HERALD

Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026



Celebrate



Listen

The boat is BIGGER than we think

SIBU: Nine crosses from across Malaysia came together at Sibu Gateway, giving visible expression to the call that brought bishops, clergy, religious and laity from the country's nine dioceses to the Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026 (MPC2026): *Celebrate, Listen and Walk Together,* inspired by Isaiah 2:2–5.

From September 9 to 12, prayer and discernment shaped the convention's Eucharistic celebrations, sessions on Family, Church, Ecology and Society, and Conversations in the Spirit. Delegates heard a synthesis of those conversations, and each bishop offered a pastoral address. The procession and Missioning Mass sent them back to their communities with a shared responsibility: to keep listening and let what they heard in Sibu guide the Church's next steps.

Three images — *On the Boat Together, Cast the Net* and *An Abundant Catch* — invite the Malaysian Church to recognise who shares its journey, listens more deeply and walks forward together.

On the Boat Together asks Catholics to look around. The boat holds people of different cultures and circumstances, alongside neighbours of other faiths and people of no faith. The poor, the wealthy, the sick, migrants, widows, older people and those without homes are part of the same human family. All depend on Creation, the "common home" Pope Francis has urged humanity to care for.

To *celebrate* is to recognise the dignity and gifts of those alongside us. It also takes humility: everyone in the boat needs God's mercy, and everyone has something to offer.

Cast the Net asks what happens when that recognition becomes a relationship. Listening can mean staying close to someone in grief, hearing why a person feels unwelcome in a church community, or accompanying a family through difficulty. Such presence can speak of Christ's love, even when there is no easy answer.

At MPC2026, the Conversations in the Spirit gave delegates space to *listen,* but the synthesis presented to the assembly could not reflect every concern raised in the smaller groups. At the forum, delegates voiced further comments and concerns. These were recorded without a response at the time. To listen is also to return to what was heard, including what did not reach the larger platform.

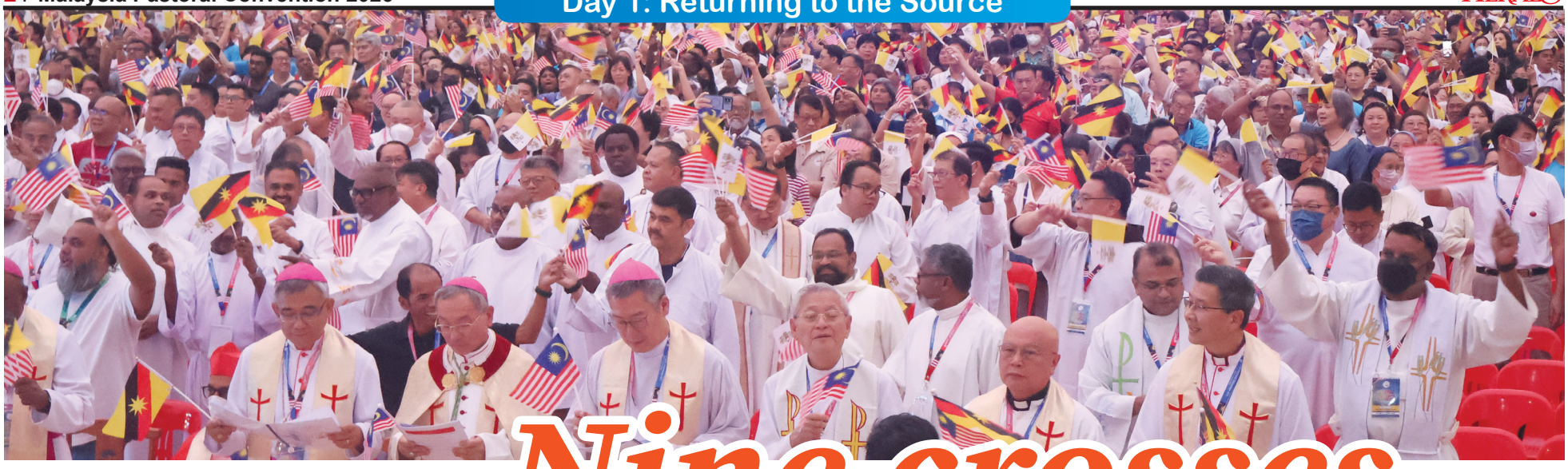
An Abundant Catch points to what can grow when the Church remains open to those voices: stronger bonds, deeper trust and communities willing to learn from people they might otherwise overlook. Alongside "What can we do for them?", the Church can ask, "What is God saying to us through them?" Those who need accompaniment may also reveal Christ to those who come to serve.

The nine crosses now stand together at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in Sibu. For the people who gathered around them, the journey continues in parishes, dioceses and daily encounters. To *walk together* is to carry what was celebrated and heard in Sibu into the choices ahead — especially when those choices affect people whose voices are easiest to miss.



Walk Together

Day 1: Returning to the Source



Nine crosses, one Malaysian Church

On the ground where the Catholic mission in Sibu took root 121 years ago, the Church in Malaysia gathered around one Cross to begin a new journey of discernment, communion and mission.

Around 3,000 delegates and local faithful gathered on September 9 for the Opening Mass of the Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026 (MPC2026).

The evening began with praise and worship and a paraliturgy of the Cross animated by young people, before rain began to fall just as the celebration of the Eucharist was about to begin.

Archbishop Simon Poh of Kuching was the main celebrant, with the archbishops and bishops of Malaysia concelebrating.

Welcoming the gathering with "Selamat datai ka Sibu", Archbishop Simon recalled that the Catholic mission in Sibu began on this ground in 1905, when the Mill Hill Missionaries arrived and built the Sacred Heart Chapel. Nearby Jalan Mission still bears witness to that history and leads towards the present Sacred Heart Cathedral.

Archbishop Simon noted that 121 years later, Catholics had returned to the same ground gathered around the assembled MPC Cross — symbolising their desire "to be truly one Catholic Church" drawn from across Malaysia.





Nine crosses become one

The nine crosses representing Malaysia's dioceses and archdioceses had been blessed at Sacred Heart Cathedral in Kota Kinabalu during the first Malaysia Catholic Youth Day on April 3, 2025, before being taken back to their respective dioceses.



Over the following 18 months, they travelled through cathedrals, parishes, churches, convents, *kampungs,* housing communities and estates across Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak.

At Sibu Gateway, their journeys converged as they were assembled into one large Cross with the *Corpus* — symbolising nine local Churches coming together as one Catholic Church in Malaysia.

Explaining that "convene" comes from the Latin *con-venire* — to come together — Archbishop Simon said the nine dioceses had come as one, each bringing the cross that had journeyed among its people.

The design of the Cross also incorporated distinctly Malaysian symbols. *Padi* represented food, shared life and harmony, while its deep reddish colour recalled the Precious Blood of Christ and His sacrifice, forgiveness and reconciliation.

The *bunga raya,* Malaysia's national flower, represented the Church's Malaysian identity, love for the nation and responsibility towards nation-building.

Carrying the lives of the people

Archbishop Simon said the worn crosses carried something deeper than their physical journeys.

Throughout their pilgrimage, people had touched and venerated them, prayed before them and brought their struggles, thanksgiving and hopes to the Cross.

"Each cross holds the memories, prayers and hopes of our people," he said.

They represented loneliness, poverty, migration, sickness, rejection and loss — but also perseverance, healing, forgiveness and hope.

By offering the united Cross at Mass, the archbishop said, the Church was symbolically placing before God the sacrifices, suffering, desires and aspirations of Catholics throughout Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak.

True happiness

Reflecting on the Beatitudes in Luke's Gospel, Archbishop Simon said Jesus offers a different understanding of happiness from that promoted by a world driven by wealth, power and influence.

Christ's disciples are blessed, he said, when they place God at the centre of their lives, depend upon Him and trust Him amid their circumstances.

While material goods are necessary, the prelate warned against allowing them to become the source of human security. This can lead to indifference towards others and the exploitation of both people and natural resources.

Jesus instead points to true happiness through dependence on God and loving service, especially towards those in need.

His message also touched the four areas at the heart of MPC2026 — Family, Church, Ecology and Society.

Under the shelter of the Cross

Archbishop Simon described MPC2026 as a journey of discernment undertaken "under the shadow and shelter of the Cross".

Catholics from all nine dioceses had come together to *Celebrate, Listen* and *Walk Together* as they sought to discern what God desires of the Church in Malaysia.

Following the Mass, the united Cross was carried in procession from Sibu Gateway along Mission Road towards the Convention venue at Kingwood Hotel.

There it remained at the heart of MPC2026, where delegates could pray before it, place their hopes and dreams before God and draw strength for the task ahead.

The procession carried particular significance. From the historic ground where missionaries planted the Catholic faith in Sibu in 1905, a Cross carrying the prayers and experiences of Catholics across Malaysia was being carried forward by a Church discerning its next steps in mission.

Concluding his homily, Archbishop Simon invoked Mary as a model of discipleship — from her "yes" at the conception of Jesus, through the Cross and to Pentecost — and prayed that she would accompany delegates as they discerned the Lord's mission for the Church in Malaysia.

The opening celebration thus connected the Church's past with its future: the ground where the faith had taken root in Sibu, the crosses carrying the prayers and stories of communities across the nation, and a Malaysian Church gathered to discern where God was calling it next.

Nine crosses arrived in Sibu carrying different journeys.

They left Sibu Gateway as one.














Diversity is inherited, unity must be built

Malaysians must move beyond merely tolerating one another and build understanding, respect, trust and cooperation across religious and cultural differences, said Minister of National Unity Dato Sri Aaron Ago Dagang.

Officiating the first Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026 (MPC2026) at Kingwood Hotel, Sibu, on September 10, he said unity required deliberate effort and could not be achieved by the Government alone.

"Diversity is what we inherit; unity is what we build," he told delegates from the nine dioceses of Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak.

Describing MPC2026 as the first national Catholic gathering of its scale since Malaysia's formation in 1963, Dato Sri Aaron said its theme, *Celebrate, Listen, Walk Together,* was relevant not only to the Church but also to the nation.

It called Malaysians to appreciate the country's diversity, create space for genuine dialogue and strengthen the bonds that enabled them to move forward together despite their differences.

Dato Sri Aaron commended the Catholic community for its contribution to Malaysia through education, healthcare, social welfare, charitable work and service to those in need.

Faith, he said, must extend beyond places of worship. When religious communities serve vulnerable people, strengthen families, educate the young and reach out regardless of race or religion, they contribute to the unity and resilience of the nation.

He linked the Christian commandment to love one's neighbour with the Ministry's efforts to promote social cohesion through initiatives such as *Kawasan Rukun Tetangga.*

"Unity begins with how we treat the person next to us," he said. "Before we speak of building a united nation, we must first build trust between neighbours, families and communities."

Likening Malaysia to a "salad bowl", he said each ingredient retained its identity while contributing to something richer. Malaysians did not need to become the same to be united, but could preserve their ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural identities while sharing one country and one future.



The Minister cautioned that Malaysia continued to face prejudice, misinformation and distance between communities. While social media could connect people, it could also reinforce stereotypes, suspicion and division.

Religious leaders therefore had a critical role in shaping values, guiding families and young people, and building bridges where others sought to build walls.

He urged religious communities to go beyond interfaith dialogue and work together to help the poor, support families, respond to disasters, care for the environment and accompany young people.

"Policies and programmes can provide the framework, but the substance of unity is built through the relationships, trust and shared experiences that connect Malaysians in their everyday lives," he said.

Recalling how Malaysians helped one another during floods and other crises without first asking about race or religion, Dato Sri Aaron said such moments showed that the nation's differences could be a source of strength.

As Malaysia Day approached, he reminded delegates that while the nation's founding fathers had given Malaysians their country, the present generation was responsible for strengthening it.

He hoped the spirit of *Celebrate, Listen, Walk Together* would extend beyond MPC2026 and inspire greater responsibility towards the nation.

The Minister then declared MPC2026 officially open, praying that its deliberations and exchanges would contribute towards "a stronger Church, a stronger community and a more united Malaysia".





Celebrate with gratitude, listen with wonder, walk in faith

The Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026 (MPC2026) offered the Malaysian Church an opportunity to recognise its gifts, listen to the Holy Spirit and discern how God was calling it forward, said Msgr Jude Miranda.

Presenting the convention's orientation and direction at its opening, Msgr Jude, the MPC2026 Peninsular Malaysia coordinator, said its theme, *Celebrate, Listen, Walk Together,* was a "spiritual style" that delegates were invited to embody.

He outlined three attitudes for the gathering: celebrating and exchanging gifts, listening with wonder and awe, and walking with God according to His timing.

Msgr Jude reminded delegates that although they came from different dioceses, ministries and backgrounds, they were gathered as the undivided Body of Christ in Malaysia.

They also carried with them the people they represented, including families, young people, Basic Ecclesial Communities, the elderly, persons with disabilities, indigenous communities, the sick, unemployed and marginalised.

"No one is excluded and no one will be excluded," he said.

Referring to the "exchange of gifts" highlighted in the Final Document of the Synod on Synodality, Msgr Jude said everyone had something to contribute through their life, ministry, parish and diocese. Even those who were not physically present had a part to play in building the Body of Christ.

The first attitude, celebration, called participants to recognise and give thanks for the goodness already present in the Church and its people.

A person's value, he stressed, did not depend on achievement or productivity. In a world driven by efficiency, optimisation and instant solutions, MPC2026 offered participants an opportunity to pause and appreciate one another as gifts from God.

To celebrate was also to acknowledge that goodness could continue to flourish. Before producing plans or charting pastoral pathways, delegates already had reason to celebrate the gift of one another.

The second attitude was to listen with wonder and awe, particularly during the keynote addresses and Conversations in the Spirit.

Genuine listening placed the person before the response, Msgr Jude said. It required participants to resist offering immediate solutions and instead give others the time and space to express their experiences in their own way.

Listening was not merely a skill, but a gift inspired by the Holy Spirit and one that people could offer one another.

The third attitude was to walk with God and trust His timing. This meant letting go of the need to rush or control outcomes and remaining open to God amid uncertainty.

"To walk with God is to acknowledge that He is in charge, He is leading, He is the captain," Msgr Jude said.

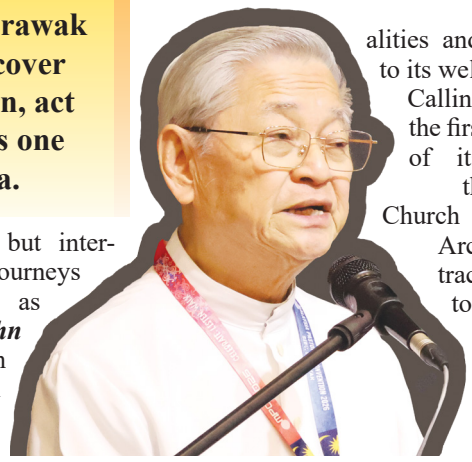
Walking with God also meant walking with those whom God had chosen, he added. The Church's synodal journey was not undertaken alone, but with Christ and the whole of humanity towards God's Kingdom.

"Celebrate the gifts that God has given us. Listen in wonder and awe. Walk with God and trust His timing," he urged.

Day 2: The First Address

From a Church 'in' Malaysia

After decades of travelling different pastoral paths, the Churches of Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak are being called to discover what it means to discern, act and serve the nation as one Church of Malaysia.



Five decades of separate but interconnected pastoral journeys converged at MPC2026 as ***Archbishop Emeritus John Ha*** traced how the Church in Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak had responded to their own realities — and why those experiences must now shape a common mission.

Delivering the Convention's first address, *How Shall We Decide and Act Together Collectively as a Church of Malaysia?* on September 10, the former Archbishop of Kuching said the challenge was to move from being simply a Church "in Malaysia" to becoming a "Church of Malaysia" — one that belongs to the nation, embraces its realities and contributes to its well-being.

Calling MPC2026 the first convention of its kind for the Catholic Church nationwide, Archbishop Ha traced its origins to the Fourth Peninsular Malaysian Pastoral Convention (PMPC IV) in 2016, when Archbishop Julian Leow proposed a pastoral convention involving the whole Malaysian Church.

At the time, Archbishop Ha and Bishop Richard Ng of Miri supported the proposal while acknowledging significant challenges, including unfamiliarity between clergy in East and West Malaysia, economic disparities and differing regional experiences.

The proposal was subsequently accepted by the Bishops' Conference, and a series of national gatherings prepared the way: the Malaysian Catholic Clergy Assembly in 2018, Malaysian Religious Assembly in 2023 and Malaysian Catholic Youth Assembly in 2025.

For Archbishop Ha, however, the deeper force behind this journey was the Holy Spirit.

"The Spirit is the Spirit of unity," he said, expressing his conviction that the Spirit desires Catholics throughout the country to become one Church — "the Church of Malaysia".

From 'in' Malaysia to 'of' Malaysia

That distinction, he explained, is important.

A "Church in Malaysia" can suggest a Church concerned primarily with its own members. A "Church of Malaysia", however, goes beyond itself to serve the nation of which it is an integral part.

Such a Church embraces the realities of the country and works for its well-being, seeking to promote national unity through mutual respect and acceptance, peace and harmony, progress and prosperity.

Unity, Archbishop Ha stressed, is inseparable from mission. Recalling Jesus' prayer "that they may all be one" in John 17, he said the communion of Christ's disciples is itself a proclamation of Christ to the world. To strive to become one Church is therefore also to become a missionary Church.

But unity does not mean uniformity. Like Malaysia itself, the Catholic Church is enriched by different races, cultures and traditions. Its diversity finds unity in Christ and should move Catholics to reach beyond themselves in love, respect and acceptance.

The Church of Malaysia is therefore called not merely to speak about unity, peace and harmony, but to become a force that helps foster these values within the nation.

The question before MPC2026, therefore, was not simply how Catholics could become more united internally, but what a united Malaysian Church could contribute collectively to the country.

Lessons from 1976

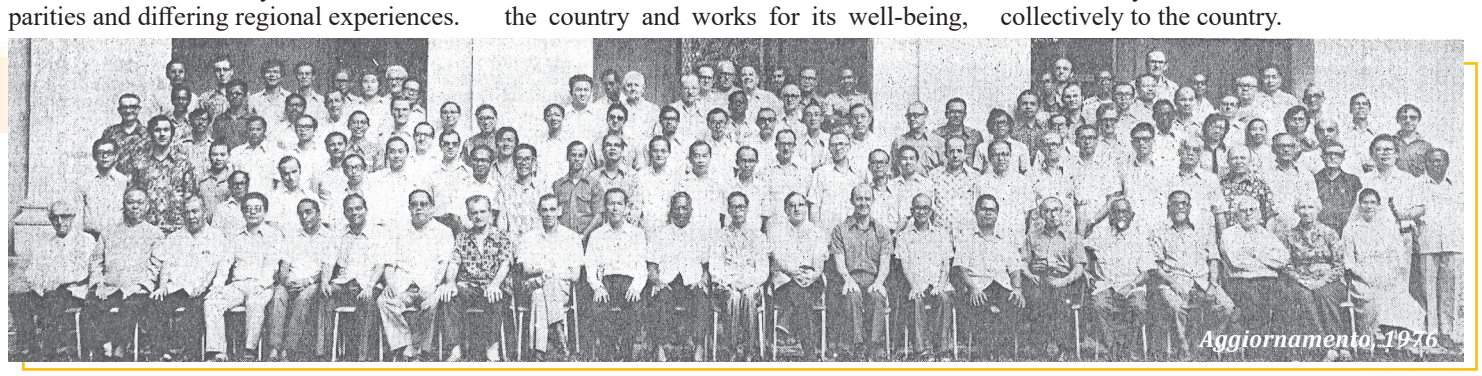
Archbishop Ha looked to history for guidance, saying the past reveals how earlier generations responded to the challenges of their time and can help the Church discern how to respond today.

He recalled the first Peninsular Malaysian Pastoral Convention, or *Aggiornamento,* held at College General in 1976.

Inspired by the Second Vatican Council and Pope John XXIII's call for *aggiornamento* — "updating" — the bishops recognised that a rapidly changing world required the Church to examine how it lived its mission.

Malaysia faced its own uncertainties, including the aftermath of the May 13 racial riots, communist insurgency and regional instability.

Against this background, the bishops recognised the importance of strengthening the faith and leadership of the laity.



Aggiornamento 1976

The 1976 gathering brought together 123 priests and the three Peninsular bishops. Among the issues discussed were Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs), clergy-laity communion, leadership and the role of the laity, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, and ministry to the poor and marginalised.

Its influence continued long afterwards. BECs grew, lay leadership flourished and human development became increasingly integrated into diocesan life.



Second Vatican Council



Eucharistic Celebration presided over by Bishop Joseph Hii, homily by Archbishop John Wong



Gereja Katolik Malaysia pic





to a Church 'of' Malaysia

Three journeys, one Malaysian Church

Sabah and Sarawak were meanwhile undergoing their own experiences of upheaval, renewal and greater lay participation.

In Sabah, the expulsion of Mill Hill missionaries placed greater responsibility on local Catholics. Archbishop Ha recalled how lay Catholics, including Peter Mojuntin, urged the missionaries not to abandon the local Church.

The difficult period unexpectedly strengthened lay leadership and helped inspire priestly and religious vocations. The growth of lay participation also enabled the development of PAX — the Pastoral Assembly of the Catholic Church in Sabah — which became a driving force in the growth of the Church there.

In Sarawak, Church leaders similarly recognised the importance of working together. Joint initiatives included translating liturgical texts into Iban, establishing catechetical formation in Marudi and founding St Peter's Seminary in Kuching.

Archbishop Peter Chung's 1976 pastoral letter, *Our Task and Responsibility,* subsequently called the faithful to assume their responsibilities and roles in the Church, reflecting Vatican II's vision of the Church as the People of God.

For Archbishop Ha, these were not separate stories running alongside a primarily Peninsular history. They were different journeys belonging equally to the story of the Church of Malaysia.

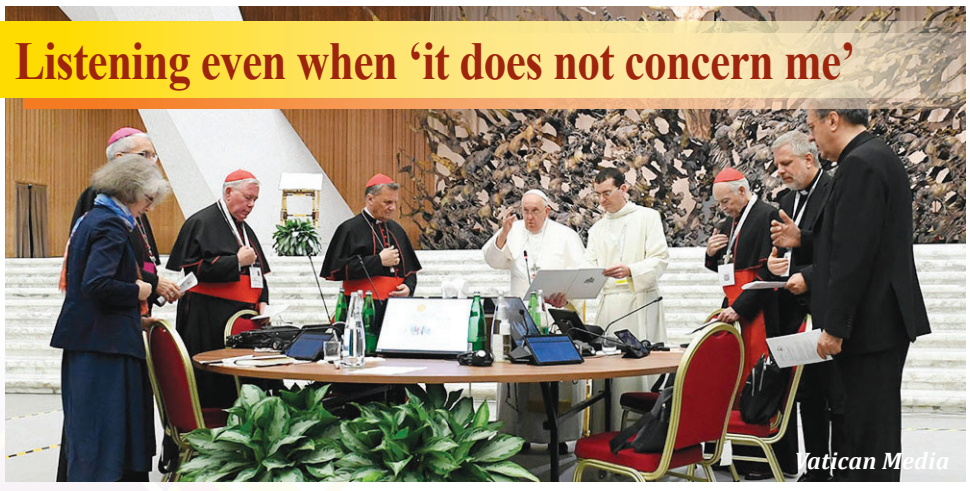
Each region had faced its own realities and found ways to respond through stronger participation, lay responsibility, formation and communion.

MPC2026 therefore brought those journeys together, not to erase their differences, but to allow the Church to listen to what each could contribute to a common future.


2024 PAX Assembly



Listening even when 'it does not concern me'


Vatican Media

If *aggiornamento* and Vatican II helped shape the Church's response in 1976, Archbishop Ha said the present generation has received another call to renewal through Pope Francis' emphasis on synodality and the Synod on Synodality.

Like their predecessors, Catholics today must ask what kind of Church the present circumstances require.

This means identifying both common challenges and those particular to Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak, while taking seriously what emerged from parish, diocesan and regional assemblies leading to MPC2026.

The process itself is important. Through Conversation in the Spirit, participants listen and allow themselves to be listened to, seeking together to discern what the Spirit is saying to the Church.

Archbishop Ha stressed that solidarity becomes especially important when an issue concerns one region more directly than another.

No delegate should respond: "This does not concern me."

Instead, Catholics are called to listen attentively and stand in solidarity with one another because they belong to one Church — the Church of Malaysia.

Such an attitude gives practical meaning to synodality. Becoming one Church is not simply about gathering together nationally, but learning to carry one another's concerns and allowing the experiences of another region to become part of one's own discernment.

From discernment to action

For Archbishop Ha, this sense of being one Malaysian Church rests in a "oneness of spirit" in which the Churches of the Peninsula, Sabah and Sarawak genuinely care for one another.

Such solidarity provides moral and spiritual support, strengthens communion and encourages participation.

A synodal Church engages all the faithful in discerning together the best course of action for the circumstances before them. When such listening and discernment become regular and consistent, he said, they can eventually influence the way Catholics participate in society itself.

The result should be a community in which every person has value and a role regardless of race, religion or culture — bringing about "unity amid diversity".

Archbishop Ha acknowledged that this vision might appear an "impossible dream", but urged delegates to trust in the Holy Spirit.

History itself, he said, provides reason for hope. The Church has survived uncertainty, upheaval and change because the Spirit has continued to work through its people. That same Spirit remains present in the Church of Malaysia today.

MPC2026, therefore, could not simply commemorate what previous generations had achieved. Just as the Church in 1976 drew inspiration from *aggiornamento* and Vatican II to discern its response to the realities of that time, the Church in 2026 draws inspiration from Pope Francis' call to synodality and the Synod on Synodality.

The task now is to discern, through Conversation in the Spirit, what the circumstances of Malaysia today require of the Church.

Archbishop Ha placed two questions before the Convention: "Identify ONE area where the Church can contribute to the nation's well-being. How is the Church to do it?" and, more fundamentally, "What do you think the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church of Malaysia?"

The challenge of MPC2026 was therefore not only to become more united, but to discover what that unity is for — how a Church shaped by different histories, cultures and experiences can together serve the country it calls home.

The answers cannot belong to the Peninsula, Sabah or Sarawak alone. Nor can discernment end when the Convention concludes.

They must be discerned together — and acted upon together — as one Church of Malaysia.

Scan the QR code for the full text

On the boat together. He may teach us His ways (Is 2:3b)

Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu

The presentation by the Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu told a story of restoration/reconciliation — how the Cross of Christ/*Perjalanan Salib* brought a family back together, helping them to journey together again, rooted in faith and with God at the centre of their lives.


ArchKK pic

In today's busy world, family members can live under the same roof yet become increasingly distant from one another. Work, daily routines and time spent on screens can reduce opportunities for meaningful communication and time together.

Over time, this lack of communication can also affect the family's faith life, including going to church together. In the midst of everyday responsibilities, families can lose sight of the importance of keeping God at the centre of their lives.

The arrival of the *Perjalanan Salib* at the parish became a turning point in the story. It reminded the family that difficulties and wounds do not have to be faced alone. Through their encounter with the Cross, the family began reconnecting, walking together again and recognising that God had remained with them throughout their struggles.

The entire production process, from developing the idea to filming, took about four months.

Following the video presentation, the Kota Kinabalu delegates performed "Mamarayou," meaning "praising God". The delegates sang while performing the Sumazau, moving around the hall and inviting the gathering into the celebration.


ArchKK pic

The presentation combined the story of family reconciliation with the cultural identity of Sabah, highlighting a simple message: families are called to remain connected, journey together in faith and keep God at the centre of family life.

What is the Holy Spirit saying to the Church in Malaysia?

The following summary reflects the CIS synthesis presented by the MPC Working Committee, based on the inputs gathered through the consultation process.

Identify ONE area where the Church can contribute to the nation's well-being. How is the Church to do it?
From this Conversation in the Spirit, what do you think the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church of Malaysia?

Conversation in the Spirit 1 and the Synthesis



Here is the condensed summary of the CIS 1 synthesis, retaining all key points across the five areas of convergence.

1. Build Unity in Diversity

- ***Bridge-Building Role:*** Serve as a bridge of unity, dialogue, and mutual understanding across Malaysia's multi-racial, multi-cultural, and multi-religious society.
- ***Social Harmony:*** Witness to Christ's love by fostering acceptance, respect, and peaceful relationships rather than deepening existing societal divisions.

2. Strengthen Families Through Formation and Education

- ***Core Foundation:*** Recognise the family as the essential foundation for a stronger Church and a healthier society.
- ***Holistic Formation:*** Support parents, children, and youth through human and faith formation that builds dignity, integrity, responsibility, compassion, and respect.
- ***Shared Ecosystem:*** Nurture faith and values starting in the home, sustained through parishes, Catholic schools, and local communities.

3. Go Forth, Listen, and Accompany *(Turun Padang)*

- ***Proactive Presence:*** Move beyond Church walls to *turun padang* and encounter people directly in their daily realities.
- ***Focus on the Margins:*** Prioritise accompaniment, humility, and service for the poor, youth, elderly, migrants, marginalised, wounded, and persons with special needs.
- ***Synodal Witness:*** Act as salt of the earth and light of the nation through active service, collaboration, and walking together.

4. Listen to Young People and Respond to Present Realities

- ***Addressing Disconnection:*** Engage young people who feel unheard or undervalued by the Church.
- ***Pastoral Accompaniment:*** Respond to complex modern realities — mental health issues, mixed marriages, secularism, religious relativism, and shifting social values — with genuine listening rather than relying solely on rigid rules or structures.
- ***Co-Responsibility:*** Strengthen collaboration among bishops, clergy, religious, and laity to carry out the shared mission of the Church.

5. Begin Transformation with Personal Conversion

- ***Heart of Renewal:*** Acknowledge that institutional Church transformation must start with individual inner change.
- ***Personal Accountability:*** Allow the Holy Spirit to transform personal attitudes first — becoming more welcoming, listening, humble, compassionate, and visionary in daily life to enable broader Church renewal.

On the boat together. He may teach us His ways (Is 2:3b)

Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur

From the early pioneers who helped establish the Catholic Church in the Klang Valley to a vibrant, diverse community called to listen and walk together, the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur presented its faith journey through a moving multimedia presentation titled *On the Boat, Together – The Conversion of Relationships* on the second day of the Malaysia Pastoral Convention (MPC).

The presentation offered delegates a reflective glimpse into the history and growth of the Archdiocese, honouring the foundational contributions of its early communities, pioneer missionaries, and the bishops who have shepherded the local Church over the years. Historical photographs and archival material were seamlessly woven into the feature before bridging into today's reality — a living Church shaped by different cultures, languages, generations, vocations, and life experiences.

Yet, the presentation went far beyond merely celebrating diversity. At its heart was a deeper, more challenging question posed to all present: ***"Do we really listen to one another?"***

Through a sequence of quiet visual encounters, the feature traced a spiritual shift — moving from simply existing side-by-side towards genuinely encountering, listening, receiving from one another, and learning to walk together as one body.

Almost all the delegates, led by Archbishop Julian Leow, participated in the presentation. Most of the footage was captured during the physical preparation session.

This journey culminated in the image of a boat: a symbol of a synodal Church where people retain their distinct cultures, languages, and gifts, yet are united in moving forward together in Christ.

Central to this message was the traditional folk song *Dayung Sampan,* chosen as the musical expression of their shared pilgrimage. The lyrics were specially adapted by the KL team using multiple languages and expressions to mirror the Church's rich multicultural fabric.

The *sampan* serves as a fitting metaphor for Church life: it moves forward only through the combined effort of everyone rowing together — no single person can navigate it alone, and all must row in the same direction towards one destination in Christ.



ArchKK pic

Following the video screening, all delegates were invited to join the team in singing *Dayung Sampan,* instantly transforming the audience from mere observers into active participants in the journey as ***"We are not watching the boat. We are in the boat."***

The full presentation can be viewed online at *https://l1nk.dev/gyj8iob.*

Archdiocese of Kuching



From the arrival of missionaries and the challenges of language and culture to the growth of a vibrant local Church, the Archdiocese of Kuching brought its journey of faith to life in Sibu.

The performance traced the missionary journey of the Church in Sarawak, recalling how the Good News took root among local communities and continued to grow despite difficulties encountered along the way.

Catholic missionaries first arrived in Kuching on July 10, 1881. In the years that followed, they ventured beyond the town into local communities, learning their languages and customs while proclaiming the Gospel.

These encounters were creatively portrayed on stage. A boat, paddles and a fishing net evoked the missionaries' journeys into communities and their efforts to "cast the nets" of faith. The image also echoed Christ's call to become fishers of people — going out rather than remaining in familiar surroundings.

The presentation showed that evangelisation was not without obstacles. Missionaries had to overcome differences in language and customs, while some later faced expulsion from the country. Yet the mission continued as the faith increasingly took root among local Catholics. Historical accounts from the Archdiocese note that government regulations eventually required expatriate missionaries who had served beyond a stipulated period to leave, further accelerating the transition towards local Church leadership.

The performance then moved from the missionary era towards the emergence of a local Church, symbolised by the Bible, the Cross and the establishment of churches and communities.

A significant milestone came with Archbishop Peter Chung, who became the first Archbishop of Kuching when Kuching was elevated to a Metropolitan Archdiocese in 1976. His leadership was followed by Archbishop John Ha, who served from 2003 to 2017, and subsequently by Archbishop Simon Poh, who continues to shepherd the archdiocese today.

Through these transitions, the performance highlighted an important reality: although missionaries planted the seeds, the Gospel was gradually entrusted to the local Church, which assumed responsibility for continuing the mission.

The presentation concluded with *The Great Jubilee*, a fitting song of thanksgiving and hope.

From presence to accompaniment

Families do not need a Church that observes their struggles from a distance, but one willing to listen to their stories, walk with them and recognise the faith already at work in their lives.



Pastoral ministry must begin with families as they actually are — carrying their joys, wounds, pressures and complicated realities — rather than with an idealised picture of what family life ought to be, Cardinal Pablo Virgilio David. *pic*, told MPC2026.

Addressing delegates via video link on September 11 on *Family and Church Journeying Together in Our Time,* the Bishop of Kalookan, Philippines, and Vice President of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), drew on his diocese's experience among poor urban communities to propose a pastoral approach that replaces judgement and distance with listening, presence and accompaniment.

Though unable to be physically present in Sibu, Cardinal David said he wanted to share what Kalookan had been learning rather than offer a theological lecture or a model for others to copy.

Synodality, he said, was not about finding a perfect pastoral formula, but learning to walk together, listening to the Spirit through people's lives and changing direction when established approaches no longer brought the Church close enough to them.

This requires the Church to face the gap between the Christian ideal of family life and the complex circumstances in which many families live. Drawing on Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, Cardinal David said the ideal of faithful and fruitful married love remains a horizon that gives direction. Pastoral ministry, however, begins by recognising where people are and what has brought them there.

Pope Francis' call to form consciences rather than replace them was not an invitation to moral relativism, he stressed, but to pastoral realism. Discernment holds together the demands of the Gospel and the circumstances of a person's life, while accompaniment means walking with people towards the next possible step.

That Gospel approach changes the questions the Church asks when it encounters a family in difficulty. Instead of beginning with, "What is wrong with this family?" pastoral workers should ask, "What happened to this family?" And after listening to its story: "How can we walk with them from here?"

When life does not fit the ideal

Kalookan, part of Metropolitan Manila, is densely populated and includes many poor urban communities where families live in crowded informal settlements and depend on precarious livelihoods. Parents may work away from home or overseas, leaving children in the care of grandparents and relatives.



Households may face unemployment, teenage pregnancy, addiction, imprisonment, serious illness, debt, abandonment or marital breakdown. The diocese was also deeply marked by killings during the so-called war on drugs, leaving women grieving while trying to support their children and children carrying the trauma of losing parents violently.

Such experiences taught the diocese not to explain every fractured family simply as a result of personal moral failure. Choices and sin have consequences, Cardinal David said, but family life may also be wounded by poverty, migration, violence and social conditions over which people have little control.

That realisation forced the Diocese of Kalookan to examine its own pastoral habits. Despite having parishes, sacraments, catechetical programmes, religious organisations and social ministries, many poor families remained distant from the Church. Some lived only a few kilometres from a parish, yet the social and pastoral distance was far greater.

The usual question had been: "Why don't these people come to church?"

Cardinal David said the diocese eventually realised it had the question backwards: Why was the Church waiting for people to come, instead of going to them?

This led to the establishment of Mission Stations within poor communities, with chaplains and lay pastoral leaders working closely with residents. Their first purpose was not to construct another church building or reproduce parish structures on a smaller scale. It was simply to be present.

Cardinal David summarised the approach in three words: "Listen. Dialogue. Be present."

Presence meant knowing people's names and stories — noticing why a child had stopped attending school, why a mother had disappeared from community life or why an elderly person was suddenly alone. Pastoral ministry began with relationships rather than programmes.

Families accompanying families

The Mission Stations also connected naturally with Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs). A priest responsible for thousands of Catholics cannot know what is happening in every home, but neighbours often know when a family is facing hunger, illness, abuse or abandonment.

When such relationships are shaped by faith, pastoral care no longer flows only from clergy to people. Families begin accompanying other families.

Cardinal David linked this experience to the Bangkok Document and its vision of a civilisation of love in which "families help other families". The Church continues to serve families through the sacraments, catechesis, counselling and pastoral care, he said, but families should not be regarded only as recipients of ministry. They are active participants in mission, with gifts and experiences that can strengthen others.

● *Continued on Page 8*

Conversation in the Spirit 2 and the Synthesis

As I listen to the realities of families and the Church today, with all its opportunities and challenges, what is the Holy Spirit inviting me to let go, to continue, or to begin so that I can become an instrument of God's love to everyone?

Convergences

1. Paradigm Shift to Accept Diverse Family Backgrounds

- ***Inclusivity over Idealism:*** Shift from the traditional, ideal family model to accepting diverse backgrounds (e.g., single parents, LGBTQ+).
- ***Empathetic Engagement:*** Foster empathetic, generous, non-judgmental listening to build wholesome relationships within families and the Church.
- ***Overcoming Obstacles:*** Let go of fear, judgment, prejudice, indifference, assumptions, and individualism.

2. Building Bridges of Unity

- ***Intentional Dialogue:*** Initiate purposeful dialogue and extend kindness across cultural and social boundaries.
- ***Ground-Level Presence:*** Visit poor and marginalised families to understand their real situations firsthand.
- ***Generosity and Humility:*** Dedicate time and resources to journey alongside families while practicing humble, context-centred listening.

Matters for Consideration

1. *Gereja Bergerak* (Church on the Move): Mindset of a Neighbour

- ***Neighbour vs. Institution:*** Transition from an institutional image to acting as a neighbour who reaches out to the distant without imposing views.
- ***Structural Tension:*** Address the friction between preserving traditional structures and becoming an active outreach Church.
- ***Trusting God:*** Shift from trying to control outcomes to trusting God's active work in people's lives.

2. Serving Families in Difficult Situations

- ***Grassroots Realities:*** Support urban families with working parents, alongside critical challenges like undocumented persons, poverty, and mixed marriages.
- ***Inclusive Ministry and Liturgy:*** Make formations accessible to the poor, and adapt liturgies to be inclusive, child-friendly, and responsive to special needs.
- ***Family-Ministry Balance:*** Address over-commitment in Church ministries by setting healthy boundaries to safeguard personal family relationships.

3. Special Concerns

- ***Leadership Demands:*** Resolve clergy over-reliance on the same small group of volunteers.
- ***Generational and Interreligious Balance:*** Honour the wisdom of the elderly while welcoming youth ideas, and navigate respectful interreligious interactions.
- ***Ecclesial Integrity:*** Tackle hypocrisy and prevent the misuse of Church resources for personal gain.

Proposals

1. Equipping Parents as First Faith Educators

- ***Parental Formation:*** Form parents to guide their children's faith adaptation to modern realities.
- ***Capacity Building:*** Equip priests, religious, pastoral workers, and lay leaders with encounter, accompaniment, and empowerment skills.

2. Investing in Pastors (Lay and Ordained)

- ***Fair Compensation and Professional Support:*** Invest in pastoral workers with fair wages for full-time family accompaniment, backed by professional help when needed.
- ***Administrative Relief for Priests:*** Reduce clergy administrative burdens so they can focus on direct pastoral care.
- ***Prophetic Mission:*** Collaborate with parish priests to care for families and the elderly through deeper, gap-bridging ministry.

3. Improving Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs)

- ***Safe Spaces and Re-evangelisation:*** Strengthen BECs to offer safe environments for sharing struggles, driving personal outreach and discipleship.
- ***Resource and Catechetical Renewal:*** Update catechism and create accessible materials (videos, books) for one-to-one pastoring.
- ***Technology and Culturally Sensitive Nurturing:*** Use online formation to bridge generational gaps, while grounding faith in scripture, prayer, *lectio divina*, and cultural respect.

4. Navigating Technological and Societal Realities

- ***Digital and Social Media Impact:*** Adapt pastoral approaches to tackle gadget addiction, social media influences, and changing cultural trends.
- ***Compassionate Pastoral Care:*** Respond to youth and family struggles — such as peer pressure, materialism, and isolation — with nuanced, non-judgmental care rather than rigid doctrinal enforcement.

Walking together beyond the parish

● *Continued from pg 7*

Nor does a wounded family have to become strong before it can accompany another.

Widows understand the silence of other widows. Parents who have struggled with a child battling addiction can accompany others facing the same anguish. Grandparents raising grandchildren understand both the exhaustion and joy involved. Families that have experienced hunger may be among the first to recognise it in another home.

Kalookan's experience also challenged the assumption that the Church was bringing Christ to the poor.

Cardinal David said the Church discovered that Christ was already present in mothers struggling to hold their families together, grandparents raising another generation and neighbours who had little but still found something to share.

"We went there intending to evangelise and discovered that the poor were also evangelising us," he said.

BECs, therefore, should not be assessed only by attendance or the number of prayer meetings, but by whether they notice households in distress before hardship becomes a crisis. A simple measure of genuine accompaniment, he said, is whether families discover that they no longer have to face life's struggles alone.

Walking together across faiths

Turning to Malaysia's religious and cultural diversity, Cardinal David said journeying together could not mean only Catholics walking with other Catholics.

The Bangkok Document of the FABC presents the Church's mission as one of dialogue with cultures, religions and the poor, inviting Christians to journey together as peoples of Asia.

In Malaysia, a Catholic family's neighbour may be Muslim, while children's friends may be Buddhist or Hindu. Religious difference is encountered in schools, workplaces, neighbourhoods, extended families and interreligious marriages.

Such marriages pose genuine pastoral challenges, he said, but can also become a first school of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. Families learn how to remain faithful to their beliefs while respecting the conscience of someone they love, and how to pass on their faith without teaching contempt for another person's religion.

Dialogue, Cardinal David stressed, is not the opposite of identity. Following Christ should make Christians more capable of recognising people of other faiths as brothers and sisters.

A BEC that deepens Catholic faith but becomes an enclave indifferent to the surrounding community is therefore missing something essential.

"Hunger does not ask for a baptismal certificate," he said. Fire does not distinguish between Catholic and non-Catholic homes, and a grieving mother remains a neighbour regardless of her religion.

The family as a 'domestic mission station'

This reciprocity also means families have something to teach the wider Church. Their daily experience of listening, negotiating differences, forgiving and caring for vulnerable members can form the very habits needed for synodality.

The family, therefore, is not only a domestic Church, Cardinal David said, but also a "domestic mission station" when it becomes a place of hospitality and learns to notice the suffering of others.

In concluding, he warned against two pastoral extremes: holding the ideal so rigidly that the Church cannot accompany complicated lives, or becoming so attentive to complexity that it loses the courage to proclaim the Gospel's horizon.

Amoris laetitia, he said, refuses that false choice.

The Church can uphold lifelong fidelity while accompanying those who have experienced abandonment, teach responsibility while recognising the pressures that fracture households, and call people to conversion while assuring them that failure does not place them beyond grace.

"What accompaniment refuses is abandonment," Cardinal David said.

He left those involved in family ministry with two questions: Are families less alone because the Church is present? And are other families less alone because Catholic families are their neighbours?

In Malaysia, those questions extend beyond parish and religious boundaries. They ask whether Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Indigenous and other communities experience Catholics as neighbours willing to stand beside them in times of fire, flood, illness, grief or death.

No family arrives perfectly formed, Cardinal David said, and the Church itself remains imperfect. The task is to keep walking — holding up the ideal while helping those who fall to stand again.

Echoing Pope Francis' invitation in *Amoris laetitia*, he concluded: "Let us make this journey as families, let us keep walking together."

Scan the QR code for the full text

Cast the Net (Jn 21:61). We may "listen" walk; in His paths (Is 2:3c)

Diocese of Malacca Johore



Building on the theme of its 50th anniversary in 2022 — *History, Story, Mission* — the Diocese of Malacca Johore (MJD) used its cultural presentation at MPC2026 to showcase the history, story and mission through which Catholicism took root in Malacca and Johore and continues to grow.

Planning began with online brainstorming sessions with MJD delegates, followed by feedback through Google Forms and further refinement. The presentation was divided into three parts: Malacca presenters performing *Kristang* and Nyonya dances; Johor presenters singing *Rasa Sayang* in Mandarin, Tamil, Sabahan, Sarawakian and Orang Asli languages; and a combined Malacca Johore group presenting the closing *Rasa Sayang* dance.

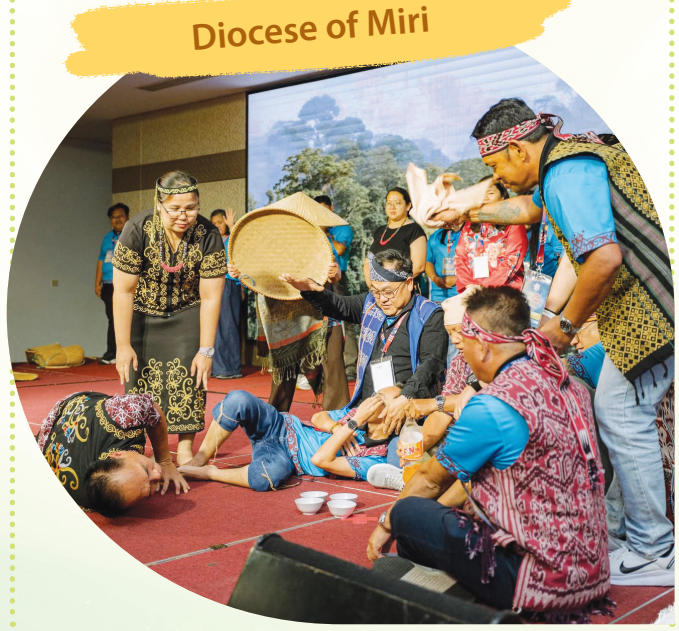
Over one month, the presenters practised separately under experienced dance instructors. Marina Danker from Trupe Cultural Portuguesa Melaka taught the Portuguese folk dance *O Malhao Malhao*, while Sorfina Aida, drawing on her experience in dance and Nyonya theatre, choreographed and taught the Baba dan Nyonya dance. The closing *Rasa Sayang* dance was choreographed and taught by Mark Nicholas, a young dancer from the Church of St Theresa, Masai.

The team also learned to weave Orang Asli accessories from Aeron Stephanie, Sheena Johan, Yoharena Johan and Elana Sintin of Rumah Besar Katolik Tok Batin Bong Ajang, Bekoh.

At the end of August, the presenters gathered for a joint rehearsal and to get to know one another. The team also prepared videos highlighting MJD's history and present-day mission, together with props representing its spiritual dimensions — Encounter, Enlightened, Empowered and Evangelise — and the three pillars of synodality: Communion, Participation and Mission.

The presentation brought together MJD's heritage, cultural diversity and continuing mission in a celebration of its journey from history and story towards a shared future.

Diocese of Miri



For the Diocese of Miri, distance and time constraints made preparation challenging, as delegates came from places as far as Limbang, Ulu Baram, Asap and Belaga.

To overcome this, preparations were coordinated through online discussions. The delegation adopted a spontaneous *tari drama,* combining acting, dance and singing, allowing everyone to participate despite the difficulties of gathering for rehearsals.

Entitled *Casting the Net (Tebarkan Jala),* the presentation portrayed the journey of the people of Miri's interior from their traditional way of life to their encounter with Christianity through the arrival of the Mill Hill missionaries.

The drama depicted their dependence on nature and traditional beliefs, including interpreting animal and bird sounds as omens and following the moon for agricultural activities. The arrival of the missionaries marked a turning point, symbolised by priests and religious casting their nets from a boat. Bishop Richard Ng of Miri also took part in the scene, representing the continuing mission of evangelisation

A joyful dance followed, celebrating the people's acceptance of Christ. The presentation concluded with all the Miri delegates singing *Tebarkan Jala*, a call to proclaim the Good News and continue the mission of evangelisation.

The presentation reflected a journey of conversion, joy and mission, expressing the call to build one Malaysian Church rooted in the love and mercy of Christ.

Diocese of Sandakan



The presentation by the Diocese of Sandakan was one of the memorable moments of the convention. It began with a video based on the MPC theme, *Casting the Net.* The story was about a priest who experienced a personal conversion of heart as he went deeper into his encounter with Christ through his priesthood. He learned to rely more on God in his ministry. Looking back at the fruits of his service, he saw how people from different backgrounds had been brought together as one community in the Church, which continued to grow. The story and song affirmed the faithful as one people united in Christ.

Because of the distance between the parishes, most of the preparation and communication had to be done online and through WhatsApp. There was little opportunity for everyone to practise together, with the physical practice taking place only on the night before the presentation. Despite the limited time, everyone worked together and gave their best.

The song *Satukan Kami,* which is well known to many, was chosen as part of the presentation. Martinus Simon of Lahad Datu suggested combining the song with the visual presentation. The Diocese of Sandakan is made up of people from diverse backgrounds, and this diversity is also reflected among Malaysia's nine dioceses. Thus, *Satukan Kami* carried a deeper meaning — a call to unite all of us as one Church in Christ. When the song was played, many people in the hall turned on their phone lights and raised them in the air, creating a beautiful moment of unity.

The presentation ended with *Poco-poco,* a popular group line dance in Sandakan. The song and dance were presented by all the Sandakan delegates — priests, religious and laity. Almost everyone in the hall joined in, creating a joyful and lively ending. It was a simple but meaningful expression of unity, togetherness, and the spirit of the Diocese of Sandakan.

Building an 'ecology of responsibility'

Malaysia faces deepening divisions, economic insecurity, disinformation and environmental pressures — but also possesses the resilience, kindness and capacity for change needed to confront them.



Seeing Malaysia honestly — neither overlooking its achievements nor ignoring the pressures confronting its people — is essential to understanding the Church's responsibility towards Creation and Society, according to political scientist Dr Bridget Welsh.

In her September 11 address, *Our Responsibility for Creation and Society Today*, Dr Welsh examined five challenges shaping the country before turning to areas where Catholics could help build what she called an "ecology of responsibility", particularly by standing with those experiencing poverty, exclusion and powerlessness.

Approaching the subject through the lens of power — how it is exercised and experienced by ordinary people — Dr Welsh described herself as both an "outsider and an insider", having first come to Malaysia in 1980 and later making the country her home.

"Malaysia is a treasure, and she needs to be treasured," she said.

Drawing on Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'*, she said Creation should not be understood merely as something completed in the past, but as something still unfolding and requiring care. Humanity is entrusted with stewardship of what ultimately belongs to God.

Responsibility for Creation therefore extends beyond environmental protection to the social relationships, institutions and communities entrusted to human care.

Nation-building and stewardship, she said, are neither simple nor linear. Progress comes with setbacks, while environmental, social, political and economic challenges are deeply interconnected.

Five challenges confronting Malaysia

Dr Welsh identified five broad challenges shaping contemporary Malaysia: declining moral leadership; worsening racial, religious and regional relations; disinformation and the changing nature of knowledge; an economic disconnect between growth and lived experience; and a growing sense of powerlessness.

On moral leadership, she argued that abuses of power, corruption, racial and religious division and political compromises have weakened public trust.

She stressed that her criticism was not directed at one party, coalition or individual, but at what she described as a systemic problem affecting Malaysian politics more broadly.

Distrust, anger and uncertainty, she said, can filter into society and personal relationships, reinforcing defensiveness and division. Religious communities therefore carry a responsibility to uphold moral principles while recognising the complexity of the choices ordinary Malaysians face.

Dr Welsh said she had long regarded the Catholic Church as one of Malaysia's moral foundations. Its witness, she said, requires both *ketabahan* (fortitude) and *rahmat* (grace).

Understanding must be joined by empathy

A second concern was the state of ethnic, religious and regional relations.

Social separation and declining trust, Dr Welsh said, make it increasingly important for Malaysians not only to understand one another but to develop empathy.

Citing Romans 12:15 — "Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn" — she said understanding and empathy must go together.

She expressed concern about the politicisation of religion and exclusionary tendencies, while stressing that her criticism was not directed at Islam itself. Muslims, she noted, are also directly affected by poor governance, poverty and social problems.

Dr Welsh also pointed to the growing assertion of Sabah and Sarawak's regional interests and the need for greater understanding between Borneo and Peninsular Malaysia. Greater autonomy and resources had brought gains, she said, but also generated resentment in some quarters.

Truth in an age of disinformation

Disinformation presents another challenge.

Dr Welsh described how deliberately false information can exploit prejudice and negative emotions, particularly around religious communities. WhatsApp groups and trusted social networks can become channels for misinformation when material is forwarded without its source being checked.

For Christians, she said, truth-telling is also a moral responsibility.

Artificial intelligence adds another dimension. As Malaysia expands its AI and data-centre infrastructure, questions of governance, human relationships and environmental impact must accompany technological development.

"How our communities adopt AI will shape relationships and agency for the next generations," she said.

When economic growth is not felt

Malaysia's economic indicators may point towards progress, but Dr Welsh cautioned against assuming that improving national figures reflect the experience of every household.

She described an "economic disconnect" between the economy measured and the economy experienced.

Despite improvements in household income and measures of inequality, many Malaysians continue to experience high living costs, limited savings, household debt and barriers to social mobility. Urban-rural inequalities also remain significant, particularly in Sabah and Sarawak.

Growth, she said, can be real without being shared or experienced equally.

Behind this insecurity is a growing sense among some Malaysians that they have little control over the forces shaping their lives. Dr Welsh linked this powerlessness to pressures affecting mental well-being, particularly among young people.

She urged greater attention to the young, whose experiences of mental-health pressures, economic insecurity and rapidly changing social and digital environments will increasingly shape Malaysia's future.

● *Continued on Page 10*

An Abundant Catch
Let us walk in the light of the Lord (Is 2:5)

Diocese of Keningau



The Diocese of Keningau presented two songs during MPC2026, bringing its message of faith and journeying together to the stage through music.

The first song, *Mororobuat,* (farming) was composed by Bishop Cornelius Piong. This was followed by *Umat Tuhan Berjalan Bersama* (People of God Journeying Together), also composed by Bishop Cornelius. The latter is the theme song for the Vision, Mission and Aspiration of the Diocese of Keningau.

The presentation was a collective effort by the Keningau delegates under the guidance of the Keningau Diocesan Catholic Youth Apostolate.

Despite having only one rehearsal during a Study Day attended by the diocesan delegates before MPC2026, the group came together to present the two songs as an expression of Keningau's shared faith and commitment to journeying together as the People of God.

The Diocese of Penang celebrated the rich cultural and linguistic diversity of northern Peninsular Malaysia through a medley of folk songs woven with Gospel themes and values.

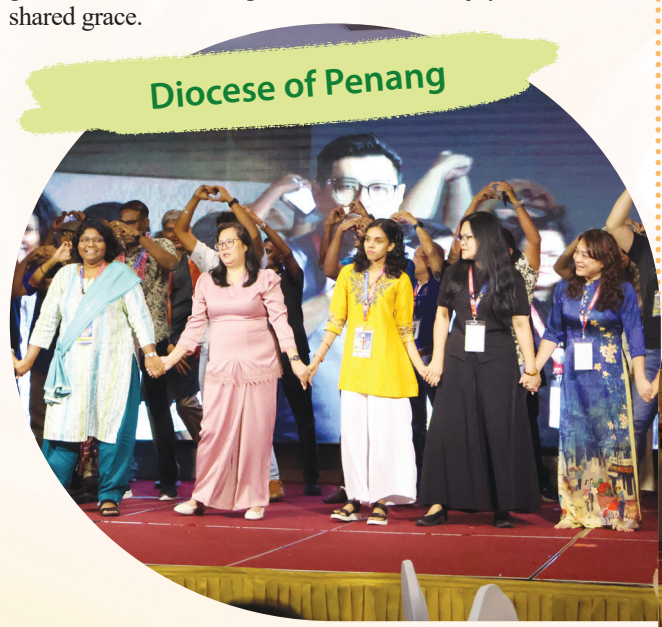
The presentation opened with the Kelantanese classic *Ewa Bule (Wau Bulan),* symbolising the Church's missionary call to reach the peripheries. Like the kite guided by its three strings, *Teraju Tigo,* the Church's mission is anchored in the Holy Trinity.

This was followed by the Mandarin worship song *Path of Grace*, reflecting God's guidance and the call to walk together in trust, like Peter casting his nets into the deep.

The delegates then brought a joyful energy through *Chan Mali Chan,* whose call-and-response lyrics echoed the Good Shepherd's call to seek out those who are lost, isolated and at the margins.

The presentation concluded with the lively Sri Lankan Baila song *Surangani,* whose refrain about catching fish offered a joyful expression of *An Abundant Catch*. Together, the songs demonstrated how Malaysia's diverse traditions can come together as one, reflecting a Church united in joy, mission and shared grace.

Diocese of Penang



Diocese of Sibu



Sibu showcased the richness of local heritage through dance, history, and song.

The presentation brought together around 50 performers across generations, including members of Couples for Christ, their families, and Orang Ulu community members. Weeks of dedicated rehearsal culminated in a multi-generational showcase of unity.

Alongside the cultural displays, Chancellor, Fr Alphonsus Tang, shared key milestones in Sibu's history. The evening ended on a high note with an energetic performance of *Bekikis Bulu Betis*.



Day 3: Third Address — Society & Ecology

From powerlessness to participation



● *Continued from Page 9*

Building an 'ecology of responsibility'

Having outlined the challenges, Dr Welsh identified five areas where the Church could strengthen its contribution: statelessness and migrants; Indigenous poverty, hunger and child stunting; environmental protection; inter-ethnic and interreligious relations; and education.

"The Church community cannot stand outside" the challenges confronting society, she said.

Despite pressures that could encourage Catholics to turn inward, she said the Malaysian Church had maintained an outward-looking role that should be strengthened.

Stateless people, particularly in Sabah, represent one of the clearest examples of powerlessness. Generations may live without documentation, restricting access to formal employment, healthcare, education and political participation.

Dr Welsh urged particular attention to children and communities such as the Bajau Laut, while calling for greater support for civil society organisations providing legal aid and advocating for documentation and education.

Poverty, hunger and the environment

Indigenous communities likewise continue to experience disproportionate poverty, hunger and malnutrition.

Drawing on her fieldwork in Sabah, Dr Welsh urged Malaysians outside these communities to encounter their realities directly. Similar concerns affect communities in Sarawak and Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia.

She pointed to childhood stunting, which she said had risen to 24.3 per cent nationally in 2024, as evidence that hunger and inadequate nutrition remain serious concerns despite Malaysia's relative prosperity.

The Church, she said, can use its presence and moral authority to bring greater attention to conditions that too often remain unseen.

Environmental stewardship must similarly become more central to Catholic awareness and action.

Deforestation and peatland conversion are not distant policy debates, Dr Welsh said. They affect drinking water, flooding and the natural inheritance left to future generations.

"Our responsibility here must be as concrete as trees planted for a generation not yet born," she said.

Dialogue must endure

Dr Welsh also called for sustained interfaith engagement.

Formal dialogue mechanisms, she observed, have sometimes emerged during periods of tension only to fade when the immediate controversy passed. Dialogue must instead become rooted locally through communities and social networks.

Personal encounter matters because greater exposure to people of other faiths can weaken prejudice and misunderstanding.

Ordinary Malaysians, she maintained, still possess a desire to understand one another and live in harmony. The challenge is to build relationships resilient enough to survive controversy rather than retreat when difficulties arise.

Education and a 'redistribution of voice'

A product of Catholic education herself, Dr Welsh stressed the contribution mission schools have made to learning, social mobility and Malaysian society.

Around 462 mission schools remain nationwide, including 235 in Sabah and Sarawak, she said. Their legacy needs protection and greater investment, alongside exploration of new educational institutions and centres of learning.

She also urged Catholics not to rule out the possibility of a Catholic university in Malaysia.

But running beneath all the challenges she identified was a deeper issue: powerlessness.

"Synodality means a real redistribution of voice," Dr Welsh said, arguing that empowerment is not merely a political concern but a pastoral necessity.

Having a genuine voice changes how people experience their community, particularly those historically overlooked — the poor, young people, Indigenous communities and women.

Engaged parishes, active community groups and civic participation can become practical responses to the belief that nothing can change. Every act of participating, organising and "showing up", she said, is an exercise in *ketabahan* and *rahmat* — fortitude and grace.

Reasons to celebrate

Yet Dr Welsh did not want delegates to leave with a picture of Malaysia defined only by its problems.

Using the familiar image of *teh tarik*, she urged Malaysians to focus not simply on the tea, milk and sugar, but on "the pulling of it all together".

Malaysia's nation-building, she said, deserved to be recognised as an achievement even as the work of building the country continues.

She pointed to Caritas Malaysia, established in 2020, which brought the human-development offices of all nine dioceses together nationally, demonstrating how concern for the poor, the vulnerable and migrants can become coordinated action.

Beyond structures and statistics, Malaysia's strength could also be found in countless acts of kindness across religious and communal boundaries.

"There are so many good Samaritans across faiths," she said.

Drawing on another distinctly Malaysian image, Dr Welsh reminded delegates that the *cili padi* may be small but is fierce — and when brought together "community by community, parish by parish, diocese by diocese", becomes something stronger than any could produce alone.

The challenge, she said, is to be honest about moral decline, fragmentation, disinformation, economic inequality, powerlessness, hunger, exclusion and environmental degradation, while being equally honest about the fortitude, grace, cooperation and kindness already alive within the Church and Malaysian society.

"*Ketabahan dengan rahmat*. Fortitude and grace. *Kecil-kecil cili padi*. Small, and fierce."

"Let us take the time, today, to celebrate — and to create."

Scan the QR code for the full text

Conversation in the Spirit 3 and the Synthesis

As I listen to the realities of the *Rakyat*, how can the outreach of the Church make the mission of Jesus more visible and move us from information to implementation that brings sustainable benefits for the future generation?

Convergences

1. Environmental Stewardship as a Shared Responsibility

- ***Holistic Approach:*** Integrates indigenous wisdom and creation justice, linking ecological care directly to economic and human issues.
- ***Societal & Environmental Issues:*** Addresses common challenges (corruption, injustice, social division, haze) via interreligious collaboration and partnerships with government agencies, NGOs, and professionals.
- ***Cross-Sector Collaboration:*** Essential across NGOs, government bodies, and interdenominational groups to achieve societal sustainability.

2. Addressing Social Justice

Unified Church: Transcends East-West Malaysia divisions to pool resources, share expertise, and show practical solidarity.

- ***Networking and Resource Sharing:*** Bridges geographical distances and overcomes local shortages between dioceses and parishes.
- ***Interconnected Duties:*** Integrates community empowerment, social justice, disaster relief, care for the marginalised, and ecological justice (poverty, migration, indigenous rights).

3. The Prophetic Voice for the *Rakyat*

- ***Concrete Action:*** Moves beyond awareness to sustainable, life-transforming action for the *rakyat* and creation.
- ***Courageous Advocacy:*** Steps out of comfort zones to speak up for human dignity, social justice, and the common good.
- ***Proactive Presence:*** Serves as a societal leaven and beacon from urban centres to indigenous communities.

4. Youth Empowerment

- ***Holistic Formation:*** Shapes youth into faithful disciples and responsible citizens for future sustainability.
- ***Intergenerational Unity:*** Fosters learning and unity across generations to inherit a mission of hope and renewal.

Matters for Consideration

1. Addressing Issues Courageously

- ***External Challenges:*** Speaking freely is limited by restricted public discourse and the impacts of Islamisation.
- ***Internal Capacity Gaps:*** Dioceses and parishes lack specialised internal resources to single-handedly address complex legal, mental health, and family issues.

2. Sustainable Allocation of Resources

- ***Bureaucracy and Priorities:*** Requires streamlining assistance, prioritising spending on people over physical structures/edification, and clear stakeholder engagement to avoid one-off programmes.
- ***Volunteer and Staff Support:*** Needs adequate budgets for volunteer burnout prevention, training, professional services, and market-value staff salaries.

3. Empowerment Without Burnout

- ***Sustained Commissioning:*** Empowers youth, Caritas, Creation Justice, and Migrant ministries without duplicating structures or over-exerting resources.
- ***Integrity and Wisdom:*** Fosters ethical leadership to combat favouritism and corruption, balancing moral integrity with practical wisdom to ensure mission safety and effectiveness.

Proposals

1. Catholic Education and Formation

- ***Innovative Youth Programmes:*** Implements dynamic formation (e.g., anthropological catechism), involves youth in outreach, and equips them as digital missionaries.
- ***Accessible and Higher Education:*** Provides unbiased, affordable education for the poor, expands Catholic schools, and proposes establishing the first Catholic university in East Malaysia.
- ***Seminary Curriculum:*** Integrates social and political sciences into seminary training to equip clergy to understand national contexts and speak truth courageously.

2. Engaging Malaysian Society with Catholic Values

- ***Bridge-Building:*** Utilises *gotong-royong*, community visits, and fellowship to build unity and belonging across society.
- ***Living the Faith:*** Translates Catholic Social Teaching into daily action, equips leaders to serve beyond the Church, and engages actively in nation-building today.

3. Ecological Accountability

- ***Active Practice:*** Ensures *Laudato Si'* pledges translate into lived accountability rather than symbolic gestures.
- ***Policy and Law:*** Advocates for deeper knowledge and enforcement of ecological laws and policies.

4. Transparency as an Evangelical Virtue

- ***Financial Disclosure:*** Demands full transparency from bishops' groups and Parish Pastoral Councils regarding financial management and pastoral funding to maintain Church trustworthiness.

Interventions and suggestions



Rayellicty Raymund of **Keningau** raised the need for Catholic mission schools in rural areas during the open forum. Hearing someone in her group speak about attending a mission school brought home the gap in Nabawan, where there is a mission preschool but no mission primary or secondary school.

"My seven-year-old attended the mission preschool, but I cannot continue sending my child to a Catholic mission school after kindergarten," she said.

Rayellicty urged the Church in Malaysia to consider establishing mission primary and secondary schools for children in rural communities.

Philip Lasimbang of Kota Kinabalu urged the Malaysian Church to revisit an earlier proposal for a Catholic university, which he said had never materialised.

Such a university could continue the formation of students from mission schools and complement existing seminaries and training centres, he said. He believed there would be sufficient demand for places, as well as potential support in the form of land, funding, lecturers and other resource people.



"I don't think getting students would be a problem," Philip said. "The challenge is getting government approval for the university."

If approval could not be obtained at the federal level, he suggested exploring whether Sabah and Sarawak could take the initiative. "Could Sabah and Sarawak start this?" he asked, urging the Church to examine what it would take to bring the proposal to life.



For Cecilia Tan Jing Rou, the youngest delegate at the convention, the MPC renewed her desire to stay involved in the Church. She said some young people experience Mass as "just another task" and are drawn to church mainly because their friends are there. Those friendships matter, she added: shared ideas and companionship can help young people move forward in faith together.

From the **Diocese of Malacca Johore,** Cecilia also saw a need for better communication across language groups. "Even if we are not confident in English or Bahasa Malaysia, we can try to speak to young people from other groups," she said. She acknowledged that crossing that barrier was difficult for her, too, and that she was learning to step outside her comfort zone.

"I want to remain passionate, stay active in the Church and continue seeking my mission," she said, "so that I can be an instrument of God's love."

Originally from Cameroon and now serving at the parish of St Paul, Long San in the **Diocese of Miri, Fr Nelson Zang Kum** said the Malaysia Pastoral Convention was an opportunity to reflect on how the Church could bring people of different cultures, religions and backgrounds together.

"It is an opportunity for us to ask ourselves that great question and look for ways forward," he said.

For Fr Nelson, the starting point is acceptance. "Not just tolerate, but accept one another," he urged. That means being willing to work together across differences and to find unity in diversity.

Such an attitude, he said, could help the Church in Malaysia bring people of different cultures, religions and races together "to work as one family" towards a common goal.



Albert Andau Paulus Andau from the **Diocese of Sandakan** said the MPC succeeded in bringing Church leaders and representatives from across the country together in solidarity. Its longer-term success, however, will depend on what happens in the parishes.



"There is still a gap between the conversations in the convention hall and the realities of small and rural parishes," he said. Without clear steps for implementation, he fears the convention's resolutions could remain in a document rather than make a difference in the lives of the faithful.

Albert valued the Conversation in the Spirit, particularly the honesty of the small groups, but felt they needed more time for deeper discernment. He also appreciated the open forum, where delegates raised difficult questions. "If we want the Church to grow, we need to accept different views, including those that may be uncomfortable to hear," he said.

For Albert, the next questions are practical: "What do we need to do? Where do we begin? Who will help us?" He suggested that diocesan leaders set out a written mandate and timeline, then work with parish priests and pastoral councils on local plans. Parish task forces could identify suitable priorities and begin realistic projects within six months.

He hopes future conventions will make greater room for the voices of the poor, the marginalised and those disappointed by the Church, as well as allow delegates more time to rest and reflect.

The experience has also prompted him to examine his own ministry: "Am I only helping to maintain the institution of the Church, or am I truly helping to bring Christ's mission to life?" To him, synodality becomes real when people listen to one another, welcome correction and are willing to change.



For Paul Julianose of the **Diocese of Penang,** the convention's images of the boat, the nets and the abundant catch led to a searching question. Before Jesus told the disciples to cast their net, He asked: "Haven't you caught any fish?" (Jn 21:5).

Paul said the Malaysian Church must be willing to ask itself the same question. "We can enjoy warm fellowship on the boat all night," he said, "but if the net comes up empty, we have missed the point." The image, for him, was a reminder that the Church's mission depends on Christ's presence and direction.



He hoped the fruits of MPC2026 would lead to clear pastoral pathways, with timelines and a way to assess progress. He also cautioned against pursuing activities that looked attractive while deeper needs went unattended. "We must rework the ground itself," he said.

Stephanie Lee of the **Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur** said the convention's focus on society was especially close to her heart.

"We need more people to recognise that mental health is something we should talk about," she said, rather than treat it as a stigma to be hidden. When someone needs help, she urged people to reach out instead of looking away.



That care must extend beyond the Church. "Whether they are Catholic or not, everyone deserves to be heard," she said, and to receive empathy, compassion and care.

"A caring Church cannot speak only from within its buildings. It must go out, listen and understand the realities people face," **Sr Susan Dulang of the Congregation of Sisters of Saint Francis of Sarawak** told the open forum.



She pointed to customary land rights in Sabah and Sarawak, asking whether the Church was ready to stand with communities whose rights and livelihoods were affected, especially when their voices went unheard.

Care for Creation, she said, must also lead to clear positions and action. "Is the Church willing to say 'no' to a major development project" when evidence shows it could seriously harm the environment, local communities and future generations?

"To be a truly caring and prophetic Church, we must listen to the cry of the people and the cry of the earth," Sr Susan said. "We must also have the courage to stand with them and speak up."

Anna Teresa Amandus of **Sandakan** called for ongoing formation for those serving in the Church, so they could deepen their knowledge and bring what they learnt back to their communities.

"Young people should also be encouraged to pursue holistic formation," she said. Speaking from her experience as a graduate of the Institute for Formation Pastoral Asia (IFPA), she noted that others who had studied there were contributing to Church ministries.

Anna Teresa also urged those aged 35 and above to continue serving as they moved on from youth ministry. "Other ministries need their voices too," she said, adding that this would help sustain leadership in the Church.



Scan the QR code for more sharings by the delegates

Speaking entirely in Bahasa Malaysia during the open forum, **Sandra Ann** of the **Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur** asked whether the convention's practice of synodality was reflected in the way delegates were able to participate.



"We speak about listening, participation and walking together," she said. "Why, then, are most of the reports and main sessions presented in English when many of us understand Bahasa Malaysia?" Using a language familiar to most delegates, she suggested, would help them follow the discussions and contribute fully.

Sandra also questioned the reliance on speakers from outside when Malaysia had experienced people who understood the life of the local Church. She asked how the Church could give "greater space and trust to local voices, experiences and expertise".

Her CIS group, she added, still struggled to picture what a Malaysian Catholic Church that listens and walks together would look like in practice. "How does the Church listen? Whom does it listen to? What channels allow the voices of the faithful to reach the Church?"

She named families, young people, women, older people, Indigenous peoples, migrants, the poor, and those who felt hurt, marginalised or distant from the Church. Listening to them, Sandra said, must lead somewhere: her group wanted concrete examples of how their voices could shape pastoral decisions and actions.

Concerns, challenges and hopes



For **Fr Desmond Jansen** of the **Diocese of Penang,** MPC2026 was the fulfilment of a long-held hope. He was 18 when he attended the first Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Convention and a seminarian when he attended the second. Ever since, he had prayed for a convention that would bring the whole Malaysian Church together.

"Today, as a priest, it has become a reality," he said. "We may be separated by the South China Sea, but we are united by the Holy Spirit."

Fr Desmond hoped delegates would carry that unity home. "No more Peninsular Church, Sabah Church or Sarawak Church. We are one Malaysian Church, journeying together in one boat and one Spirit."

Whatever their race or language, he said, Catholics could learn to speak "the language of love" so that future generations would know and live that unity. He closed with a prayer that the Sacred Heart of Jesus would continue to accompany the Church, and that Mary would watch over it with a mother's love. "Puji Tuhan."

During the open forum, **John Baptist Low** of the **Diocese of Malacca Johore** proposed that parishes learn from ecological initiatives that have worked elsewhere, then adapt them for their own communities.

"If a parish has successfully stopped using plastic, for example, others could follow and put the same practice in place," he said. Sharing practical examples would give parishes a starting point instead of leaving each community to work out its own approach.



He also urged parishes to begin with "low-hanging fruit" — simple steps they could take immediately and carry out well. Each success should be celebrated, he said, to encourage those involved and give them confidence to take the next step.

Those early efforts could then build towards larger, longer-term plans for caring for creation.

Before coming to the Malaysia Pastoral Convention, **Darrel Noel** had a question: "What can I bring home from MPC? What can I contribute, especially to the young people in the **Diocese of Keningau?"**

After several days in Sibu, he felt he had found an answer. As delegates discussed the difficulty of drawing young people into church life and ministry, one insight stayed with him: "It all begins with the family."

Darrel said families have an active part in the Church's mission, both within their own homes and through the relationships they build with other families. In that sense, the family is "not only a domestic Church, but also a domestic mission".

This calls for a change of approach, he said. "Instead of asking, 'Why aren't they coming to church?', perhaps we should begin asking, 'What if we go to them?'"



Like Jesus, the Church must go out to meet people rather than wait for them to come.

He summed up what he would take home in three invitations: "Listen. Dialogue. Be present."

Spencer Klumai of the **Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur** said he hoped the nine bishops would consider standardising the age at which young people receive the Sacrament of Confirmation.



He said candidates in Peninsular Malaysia are general- ly confirmed at 17, in Form Five, while those in Sabah and Sarawak are confirmed at 16, in Form Four. This can create difficulties for families who move from the peninsula to East Malaysia. A 17-year-old may have missed the local Confirmation programme and, he said, may then be directed to RCIA.

"Such cases may be few, but the impact on the students concerned is significant," he said, citing two cases in his parish over the past three years.

Spenser urged the bishops in Peninsular Malaysia to consider lowering the age to 16. He added that a common age could also help teachers prepare for Confirmation classes, as syllabuses currently vary between parishes.

"I hope the bishops will give this matter serious consideration," he said.

Iris Leong of **Malacca Johore Diocese** urged the Church to pay closer attention to families caring for elderly parents. Many adult children have to work and struggle to provide care during the day, she said. "Could we offer home care, so that older people are looked after while their children are at work?"

She also proposed a centre where families could seek help with scholarships for further education and with medical needs. The cost of caring for older people with conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes and high cholesterol can be difficult for families to bear, she said.



Iris recalled a time when people knew they could turn to the Catholic Church for food when they were poor. "Why not return to that spirit," she asked, "and provide support for education, medical care and the elderly?"

Iven Estrada Gabriel of **Sandakan,** asked how the Church could better accompany families with neurodivergent children. In his parish, one family has three children, two of whom are autistic.

"What steps is the Church taking to accompany this family and their children so they can journey with us as part of the Church?" he asked during the forum.



Iven also raised concerns discussed at a children's pastoral gathering in Penajam from Sept 5 to 7 about the misuse of social media, bullying and sexual harm. He asked whether education on responsible social media use could be included in the Church's catechetical programme.

"If young people do become involved in such offences, where can they turn?" he asked. "How will the Church help them and their families?"

Esther Chee Kai Zhim, a delegate from the **Archdiocese of Kuching,** urged the Church to listen to young people and take their ideas seriously.

"Young people are the now of God," she said. "We need to hear everyone's voices." While the wisdom of older generations matters, she added, the Church must also make room for young people's opinions, ideas and hopes for its future.





Patrick Marius of the **Diocese of Keningau** asked why inculturation had not been raised in the convention's discussions, even as delegates celebrated the cultures, traditions and identities they had brought with them.

"If we want to strengthen our identity, we cannot set aside who we are — where we come from and what is deeply rooted in our lives," he said.



Recalling the call to put out into deeper water and cast the nets, he asked delegates to consider what that invitation might mean for their communities. "What is happening with inculturation where we live? Are we afraid to go into deeper water?"

For Patrick, engaging with inculturation could help the Church deepen its faith in the Malaysian context.

When I recall my journey towards MPC 2026, I cannot help but imagine all of us as the Malaysian Catholic Church climbing a mountain together, journeying towards the same peak. This journey began in 2018, when the clergy, religious and laity gathered in their respective assemblies to listen, reflect and discern together. From this process emerged the Pastoral Thrust, which became like a GPS guiding us on our journey towards the peak of MPC 2026.

Personally, I was very curious and excited to see what would happen when the Catholic Church of the West and the East came together at MPC. Like any mountain climber who finally reaches a higher point, I too experienced a sense of exhilaration. I was filled with joy at belonging to a wider Malaysian Church that is so vibrant and diverse. I especially appreciated the interactions and exchanges that took place at Conversation in the Spirit (CIS). However, my enthusiasm was somewhat diminished by what took place during the open forum.

First Disappointment: Limited Participation in the Open Forum

The main purpose of an open forum is to provide an accessible space where participants can ask questions, express concerns and engage in free and direct dialogue. However, at MPC, only two representatives from each diocese were given the opportunity to speak, with each having just two minutes.



Although a QR code was provided for other participants to submit their concerns, I felt that this did not fully serve the purpose of an open forum. When concerns are submitted digitally without being shared with the wider assembly, the larger gathering does not have the opportunity to hear, understand or engage with those concerns collectively.

Second Disappointment: The Forum Becoming a "Wish List"

My second disappointment was that the forum seemed to become more of a space for expressing individual "wish lists" — such as a Catholic Drug Rehabilitation Centre, Catholic Mall, Catholic Mission Schools in the interior, and so on—rather than a space for responding to and reflecting on the synthesis that had been presented.

I do not blame the participants for this. The synthesis reports were extensive, and it was difficult to absorb and reflect on everything at one time. Furthermore, participants were not given sufficient time to study the synthesis, reflect on it personally and prepare their responses.

As a result, the open forum did not always become an opportunity for deeper conversation about the direction of the Malaysian Church. Instead, it sometimes became a space for presenting particular needs or desired projects.

Suggestions for Future Assemblies

Since this may have been the first experience of an open forum of this kind for many participants, it may be helpful to provide a clear explanation beforehand about the purpose, process and expectations of an open forum. Participants would then have a better understanding of how their contributions can help the wider Church in its discernment.

Secondly, if the intention is for comments to be presented on behalf of each diocese, it may be helpful to provide time for participants to gather in their respective dioceses after the synthesise report. In that way they could discuss the synthesis together, identify the key issues that emerge from each CIS, and discern what should be brought to the wider assembly.

In this way, the contributions at the open forum could move beyond individual "wish lists" and become more collective, reflective and substantive responses to the synthesis.

Continuing the Journey

Despite my disappointments, I remain grateful for the opportunity to participate in MPC 2026. The image of the mountain reminds me that reaching the summit is not simply about arriving at a destination. It is about how we journey together, listen to one another, support one another and discern the path ahead.

Perhaps MPC2026 is not the end of the climb but another significant point along the journey of the Malaysian Catholic Church. The challenge now is to continue climbing together—clergy, religious and laity — so that the Pastoral Thrust becomes not merely a GPS that shows us the direction, but a shared commitment that helps us move forward together as one Church.

Sr Amy Sam, IJ
Diocese of Penang

Service, mission and the Holy Spirit



ArchKK pic

On the final day of MPC2026, Malaysia's bishops reflected on what had emerged from the Convention, sharing their perspectives on the journey ahead and how its fruits might be carried into their respective dioceses. The pastoral pathways and overarching pastoral statement arising from MPC2026 will continue to take shape through prayerful listening and discernment, and will be shared when the process is complete.

Go into the deep and serve beyond the Church walls



Bishop Richard Ng of Miri Diocese, began his sharing on a light-hearted note, recounting a dream he had the previous night.

"In my dream, the heavens suddenly opened and a great wall of water came down, filled with so many fish. I was very happy because I managed to catch a very big fish," he said, drawing laughter from the assembly.

He suggested that the dream might have been influenced by the previous evening's reflection on casting the net. Yet beneath the humour was a message for the Malaysian Church: "We need to go into the deep, and we need to cast our nets."

Noting that Catholics make up less than 10 per cent of Malaysia's population, Bishop Richard asked whether the Church should be satisfied with remaining where it is.

"There are many people waiting to encounter Christ and experience His love. We cannot remain on the shore. We have to go deeper and cast our nets wider."

That mission, however, must begin within each person. He stressed the need for personal conviction, *metanoia* and genuine discipleship.

"Only when we ourselves have encountered Christ and allowed Him to transform us can we truly bring Him to others," he said.

Bishop Richard also placed a particular challenge before young Catholics, describing them as leaders who are already emerging today. He encouraged them to consider entering politics and to recognise public service as a possible vocation.

"We need good people in politics if we want good leaders and moral leadership in our country," he said. "Do not enter politics simply for money, position or power. Enter because you want to serve your people and your country, and contribute to the common good."

Expressing confidence in the capabilities of young Catholic leaders, he urged them not to be afraid to step forward and discern whether God might be calling them to serve the nation through political life.

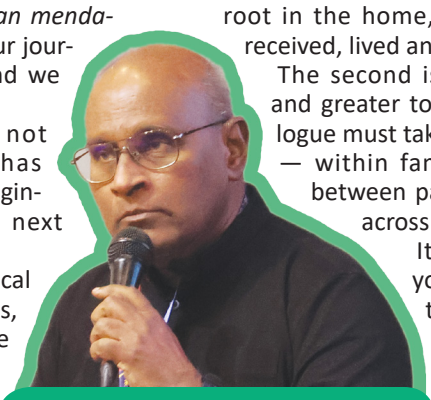
The bishop added that the mission of Catholics could not remain confined within church walls. Christians are called to be present in society, particularly wherever decisions are made and the common good is at stake.

The laity, he said, have an important vocation in both the Church and the world. They cannot remain passive spectators, but must participate in shaping a society that respects human dignity, promotes justice and serves the good of all.

As delegates prepared to leave MPC2026, Bishop Richard invited them to consider how everything they had heard and discerned could be carried beyond their churches and into the realities of Malaysian society.

"Go into the deep. Cast the net," he said. "There is still much work for us to do."

The wilderness ahead is our mission field



As MPC2026 drew towards its close, **Bishop Bernard Paul** of Malacca Johore diocese invited delegates to ask two important questions: "Where are we now, and where to next?"

He likened the Convention to a voyage nearing its destination: "*Pelayaran kita hampir tamat; kita akan mendarat sebentar lagi*" — our journey is almost over, and we will soon come ashore.

Yet landing does not mean the journey has ended. It marks the beginning of the Church's next stage of mission.

Drawing on the biblical image of the wilderness, Bishop Bernard said the Church would be led by the same Spirit who guided Jesus into the wilderness.

"Our wilderness will be the mission land, the mission field ahead of us," he said.

The wilderness is a place of testing, trials and temptation, but also a place where vision is clarified and identity strengthened. As the Church enters the mission field, it must be prepared to resist the temptations of instant gratification, sensationalism and power.

It must also remain faithful to its God-given identity, mandate and way of proceeding.

Bishop Bernard said that after attending gatherings such as MPC2026, he often left with a question for God: "What next, Lord?"

For him, the answer was clear: "Be ready for the wilderness." At the same time, the Church should trust that the Paraclete — the Holy Spirit — would accompany and guide it.

From his journey and encounters with delegates, Bishop Bernard sensed that the Church in Malaysia was being called to continue as a bridge-building Church through a threefold mission.

The first is evangelisation, beginning within the family. Mission must take root in the home, where faith is first received, lived and passed on.

The second is dialogue for unity and greater togetherness. This dialogue must take place at every level — within families and parishes, between parishes and dioceses, across regions and beyond. It must also include young people, families, the poor and the voiceless, while extending to people of other faiths.

The third is social mission: bringing the Gospel into the realities of society and ensuring that the Church remains close, accessible and responsive to people's lives.

Bishop Bernard also emphasised the importance of inclusive listening within Basic Ecclesial Communities and other Church structures. Communities and ministries, he said, must become a "touchable world" — places where people feel welcomed, heard and accompanied.

As delegates prepared to leave MPC2026, he reminded them that the road ahead would not be free from uncertainty or struggle. Yet the wilderness should not be feared. It is there that the Spirit purifies motives, clarifies the Church's mission and prepares God's people for faithful service.

The voyage may be approaching the shore, but the mission is only beginning.

Pause, listen and let the Spirit lead



As the Church in Malaysia looks beyond MPC2026, **Archbishop John Wong** called for an ongoing process of reflection, renewal and openness to the Holy Spirit.

"In order to move forward together, my dear brothers and sisters, we need to keep reviewing ourselves and allow the Spirit to guide us," said the prelate of the Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu.

Journeying together, he explained, is not simply about pressing ahead or moving quickly from one programme to another. At different points along the way, the Church must be willing to pause and honestly examine its life, direction and faithfulness to God's call.

"We need to ask where we are, where God is calling us and whether we are truly allowing the Holy Spirit to lead us."

Such self-examination is not intended to discourage or hold the Church back. Rather, it helps the community recognise what must be strengthened, what may need to change and where the Spirit may be opening new paths.

For this reason, Archbishop John highlighted three dispositions needed for the journey ahead: humility, courage and openness.

The Church needs the humility to listen — to God and to one another — particularly to voices that may be different from its own. It also needs the courage to renew itself when renewal is necessary, rather than holding on to familiar ways simply because they are comfortable. Above all, it must remain open to the Holy Spirit and be prepared to follow wherever God is leading His Church.

Archbishop John described MPC2026 as part of this continuing journey of listening and discernment. The Convention had brought the Church in Malaysia together to pray, reflect and hear one another, but its fruits must now be carried beyond the gathering.

"What we have experienced here must now be brought back to our dioceses and communities," he said.

This means allowing the spirit of the Convention to take root in local realities — in dioceses, parishes, families and communities. The listening that began at MPC2026 must continue, and the discernment experienced there must shape the way the Church responds to the people and situations it encounters.

Moving forward together, therefore, will require patience and attentiveness. It will mean reviewing the journey from time to time, recognising where renewal is needed and remaining faithful to the promptings of the Spirit.

Archbishop John concluded with a simple but powerful expression of the communion and shared responsibility required for the road ahead:

"Together, we journey. Together, we listen. Together, we build."

Day 4: Pastoral Address

Moving forward together

From ego to eco: A call to metanoia



Bishop Joseph Hii began his sharing with a story from his early seminary days. When asked which diocese he came from, he confidently replied, "Sibu," unaware that it was not yet a diocese. Fr Terence Siew jokingly told him: "Wow, you are very daring — already making Sibu a diocese!"

"Today, I am truly the second bishop of the Diocese of Sibu," he said, drawing applause.

His fellow seminarians, who called him "Ah Hii", would also tease him by asking: "Can anything good come from Ah Hii?"

Turning the joke towards the host diocese, Bishop Joseph asked: "Can anything good come from Sibu?"

The question echoed Nathanael's response when Philip told him about Jesus of Nazareth. Philip simply replied: "Come and see."

When Nathanael encountered Jesus, he discovered that Christ already knew him. That encounter transformed his scepticism into faith, and Jesus promised him: "You will see greater things."

Bishop Joseph said he came to MPC2026 with the same desire — to encounter Jesus, experience how deeply Christ knew him and trust that He could accomplish greater things.

Yet that encounter also confronted him with his need for personal conversion.

"The Lord asked me for my own personal conversion," he said. "I have been going my own way, so full of ego and full of myself."

Ego, he observed, is not confined to individuals. It can also shape families, communities, dioceses, Churches and societies, making them inward-looking and unable to hear the needs of others.

Speaking candidly about his leadership of the Diocese of Sibu, Bishop Joseph admitted that he had sometimes focused too heavily on his own plans and priorities.

Reflecting on the diocese's Decade of Creation Justice, which concludes this year, he acknowledged that although its vision was good, much of it had come from his own ideas.

"I came out with my own plan and forced it down on the people, thinking they would accept it," he said. "But it failed in many ways."

The experience led him to ask: "Am I humble enough to let go, to die to my own plan and allow the Holy Spirit truly to lead?"

Genuine listening, Bishop Joseph said, requires humility and a willingness to die to oneself. Referring humorously to the Convention's day devoted to listening, he admitted: "Yesterday, the whole day was about listening. I failed!"

He then reflected on the cries he had failed to hear — those of families, the Church, society, the poor and Mother Earth.

"When I am full of myself, I cannot hear. I cannot listen," he said.

This realisation led him to propose a *Year of Metanoia* for the Diocese of Sibu — a time of repentance, conversion and renewed attentiveness to the Holy Spirit.

"I need to allow the Lord to break me from my self-centredness and my beautiful plans," he said. "I need to die to myself. Only then can there be new life."

He described this conversion as a movement "from ego to eco".

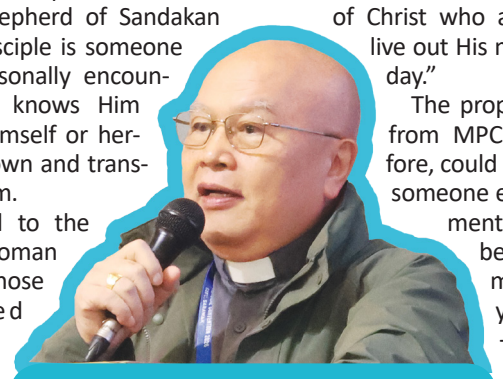
"Eco is relational," he explained. "It is about our relationship with ourselves, with the family, with the Church, with society, with Mother Earth and with the whole of creation."

MPC2026, he added, had brought Catholics from across Malaysia together for prayer, listening, reflection and communion. Its fruits must now be carried into families, parishes, communities and society.

Like Nathanael, the Church is invited to "come and see", allow itself to be known and transformed by Christ, and trust His promise: "You will see greater things."

Bishop Joseph expressed the hope that the Church in Malaysia would listen deeply, walk closely with her people, build bridges instead of barriers and respond courageously to the realities of the time.

Are we really disciples of Christ?



Amid the many expectations surrounding MPC2026, one word kept returning to **Bishop Julius Dusin Gitom**'s heart and mind: discipleship.

Through Baptism, he said, Christians can rightly call themselves disciples. Yet he invited delegates to look beyond the title and confront a deeper, more personal question: "Are we really disciples of Christ?"

For this shepherd of Sandakan Diocese, a disciple is someone who has personally encountered Christ, knows Him and allows himself or herself to be known and transformed by Him.

He pointed to the Samaritan woman at the well, whose complicated life changed through her encounter with Jesus.

"Christ knew her story. He knew who she was, and that encounter touched her deeply," he said. Having recognised Christ, she did not keep the experience to herself, but returned to her people and shared what she had discovered.

In the same way, Bishop Julius said, MPC2026 should become a personal encounter with Christ for every delegate.

"We have spent these days listening, praying, reflecting and discerning together. But all these will have meaning only if our encounter with Christ leads us to become true disciples."

The Convention had examined many dimensions of the Church's mission and produced various proposals through collective discernment. The crucial question, however, was whether delegates were prepared to take ownership of them.

"It is easy to say, 'The Church should do this,' or 'The Church should do that.' But then we must ask ourselves: Who is the Church?"

"We are the Church," he said. "The Church is made up of disciples of Christ who are called to live out His mission every day."

The proposals arising from MPC2026, therefore, could not be left to someone else to implement. They had to become "my mission and your mission" — a responsibility embraced by every disciple.

Such ownership requires genuine conversion of heart, Bishop Julius said. A true disciple remains close to Christ and recognises Him not only in prayer and worship, but in other people, especially those who are poor, vulnerable or in need.

He urged delegates not to return to their dioceses, parishes, families and communities carrying only documents, proposals and memories. They should leave as transformed disciples, ready to live the mission they had helped to discern.

"As disciples of Christ, let us have the courage to take up Christ's own mission," he said.

"We leave this place as one Church in Malaysia, ready to embrace that mission together."

Every piece matters in building one Malaysian Church



On behalf of the bishops, **Archbishop Julian Leow** of **Kuala Lumpur** acknowledged that they, too, are human and have at times fallen short of expectations.

Reflecting on MPC2026, he said Archbishop Emeritus John Ha's presentation on the Church's history had helped delegates understand the journey that brought them to the Convention.

The 1976 *Aggiornamento* in Peninsular Malaysia embodied the renewal of the Church following the Second Vatican Council. Fifty years later, MPC2026 offered another opportunity to reflect on the present and discern the future.

"When we know our past, we can better understand where we are going," he said.

Archbishop Julian also recalled the observation of the Minister of National Unity that MPC2026 began with Celebrate, while the ministry's own process placed celebration at the end — after people had first sought to understand and accept one another.

The Church could begin by celebrating, Archbishop Julian said, because it had much for which to be grateful: its cultures, differences, diversity and the ability to come together around the same table.

Quoting the minister, he said: "Our diversity is inherited, but our unity has to be built."

This led Archbishop Julian to place a direct question before the assembly: "Are we united? Do we see ourselves as part of the Body of Christ?"

Without that sense of belonging, he warned, the work ahead would become an uphill task. Delegates could not stand outside the process and speak about "the Church" as if it referred only to bishops, priests, commissions or institutions.

He recalled the many suggestions raised during the open forum: "The Church must do this" or "the commission must do that".

"But we are the Church," he said. "We are the ones who will be doing these things."

The challenge for each delegate, therefore, was to ask: "Am I part of this whole process? Do I see myself as an important and crucial part?"

Using the image of a jigsaw puzzle, Archbishop Julian asked which piece was the most important.

"The missing piece," he replied. "The missing piece is the most important because it completes the picture. Each one of us is important and crucial."

He also referred to the realities facing families and the Church, which had been highlighted during the Convention. While the ideal remains on the horizon, the Church must first take an honest look at its present situation.

"The Church must be present. The Church must walk with our families," he said, acknowledging that it had sometimes failed to do so.

He called delegates to recommit themselves to accompanying families and becoming active participants in the Church's shared journey.

Archbishop Julian also recalled Bridget Welsh's reminder that the Church must serve as a moral compass in society.

"If not us, who will give moral direction?" he asked.

The Church, he said, must examine its role in society and become a beacon of hope and a light to the world. This mission also requires adequate resources so that pastoral plans and programmes can be carried out effectively.

Turning to the relationship between Sabah, Sarawak and Peninsular Malaysia, Archbishop Julian said MPC2026 showed that longstanding distances and differences could be narrowed when people sat together to pray, share and discern.

The foundations for greater unity were already present. He pointed to the shared formation of seminarians in Kota Kinabalu, Penang and Kuching; the work of Caritas Malaysia in responding collectively to disasters; the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia; and MPC2026 itself.

"We have all of you to be the catalysts and the leaven that bring about greater unity," he told the delegates.

The next step, he said, was to identify the "low-hanging fruits" — actions that could begin immediately through personal responsibility for the nation, society and the environment — while also planning for medium- and long-term goals.

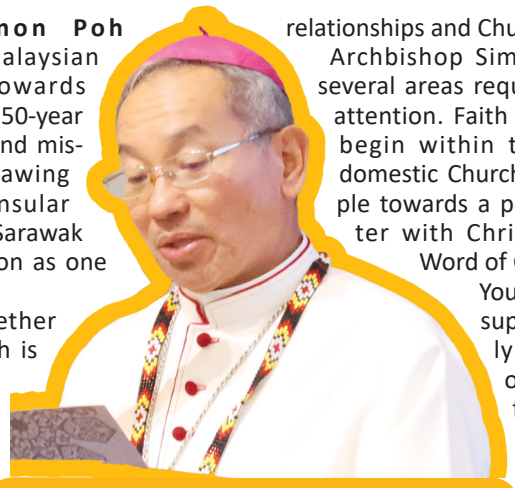
He expressed hope that another national pastoral convention would not be delayed for another decade.

"Perhaps in five years, we can come together again," he said, adding with a smile, "and *makan-makan*."

Behind the humour was a clear invitation: the unity experienced at MPC2026 must now be built intentionally. Every delegate has a place in that work, and every "piece" is needed to complete the picture of one Malaysian Church.

as one Church in Malaysia


ArchKK pic



Becoming one Malaysian Church

Archbishop Simon Poh described the Malaysian Church's journey towards MPC2026 as part of a 50-year story of grace, hope and mission — a journey drawing Catholics from Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak into deeper communion as one People of God.

"What links us together as a Malaysian Church is the significance of 1976," said the archbishop of Kuching.

In Peninsular Malaysia, the 1976 *Aggiornamento* in Penang brought clergy, religious and laity together to read the signs of the times. It led to the growth of Basic Ecclesial Communities and paved the way for decades of pastoral conventions.

That same year marked a new stage of maturity for the Church in East Malaysia, with the establishment of the Archdiocese of Kuching and the Dioceses of Miri and Kota Kinabalu.

Remembering these parallel beginnings, Archbishop Simon said, helps the Church recognise a shared historical identity and a journey that has gradually brought its different regions closer together.

This unity has continued through national gatherings of clergy, religious and young people, including the Malaysian Catholic Clergy Assembly (MCCA), Malaysia Religious Assembly (MRA) and Malaysia Catholic Youth Day (MCYD). Such encounters have built bridges across Peninsular Malaysia and Borneo and strengthened the sense of belonging to one Malaysian Church.

The same communion is evident in priestly formation. Seminarians undertake their philosophical studies together at College General in Penang before continuing their theological formation at St Peter's College in Kuching. Living and studying in both Peninsular and East Malaysia exposes future priests to the country's diverse cultures and pastoral realities.

Religious brothers, sisters and priests also embody this unity by serving across diocesan and regional boundaries.

Archbishop Simon compared the Church's pastoral journey to the road to Emmaus. Along the way, Catholics carry the sufferings, sacrifices, hopes and crosses of their parishes and dioceses. Through prayer, Conversation in the Spirit and deep listening, they encounter Christ among them and recognise Him in the breaking of bread.

The *Perjalanan Salib,* in which nine pilgrim crosses journeyed through the dioceses of Malaysia before being united at MPC2026, gave visible expression to this shared journey.

"Despite our different backgrounds and realities, we are one People of God walking together," he said.

Like the disciples at Emmaus, the Church is called to allow its encounter with Christ to set hearts on fire and send believers out as missionary disciples.

This renewal begins with personal *metanoia* — a conversion of heart — and must lead to the conversion of pastoral relationships and Church structures.

Archbishop Simon highlighted several areas requiring continued attention. Faith formation must begin within the family, the domestic Church, and lead people towards a personal encounter with Christ through the Word of God.

Young people need support, particularly when studying or living away from home. They should also be encouraged to discern vocations of public service, including politics and teaching, so that Gospel values can help shape society and education.

The Church must also recognise its deeply indigenous identity. While ministries among the Kadazan Dusun, Murut, Iban, Bidayuh, Melanau and Orang Ulu are well established in Sabah and Sarawak, greater sharing of resources could strengthen ministry among the Orang Asli and other indigenous communities in Peninsular Malaysia.

Social mission must remain another priority. Through Caritas, disaster relief, migrant outreach and other works of solidarity, Catholics are called to stand with those in need, both within Malaysia and beyond.

Yet responsibility for these missions cannot be left solely to bishops, priests or Church organisations.

Playing on the letters in the word "Church", Archbishop Simon reminded delegates: "Without 'U' and 'R', the word is incomplete — because YOU ARE the Church."

The laity are called to live their secular vocations faithfully in offices, classrooms, neighbourhoods and workplaces. Each baptised person shares responsibility for bringing the Gospel into society.

The Church must also ask a searching question: "Who is not in church on Sunday?"

That question directs attention towards those on the margins — families facing financial hardship, the divorced, the wounded, the elderly, persons with disabilities and those who have become estranged from the faith. A missionary Church cannot wait for them to return on their own; it must step out, listen and accompany them.

Archbishop Simon described MPC2026 as "a kairos moment" — a time of grace in which the Church recognises God at work and discerns where the Holy Spirit is leading.

What had been prayed, heard and discerned at the Convention must now be carried into families, communities and society.

Looking ahead, he called the Malaysian Church to follow Mary's example of faithfulness at the foot of the Cross, listen to one another with open hearts and cast its nets into the deep.

May the Church, he said, continue to walk in unity and "whisper the Gospel" across Malaysia — bringing the hope of Christ to its people as one Malaysian Church.

Four signs of the Spirit at work

Reflecting on the four days of MPC2026, **Cardinal Sebastian Francis** of Penang diocese expressed gratitude for the way delegates remained committed to the spiritual process entrusted to them.

"The Holy Spirit gave us a process for these last four days," he said. "I have been amazed at our collective fidelity in remaining faithful to that process until the last day."

By honouring the process of prayer, listening, sharing and discernment, he said, the delegates had also remained faithful to the Holy Spirit.

Cardinal Sebastian identified four ways in which he had witnessed the Spirit moving among the participants and across the Church in Malaysia.

The first was the power of the Holy Spirit at work in their collective silence.

"Our silence was powerful," he said, giving thanks for the willingness of delegates to quieten themselves, listen attentively and create space for the Spirit to speak.

The second was the Spirit's power at work through their words, particularly during the Conversations in the Spirit. As delegates listened and responded to one another, their words brought forth the fruits of prayerful discernment.

The third was the Holy Spirit at work in their collective actions. Cardinal Sebastian recalled the stories delegates shared about evangelisation and mission already taking place in dioceses, parishes and communities.

"That was inspiring, motivating and energising for me," he said.

The fourth was the Spirit's presence in the Church's collective dreams, visions and hopes for "a new heaven and a new earth".

These dreams, he suggested, were not simply human ambitions. They reflected a people opening themselves to what God might desire for the Church and the world.

Cardinal Sebastian said he wished to bring these four gifts — collective silence, words, actions and hope — into the Eucharist and offer them to the Triune God, together with his brother bishops and the entire assembly.

He prayed that the Holy Spirit would keep the Church in Malaysia fully alive as the nine dioceses continued their journey together beyond MPC2026.

This same pattern, he said, must continue: listening together in silence, sharing what the Spirit is saying to the Church, recognising what the Spirit is already accomplishing through collective action, and daring to imagine the new heaven and new earth towards which God is leading His people.

"May the Holy Spirit keep the Church in Malaysia fully alive," he said.



Cultivating a spirit of care

Representing Bishop Cornelius Piong, who was unable to attend, **Msgr Gilbert Lasius** of Keningau diocese, spoke of a principle the bishop has long encouraged in the Diocese of Keningau: *sikap ambil peduli* — a spirit of care and concern for one another.

"The first aspect is our relationships," he said. The bishop, priests and laity, especially those entrusted with leadership, must take time to listen to one another, work together and sustain the bonds that make shared mission possible. "Without this spirit of care in our relationships, it will be difficult for us to move forward."

The second aspect is care for the Church's physical needs and for the faith and spiritual growth of its people. This means paying attention to whether churches are welcoming places to gather and worship, while ensuring that formation reaches children, young people, parents, lay leaders and catechists.

These two forms of care prepare the Church for the third aspect: caring for God's creation and for one another's well-being. A community that learns to care for its relationships and nurture the faith of its members is better able to recognise its responsibility for the people and world around it.

"When we truly embrace this spirit of care — caring for our relationships, our Church, the faith of our people, one another and God's creation — we can truly build the Church as the People of God, journeying together in faith and mission."



A message of hope sealed for the Church of tomorrow

Before the Missioning Mass at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart on September 12, the Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026 (MPC2026) entrusted its hopes and prayers to those who will carry the Church's mission into the future.

Archbishop Simon Poh placed a time capsule within the *Salib* and sealed it. The capsule holds symbols and messages prepared by Malaysia's nine dioceses, reflecting the voices of the Church today and reaching towards the generations to come.

Children in Miri wrote to the children who will come after them; priests in Malacca Johore addressed their future brothers in ministry; and persons with disabilities in Kuching shared their hopes with those who will follow. Parents in Penang and grandparents in Kuala Lumpur offered their own words to the families of tomorrow.

Teenagers in Sandakan and young people in Keningau spoke to those who will one day stand where they stand. Families in Kota Kinabalu addressed future families, while the religious in Sibu left a message for those who will answer the same call.

Together, their words carried a hope that faith, care and courage would continue to grow long after the convention had ended.

The capsule also contained the *Perjalanan Salib* and MPC2026 logos, and a swan symbolising Sibu, the Swan City.

Sealed within the *Salib* are prayers for a Church whose faces we do not yet know. The children, families, priests, religious and communities of tomorrow will have their own joys and struggles, and their own paths to discern. When they open the capsule, they will find that the Church of 2026 had already made room for them in its heart. Its messages offer them a blessing across the years: may they listen deeply, walk together faithfully and find the courage to carry the mission forward.

The *Salib* will remain in Sibu until the next MPC.



Archbishop Simon Poh with the time capsule.



Archbishop Simon Poh inserting the MPC 2026 logo into the capsule. It will only be opened at the next MPC.



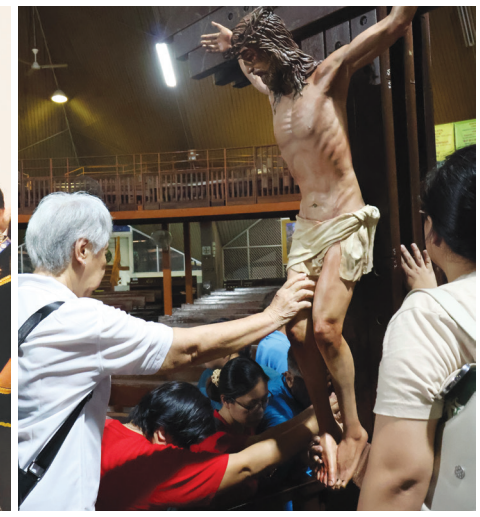














THE HERALD TEAM IN SIBU

From left: Amanda Mah, Sandra Ann, Perzeus James, Patricia Pereira, Melania Liza Magnus, Christina Lazaroo, Adelina Wong and Elvina Fernandez.

WHO ARE THE DELEGATES? A PROFILE OF THE 757 PARTICIPANTS

A statistical snapshot of the delegates' gender and age.

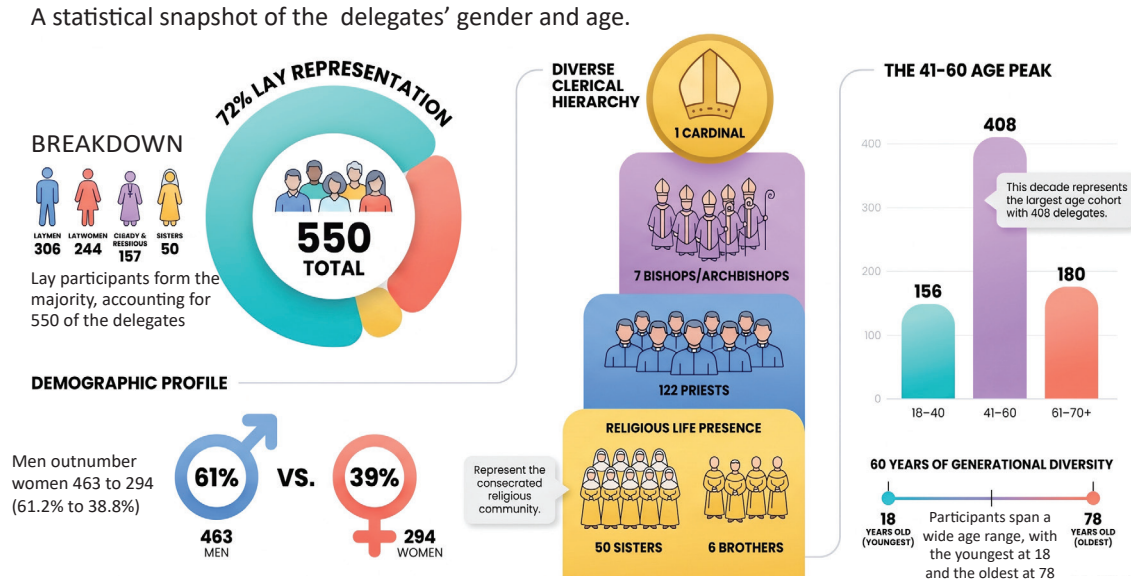


Photo credit: HERALD, Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu SOCCOM and Gereja Katolik Malaysia