



**Office of The Bishop
The Diocese of Sibü**
Catholic Church
P. O. Box 495
96007 Sibü, Sarawak, Malaysia
Tel: 6084-317373 / Fax: 6084-321299



Dear People of God,

Date: 1st January, 2024

(I) A decade of Creation Justice for the Diocese of Sibü from 2017 to 2026

- (a) Creation Justice - Evangelization In Union With Creation: Ego-Centered to Eco-Christ Centered, 2017 (*Laudato Si mi Signore*)
- (b) The Joy of Love - Let's Begin From Home, 2018 (*Amoris Laetitia*)
- (c) Freedom - Rejoice and Be Glad: Call to Holiness through the 8 Beatitudes, 2019 (*Gaudete et Exsultate*)
- (d) Water and Baptism - Gift to all Creation, 2020 (*Christus Vivit*)
- (e) Air and Confirmation - Breath of Life in all Creation, 2021 (*Querida Amazonia*)
- (f) Food and Eucharist - On Sustenance and Fraternity of all Creation, 2022 (*Fratelli Tutti*);and
- (g) Soil and Reconciliation - Interconnectedness with all Creation, 2023 (*Evangelii Gaudium*)

(II) "Protect Our Earth, Protect our Children" National Campaign from 2020 to 2024

- (a) 2020, Use Less Electricity
- (b) 2021, Cut down Meat, Dairy and Food Waste
- (c) 2022, Stop Plastic Pollution; and
- (d) 2023, Cut Fuel Consumption

May the grace and peace of God be with you all. The message of Pope Francis on this World Day of Peace 2024 is to appeal the international community to regulate AI (Artificial Intelligence) so as to serve the cause of human fraternity towards peace, justice and equality.

"Praise God for all His creatures!" These words of St. Francis of Assisi resound once again in the opening line of the new Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis entitled *Laudate Deum* (Praise God) signed on 04.10.2023, the Feast of St Francis of Assisi, the Patron saint of Ecology, at the launching of the first round of the Synod of Bishops on Synodality in the Vatican. The Pope felt that our responses to the climate crisis since he wrote his Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* eight years ago have not been adequate. That was when in response to his call we embarked on a decade of Creation Justice for the Diocese of Sibü. Hence, this year our Creation Justice theme on the care of our common home and the 7 sacraments is

"Year of Oil and Anointing – The Healing Gift of God's Creation" in light of *Laudate Deum*.

In Psalm 133, we read "How good and how pleasant it is, when brothers dwell together as one! Like fine oil on the head, running down upon the beard, Upon the beard of Aaron upon the collar of his robe, Like dew of Hermon coming down upon the mountains of Zion. There the Lord has decreed a blessing, life for evermore."

This Psalm alludes to a benediction over a peaceful community. We see today how the world struggles to maintain peace and unity among warring nations which have resulted in untold pain and misery, and significant economic and energy crisis. We pray that wars will cease for we are all brothers and sisters dwelling together in this common home. Only when we have peace and unity will we be blessed like the biblical imagery of the holy oils upon Aaron the priest

dripping down his robe to bless the ground or as dew of the rainless summer that waters the crops whereby all living things and arid ground will be enriched and blessed.

In many cultures and in the Bible, oil is used to anoint king and set people apart as leaders. Therefore, we see in 4 out of the 7 Sacraments of the Catholic Church, Holy Oil is used in invoking the Holy Spirit on the candidates. Besides forgiveness of sin, it gives strength and healing, and it arouses grace and dignity, as children of God who are sealed for mission in God's Kingdom. Holy Oil is also used during ordination of priests and consecration of bishops, and even when blessings of objects like Altar, Church Building, Chalice, Paten etc. which are consecrated with Chrism Oil.

We know only too well the impact that the climate crisis has on all creatures, even on our plants and vegetation. In the ancient world, virgin olive oil is called 'liquid gold' by Homer and 'the great healer' by Hippocrates due to its many positive effects on health. Petroleum on the other hand is also known as "liquid gold" or "black gold" in our modern world because of its high value in the commodity market and is also directly or indirectly a source for many organic products which are useful to humans. Like gold it is expensive and difficult to find. Those nations which have oil reserves are rich and powerful. Alas, we also see that the pursuits for money and power have seen rampant explorations of oil without regard to the pollution and harm caused to our natural ecosystem. Furthermore, they are already exploiting from what should be the reserves meant for the future generations. Like the recently concluded COP 28 Summit on Climate Change in Dubai, UAE whereby there is no urgency shown in fading out fossil fuel which is the main cause of global warming since the industrial age.

Our Mother earth is now critically sick and in need of healing. Some effects of the climate crisis are already irreversible. Other creatures of this world have stopped being our companions along the way and have become instead our victims. We have failed as stewards in our responsibility to care for our common home and this is "a tragic and striking example of structural sin." We need to realize the close relation of human life with that of other living beings and with the natural environment. Pope Francis had repeated over and over again that "Everything is connected" and "No one is saved alone."

Climate crisis is a human and social problem on any number of levels. It calls for involvement on the part of all on every level of society. Every family ought to realize that the future of their children is at stake! As Christians we are commanded to love God and our neighbor and these require transformation on our part and change of mindset so that we can begin to genuinely care for one another and the whole of Creation for we realize human life is incomprehensible and unsustainable without other creatures. As part of the universe, all of us are linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of universal family. We could not continue to be indifferent to the 'Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor'. Some simple ways we can do to change our lifestyles are learning to control our compulsive buying disorder, reducing food waste, saving electricity by 'switching off' when not in use, not throwing rubbish everywhere, showing care and concern for the poor, collecting rain water for watering plants and even

learning to pause and admire nature so that we will appreciate its beauty and glorify its Maker. These simple ways we can pass on and teach our children and grandchildren from a young age.

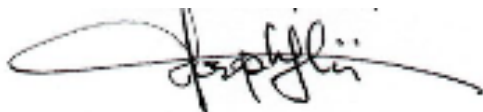
In September, at the start of the Season of Creation, we will continue with the fifth year of our national campaign to **“Protect Our Earth, Protect our Children”** with the theme Use Less Paper and Wood. In preparing ourselves for the **Jubilee 2025** with the theme **Pilgrims of Hope**, and the Synodal model of the Church Reformation Process, the Pope has called for all of us to study the 4 Constitutions of Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium — The Sacred Council*, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy; *Lumen Gentium — The Light of Nations*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church; *Dei Verbum — The Word of God*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Divine Revelation; and *Gaudium et Spes — The joys and the hopes*, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the modern World; and also to mark this year with the Year of Prayer in renewing ourselves. In line with her Universal Mother Church, the Malaysia Catholic Church is gearing towards her Pastoral Convention 2026, whereby we are called to celebrate, listen and walk together as we focus on 4 areas pertaining to Church, Family, Society, and Ecosystem/Ecology. Moreover, we are to revisit some of the Church documents namely, *Evangelii Gaudium*, *Amoris Laetitia*, *Fratelli Tutti*, *Laudato Si’* and *Christus Vivit* which our Diocese have adopted as our reading materials previously in our one decade of Creation Justice. Our Diocese of Sibü had also organized the Pastoral Assembly from 24-25 November, 2023, with the theme “Celebrating Our Baptism” and the theme song is based on Psalm 133. The Sarawak Regional Assembly is scheduled from 18-19 September, 2024.

We pray especially for the sick and the elderly amongst us that they may continue to witness to the life of Christ in whatever state that they may be in and not to be people without hope. May they continue to receive encouragement and support from their friends and family members. May those who are involved as caregivers and in the health sectors be motivated by genuine care, concern and to uphold the dignity of life always in their decisions.

Not forgetting, as one human family may we be ecologically converted and be true stewards of our sacred vocation from the Creator God, to heal our Mother earth that is now sick with cancer, wounded and poisoned due to our human greediness, indifference and disrespectfulness for the dignity of all Creation.

Let us journey together as One universal family that is at One with God and at One with Creation calling upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit in discerning what is God's will for us as we move forward as a Diocese. We pray that we will always follow Mother Mary in being a true living tabernacle carrying Christ and bringing Him to others as we proceed towards a more Synodal Church.

‘Ecclesia Christi Sponsa’



Bishop Joseph Hii Teck Kwong
Diocese of Sibü