

REPORT OF MALAYSIA RELIGIOUS ASSEMBLY, 2023

8 to 11 June 2023

MAJODI, JOHOR



Prepared by Main Organising Team

1. Vision of MPC 2026

The Catholic Church in Malaysia coming together as clergy, religious and laity to celebrate, listen and walk in the Light of the Lord (cf. Is. 2: 2-5).

To realise this vision, four focus areas namely on Church, Family, Ecology and Social were emphasised. The methodology of the Theological Reflection: See, Judge and Act was adopted for this process. The Malaysia Religious Assembly 2023 was one of the assemblies leading towards the Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026. The religious in Malaysia participated with much enthusiasm, openness and renewed hope on this Synodal journey.

2. The Goal of Malaysia Religious Assembly 2023 (MRA)

To prepare and submit a reflective report on the role of consecrated religious in areas of Church, Family, Ecology and Social to Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026.

3. The Process

3.1 The Brainstorming

In 2021, the three Religious Representatives for the three regions of Semanjung Malaysia, Sarawak and Sabah, namely Sr. Salomi Cruz (RGS), Sr. Rose Wong (SSFS) and Br. Thomas Paul (SG), respectively; together with Sr. Laurina Loh (RGS) formed the initial Core Team to brainstorm on how to organise the MRA. They recourse for an assistant from a consultant, namely Ms. Patricia Nunis.

3.2 The Questionnaires For Theological Reflections

From the Brainstorming, the following questionnaires were crafted:

3.2.1 QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. CHURCH (*EVANGELLI GAUDIUM* – The Joy of The Gospel)

The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. ...With Christ joy is constantly born anew. (#1, *Evangelii Gaudium*). The document invites us to share the gospel message of joy and mercy and through actions/examples. A call not to change church doctrines but the way Christianity is presented to the world. In the midst of the social injustices, economics of exclusion, inequalities etc. in society, it is our personal and collective responsibility to bring forward the new evangelization.

Celebrate:

What are our experiences of living the joy of the gospel? As we listen to one another, what gospel message speaks to you?

Listen:

In the midst of today's realities, what may be our challenges as 'missionary disciple' in the Church and in the society/world? (Share some challenges that you may encounter.)

Walk:

In light of our charism, as religious and church, how can we continue to respond to be effective 'missionary disciple' and agents of evangelization? (Give some concrete actions.)

2. FAMILY (*AMORIS LAETITIA* – The Joy of Love)

The joy of love experienced by families is also the joy of the Church (#1). This exhortation, first represents an invitation to Christian families to value the gifts of marriage and the family, and to persevere in a love strengthened by the virtues of generosity, commitment, fidelity and patience. Second, because it seeks to encourage everyone to be a sign of mercy and closeness wherever family life remains imperfect or lacks peace and joy (#5)

Celebrate:

What are our experiences of encountering God in living the joy of love? As we listen to one another, what gospel message speaks to you?

Listen

In the midst of today's realities, what may be our challenges in reaching out to families and those in vulnerable situations? (Share some challenges that you may encounter.)

Walk

In light of our charism, as religious and church, how can we continue to respond to the invitation of being a sign of mercy and closeness? (Give some concrete actions)

3. ECOLOGY (*LAUDATO SI'* – Care for our Common Home)

The global ecological crisis is not only one of the biggest threats to human family but also to all life on earth. The ecological crisis is made up of a wide range of interconnected problems from climate change to biodiversity loss, resource depletion to air pollution plus many more. This leads to extreme poverty and social inequality, contributing to modern slavery to human trafficking, mass migration, etc.

The environmental and social crises are not two but one crisis. The cry of the earth and the cry of the poor are the same cry –interconnected by human greed operating within a flawed socio-economic structure that privileges a small minority while diminishing the majority. The ecological crisis is a symptom of something deeper because at the heart of it lies a deep human and spiritual crisis in that we have forgotten who we are and where we have come from. We are called to take an integrated approach. This also demands a new way of seeing, thinking and acting. (Adapted from eco.catholic.com)

Celebrate:

What are our experiences of Care for our common home? As we listen to one another, what gospel message speaks to you?

Listen

In the midst of today’s realities, what may be our challenges in caring for the Earth, our common home? Share some challenges that you may encounter.)

Walk:

In the light of our charism, as religious and church, how can we continue to hear and respond to the cry of the Earth and its people? (Give some concrete actions.)

4. SOCIAL (*FRATELLI TUTTI* - Fraternity and Social Friendship)

In his simple and direct way, Saint Francis expressed the essence of a fraternal openness that allows us to acknowledge, appreciate and love each person, regardless of physical proximity, regardless of where he or she was born or lives. (#1 *Fratelli Tutti*)

St Francis felt himself a brother to the sun, the sea and the wind, yet he knew that he was even closer to those of his own flesh. Wherever he went, he sowed seeds of peace and walked alongside the poor, the abandoned, the infirm and the outcast, the least of his brothers and sisters. (#2, *Fratelli Tutti*)

Celebrate

What are our experiences of living the *Fratelli Tutti*? As we listen to one another, what gospel message speaks to you?

Listen

In the midst of today’s realities, what may be our challenges in creating an inclusive society?

(Share some challenges that you may encounter.

Walk

In the light of our charism, as religious and church, how can we continue to respond in building a better, more just and a peaceful world? (Give some concrete actions.)

3.3 The Main Organising Team and MRA Working Committee

The Main Organising Team was setup in 2022 as follows

Chairman	:	Friar Valentine Gompok (OFMCap)
Secretary	:	Sr. Calista Saliun (FSIC)
Treasurer	:	Sr. Catherin Uming (SSFS)
Logistic	:	Sr. Retta Savariannan (FDCC) and Sr Chennisia Seting (SSFS)

Religious Representatives for the three Regions

Sr. Salomi Cruz (RGS)	-	Peninsular Malaysia
Sr. Rose Wong (SSFS)	-	Sarawak
Br. Thomas Paul (SG)	-	Sabah

The MRA Working Committee was eventually setup. It consists of the Main Organising Team and Representatives from each Religious Order / Congregation in Malaysia

3.4 Dissemination and Collation of the Theological Reflections

The Questionnaires were disseminated in August 2022 and collated in December 2022.

3.5 The Synthesising

The Three Regions collated and synthesised the responses in December 2022.

The persons entrusted to do the collating and synthesising were:

Sabah Region	-	Sr. Calista Saliun (FSIC)
Sarawak Region	-	Fr. Alvin Ng (SJ) and Sr. Catherine Uming (SSFS)
Malacca-Johore Diocese	-	Br. Thomas Paul (SG)
Kuala Lumpur Archdiocese	-	Sr. Laurina Loh (RGS)
Penang Diocese	-	Fr. Joe Stephen (CSsR)

The collated reports from the three dioceses in Peninsular Malaysia were synthesised into one report by Br. Thomas Paul (SG).

3.6 The Resource Persons

The following resource persons gave the input during the MRA, namely:

Br. Dominic Yeo-Koh (SG)	-	Church
Sr. Salomi Cruz (RGS)	-	Family
Ms. Clare Westwood	-	Ecology
Fr. Alvin Ng (SJ)	-	Social

4.0 The Pre-MRA Online Meet

The Pre-MRA meet via zoom was held on 12 May 2023. The objectives of this meeting was to gather their hopes and expectations for MRA. It is also for the participants to know each other better in their respective groups. Each participant was already assigned in their respective group from the registration information.

5.0 Malaysian Religious Assembly

5.1 The Participants

- 5.1.1 There were 191 participants registered for the MRA (from 28 Religious Orders / Congregations). Two (2) Archbishops and three (3) Bishops attended the MRA, although not all of them could stay until the end.
- 5.1.2 Three (3) members of the press (3 from Herald and 1 from Catholic Sabah) covered the event.
- 5.1.3 5 volunteers
- 5.1.4 Singaporean Friar Derrick Yap (OFM), the Chairman of Conference of Religious Major Superiors of Singapore-Malaysia
- 5.1.5 There were four (4) Malaysian Religious currently posted in Singapore

5.2 The Presentation of Collated Synthesis of the Theological Reflections

The presentation of the collated synthesis was done according to each focus area: Church, Family, Ecology and Social.

5.3 The Input from Resource Persons

The input followed the presentation of the collated synthesis. This was done according the four focus areas.

5.4 The Personal Reflection

Personal reflection took place after the input from the Resorce Persons. Time allocated for the personal reflection was 15 minutes.

5.4.2 Questions for reflection were provided by the Resorce person for the Spiritual Conversation:

5.4.2.1 *Church*

How would you envisage yourself as a Joy-filled witness of Christ?

In what way has The Joy of the Gospel (EG) impacted you as a Person and a Religious?

How are we Religious a church within the Church?

5.4.2.2 *Family*

In what ways can we address the pastoral priorities surfaced from the theological reflection with creativity and missionary zeal?

The above question is to be reflected and converse based on:

Pastoral Priorities

- Inadequate witnessing of Gospel Values by church and its leaders
- Church and religious practices lack relevance to families
- Need updated knowledge/professional competencies to address issues of families
- Collaboration and networking among the religious in family ministries
- Pastoral care and visits to the families
- Religious communities witnessing through community living

5.4.2.3 Ecology

- 1) What was the biggest takeaway for your head?
- 2) What was your biggest takeaway for your heart?
- 3) How can you and your community/congregation best help people face a climate-challenged future with competence, confidence, faith, courage & hope? What do you need in order to do so? "Ask and you shall receive...."

5.4.2.4 Social

Celebrate – Discuss and identify *the one common charism* that we all share (as religious in this group) that we can offer to the world today?

Listen – If the founders of our congregation were to arrive in Malaysia today, what would he/she do?

Walk – Based on the charism identified above, what is one concrete, collaborative action that we can undertake going forward?

5.5 The Spiritual Conversation

5.5.1 Each participant was already assigned in their respective groups. There were 20 groups of 9/10 participants for the Spiritual Conversation. In each group facilitator, secretary and timekeeper were already pre-assigned.

5.5.2 An hour was allocated for the Spiritual Conversation.

5.6 Outcome of the Spiritual Conversation

5.6.1 The outcome of the spiritual conversation was presented to the Assembly.

5.6.2 Five groups presented their outcome/responses from their Spiritual Conversation for each focus area.

- | | | |
|---------|---|----------------|
| Church | - | Group 1 to 5 |
| Family | - | Group 6 to 10 |
| Ecology | - | Group 11 to 15 |
| Social | - | Group 16 to 20 |

5.6.3 All outcomes from the Spiritual Conversation were collected and synthesised into a reflective report to reflect the role of consecrated religious in the areas of Church, Family, Ecology and Social.

5.7 The Celebrations

On the night of 10th June, 2023, marked the celebration of the Assembly. Various stage presentations performed by the Religious. It was night to remember and everyone had enjoyed the celebration.

5.8 The MRA Statements

The Drafting Committee Members:

Br. Thomas Paul (SG) - Coordinator
Fr. Ramon Borja (SDB)
Fr. Nicholas Hoh (OCD)
Fra. Gerald Terence (OFM)
Sr. Elizabeth Jothee (FSP)
Sr. Eva M. Lotilla (MSLT)
Sr. Sandra Yap (FSIC)

The Draft MRA Statements were presented on the last day of the assembly (11 June 2023) by Fr. Nicholas Hoh (OCD).

The draft was edited and revised by the Core Team as follows:

5.8.1 Church

We celebrate and acknowledge the uniqueness of our charisms which enriches our local Church by witnessing to God's mercy and compassion in the society through personal and communal presence. Rooted in our personal relationship with God and embodying the gospel values, we are challenged to live joyfully the evangelical counsels to be counter-cultural witnesses in a world that promotes the culture of individualism and consumerism.

We need to move out from our comfort zone to the periphery where the marginalised live and experience much injustices. To listen compassionately to the cries of the poor and to be in solidarity, calling forth for personal and communal transformation; and that will lead us to be the authentic witnesses to the Church and to be transformational leaders in Society.

By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:35)

5.8.2 Family

We celebrate our belongingness in our family, community and church as a whole and our interconnectedness with the larger society. We treasure the harmonious relationships which exists in a multi-racial society with people of different faith, diverse languages and culture. The gospel values of acceptance and welcoming attitude, to forgive and to embrace one another unites us as a family.

While acknowledging the blessings of family life, the problems faced by individuals and families have become more challenging and complex due to the negative influences of social media, dysfunctional families, etc. There is a great need for accompaniment, listen with empathy without being judgemental and prejudice; and to be creative when doing family ministry.

Therefore, we need to upgrade and update ourselves in professional skills and knowledge to be relevant and effective. There is an urgent need to collaborate and network with various religious congregations, church groups, private and public agencies and other faiths bring healing and reconciliation within persons and families.

“Bear with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgive each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.” (Col. 3:13)

5.8.3 Ecology

In celebrating Earth our common home, we acknowledge the sacredness of our interconnectedness with God, one another and whole of creation. The survival of human life and every living creature are interdependent on the resources of the earth. However, our attitudes of greed and selfishness has led to the destruction of our own survival.

The global ecological crisis is rapidly is affecting human family and all of life on earth and we know there is no reversal. The crisis is interconnected from climate change to biodiversity loss, depletion of resources, and many more which leads to other social problems such as extreme poverty and social inequality, climate refugees, etc. Hence, the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor is one global crisis. There

is an urgency to ensure protection and sustainability of the earth and its resources for future generations.

As religious, we have a responsibility to assume a leadership role in undergoing a personal and communal ecological conversion that comes from within our hearts. This conversion should lead to every possible effort to care for the earth, even in the face of indifference and resistance. We need to adopt an integrated approach at personal and communal levels; to live a simple lifestyle, and to reduce waste, dialogue and partnerships with government agencies and private sectors to collaborate and implement programs for care of the earth and sustainability of resources for future generations.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. (Gen 2:15)

5.8.4 Social

We celebrate unity in diversity and uniqueness of cultures among the multi-racial and multi-religious society in Malaysia. As religious, we are also blessed with different charisms in the church which is given by God to be at the service of mission. It is imperative to reclaim our Founders' and Foundresses' original charism and vision that empowered them to go beyond boundaries, race, color, and creed to new frontiers to announce the Gospel message of unconditional love, peace and harmony through creative mission.

In reaching out to the poor and marginalised, we are called to be bridge builders, to work for the common good, respecting human dignity and transforming the conditions that causes suffering. In the spirit of fraternal love and social relationships, we accept and complement each other, recognise the dignity and God's unconditional love for each person, inclusivity, and unity in diversity.

Rooted in God's love, we as religious are urged to radiate this same love (*Cura Personalis: care for the entire person*) to our brothers and sisters in community, and to all whom we encounter in our apostolate especially those in the peripheries. This two-fold mission needs to take into account the signs of the time, through our collaborative efforts as religious communities and with various groups and agencies.

The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)

5.9 The Feedback from Participants

Overall, the participants expressed their experience as a Spirit-filled Assembly, a sense of solidarity among religious.

6.0 The Online Streaming

The online Streaming was done for those Religious who were not able to attend the MRA in person. Not all the segments were broadcasted live.

The segments that were broadcasted live are:

1. The Opening Mass
2. The Presentations of the collated synthesised Theological Reflections.
3. The Input Presentation by the resource persons
4. The Presentations of the outcome from the Spiritual Conversation
5. The Presentation of the Draft Statement
6. The Closing Mass.

7.0 Concluding

As a whole, the MRA was a memorable occasion and the participants had benefited the process and inputs.

Friar Valentine Gompok (OFMCap)
Organising Chairperson

CC Friar Derrick Yap,
President of Conference of Religious Major Superiors, Singapore-Malaysia

