



▲ Representing the diocese at the conference were, left to right: Father Rene Jauregui, Alejandro Barraza, Martin Wong, Kristine Nguyen, Stella Choi, Theresa Maalouf, Lauralyn Solano and Antony Ta.



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About the “Alive in Christ” conference at [www.usccb.org/committees/cultural-diversity-church/alive-christ](http://www.usccb.org/committees/cultural-diversity-church/alive-christ).

## Broken. Messy. Together.

### National conference illuminates young, diverse, prophetic voices and experiences

BY LYNETTE MAGNINO

**CONVERGING IN CHICAGO IN LATE JUNE, YOUNG ADULTS, MINISTRY LEADERS, CLERGY AND BISHOPS FROM ACROSS THE NATION EAGERLY ANTICIPATED THE “ALIVE IN CHRIST: YOUNG, DIVERSE, PROPHETIC VOICES JOURNEYING TOGETHER” CONFERENCE.**

by groups and individuals to take the ideas from what happened during the event, and take action within dioceses to continue the conversation,” says Antony Ta, one of two regional youth and young adult ministry coordinators for the diocese, who attended along with regional coordinator Alejandro Barraza.

Content and context for the sessions beautifully amalgamated two years of journeying toward the event amid COVID-19, the 2018 Synod of Bishops on Young People and Pope Francis’ 2019 Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, “Christ is Alive.” Yet, “what

The Diocese of Sacramento sent eight leaders to the important synodal-styled sessions which were hosted by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). “Cultural families” presented prayer services and Masses throughout the event representing Asian/Pacific Islanders, Black/African Americans, European-Americans, Hispanic/Latinos, Native American and Alaska natives, and the pastoral care of migrants, refugees and travelers.

“Commitments were made

happened during the event” according to Antony and other participants seemed to uniquely unite the nearly 400 in attendance in ways that never could have been formally planned. It set the tone for the entire gathering.

#### WE MOVE FORWARD ‘BECAUSE OF THE EUCHARIST’

On the second day, in an early session, an innocent error in prayer seemed to punctuate how easily inadvertent omissions, slips or careless mumbles or pronunciations can occur. Participants agreed the discouraging mistake seemed implausible and contradictory to the very purpose of the gathering. Yet it happened.

“It opened up some incredibly painful wounds within the communities,” explains Martin Wong, 28, representing the Sacramento Chinese Catholic Community and St. John Vianney Parish in Rancho Cordova. He tells how the moment stirred the pain and suffering of some cultures’ experiences of being historically silenced or marginalized.

“It was messy,” he says, almost wincing at the memory and opining, “We spend so much time eating dinner in our rooms, and when we’re finally called to come and break bread together as a family, we realize that one person eats this way and another person another way, or some have not eaten fully, and others have survived on scraps for decades.”

What happened next demonstrated the grace of the Holy Spirit. Public acknowledgment, dialogue, time, apologies and prayer shaped the rest of the conference.

“We practiced and actively engaged in the messiness,” Martin says, adding that “we sat in the brokenness and admitted to it and we were able to move forward, through it, because of the Eucharist, because we were a community united by Christ.”

Theresa Maalouf, 27, co-leader of Fiat Young Adult Ministry at Good Shepherd Parish in Elk Grove, recounts the experience, too, citing how “it showed us how our Church is messy, but in a beautiful way.”

“We don’t do everything correctly, but that’s the beauty of the Church and we don’t rush past it,” Theresa stresses, stating the importance of allowing space for the hurt. She refers to an example offered by one keynote speaker, Society of the Precious Blood Father David A. Kelly.

“He was talking about how as soon as Good Friday is over, we immediately begin decorating for the Easter vigil,” she says, implying we “move too quickly from the horrors of the crucifixion to the alleluia of the resurrection.” Father Kelly’s words resonated with Theresa, who applied them to the hurt and pain experienced in the Church, and “the troubling histories of our cultural families within society.”

“We have to be willing to actually sit in that space” and risk the discomfort, Theresa believes, indicating that conference attendees were challenged undeniably – and the Church is challenged – “to live in that Holy Saturday and make room for the pain” rather than brushing past it too quickly.

In sharing testimonies and hearing stories, Theresa says conversations always came back to the Eucharist.

“The resounding thing that pulled everyone together was the Eucharist,” she reflects without any surprise that receiving Christ as one body heals wounds. “We need the grace of the Eucharist,” she affirms.

### FRUITFUL WORK

Attendees spent three days immersing themselves in general sessions, workshops and breakout sessions designed to usher actionable ideas to take home. Further, focused workgroups framed their discussions on key conference objectives such as historical memory, inclusivity, diversity and giftedness, accompaniment and formation.



**We do not have a future if we do not cultivate the present. How do we radically involve young adults in every aspect of church leadership?”**

Martin Wong, St. John Vianney Parish, Rancho Cordova

“They encouraged us to make POP statements,” Theresa says, explaining the acronym’s meaning. “Purpose, outcome, process,” she continues, noting how small groups created POP statements that metamorphosed into greater collective statements within each of the workgroups.

The small groups plan to stay connected and continue the conversations in their respective regions, dioceses and ministries.

“There are a lot of real issues right now,” Martin says, suggesting in “previous times people did not have such a complete experience” with the real situations in society. They “stayed away from them” but now he sees the need to “meet them head on and that will make us more complete Catholics.”

Martin proposes that young adult engagement and creating authentic multicultural experiences hold the keys to revival in the Church.

“We do not have a future if we do not cultivate the present,” Martin posits, further asking, “How do we radically involve young adults in every aspect of church leadership?” As the chair of St. John Vianney’s parish pastoral council, Martin provides a powerful example of engaging young adults and “opening spaces for them and accompanying them.”

In fostering intercultural communities, Martin emphasizes this cannot simply be a “surface level” exercise. “We are incomplete as a Church without our brothers and sisters in Christ,” he insists, hoping for “more opportunities to engage and to interconnect and to be brave and courageous.”

Antony describes how people left the conference with “an understanding of the Church fully realized,” having witnessed, acknowledged and accepted the authentic brokenness and messiness that exists within the Church.

“We can still work together, still be the body of Christ and move forward,” Antony says, envisioning a future Church ethos reconciled in healing and Christ’s mercy, “coming to terms with the reality.”

“It’s going to require a lot of emotional labor,” Martin senses of the work ahead. “It’s also going to require an incredible amount of grace, willingness and vulnerability,” but he considers “we are more Catholic in that messiness than we are in segregated environments.” †

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