

WELCOME REMARKS

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Your Eminences, Excellencies, Rev. Fathers, Religious Men and Women, brothers and sisters in Christ.

Last October 9-10, 2021, Pope Francis convoked the Synod on Synodality in Rome with the theme: “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission. This was an invitation for the Church to take a bold step to go to the outskirts and listen to as many voices as possible especially to those in the peripheries. After opening the Synod last October 17, 2021 in our respective ecclesiastical territories, a series of consultations were held both virtually and face-to-face which culminated with Diocesan Pre-Synodal Meetings to come up with our particular synthesis of the synodal process. This past month, our ecclesiastical regions held our respective meetings and collated all the syntheses as a bridge to this national pre-synodal phase. In a wider experience, we have heard the many lights and shadows of the church through many unheard voices who participated in the regional consultations. We have also witnessed the joy of our brothers and sisters who felt that we are a listening Church.

We have been made aware, as the Vademecum states that: “The Synodal Process is first and foremost a spiritual process. It is not a mechanical data-gathering exercise or a series of meetings and debates. Synodal listening is oriented towards discernment. It requires us to learn and exercise the art of personal and communal discernment. We listen to each other, to our faith tradition, and to the signs of the times in order to discern what God is saying to all of us. Pope Francis characterizes the two interrelated goals of this process of listening: ‘to listen to God so that with Him, we may hear the cry of his people; to listen to his people until we are in harmony with the will to which God calls us.’”

It is in this light that the Bishops of the Philippines have decided to undergo this next level of a National Consultation in the context of our annual retreat, to continually listen to the Holy Spirit and to listen to each other so as to further discern the regional syntheses with the help of our National Synodal Team in order to arrive at a consolidated synthesis for the local Church in the Philippines. The Vademecum also states that: “These syntheses will then serve as part of the basis for the first edition of the instrumentum laboris, which will be published by the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops.” This will be elevated to the Continental Phase—for us belonging to the continent of Asia—to the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences (FABC).

On behalf of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, I welcome you, our dear delegates, priests, consecrated persons, and laity, to this National Pre-Synodal Meeting. Let us make this a “truly synodal experience of listening to one another and walking forward together, guided by the Holy Spirit.”