphere.
2. Meaningful, relational and participatory liturgical and sacramental celebrations.
3. Faith formation becomes a community engagement, where everyone feels the responsibility to pass on the faith to others.
4. Effective collaboration among Commissions for Faith Formation, Bible, Liturgy, Proclamation and Vocations, Seminaries, Clergy and Religious, catering to the faith formation needs of families, children, youth and laity.

#### **I was isolated but never regretted**

I am Patra (name changed) from Joshipur Mission, Balasore Diocese. I had a government job in the Excise Department with a good salary and benefits. The Word of God and the work of the Church disturbed my conscience. I realized my work conflicted with my faith. Convinced by the Gospel, I left my job and moved my family to Khodokai village, embracing Jesus as our Lord and Saviour. In 1999, we were the

only Christian family in the area. My family was isolated and rejected. I never regretted it. Over the years, our witnessing life bore fruits, and today, we have a growing Catholic community. This is the invaluable legacy I would like to pass on to our future generation.

*Bp. Varghese Thottamkara C.M., Balasore*

## 5.2 Children

### a. Introduction

Children are a precious divine gift, entrusted to us by God, and they hold the promise of a bright and hopeful future for the Church, society and the world at large. They embody innocence, joy and the seeds of faith that will shape the generations to come. As the Church in India, we recognise our sacred responsibility to nurture, guide and form them in the light of Christ's teachings, ensuring that they grow in wisdom, faith and love. The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act defines a child as anyone under the age of 18 years.

Investing in the holistic development of children --- spiritually, morally and intellectually --- is not only a duty but a privilege. By fostering a strong foundation in faith and values, we equip them to become responsible stewards of the Gospel, active members of the Church and compassionate leaders in society. In a world marked by rapid change and challenges, the role of the Church in accompanying children on their journey of faith is more crucial than ever, strengthening our commitment to safeguarding, educating and empowering children.

### b. Realities and Challenges

1. **Access to quality education:** While the Church has played a major role in education, Christian children from economically weaker backgrounds struggle to access quality schooling due to financial constraints.
2. **Poverty and marginalisation:** Many Christian children, especially those from Dalit and tribal backgrounds, suffer from economic hardships, limiting their access to proper nutrition, healthcare and education.
3. **Child labour and exploitation:** In economically weaker Christian communities, children are sometimes forced into labour to support their families, affecting their schooling and overall well-being.

4. **Declining religious engagement:** With the growing influence of social media and modern lifestyles, many young Christians are less engaged in Church activities and faith-based learning.
5. **Religious discrimination and intolerance:** In some parts of India, Christian children face discrimination and social exclusion due to their faith.
6. **Vulnerability of the innocent:** Some children are sexually abused at home and there is helplessness when the school authorities, parish and family are unable to help or intervene.

### c. Synodal Pathways

1. **Ensuring access to quality education:** Catholic schools should prioritise admitting underprivileged Catholic children and provide scholarships or sponsorships to ensure financial constraints do not hinder their education. Mandatory 10 per cent of the children from the poorer sections to be admitted into our schools.
2. **Strengthening faith and community engagement:** Enhance Sunday Schools and Bible study through play-acting, painting, storytelling, singing and video-making to foster faith formation among children and young people.
3. **Advocating for the rights of children:** Engage in dialogue with government authorities and collaborate with Christian and secular organisations to advocate for policies that protect Christian children from discrimination and violence, while ensuring their legal and social protection.
4. **Strengthening child safeguarding measures:** Implement the Safeguarding Policy in schools, parishes and institutions, and provide reporting mechanisms and support systems to protect children from abuse and neglect. Ensure effective functioning of the Safeguarding Committee. Train priests, religious and lay leaders in counselling and trauma-informed care for children experiencing abuse or emotional distress.

### d. Strategies and Plans

1. **Have a Child Safeguarding Policy in every diocese and institution:** Put in place a Child Safeguarding Policy at all levels – institutions and dioceses - and implement the same. Everyone, including the clergy and religious, must sign the undertaking to safeguard children and vulnerable persons (*PP, Canon Law, Goal 1, Objective 1, Indicator 2, p. 54*).



2. **Keep Children's rights first:** Train and form priests, religious and laity employed in the Church to be attentive to the protection of children at the premises of Churches and Institutions and to respond urgently and compassionately, putting the vulnerable child's rights first.
3. **Provide innovative formation:** Equip Sunday School teachers to engage in faith formation through innovative ways so that children love to learn about Jesus and fall in love with Jesus.
4. **Ensure faith formation of children in Parish and family:** Sunday catechesis, family catechesis by parents towards children and sacramental catechesis of Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Eucharist and Confession.

#### **e. Changes that the CCBI would like to witness**

1. Zero tolerance for abuse of children by all faithful, including clergy and consecrated persons.
2. A Child Safeguarding Policy that is effective in all the dioceses and institutions of India.
3. An innovative model of faith formation that is scientific and adapted for children.

### **5.3 Family**

#### **a. Introduction**

The Catholic family, as a domestic church, is the fundamental community or cell of the parish, of the diocese and of the universal Church. The family is the "original cell of social life" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2207), and the need to support it, recall our roles within it and strengthen our commitment to those roles is more important than ever. Pope Francis states in *Amoris Laetitia*, n. 325, "No family drops down from heaven perfectly formed; families need constantly to grow and mature." Families need to be strengthened in the face of challenges and conflicts faced by them.

#### **b. Realities and Challenges**

1. **Weakening of family bonds:** The pervasive influence of technology and social media can weaken family bonds and hinder face-to-face communication. Busy schedules, a changing work culture and financial pressures can leave little time for building quality relationships in family, leading to increased stress. Increased

rates of divorce, marital infidelity, single-parent households and blended families can present unique challenges to family dynamics and stability.

2. **Spiritual and moral formation:** The increasing secularisation of society can pose challenges to the spiritual and moral formation of children. Many families lack access to quality religious education, leading to erosion of family and ethical values.
3. **Social and economic pressures:** Poverty and economic inequality can create significant stress and instability within families. Issues, like drug abuse and addiction, can devastate families and create significant challenges for parents and children. The increasing mental health issues among adults and children pose a significant challenge for families.
4. **Lack of support systems:** Many families lack access to adequate social services, such as affordable childcare, mental health support and family counselling. The erosion of community support networks can leave families feeling isolated and overwhelmed.

### c. Synodal Pathways

1. **Strengthening the family as the domestic church:** Prioritize the family as the primary unit of faith formation, recognising its unique role in nurturing children's spiritual and overall growth. Key aspects include offering handholding accompaniment through ongoing formation and guidance, and fostering a sense of community among families within the parish through shared experiences, celebrations and support networks.
2. **Proactive pastoral care and accompaniment:** A proactive approach to pastoral care is needed. Its three dimensions are: accompaniment and walking alongside families in their joys and struggles, cultivating a culture of active listening and providing genuine, personalised support to families.
3. **Reaching out to families spread out and in the margins:** To earn a decent living, families migrate to new locations and they are spread out. The work pressure also prevents them from reaching out to the Church. Instead of expecting these families to come to the Church, evolve new strategies and support systems to reach out to these families.

#### d. Strategies and Plans

1. **Encourage family prayer and faith formation:** Encourage and support daily family prayer as a means of strengthening faith and unity. Provide catechesis and parenting workshops to help families guide their children in faith (*PP, Family, Programmatic Strategy, p. 80*).
2. **Strengthen family bonds:** Conduct family visits, interactive sessions and community gatherings to build deeper relationships within families and the parish (*PP, Family, Programmatic Strategy, p. 80*).
3. **Support for mothers and families:** Establish support networks for pregnant women, families in crisis and parents facing challenges in raising children (*PP, Family, Goal 1, Objective 3, p. 77; programmatic strategy, p. 80*).
4. **Organise pre-marital preparation and post-marital accompaniment:** This cannot be a one-time course, but a continuous journey of enrichment to enhance family and a pro-life culture (*PP, Family, Goal 2, no. 2, p. 79*).
5. **Conduct family counselling:** A compassionate pastoral care ensures that families are not left alone in their struggles, including broken families, those affected by addiction, single-parent families and migrant families (*PP, Family, Mission Trajectory, p. 77; programmatic strategy, p. 80*).
6. **Promote new forms of family care:** Family movements, such as Missionary Families of Christ (MFC)/Couples for Christ (CC) and other movements, should be emphasised to encourage families to support one another in faith (*PP, Family, Programmatic Strategy, p. 81*).
7. **Train and form animators:** Formative programmes and materials on counselling for priests and religious, to equip them in guiding families in crisis (*PP, Family, Goal 1, Objective 1, KPI 2, p. 78; Activity Plan Matrix, 14, 15, 17, p. 83*).
8. **Establish family centres:** Have a family centre in the Parishes/Dioceses.

#### e. Changes that the CCBI would like to witness

1. Families in despair experience the accompaniment of the Church.
2. Newly married couples separated from their families for various reasons and living in urban pockets, flats and slums are reached out to by the Parish.
3. New models of families accompanying families.

### **Gift of Synodality to our family**

A young man approached me after a diocesan gathering in Kannur. With deep emotion, he asked me to thank Pope Francis for the Synod consultations. He shared how his family came together for the parish consultation. It had been a long time since they had sat and prayed as a family. As they spoke and listened, a deep and divine feeling filled the room. His mother cried as his father and brother shared their thoughts. Tears of joy and reconciliation brought them closer to one another. He called it a beautiful gift of synodality and togetherness. His words touched my heart as a true witness to walking together in our synodal journey.

*Bp. Alex Vadakumthala, Kannur*

## **5.4 Youth**

### **a. Introduction**

Young people bring energy, new ideas and a strong desire to make a difference. However, many young people feel disconnected from the Church, struggle with personal challenges and face difficulties in finding their place in the faith community. The Church must listen to young people, walk with them and support them in their journey of faith, personal growth, life orientation and career. The Church must explore ways to provide guidance, encouragement and opportunities for them to grow as leaders, serve others and deepen their relationship with God.

### **b. Realities and Challenges**

1. **Feeling disconnected from the Church:** Many young people believe that the Church does not understand their struggles or concerns, leading to feelings of disconnection. As a result, some drift away from the Church as they perceive its approach as irrelevant to their lives.
2. **Struggles with faith and identity:** Young people seek meaning and purpose, but sometimes struggle with doubts about their faith. They need a safe space to ask questions and express their thoughts. The fast-changing world makes it harder for them to stay rooted in Christian beliefs.
3. **Social and personal challenges:** Many young people face stress, anxiety, job insecurity and peer pressure. Problems, like unemployment, addictions and

mental health issues, make life difficult. They do not know where to look for guidance to navigate these challenges.

4. **Lack of encouragement in leadership:** Young people have talents and abilities and look for opportunities to contribute to the mission of the Church. They often feel rejected as their opinions are not valued or taken seriously.
5. **The need for stronger family and community support:** Families sometimes fail to understand or support the struggles of the young. The generation gap creates a trust deficit and hinders communication. Young people seek role models but feel uninspired by Church personnel.

### c. Synodal Pathways

1. **Listening to young people:** We must engage with the young while maintaining a respectful listening mindset, recognising that they have much to contribute to the Church. Spend time with young people and listen to their dreams and struggles.
2. **Providing stronger spiritual and pastoral support:** Young people need guidance in deepening their faith through retreats, prayer groups and faith-sharing sessions. Provide mentors and counsellors to accompany them in their spiritual journey and help them in dealing with personal struggles.
3. **Encouraging leadership and active participation:** Involve the young in parish activities, Church committees and decision-making. Trust them, give them responsibilities and provide space for innovation, to nurture their leadership skills.
4. **Bridging the gap between generations:** Create opportunities for interaction between young people and older generations, to build understanding and trust. Families should be encouraged to support and communicate with young people about faith and life. Organize events that bring together different age groups for shared experiences.
5. **Addressing real-life challenges:** The Church must provide practical support, such as job placement services, skill training and mental health programmes, including management of stress and of addictions.

### d. Strategies and Plans

1. **Build a welcoming and inclusive Church for young people:** Create an environment where young people feel welcomed and valued. Allow them to

voice their concerns on social and Church matters. Faith formation programmes should be interactive and relevant to their daily lives (*PP, Youth, Goal 1, p. 149*).

2. **Develop strong leadership programmes:** Train and guide them to take up leadership roles in the Church. It is ideal to have a potential layperson as a Diocesan Youth Director, while the clergy could provide spiritual animation (*PP, Youth, Goal 2, p. 149*).
3. **Strengthen family and community support:** Family-based programmes, such as family retreats, interactive sessions, gatherings, etc, could bridge the generation gap and promote understanding (*PP, Family, Goal 2. p. 79*).
4. **Offer practical help for real-world challenges:** Provide job training, career guidance and counselling, and linkage with potential opportunities as well as mental health, emotional well-being and personal growth programmes.
5. **Encourage active participation in social and Church life:** Young people should be encouraged to serve their communities through outreach programmes and social initiatives. Inspire them with practical role models to be involved in movements that promote justice, peace and ethical leadership (*PP, Youth, Goal 2, p. 149*).

#### **e. Changes that the CCBI would like to witness**

1. The young people feel valued, respected, appreciated and encouraged in their faith journey and personal growth.
2. In all the participative structures and decision-making bodies, at least 20% of the youth are present and contributing.
3. The families, elders, clergy and religious are appreciated by the young for their personal guidance, formation and mentorship.

#### **We mobilised funds locally and trained youth!**

After completing my post-graduation, I returned to Agartala to pursue higher studies and seek employment. Around that time, I was entrusted with the responsibility of leading the youth of St. Francis Xavier Cathedral Parish, Agartala. Though I accepted the role, I had little idea of how to manage it. I gradually learned with the guidance of the fathers and the youth. Together, we initiated small yet impactful activities, such as helping families with cleaning and repairs. Through these

efforts, we were able to gather contributions for the youth fund. I was happy when I realised that we could mobilise funds locally. With this fund, we did youth training. I also witnessed my mother's active involvement in Maria Songho. She encouraged women in our community to lead a more meaningful and prayerful life. Her motivation eventually led me to attend the National Conference of Women in Jharsuguda, Odisha. This was a turning point, as it opened my eyes to the vital role of women in fostering love, understanding and faith within parish communities. Soon after, I was allowed to serve as the Secretary of the Maria Songho of the Cathedral Parish, Agartala. I am happy to work for women in our parish as well as in the diocese.

*Ms. Debbarma, Diocese of Agartala*

## 5.5. Laity

### a. Introduction

In his 1988 Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, Pope Saint John Paul II stated that the third millennium would be "of the lay people." The lay faithful are baptized members of the Church who live their Christian vocation in the world, bearing witness to Christ in their daily lives, as envisaged by their common priesthood. For this reason, they participate in their own way in the threefold priestly, prophetic and kingly mission of Christ to build up the Body of Christ. They also have, according to the condition of each, the special obligation to permeate and perfect the temporal order of things with the spirit of the Gospel.

### b. Realities and Challenges

1. **Lack of awareness:** Lack of awareness of their baptismal calling to actively participate in the Church's mission. Many think that the mission belongs solely to the clergy and consecrated persons. This hinders co-responsibility.
2. **Lack of empowerment and formation:** Insufficient training and formation opportunities for lay leaders limit their capacity to effectively fulfil their roles within the Church.
3. **Lack of meaningful participation:** Limited involvement in structures of participation, such as councils and commissions, decision-making bodies and ministries. Lack of recognition and support for the contributions of lay leaders. The presence of lay associations that operate independently of or even in

opposition to the Parish Pastoral Council creates division and hinders effective collaboration.

4. **Clericalism vs Co-responsibility:** A lingering sense of clericalism, where clergy are perceived as the primary decision-makers, discourages lay involvement and hinders the active participation of the laity.

### c. Synodal Pathways

1. **Empowerment and formation:** Foster a culture of co-responsibility between clergy and laity, with the laity actively involved in decision-making processes, administration, stable lay ministries and financial transparency at parish and diocesan levels. Provide theological and pastoral formation to equip the laity for their roles and co-responsibilities within the Church (*PP, Laity, Goal 2, no. 2, p. 86*).
2. **Recognizing and supporting lay leadership:** Acknowledge and appreciate the contributions of the laity to the life and mission of the Church. Invest in the formation and development of lay leaders through training programmes, workshops and other support mechanisms. Create structures that support lay leadership at all levels, including Parish Councils, Diocesan Committees and other relevant bodies (*PP, Canon Law, Programmatic Strategy, p. 55; Laity, Goal 2, p. 85*).
3. **Public engagement and social impact:** Equip the laity to be active participants in society, influencing public discourse and promoting Christian values in public life and governance, advocating for justice, peace and human dignity (*PP, Canon Law, Goal 2, p. 54*).

### d. Strategies and Plans

1. **Invest in continuous formation:** Provide ongoing formation opportunities for laity, including adult catechesis, spiritual direction and leadership training. Conduct comprehensive formation programmes for the laity that cover theology, spirituality, leadership skills and the role of the laity in the Church (*PP, Canon Law, Goal 2, p. 54; Programmatic Strategies, p. 55; Activity Plan Matrix, 11, p. 57; Laity, Goal 1, p. 85, Programmatic Strategies p. 87*).
2. **Spaces in structures:** Strengthen the canonical provisions for lay participation, form parish/diocesan pastoral councils and finance committees, and install the laity as stable ministers in the Church -- lector, acolyte, catechist, etc., (*PP, Canon*



*Law, Goal 2, p. 54; Laity, Programmatic Strategy, p. 87; Liturgy, Programmatic Strategy, p. 92).*

3. **Create platforms for public discourse and engagement:** Create platforms to listen to the voices of the laity. Establish training programmes and mentorship initiatives to equip the laity with leadership skills at the service of the Church and of society. Organise workshops and seminars on social and political issues, encouraging critical thinking and active citizenship (*PP, Canon Law, Activity Plan Matrix, 11, p. 57; Bible, Programmatic Strategies, p. 48; BEC, Programmatic Strategies, p. 38; Laity, Goal 2, no. 2, p. 86*).
4. **Address clergy-laity divisions:** Foster open dialogue and communication between clergy and laity, to address concerns and build trust. Actively challenge and dismantle clericalism within the Church, promoting a more egalitarian and collaborative approach to ministry (*PP, Canon Law, Programmatic Strategies, p. 55*).
5. **Support lay initiatives:** Provide financial and logistical support for lay-led initiatives and ministries.
6. **Create support networks:** Establish networks and support systems for lay leaders, providing them with opportunities for peer learning, mentorship and spiritual renewal and facilitating a network of professionals, such as doctors, engineers, auditors, nurses, entrepreneurs, journalists, elected representatives, etc. (*PP, Laity, Goal 3, nos. 1 & 2, p. 86; Youth, Goal 2, p. 149; Programmatic Strategies, p. 151; Social Apostolate, Programmatic Strategies, p. 214*).

#### **e. Changes that the CCBI would like to witness**

1. A movement from decision-making to 'decision-taking' with everyone involved in participatory bodies as envisaged by the Magisterium and the Code of Canon Law.
2. The laity and clergy actively participate, according to their baptismal call, in building up the Kingdom of God through their threefold functions.
3. A new way of being a Church along with the laity becomes visible!

#### **The Spiritual Conversation Methodology made me more human in public life**

I am Banerjee (name changed), a 35-year-old resident of Dignabad, Port Blair. My grandparents, who came to Port Blair before independence, passed on the Catholic faith to me. I actively participate in Church activities but moved into politics after

serving as President of the Local Community. In January 2024, my Bishop invited me to a Pastoral Planning Workshop in Ranchi, but asked me to cover my travel expenses. After consulting my family, I agreed and was pleased to join eight other laypeople. The workshop challenged me to reflect on where God is calling the Church by 2033. The 'Spiritual Conversation' methodology changed my approach --- I learned to pray, listen and then speak. It transformed me from being forceful and arrogant with my ideas to being more understanding and compassionate. My relationships improved and I found joy and peace. Bishop Visuvasam Selvaraj follows the Synodal process, ensuring all voices are heard in governance and ministry. This has revitalized BECs, Parish Councils and faith formation. People are even offering free labour, 'Shram Dhan,' to strengthen faith communities in remote areas. I now realize the vital role of the laity in the Church and am grateful for this experience.

*Bp. Visuvasam Selvaraj, Diocese of Port Blair*

### **The Bidar Mission in Gulbarga Diocese**

The Bidar Mission began in 1982 and eventually emerged as the Diocese of Gulbarga in 2005. Initially, a controversy broke out among the clergy and religious regarding the needs of the poor in the area: evangelization or social work? There was conflict, uneasiness and restlessness while all were committed to the mission. Eventually, egoism popped up. To resolve this issue, we organised a three-day Mission Symposium. With the assistance of Bp. Gerald Lobo, who was a priest at that time, Professor Amit of Coady Institute, Canada, was invited as a resource person. Both parties vehemently placed their points of view. As the arguments reached a climax, Prof. Amit, in a gentle voice, said, "All of us are here with the sole motive of evangelization, which is the integral development of the poor. With our petty quarrel, let us not destroy the Church. We are called to follow an integrated approach where evangelization and social work go hand in hand. Let social work be the handmaid of evangelization." His words pierced the hearts of all those present. The heated discussion came to an end. The little Bidar Mission has become the Gulbarga diocese. I recognise the truth that the Lord speaks through lay people in our synodal journey.

*Bp. Robert Miranda, Diocese of Gulbarga*

## 5.6 Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC)

### Introduction

Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) aim at transforming every parish into a communion of communities, in a synodal way, built on the Word of God and Eucharist, renewing the Church and offering abundant life for all in India. BECs serve as instruments of evangelization and are essential in realizing the Synodal dimensions of the Church rooted in communion, participation and mission. BECs represent a transformative approach to Church life, emphasizing community building, faith sharing and active service within and beyond the faith community, by empowering lay leaders to participate in the life of the Church actively. BECs can be a participative and sustainable structure in every Diocese and Parish, following the model of early Christian communities.

### b. Realities and Challenges

1. **Limited awareness and participation:** Limited engagement from the faithful, clergy and religious due to a lack of understanding or interest. Less participation of men.
2. **Uneven implementation:** While some dioceses have thriving BECs, others struggle with inconsistent support of the pastor and initiative of the community, inadequate formation, etc.
3. **Challenges of modern life:** Urbanization, busy lifestyles and secular influences hinder regular participation and the ability to form close-knit, mission-driven communities.
4. **Animation and encouragement:** While there are individual committed leaders, there is a lack of team leadership to animate.

### c. Synodal Pathways

1. **Nurturing communion of communities:** BEC allows us to build 'Communion of Communities' in a synodal way, where all experience fraternity as sisters and brothers and everyone feels welcomed and respected (*PP, BEC, Mission Trajectory, p. 32*).
2. **Building inclusive communities:** We could build a participative, sharing, dialoguing and caring culture involving families, youth and children. Demonstrating faith in action, BEC could model itself as an inclusive community, supporting vulnerable members like widows, orphans and persons with disabilities (*PP, BEC, Goal 1: Objectives 3, p. 33*).

3. **BECs linked to parish and to the Mystical Body of Christ:** We could bring all members and families closer to the life of the parish and the Church, fostering a sense of ownership and making every member feel valued, respected and truly part of the body of Christ (*PP, BEC, Goal 2, pp. 33-34*).
4. **Living model faith communities:** By strengthening BECs, we will have a demonstrable model of living faith communities, an experience of *koinonia* from anonymity to belonging, resembling the First Christian Communities, which accompany one another spiritually, emotionally, socially and economically (*PP, BEC, Programmatic Strategies, p. 36*).
5. **Neighbourhood/Basic Human Communities:** Once the spirit of BECs is strengthened, we could take a step forward by building "Neighbourhood/Basic Human Communities" as models, wherever possible, sharing the spirituality and compassion of all religions (*PP, BEC, Programmatic Strategies, p. 37*).

#### **d. Strategies and Plans**

1. **Formation and training:** Train regional and diocesan teams on the principles of BEC, community building, conflict resolution and interfaith dialogue; train the laity and priests on the proper understanding; a course on theology, principles and practice of BEC must be introduced in all seminaries and religious formation houses (*PP, BEC, Goal 1, KPIs, p. 33*).
2. **Participation of male members:** Special efforts must be made to engage male members as active participants. This will pave the way for the participation of the entire family (*PP, BEC, Goal 1, KPIs, p. 33*).
3. **Active in participative structures of Parish/Diocese:** The participants become doers of the Word of God; proactive participation in the parish and diocesan participative structures, such as Parish and Finance Councils, Commissions and in various planning, implementing and decision-making bodies (*PP, BEC, Programmatic Strategies, pp. 36-37*).
4. **Moving beyond walled institutions:** BECs take ownership of the opportunities and problems of the communities and develop a clear plan of action on how to live the Gospel (*PP, BEC, Programmatic Strategies, p. 37*).
5. **Caring, sharing and loving:** A culture of caring and sharing, as expressions of love, must be visible in all BECs, especially in reaching out to those in the periphery, so they may feel included and valued (*PP, BEC, Goal 2, Objectives, p.35*).

6. **Adapting BEC principles to the context:** While the BEC philosophy provides a clear way of proceeding, it could be adapted to other needs and contexts by introducing innovative and creative methodologies (*PP, BEC, Activity Plan Matrix, p. 39*).
7. **Evaluation of BECs:** Periodic review and evaluation of the functioning of BECs are required to make BECs dynamic and to adapt to emerging contextual challenges (*PP, Programmatic Strategies, p. 37*).
8. **Lead by example:** Participation of Bishops, priests, religious and lay leaders in BEC meetings will boost the morale (*PP, BEC, Programmatic Strategies, p. 37*).

**e. Changes that the CCBI would like to witness**

1. BECs functioning as a domestic church, visible in practice through the inclusion of all, especially the poor, without any distinction and promoting communion, participation and synodal relationships.
2. At least in some dioceses, BECs move to Basic Human Communities, embracing interfaith relationships and social justice.
3. Rooted in the Word of God, BECs live their faith in action by engaging in social justice issues, poverty alleviation, environmental protection and the promotion of human rights.
4. Faith-inspired lay leadership is active in the parish and in the diocesan pastoral ministry as well as in community development.

**My students noticed changes in me**

I am Mathias (name changed) from Immaculate Conception Church, Kinnigoli, Diocese of Mangalore. For two years, I served as the BEC Commission Convenor without any interest. I saw it as a burden and a waste of time. In July 2024, a BEC training programme changed my perspective. I understood the true meaning and importance of Basic Ecclesial Communities. I started participating in Gospel sharing with faith and joy. My attitude changed, and even my students noticed my patience and humility. BEC meetings are now a source of joy. Our parish ensures regular meetings for reporting, evaluation and planning. A clear vision and deeper understanding could bring transformation.

*Fr. George Jacob Palackaparambil SAC*

### **Eucharist celebrated in my house changed my life for ever**

My name is Paul (name changed), and I come from a farming family. I am active in politics. Though I went to the church, I never participated in the Mass. I would stand outside the Church and engage only in development work. When new *Anbiyams* (BECs) were formed, *Chinnapar* (St. Paul) *Anbiyam* was initiated in my area in 2024. I was chosen as its representative. I did not know what *Anbiyam* was about. Fr. Vincent and his team gave an orientation and explained its importance. Slowly, my love for *Anbiyam* grew. The turning point was when our *Anbiyam* celebrated its first Mass in my house, with three priests, two nuns, and the coordinator. Eighty-five people gathered and prayed. I felt my house and my family members were blessed. Now, I take part in church activities and prayers I find joy in attending Sunday mass. I have decided to contribute to the growth of my community and the Church.

*Bp. Amalraj, Ooty*

## **5.7 Migrants and Refugees**

### **a. Introduction**

The Church is called to uphold the inherent worth and dignity of the forcibly displaced, migrants, refugees and all people on the move. "I was a stranger, and you welcomed me" (cf. Mt 25:35). Migrants and refugees in distress are the poor (*Anawim of Yahweh*) of our times. Not only do people migrate, their faith migrates too. In the words of Pope Francis, they need to be welcomed, protected, promoted and integrated. The Church can be their voice, advocating for justice and inclusion.

### **b. Realities and Challenges**

Immigration and emigration are unavoidable realities today as people need resources for survival, food on the table, education, medical assistance, care for the elderly and so on. While migration is closely linked to issues of poverty, climate change and unfair economy, the refugee scenario is due to violence and war. Migrants and refugees are uprooted from their culture, separated from their families, and are subjected to vulnerable conditions, humiliation, hardship, xenophobia and limited access to basic services in places of destination. The number of intra-state, inter-state, overseas migrants and refugees is on the increase. There is a huge migration of Catholics from Central, North and Northeast India to various cities in India. In Delhi and other cities, Christian refugees live in precarious conditions with fear and uncertainty about their future.

### c. Synodal Pathways

1. **Educating all the faithful** on Christian values, like hospitality, acceptance and solidarity by welcoming migrants, protecting their rights and helping them integrate into host communities with a spirit of unity and mission.
2. **Ensuring pastoral care** for migrants and refugees by celebrating liturgies in their languages and nurturing the gifts migrants bring to enrich the culture of the parish and the local community (*PP, Migrants, Goal 1, p. 98*).
3. **Promoting safe migration** at the source dioceses by establishing appropriate systems and linking the system with destination dioceses (*PP, Migrants, Goal 2, p. 99*).
4. **Developing networks** across dioceses, leveraging technology to accompany, guide and monitor the movement of the migrants (*PP, Migrants, KPI 5, p. 100*).
5. **Collaborating** with the Vatican Dicastery for Integral Human Development, International and National Organisations.
6. **Working with the government** in source and destination states (*PP, Migrants, KPI 3, p. 99*).

### d. Strategies and Plans

1. **Incorporating culture and language:** Enriching the celebration of liturgy for migrants by incorporating their language and culture in parishes and dioceses.
2. **Strengthening the Commission** by appointing Secretaries at the regional and diocesan levels and having focal persons at the parish level to better support migrants, address their specific needs and advocate for migrants' rights (*PP, Migrants, Objective 1, KPI 2, p. 99*).
3. **Collecting and registering data** in source and destination parishes, using the CCBI migrant portal of Catholic Connect (*PP, Migrants, KPI 5, p. 100*).
4. **Organizing periodic interactive gatherings** with local communities to encourage a welcoming attitude, mutual understanding and cultural integration (*PP, Migrants, Objective 2, p. 98*).
5. **Providing employment opportunities** for migrants, ensuring fair wages and supporting their families and the education of their children.
6. **Creating shelter options** for migrants, including short-term and temporary residential facilities at destinations.

7. **Helping migrants to enrol** in government welfare and skill development schemes and access entitlements available in each state (*PP, Migrants, Goal 2, KPI 3, p. 99*).
8. **Collaborating** with religious congregations, as religious communities have people from different cultures and states residing in destination locations for pastoral support.

**e. Changes that the CCBI would like to witness**

1. Migrants and refugees sustain their faith and enrich the Church in source and destination through their resources and experiences, making it more vibrant and dynamic.
2. The Church becomes more inclusive and synodal and the migrants' trust in the Church is visible.
3. Through pastoral care of the migrants and refugees, the Church becomes alive to the mission of evangelization in a spirit of synodality.

**I am alive because of your love and care!**

This is the story of Sruti (name changed), a young tribal Catholic woman from Orissa. Diagnosed with bone cancer, she worked as a domestic worker in Mumbai but had to return home due to her illness. Filled with despair, she had no hope until her sister reached out to the Church. In 2024, when she returned to Mumbai for treatment, Rosary Church welcomed her with open arms. The parish helped her with accommodation, paperwork, free treatment, and a monthly stipend. When chemotherapy led to an amputation, parishioners supported her with meals, prayers, and a prosthetic leg. On October 13, during the parish feast, she bravely walked to the altar and thanked the community, saying, "I am alive because of your love and care." Inspired by the Gospel, Rosary Church had already been serving cancer patients, providing free meals and shelter to those in need. Their mission expanded to offer rent-free housing for Catholic families undergoing treatment. This act of compassion reflects the Archdiocese of Bombay's commitment to service, embodying Christ's love through a spirit of synodality and care.

*Bp. Savio Fernandes, Bombay*



### **A migrant's prayer!**

While travelling by train, I noticed a migrant tribal woman sitting on the floor of the compartment as she had no seat. She wore a rosary around her neck, and at 7 p.m., she took it and began to pray. Those in the compartment noticed her, and to my surprise, the passengers gradually fell silent, respecting her prayer. I felt, in a quiet yet profound way, that she reminded them of the need to pray and perhaps even brought them closer to God. This moment left a deep impact on me that prayer should be natural and sincere, even in unexpected situations. I recalled how many migrants travel long distances to attend Mass at the cathedral, offering their small savings despite their struggles. Even non-Christian migrants, who call themselves *Khrist Bhaktas*, regularly visit the church and pray with devotion. Their unwavering faith convinced me of the deep spiritual wealth of the migrant community.

*Bp. Sebastian Kallupura, Patna*

## **5.8 Dalits**

### **a. Introduction**

Dalits, historically marginalized and oppressed due to caste-based discrimination, form a significant portion of the Catholic Church in India. However, their full participation in ecclesial and social life remains hindered by systemic injustices, socio-economic disadvantages and lingering discriminatory attitudes within society and, at times, within the Church itself. The Church is called to be a prophetic witness, upholding the dignity of Dalits, advocating for justice and ensuring their rightful place within the community of faith. Inspired by the Gospel, the Church in India must commit to dismantling caste-based inequalities and fostering a more inclusive and egalitarian ecclesial structure.

### **b. Realities and Challenges**

1. **Caste-based discrimination in Church and society:** Casteism remains a deep-seated issue, contradicting the Gospel values of equality and fraternity.
2. **Dalits and religious identity:** Policies restricting benefits to Scheduled Caste (SC) converts continue to be a major barrier to Dalits embracing Christianity.
3. **Lack of representation in Church structures:** Dalits are underrepresented in Church leadership and decision-making bodies. Their voices often go unheard in pastoral planning and governance.

4. **Economic and educational disadvantages:** Dalits face socio-economic hardships, limiting their access to quality education, employment and social mobility. Church institutions need to do more to ensure that Dalit children and youth receive equitable opportunities.
5. **Delayed implementation of Dalit policies:** The Church has formulated policies for Dalit empowerment (*cf. CBCI Dalit Policy 2016*). A few dioceses have also developed plans of action. However, the implementation remains slow and ineffective. A change of mindset and operational plans are needed to ensure that these policies translate into concrete action.

### c. Synodal Pathways

1. **Recognizing the dignity of Dalits:** Continue to explicitly affirm the equal dignity of Dalits and challenge caste-based discrimination within and outside ecclesial structures. Parishes and Dioceses should foster a culture of inclusivity, solidarity and respect.
2. **Ensuring ecclesial participation and representation:** Dalits must be given greater roles in leadership, pastoral councils and decision-making structures. Seminaries and formation houses should actively promote Dalit vocations and address caste biases in priestly formation.
3. **Advocacy for justice and equal rights:** Advocate for the Constitutional rights and social justice for Dalits, challenge discriminatory government policies and dialogue with policymakers and civil society to address Dalit concerns.
4. **Strengthening education and economic empowerment:** Catholic institutions must prioritize scholarships, skill development and employment opportunities for Dalit youth. Parishes should create support systems to help Dalits access higher education and professional opportunities.
5. **Implementing the Dalit Policy:** The Dalit Policy of the Church, "Building Inclusive Communities," must be actively implemented at every level to ensure real impact. A monitoring mechanism should be established to evaluate progress and address gaps in implementation.

### d. Strategies and Plans

1. **A Prophetic and counter-cultural witness:** Consciously eliminate caste biases in institutions and communities, wherever they still exist; Bishops and priests should lead by example.

2. **Structural inclusion and Dalit leadership development:** Lay leadership among Dalits should be encouraged and nurtured through training programmes and mentoring.
3. **Policy reforms and institutional commitment:** Dalit representation in ecclesial bodies and Church commissions should be actively promoted.
4. **Eradicating discriminatory practices:** Any form of caste-based exclusion or discrimination in parishes, institutions or religious communities must be confronted and eradicated.
5. **Justice and socio-economic empowerment:** Continue to work towards empowering Dalit communities through legal assistance, employment initiatives and self-sustaining projects.

**e. Changes that the CCBI would like to witness**

1. Dalits express that they are treated as equal members of the Church, and their contributions recognized and valued.
2. The Dalit policy is translated into practical, measurable outcomes, with a regular review mechanism.
3. Dalit leadership is visible and active from parish to national bodies and in pastoral and administrative roles.

**The Church gave me dignity and hope!**

My name is Sanjay (name changed), and I am 42 years old. I work as an advocate and also serve as a social worker. I was born in a remote village in the Diocese of Bellary, where there was no school or primary healthcare centre. As a Dalit, my family faced social and economic hardships. No one either noticed or bothered about us. The Church supported my education through sponsorship and became my second mother. With its guidance, I pursued professional studies and became a lawyer. Inspired by Catholic values, I help rural women, farmers and Dalits and fight for justice. I also run an NGO to support poor children, patients and unemployed youth. I gladly offer my expertise to my parish and diocese. I am grateful to God for my family, my faith, and the Church's support. The Church gave me dignity, hope, and a future.

*Bp. Henry D'Souza, Bellary*

## 5.9 Tribals/Adivasis/Indigenous Peoples

### a. Introduction

Tribals, Adivasis and Indigenous Peoples, often used synonymously, are among the most ancient communities in India. They have unique cultures, traditions and deep connections to their ancestral lands. Despite their rich heritage, they face severe marginalization, land loss, displacement and cultural erosion. Their struggles are intensified by socio-economic hardships, lack of political representation and inadequate access to education, healthcare and employment. The Church in India acknowledges the dignity and rights of these communities and recognizes their presence as a precious gift to the Church. However, it also understands that many of their concerns remain unaddressed. As part of its mission, the Church must walk with them, advocate for their rights and ensure their voices are heard in both Church and society.

### b. Realities and Challenges

1. **Loss of land and displacement:** Due to dehumanising development models, lands are being taken over by industries, large-scale projects and deforestation, resulting in displacement and loss of homes and livelihoods. Rehabilitation policies are poorly implemented.
2. **Struggles for legal recognition and identity:** Many Indigenous communities lack legal ownership of their lands, making them vulnerable to eviction. Their rights are legally recognized, but poorly implemented. There is an imminent danger of eliminating tribal customs, governance and ways of life.
3. **Socio-economic exclusion:** Many Adivasis and tribals live in poverty, with little access to decent jobs and economic opportunities. Tribal and Adivasi children often have poor educational facilities, leading to a high dropout rate. Health services in tribal areas are often insufficient or absent, leading to high mortality and malnutrition.
4. **Cultural and religious marginalization:** Tribal languages and traditions are being lost due to a lack of official recognition and support. The Adivasis struggle to practise their faith and traditions freely as mainstream culture dominates. Within the Church, indigenous spiritual expressions are sometimes overlooked or discouraged.
5. **Weak implementation of policies:** Though policies exist to protect tribal land rights, education and welfare, they are poorly enforced.

### c. Synodal Pathways

1. **Recognizing and respecting identity and culture:** Respect and integrate the cultural and spiritual traditions by valuing indigenous ways of prayer, music and cultural practices, and promoting the use of indigenous languages in liturgy, catechesis and faith formation.
2. **Equal opportunities in leadership:** Ensure indigenous priests, religious leaders and laypeople have equal opportunities in leadership and are included in diocesan and national Church bodies.
3. **Protecting land and legal rights:** Work with legal experts and activists to protect indigenous lands from encroachment and express dissent to unjust policies.
4. **Strengthening education and economic opportunities:** Catholic schools and colleges should provide scholarships and skill training for tribal youth. Social centres should support self-sustaining projects, like farming cooperatives and small businesses in tribal areas.
5. **Promoting inclusion and justice:** Programmes could be developed to educate society on the dignity and rights of indigenous communities.

### d. Strategies and Plans

1. **Recognize Indigenous Peoples as a precious gift:** Celebrate their heritage, wisdom and spirituality, and encourage indigenous expressions of faith.
2. **Advocacy for justice and equal rights:** Speak out against land grabs, displacement and environmental destruction, affecting indigenous communities.
3. **Strengthen legal and social support:** Network with NGOs, human rights organizations and legal professionals to assist indigenous people.
4. **Preserve and promote indigenous culture:** Celebrate indigenous culture through special liturgies, feasts and events.
5. **Develop sustainable communities:** Promote economic programmes that help indigenous people develop self-reliance and stability.
6. **Create a platform for migrant priests:** Promote the concept of migrant priests to accompany and guide the indigenous people who have accepted migration as a way to survive.

**e. Changes that the CCBI would like to witness**

1. Indigenous people feel welcomed, valued and included in all aspects of Church life, wherever they are and migrate.
2. Inter-diocesan collaboration mechanisms are set up to support the needy dioceses, predominantly with indigenous Catholics.
3. The leadership of the indigenous peoples is visible in decision-making structures.

**Jesus continues to bless us!**

Elise (name changed) was married for six years but had no child. It was an arranged marriage according to the local tribal custom among the *Sarnas*. The village was partly inhabited by the *Sarnas* and by the Christians. The husband was a good man. But he was disappointed by the fact that Elise was not able to give him a child. The bitter comments from the community members disturbed him. To make matters worse, someone or the other in the family would fall sick now and then.

Elise found solace whenever she met the Christians in the village. She experienced empathy. Elise joined them in their daily gathering for prayer. One day, one of the Christians suggested that she should pray Luke 4:18 regularly. It did not take much time to read and memorize the verse. Instead of saying "to set me free", she began to say "You have set me free". This became her mantra or prayer. Soon, she conceived, delivered a child and brought much joy to her husband and other members of the family. Now, she is a mother of three children. The husband began to attend the prayer services. She says, "Jesus is alive. He continues to bless us, hears us and save us."

*Abp. Vincent Aind, Archdiocese of Ranchi*

**My faith saved me!**

Krish Mundu (name changed), born into a Sarna (indigenous) religious family, had to abandon his education after high school due to financial problems. In 2000, he married Urmila. Facing many hardships, the family moved to Khunti to seek a better life. Krishna worked as a gas cylinder deliveryman. In 2004, Krishna met Mr. Mundri, a Catholic, who offered him a new business venture. Krishna, influenced by RSS ideology, resented all Christians. Sushil continued visiting his family and slowly became their friend. Krishna had two children. His son was diagnosed with incurable

paralysis in 2004, adding financial strain. In 2012, their situation worsened when Krishna's younger brother died. The business collapsed.

Mr. Mundri introduced him to Fr. Bisu Benjamin Aind, the parish priest, for counselling. Though, initially, Krishna was sceptical, he found solace and strength. Later, he and his family embraced Christianity. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Krishna fell critically ill but was saved by Sushil and Fr. Bisu. Krishna attributes his survival to his faith in Jesus Christ and renounced all his former beliefs and superstitions. Now, his life has changed, his business is flourishing and peace has returned to his family. The family looks after their paralysed son with love and care. This family has become a witness of Jesus' mercy and love, inspiring many people in his village to come close to Jesus.

*Bp. Binay Kandulna, Khunti Diocese*

## **5.10 Socially Excluded People**

### **a. Introduction**

Socially excluded people are the trafficked, LGBTQIA+, persons with disability, physically and mentally challenged, orphans, widows, the aged, sex workers and similar groups. The Church is already taking care of some of these people. However, several of them still lack pastoral care and compassion. The Gospel values and the teachings of the Church affirm that every person is created in the image and likeness of God. The Church is called to uphold the rights and dignity of all, especially those who are the least, the last and the lost. We need to hear the piercing voices of these people: "Will we have a place in the Church as full members with rights and dignity?" By working for inclusion, equality, justice and equity, the Church could effectively contribute to realising the Kingdom of God on earth, as everyone is created in His image.

### **b. Realities and Challenges**

The socially excluded people lack acceptance in their own families, society and the Church. They face discrimination, violence, isolation and exclusion, harassment, false accusations and economic hardships. Some individuals are forced to beg on the streets for survival, while others fall prey to exploitation and trafficking by criminal networks. Many of these groups have limited access to education, employment and decent living. They are also confronted with mental health issues and substance abuse, resulting in suicidal tendencies. Though a few individuals, groups and non-governmental

organisations are working with these groups as special priority, the Church has a long way to go in recognizing and working with these groups to affirm their dignity and rights.

### c. Pastoral Pathways

1. **Providing pastoral care:** Dedicated priests and religious could be trained, especially in counselling, and the Church could provide pastoral care to the socially excluded.
2. **Facilitating to become full members of the Church:** The Church can develop an empathetic understanding and acceptance of these individuals, ensuring that they are recognised and included as full members of the local community, the Church and the society.
3. **Becoming a voice of the excluded:** By participating in their struggles, the Church could amplify their voices for dignity and rights in appropriate fora.
4. **Capacitating to access the entitlements:** Government schemes must reach these people. The Church can share information about these programmes and assist and train the excluded communities to access various entitlements and schemes. Training could be offered to participate in *Gram Sabhas* and monitoring budget allocation and implementation of programmes by local panchayats, using the Right to Information.
5. **Collaboration and networking:** Several social work centres and religious congregations are working with the socially excluded. Linkages could be established to support these efforts and sensitise the faithful.
6. **Advocating the rights of the excluded:** It is time for Church members to go beyond charity and advocate for their rights with compassion and solidarity.

### d. Strategies and Plans

1. **Sensitise the faithful:** The faithful need to be educated and sensitised, especially regarding sexual orientations and the trafficking of young girls and boys, exploiting their vulnerabilities.
2. **Provide personal and specialised pastoral care:** These people require specialised pastoral care, including access to sacraments.
3. **Establish short-stay facilities:** In some nodal places, night shelters and short-stay facilities could be established.



4. **Develop a dedicated ministry:** As these persons do not fall under 'mainstream' society and are vulnerable, eventually dedicated ministry structures could be created by the dioceses to facilitate understanding, inclusion and integration.
5. **Offer mental health programmes:** Those who have gone through violence and trauma require Mental Health and Psychosocial Services (MHPSS), including counselling, recreational activities and rehabilitation from addictions and use of substances.
6. **Set up help desks:** In a few nodal cities and towns, help desks could be established with nodal point persons to assist trafficked persons in emergencies.
7. **Collaborate with government and civil society organisations:** Joint programmes could be developed to share information, best practices, government programmes, etc.
8. **Facilitate skills development:** Battered and excluded people require alternative skills and employment opportunities to transition into the rehabilitation process.

#### **e. Changes that the CCBI would like to witness**

1. Socially excluded people affirm that 'Synodality is in action' and express that they are accompanied, recognised and animated by the Church, especially in providing pastoral care.
2. The Church structures are seen as 'people-friendly' by the socially excluded people.
3. Local faith communities realise the importance of reaching out to the socially excluded, ensuring that their dignity is restored.

#### **Let her receive the loan!**

In a small village of Kabistharam, within the Diocese of Kumbakonam, the Basic Ecclesial Community gathered for their monthly meeting. The discussion centred on a self-help loan meant to support their livelihood. As names were considered, an elderly woman who was with her sickly husband and had no one to care for them, requested a loan for the second time, while many were still waiting to get a loan for the first time. Her eyes were filled with silent suffering. She was struggling to make ends meet and to take care of her sick husband. Moved by compassion, the group fell into a deep silence. Then, one by one, they withdrew their requests. "Let her

receive the loan," a voice finally broke through. The decision was unanimous. Tears welled up in the eyes of the elderly woman as she whispered, 'God bless you all!'

*Bp. Jeevanandam Amalanathan, Kumbakonam*

## 5.11 Women and Gender Justice

### a. Introduction

Women make invaluable contributions across diverse spheres of life. Their role within the Church is vital, necessitating a commitment to gender justice to ensure the Church's continued growth and vitality. This entails recognising women's unique perspectives, valuing their participation in decision-making processes and affording them equal opportunities to serve and lead. From the very beginning, the biblical accounts of creation affirm that man and woman are created equal in dignity, though distinct in their roles -- complementary in nature and purpose. However, in practice, there is a huge gap between what we believe in and what we practise. There is an urgent need to deepen our theological understanding of the role of women.

### b. Realities and Challenges

1. **Exploitation and objectification:** Women continue to face exploitation and objectification in contemporary society and are often reduced to mere instruments of desire.
2. **Gender-based violence and discrimination:** Across India, gender-based violence, discrimination and oppression persist, with many issues remaining unacknowledged.
3. **Social and economic inequality:** Women's leadership abilities are frequently undervalued, and their contributions overlooked. Women continue to endure various forms of injustice in both the public and private realms.
4. **Violations of fundamental rights:** The practice of female foeticide, female infanticide, inadequate access to healthcare, exclusion from decision-making and social evils, such as dowry and dowry deaths remain prevalent -- even among Christians -- highlighting deep-rooted inequalities.
5. **Marginalization in the Church and society:** Due to patriarchal mindsets, women remain marginalized in the Church and society. While they play a significant role in parish life, they are not proportionately involved in decision-making.

6. **Internalisation of patriarchal attitudes:** Numerous women have internalised patriarchal values, further undermining their dignity and mission within the Church. Their struggles are exacerbated by intersecting issues of sexism, classism and racism.

### c. Synodal Pathways

1. **Affirmative action for leadership and decision-making:** Ensure rightful space for women in leadership by actively promoting their participation in all participatory structures, including administration. Provide equal opportunities for women to serve and lead by granting access to theological education, leadership training and pastoral ministry. Establish guidelines at the parish and diocesan levels to facilitate equal representation and leadership roles for women in ministries and ecclesiastical offices.
2. **Recognition of the contribution of women religious:** Make the role of women religious more visible by acknowledging their contributions through social engagement and pastoral care. Ensure greater incorporation of women religious into ecclesial and ecclesiastical bodies. Recognize them as co-workers in mission, actively contributing to the life and evangelizing mission of the Church.
3. **Creating a culture of respect, equality and inclusion:** Foster a culture of respect and equality by challenging gender stereotypes and addressing discrimination. Promote a welcoming environment where women feel valued, respected and empowered to use their gifts for the Church and society. Provide just remuneration to working women in Church institutions.
4. **Education and awareness for societal transformation:** Educate families to change mindsets toward girl children and women, fostering trust, dignity and equality. Encourage women to recognize and fulfil their baptismal call by actively participating in the life and mission of the Church.
5. **Educate clergy, male religious and lay faithful:** Gender justice involves a two-pronged strategy: men must rise above the patriarchal mindset and women should affirm their role in all walks of life and in the Church.

### d. Strategies and Plans

1. **50% female representation:** Ensure 50% female representation in every Parish Pastoral Council, Parish Finance Committee, Diocesan Pastoral Council and Diocesan Finance Committee, to promote inclusive decision-making (*PP, Goal 2, Objective 1, p. 142*).

2. **Invest in and capacitate women:** Organise capacity-building programmes to enhance women's animation and leadership skills for active participation in Church governance (*PP, Goal 2, Objective 1, p. 142*).
3. **Implement PoSH:** Form an Internal Compliance Committee and adhere to the Protection of Women against Sexual Harassment (PoSH) in the Workplace (*PP, APM, p. 147 and Goal 1, Objective 3, Indicator 3, P. 181*).
4. **Linkage with government schemes:** Organize diocesan awareness programmes regarding government schemes, livelihood opportunities and self-employment initiatives to support women's economic empowerment (*PP, Goal 2, Education, Objective 4, p. 143*).
5. **Celebrate womanhood:** Celebrate Women's Day, Girl Child Day, Constitution Day and Human Rights Day at the parish level, to educate the faithful on gender equality, as willed by God (*PP, Education, Goal 2, Objective 2, p. 142*).
6. **Provide specialized training:** Conduct workshops for diocesan representatives on the role and functions of Parish Councils and Finance Committees, leadership development, Catholic Social Teaching, human rights, Constitutional rights, safeguarding children and prevention of sexual harassment in the workplace (*PP, Education, Goal 2, Objective 1, p. 142*).

#### **e. Changes that the CCBI would like to witness**

1. Strong, active and sustainable women's cell in every Parish, Diocese and Region.
2. Women testify that they are heard and that their views are taken seriously in decision-making bodies in the Church.
3. Clergy, male religious, and laity grow in understanding the importance of respect, equal dignity of women, participation and contribution for the Church to be effective in mission.

#### **To feel loved, heard and valued!**

In the beginning, it was not so easy to work for women. Reaching out to remote parishes gave me tremendous joy to work for the Commission. I organised a pilgrimage for them. The spiritual pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Jude, Jhansi, on behalf of the Commission for Women, was a humbling experience. As I reflect on this enriching experience, I am filled with gratitude and adoration. As the Secretary of the Commission, I saw firsthand the transformative power of faith. The pilgrimage brought together women from diverse backgrounds, fostering fellowship and

spiritual growth. I witnessed how the experience touched each participant's heart, filling them with hope, renewal and empowerment.

This pilgrimage has been a defining moment for me, reminding me that I am an instrument of God's service. I have come to realise that all that is required for women is to feel loved, heard and valued.

*Dr. Julie Rose, Archdiocese of Delhi*

## 5.12 Poverty and Equitable Economy

### a. Introduction

*Dignitas Infinita* identifies poverty as one of the greatest injustices in the contemporary world. Every person possesses an inherent dignity that must be upheld in economic and social structures, ensuring the well-being of all, especially the poor. The call for solidarity demands just economic systems that respect human rights, fair wages and dignified working conditions, ensuring that no one is excluded, which is the focus of the Sustainable Development Goals. Economic policies must serve the common good, fostering the equitable distribution of resources, social inclusion and integral human development. The Church upholds the preferential option for the poor, advocating for policies that reduce inequality, promote justice, and defend human dignity in all aspects of economic life.

### b. Realities and Challenges

1. **Deepening wealth inequality:** In 2017, the richest 1% received 73% of the wealth generated, while the bottom half of the population saw only marginal benefits.
2. **Economic growth amidst rising poverty:** India's GDP was projected to reach \$4 trillion in 2024, but 63 million people were to be pushed into poverty each year, underscoring a stark economic divide.
3. **Extreme wage disparities:** Severe income inequality and structural wage injustice.
4. **Vulnerability and systemic exclusion:** Women, children, migrants, Dalits and Indigenous communities continue to face economic marginalization.
5. **Repeated Crises:** Climate change, pandemics and conflicts further exacerbate poverty, disproportionately impacting the most vulnerable.

### c. Synodal Pathways

1. **Embracing a synodal path to justice and solidarity:** Everyone is called to walk with the poor, recognise their struggles and foster a compassionate, collective response. To embody a preferential option for the poor, the Church must influence systemic change and empower the poor to shape their future. Shifting from charity to a rights-based model empowers individuals to claim their entitlements with dignity.
2. **Fostering a culture of shared responsibility:** Wealthier parishes can support smaller ones, and financially stable dioceses can share resources with those in need. This Jubilee Year calls for the cancellation of debts and the creation of funds to uplift the poor through local fundraising mechanisms to support housing, education and livelihoods for the vulnerable.
3. **A commitment to economic empowerment:** Poverty alleviation must ensure sustainable development, rooted in the Church's mission of justice and communion. A National Core Committee, with representatives from the religious and laity, can shape a common economic vision for equitable resource distribution. Strengthening initiatives, like *Communio and Aviral*, fostering welfare funds and promoting sustainable projects will create lasting impact. Upholding the rights of the marginalized, advocating systemic change and aligning with global frameworks will reinforce the Church's commitment to social justice and human development.
4. **Empowering communities through education and skill development:** Skill development could break the cycle of poverty and promote socio-economic stability. Catholic institutions must prioritise children's education, especially Catholic children, and support higher education for future leaders. By strengthening the knowledge and skills of youth and women, the Church could foster economic self-reliance and social productivity.

### d. Strategies and Plans

1. **Listen to the voices of the poor:** Establish grassroots listening circles (Spiritual Conversation Methodology) at parish and diocesan levels, to ensure that the voices of the poor are heard and included in decision-making.
2. **Establish twinning initiatives:** Create Parish/Diocesan twinning initiatives, where well-resourced parishes/dioceses support the needy ones through financial aid and shared resources.

3. **Dedicated budget provision:** Establish a fixed percentage of diocesan budgets to poverty alleviation, prioritising education, healthcare and livelihood programmes.
4. **Skills development:** Strengthen vocational training and job placement networks to equip young people with employable skills and connect them to sustainable job opportunities.
5. **Create scholarship funds:** Expand scholarship and sponsorship schemes to ensure access to quality education for underprivileged Catholic children and youth.
6. **Handholding support:** Develop self-help groups and cooperative societies to promote financial literacy, entrepreneurship and economic self-reliance.
7. **Initiate national core committee:** Establish a national core committee to develop an economic justice paradigm for the CCBI and to coordinate resource distribution and sustainable development projects.
8. **Legal aid and negotiation skills:** Enhance legal aid and negotiation and advocacy programmes, to help the poor access government welfare schemes, land rights and labour protections.
9. **Share best practices:** Strengthen diocesan and inter-diocesan collaboration networks to share best practices, pool resources and to amplify the impact of Church-led development initiatives.

#### **e. Changes that the CCBI would like to witness**

1. The poor and vulnerable will have a stronger voice in decision-making, fostering a truly synodal Church that listens and acts in solidarity.
2. Option for the poor is reinforced from Parish to Diocese and the poor feel accompanied, animated and guided.
3. Twinning initiatives among dioceses become a reality.
4. More Catholic youth are engaged in governance and policymaking, advocating for justice and systemic change.

#### **Our home became place of peace!**

My name is Rani (name changed), a single mother from Vaduhapatty, Thatchankurichi parish. When cyclone Gaja struck, it destroyed our home and left us with nothing. We took shelter in a school, where food was scarce, and fear gripped

my heart as I looked at my son. How would we rebuild our lives? Our parish priest came to the shelter, listened to our struggles and supported us with money and materials. Within weeks, a small house was constructed. This house restored our dignity. The priest baptized my son, Augustine. Life remained challenging, but we no longer felt alone. Our modest home became a place of peace. I still live in that house, and every Sunday, I offer a silent prayer of gratitude.

*Bp. Sagayaraj Thamburaj, Thanjavur*

## 5.13 Digital Technology and Social Media

### a. Introduction

Digital technology and social media have become essential to modern communication, influencing every aspect of life. They offer powerful tools for sharing information, fostering relationships and spreading the message of faith. However, they also come with risks, such as misinformation, digital addiction and ethical concerns. The Church recognizes the need to engage with digital technology responsibly and use social media as a means of evangelization, faith formation and community building. It must promote responsible use, encourage digital literacy and ensure that media platforms are used to strengthen faith, Christian values and social concerns.

### b. Realities and Challenges

1. **The power of social media in evangelization:** Social media provide a unique opportunity to share the Gospel, reach a wider audience and create faith-inspired communities. They enable the faithful to engage in discussions on faith and prayer and to respond to social concerns.
2. **The risks of misinformation and misuse:** Social media can spread false information, fake news and harmful ideologies that mislead people. Ethical concerns, such as privacy violations, cyberbullying and online hate speeches, pose serious challenges. Many people struggle with digital addiction, neglecting real-life relationships.
3. **Lack of digital literacy and media awareness:** Many users lack the critical thinking skills needed to navigate digital content wisely. There is a need for training and education in responsible digital engagement. The ethical use of artificial intelligence (AI) and digital tools requires clear guidelines.



4. **The challenge of digital overload:** Excessive dependence on digital platforms can lead to isolation, loss of personal interactions and weakened family relationships. The balance between online and offline engagement must be maintained to preserve real human connections.

### c. Synodal Pathways

1. **Using digital technology for evangelization and faith formation:** Effective utilisation of digital tools to spread the message of Christ, promote Gospel values and support faith formation. Facilitating the creation of inspiring digital content and providing apologetics, catechesis and reflections on Christian teachings.
2. **Promoting responsible and ethical use of social media:** Introducing media education programmes and helping people use digital platforms responsibly, especially educating clergy, religious and lay leaders on ethical digital engagement. A social media policy could act as a guide to appropriate online behaviour.
3. **Combating misinformation and digital addiction:** Take a proactive role in countering false narratives and harmful online content. A healthy balance between digital and real-life interactions is necessary. Face-to-face engagements and community gatherings will help reduce digital dependency.
4. **Strengthening the role of the clergy and religious in digital spaces:** Training priests, religious and Church leaders to leverage technology and social media and become positive digital role models. Introducing digital evangelization in the seminary and religious formation and developing new online communication models to reach out to families and individuals spread out or living in isolation are the new missionary invitations.
5. **Encouraging a synodal approach to digital communication:** Foster dialogue and collaboration in digital spaces to build a strong online faith community to facilitate sharing, reflection and spiritual growth.

### d. Strategies and Plans

1. **Digital evangelization initiatives:** Realising the importance of the influence of the digital world, the Church must actively create and share faith-based content on major social media platforms. Online retreats, virtual prayer groups and digital faith-sharing sessions should be promoted. A dedicated team should

be formed in each diocese to oversee digital evangelization efforts (*PP, Media, Goal 3, p. 201*).

2. **Strengthening media literacy and digital Ethics:** Include digital literacy in the curriculum of Catholic schools, seminaries and pastoral centres. Awareness campaigns must be organised to educate people on cybersecurity, privacy, digital arrest, responsible use of AI and online ethics (*PP, Media, Goal 3, p. 201*).
3. **Establishing a stronger digital presence for the Church:** Every diocese having a digital ministry team could make the new evangelization effective. Church websites and digital platforms should be made more interactive, informative and accessible. Clergy and lay leaders should be encouraged to share their faith journeys online in an engaging and relatable way (*PP, Media, Goal 2, p. 200*).
4. **Encouraging community building through digital platforms:** Create online faith communities and encourage discussions, share testimonies and offer spiritual support. Virtual meetings and faith-based webinars should be conducted to connect people online. Interactive digital tools should be used for catechesis, sacramental preparation and pastoral care (*PP, Media, Goal 2, p. 200*).
5. **Developing guidelines for ethical digital engagement:** A Church-wide social media policy should be formulated to promote positive online interactions. Developing systems to handle negative comments, misinformation, online conflicts and guidelines to balance digital engagement and real-life pastoral responsibilities are new priorities.

#### **e. Changes that the CCBI would like to witness**

1. Children, youth and digital communities become new evangelists of faith, freed from digital addiction, accompanied and guided by the clergy, religious and lay leaders.
2. Ethical digital communication has become a new way of living our faith that promotes justice from parish to diocese.
3. A well-connected and digitally inclusive faith community, ensuring that no one is left behind in the digital transformation of society.
4. The dream of the 'Catholic Connect App' becomes a reality.

## 5.14 Ecology and Climate Stewardship

### a. Introduction

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible teaches humans to care for God's creation. We are called to be stewards of the Earth and all that is in it (cf. Gen 1:1), living in harmony with nature. This responsibility is not just personal but extends to our communities and society. The core of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is to achieve a balance between economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection by addressing issues, like poverty eradication, inequality reduction and climate change mitigation. The SDGs also aim to ensure access to basic needs, like healthcare and education for all people, while safeguarding the planet for future generations. We are called to live simply and protect our common home, following Pope Francis' appeal in *Laudato Si'* (nn. 13-15), realising that there is an organic relationship among social, economic and environmental justice. The Church can lead by example through local actions in parishes and dioceses.

### b. Current Realities

Overexploitation of the environment has resulted in deforestation, pollution, uninhabitable urbanisation, climate change and the loss of biodiversity, which breaks the divine triptych relationship of the Creator, humans and nature. This effect is exacerbated by massive displacement of the poor, irretrievable harm to nature, increasing excessive consumption of a few and short-term economic interests. Poor and vulnerable communities, especially those in the peripheries and margins, rural areas, urban slums and coastal regions, bear the brunt of global warming. Rising sea levels, extreme weather and natural disasters threaten the lives and livelihoods of the poor. Evidence clearly shows the impending danger for humanity and nature. There is a lack of political will to act. We need to consciously develop a caring worldview and environmentally harmonious practices in our daily lives.

### c. Pastoral Pathways

1. **Promoting eco-spirituality:** Teaching about the deep connection between God, people and nature (integral ecology). As St. Francis of Assisi said, *"Christian living means God, Neighbour and Nature"* (PP, Ecology, Goal 2, p. 67).
2. **Encouraging simple, sacred and shared living:** Caring for creation starts with personal choices. Promote an eco-friendly lifestyle that avoids waste and unnecessary consumption (PP, Ecology, Activity 7, p. 71).

3. **Supporting interfaith and ecumenical actions:** Working with other faith-based groups and organisations to protect the environment. Building partnerships for sustainable solutions.
4. **Promoting community participation:** Encouraging people to participate in environmental initiatives; raising awareness about the importance of clean food, water, air and soil as well as sharing the values of *Laudato Si'* and *Laudate Deum* (PP, Ecology, Activity 5, p. 70).
5. **Adopting eco-friendly practices:** Using environmentally friendly methods in church construction, celebrations and events; reducing waste and promoting green practices in church premises (PP, Ecology, Activity 9, p. 71).
6. **Educating and awareness building:** Teaching care for creation in parishes, schools and institutions; including environmental education in faith formation and catechesis (PP, Ecology, Objective 2, p. 68).

#### d. Strategies and Plans

1. **Translate *Laudato Si'* into local languages:** Make Pope Francis' message accessible to common people at the diocesan level.
2. **Awareness and education campaigns:** Integrate environmental topics into faith formation at all levels; conduct workshops, seminars and film screenings; initiate public sensitisation campaigns on Reduce, Reuse and Recycle; work with schools to promote environmental education and encourage interfaith discussions on ecological issues (PP, Ecology, Activity 6, p. 70).
3. **Appoint environmental leaders:** Assign diocesan secretaries and volunteers to promote ecological actions (PP, Ecology, Goal 1, p. 67).
4. **Empowering actions:** Organize community projects, like tree planting and clean-up drives; prioritize water conservation, responsible land use, renewable energy and eco-friendly lifestyles; conduct research and advocate for policies that protect the environment.
5. **Spiritual connection with creation:** Include nature-based spirituality in worship and retreats; encourage integral ecology prayer and reflections; inspire people to appreciate the beauty of God's creation.
6. **Create green role models in parishes:** Establish *Green Parishes* that follow eco-friendly guidelines; promote plastic-free burials and cemeteries; encourage parishioners to grow kitchen gardens; form nature clubs for children in parishes; use unused church land for environmental projects.

7. **Promote renewable energy:** Encourage the use of solar panels and rainwater harvesting; support organic waste management and farming; adopt digital solutions.
8. **Helping the poor access Government schemes:** Provide information on housing, toilets and clean cooking fuel schemes.

#### **e. Changes that the CCBI would like to witness**

1. Deepened understanding of integral ecology and inseparable connection between faith and care for the Common Home.
2. Changes in everyday practices which are in harmony with nature.
3. A targeted approach that improves the quality of life of the poor and ensures that environmental policies are practised.

### **5.15 Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue**

#### **a. Introduction**

Ecumenism is 'intra-Christian,' meaning it focuses on dialogue and relationships between different Christian Churches, while interreligious dialogue involves conversation and relationships between Christians and people of other faiths, fostering mutual understanding, respect and collaboration across different religious traditions. The Church encourages dialogue and collaboration with followers of other religions, which is carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life. We are able to recognise, preserve and promote the spiritual and moral values as well as the socio-cultural values found in them (*Nostra Aetate*, n. 3).

#### **b. Realities and Challenges**

1. **Lack of openness and understanding:** Narrow-minded perspectives and a lack of understanding between different Christian denominations can lead to competition, rivalry and even hostility, thereby hindering joint efforts in evangelization and social action.
2. **Communalism and political interference:** Communalism, religious extremism and fundamentalism can hinder meaningful dialogue. Prejudices, stereotypes and discrimination relating to religious beliefs can also continue to be significant obstacles. Political and social conflicts and interference often escalate religious tensions.

3. **Practical challenges:** Limited resources and personnel dedicated to ecumenical and interreligious initiatives and insufficient training and formation of clergy and laity can limit their effectiveness. Limited public awareness and understanding of the importance of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue can hinder public support for such initiatives. Resistance to change and a lack of willingness to overcome entrenched biases are prevalent.

#### c. Synodal Pathways

1. **Deepening ecumenical and interreligious dialogue:** Moving beyond superficial interactions towards deeper, more meaningful dialogue and collaboration. Shifting from merely theoretical relationships to consistent dialogue and action-oriented collaboration on shared concerns. Promoting ecumenical Biblical studies, joint Lenten and Advent observances, and shared prayer initiatives. Strengthening regional and diocesan fora for ecumenism and interreligious dialogue with adequate resources and training.
2. **Fostering intra-Christian unity:** Promoting ecumenical engagements within the Christian community from parish to diocese through dialogue, shared prayer and collaborative action. Recognising and embracing the shared mission of all Christians. Fostering open and honest conversations within Christian denominations to address challenges and opportunities for greater unity.
3. **Building bridges of understanding and peace:** Establishing interreligious fora and dialogue circles for open and respectful exchange of ideas and perspectives. Celebrating shared religious festivals and participating in community events. Engaging in joint social action and advocacy on issues of common concern. Promoting interreligious education and awareness programmes for all ages.

#### d. Strategies and Plans

1. **Deepen ecumenical engagement:** Organize joint worship services, prayer meetings and ecumenical retreats among different Christian denominations. Collaborate on joint social action projects, such as community outreach, disaster relief and advocacy for social justice (*PP, Ecumenism, Goal 1, p. 73*).
2. **Strengthen ecumenical structures:** Establish and strengthen regional and national ecumenical councils to facilitate dialogue, collaboration and joint action.
3. **Offer thematic sessions:** Conduct training sessions for clergy and laity on ecumenical theology, interfaith dialogue and conflict resolution. Encourage

joint theological study and reflection on shared beliefs and values (*PP, Ecumenism, Programmatic Strategies, p. 74*).

4. **Organise interreligious dialogue:** Facilitate open and respectful dialogue between people of different faiths through seminars, workshops and community events. Encourage the study of neighbour religions through lectures, workshops and cultural exchanges (*PP, Ecumenism, Goal 1, p. 73*).
5. **Celebrate religious diversity:** Celebrate and participate in each other's religious festivals and cultural events (*PP, Ecumenism, Goal 1, p. 73*).
6. **Collaborate on social justice issues:** Engage in joint action on issues, such as poverty, environmental protection and human rights. Work together to address societal challenges, such as violence, discrimination and social injustice.
7. **Promote peace and reconciliation:** Work towards a structured approach to promote peace and reconciliation within and between communities. Reach out to locations where unity and harmony are disturbed. Engage in fact-finding and bring out the truth.
8. **Form seminarians and religious:** Integrate interreligious dialogue and ecumenical understanding into the formation programmes of seminarians and religious.

#### **f. Changes that the CCBI would like to witness**

1. Fora and platforms are established and function effectively, fostering unity and harmony.
2. Peaceful coexistence is promoted with neighbour religions and Christian denominations, and joint projects are initiated to address common concerns to reach out to the poor.
3. Formation programmes and celebrations are organised, and bonding and solidarity are strengthened.

### **5.16 Peacebuilding**

#### **a. Introduction**

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God" (cf. Mt 5:9). The Gospel impels us to dare to abandon unjust structures of life and participate in building peace, reconciliation and justice. Shared values and principles -- such as freedom, democracy, the rights of nations, the rule of law and respect for human life -- have

long served as the foundation for a just and harmonious society, guiding nations toward peace, dignity and mutual coexistence. We are called to be true 'people of dialogue,' to cooperate in building peace, not as intermediaries, but as authentic mediators (*Fratelli Tutti*, n. 284). Real and lasting peace will only be possible "on the basis of a global ethic of solidarity and cooperation in the service of a future shaped by interdependence and shared responsibility in the whole human family" (*Pope Francis, Message for the World Day of Peace 2020*).

## **b. Realities and Challenges**

1. **Caste, ethnic and social divisions:** Deprivation, discrimination and exclusion based on caste, language, ethnicity and economic status, deepen social divides.
2. **Religious intolerance and fear:** Fundamentalism, fanaticish and anti-conversion laws create a climate of hostility and insecurity.
3. **Poverty and marginalisation:** Widespread poverty and denial of basic human dignity to the poor and marginalised weaken the dignity of the individuals and the civic fabric of society.
4. **Rising violence:** Social unrest, communal conflicts and systemic and targeted violence threaten harmony and security.
5. **Politicisation of religion:** The misuse of religion for political gain fuels division and polarisation.
6. **Crisis of leadership:** A perception of unjust and authoritarian civil governance erodes trust in Constitutional institutions and weakens democratic values.

## **c. Synodal Pathways**

1. **The Synodality:** The synodal way of being Church presents a vital opportunity to foster comprehensive formation, encouraging clergy, religious and lay leaders to embrace a new model of the Church, rooted in collaboration, dialogue and discernment.
2. **Being culturally sensitive and authentically Indian:** Navigate the delicate balance between remaining faithful to the Gospel and ensuring that Christians do not become targets of violence. Transcending maintenance mode or complacency, we are called to be leaders and vanguards, embracing an ethos that is both culturally sensitive and authentically Indian.
3. **Reconciliation and justice:** Standing in solidarity with the marginalised, actively promote social justice, peacebuilding, reconciliation, and defend



human rights, to empower individuals and communities to take control of their destiny.

4. **Collaborating with peace actors:** Engaging meaningfully with civil society is essential to fostering mutual understanding and promoting communal harmony, ensuring the Church remains an agent of peace and reconciliation.

#### d. Strategies and Plans

1. **Preparing peace ambassadors:** Train and prepare young peace ambassadors at the parish level rooted in the Constitutional paradigm of justice, liberty, equality, fraternity, secularism, democracy and pluralism and on conflict resolution and peacebuilding.
2. **Peacebuilding through art, music and culture:** Conduct competitions to instill the importance of peaceful coexistence through art, music and cultural shows.
3. **Dialogue in truth and love:** Foster a culture of genuine dialogue that transcends ideologies and differing opinions, uniting people in the shared pursuit of truth.
4. **Promote sustainable development:** Move beyond welfare-based assistance towards empowering individuals and communities, ensuring true human progress linked to Sustainable Development Goals.
5. **Revive the principles of *Satyagraha* and *Ahimsa*:** Embrace our common destiny by transcending narrow nationalistic ideologies, reviving the principles of *Satyagraha* and *Ahimsa* as pathways to peace and justice.
6. **Just peace in action:** Promote principles of just peace through inclusive participation, restorative justice, right relationships, reconciliation and truth-telling, building a more sustainable and just society (*PP, BEC, Goal 2, Objectives 1, 2 and 3, pp. 34-35*).
7. **Peacebuilding as a universal call:** Introduce peace education and human rights education in institutions and parishes. Promote inclusive dialogue and encounter as pathways to peace, allowing us to meet Christ in one another. By embracing the Spirit's work in diverse communities, we enrich our collective journey toward truth and goodness (*PP, BEC, APM 13, p. 40*).

#### e. Changes the CCBI would like to witness

1. Peace ambassadors are active at the parish, community and diocesan levels.

2. The connection between the Gospel values and the Constitutional principles is cherished by the faithful.
3. Dialogue and listening become our way of life in dealing with conflicts.

## VI. Conclusion

Synodality is a process, leading to a renewed way of being Church. It signifies deeper commitment to walk together as the People of God, listening to one another, discerning the Holy Spirit's guidance and fostering a deep sense of communion, participation and mission. The *Pastoral Plan* and the *Final Document* seek to enable every person to deepen communion within the Parish, Diocese or Region as well as to discern one's potential to participate in the life of the Church and contribute to its mission.

Building upon the *Pastoral Plan*, this *Final Document* advances that mission, offering deeper reflection and clearer direction. It introduces new themes --- Children, Digital Technology and Social Media, Interreligious Dialogue, Dalits, Tribals/Adivasis/ Indigenous Peoples, Poverty and Equitable Economy, Socially Excluded People and Peace Building --- which are not *prima facie* addressed by the existing Commissions, Departments and Apostolates.

While our primary focus and energy remain on the implementation of the *Pastoral Plan*, we must also heed the voice of the Holy Spirit, who stirred the hearts of the Bishops during the 36<sup>th</sup> Plenary Assembly to respond to these pressing realities. Together, the *Pastoral Plan* and this *Final Document* form a broad framework. Each Diocese and Parish is invited to read, reflect, pray and discern as a faith-inspired community, shaping a pastoral response suited to its context.

The Bishops expressed deep gratitude for their experience with the Spiritual Conversation methodology and voiced a strong desire to incorporate it into discernment and decision-making processes in the participatory structures at diocesan and parish levels.

With both pain and hope, they recalled the inspiring witness of the martyrs of Kandhamal, while giving thanks for the vibrant Church that continues to flourish there.

May Mary, the model Disciple -- perfect in faith, hope and love -- guide us to follow her example and so embrace our call to discipleship with unwavering hearts and committed lives!

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## APPENDIX

### A few pointers for immediate consideration and implementation

#### A. At the CCBI Level

1. Creating a Commission/Department/Apostolate or Desk to address the concerns of Children, Socially Excluded People, Dalits, Tribals/Adivasis/Indigenous Peoples, Interreligious Dialogue and Peacebuilding.
2. Establishing a Desk for animating and implementing a *Child Safeguarding Policy* and *Protection of Women from Sexual Harassment in the Workplace* in all Dioceses and for addressing abuses of children and vulnerable persons.
3. Ensuring that Dioceses and Regions have Pastoral Plans in alignment with the CCBI Pastoral Plan: *Journeying Towards a Synodal Church - MISSION 2033* and the Final Document *Pilgrims of Hope: Discerning the Synodal Path*, the fruit of the 36<sup>th</sup> Plenary Assembly.

#### B. At the Regional Level

1. Being closely connected to the CCBI National Secretaries/Directors/ Coordinators/Diocesan Secretaries and facilitating the implementation of the Pastoral Plan: *Journeying Towards a Synodal Church -- Mission 2033* and synodal practices in the Dioceses.
2. Upscaling the use of the Catholic Connect App to become regional, with portals for regions and regional languages.
3. Investing and training laypeople for public governance.

#### C. At the Diocesan Level

1. Developing and implementing Diocesan Pastoral Plans and establishing mandatory Diocesan Pastoral and Finance Councils for shared governance and inclusive decision-making.
2. Putting in place a 'Synodal Facilitation Team' to nurture the Spiritual Conversation methodology and synodal practices at all levels.

3. Building cordial relationships among the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and Laity, valuing the charisms and contributions of one another, underscoring that all are collaborators in the mission.

**D. At the Parish Level**

1. Ongoing capacity building of Parish Priests to collaborate and draw the best from all stakeholders and to improve parish governance.
2. Effective functioning of participatory structures, such as Parish Pastoral Councils and Finance Councils, with 50% female representation and 20% youth.
3. Adopting an eco-conscious lifestyle.

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