Archbishop of Kota Kinabalu

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PASTORAL LETTER OF ARCHBISHOP JOHN WONG
TO THE FAITHFUL OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF KOTA KINABALU

Celebrating 50th Anniversary of the Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu and 30th Anniversary of the Diocesan Organizational Pastoral Plan

18 November 2026

Dear brother priests, sisters and brothers, and all faithful,

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. May His abundant grace and love accompany you and your family in your ministry and daily life.

"Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; His mercy endures forever" (Psalm 136:1).

This year is a year of Jubilee for us, the 50th anniversary of the Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu. It provides us with the opportunity to pause and give thanks to God for all the fruits that we are seeing in our local Church.

50th anniversary of Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu

"Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain" (Psalm 127:1).

The growth that we see thus far is ultimately the fruit of His grace. It is the Lord who intended to build us into a communion of people. The Lord is gradually and gently leading us into His Kingdom. The journey began through the efforts of foreign missionaries, and over the years, we grew and matured until we become a self-governing Church, served and guided by our own local people. This journey reached an important milestone in June 1976, when we were formally established as a diocese.

Throughout this journey, we encountered challenges brought about by changing religious and secular values. This has prompted the Church to reflect on her role and mission, seeking ways to remain relevant, to help her people remain faithful. "Seek and you will find" (Matt 7:7) I believe that God has heard the seeking. In His grace, through the discernment process by our leaders at that time, the Lord has entrusted

us with a clear pastoral direction expressed through a common Vision and Mission which have served as our guiding star until now.

Therefore, this Jubilee is a time to celebrate this important milestone and to remember with gratitude how God has guided and sustained our local Church. In gratitude, we find peace and joy.

As your Archbishop, I wish to invite every one of you - my brother priests, religious, families, young people, children, and all faithful - to pause and really give thanks to God for the journey He has led us through. Share this Jubilation and gratitude with your communities, families and friends. Offer prayers of thanksgiving in our Churches, ministries and our homes.

30th anniversary of DOPP

Another significant milestone awaits us in September 2027, where we will commemorate the 30th anniversary of our Diocesan Organizational Pastoral Plan (DOPP).

After 20 years as a diocese, in year 1996, we have prayerfully discerned and established a common Vision and Mission as our official pastoral direction, through the DOPP process.

The Vision is ***"A communion of Christ-centred communities journeying together in faith, hope and love of Jesus Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit in the evangelizing mission of building the Kingdom of God."***

I believe this Vision was inspired by God, and personally for me it is like a call of a Father who desires a continuous and lasting loving relationship with His children. Our Father continues to help us realizing the Vision through six missionary activities, that we have agreed to commit:

1. ***Ongoing personal and communal renewal***
2. ***Life of prayer, nourished by the Sacraments***
3. ***Living the Word of God, guided by Church teaching***
4. ***Unity in communities, respecting other faiths***
5. ***Responsible stewardship of the environment***
6. ***Promotion of justice and peace in society***

Our pastoral journey has never been perfect. There have been successes and shortcomings, moments of enthusiasm and moments of weariness. Yet what is more important through all of these, it is the living up the "Spirit of the DOPP", namely *personal and communal renewal in a new way of being Church*.

Perhaps some of our older parishioners may remember the DOPP and know that our Archdiocese has a Vision and Mission. What about our younger generation? Do you know that the Church's movement is not simply a matter of doing things because we have always done them, but are guided by a Vision and Mission discerned by the Church thirty years ago?

Young people, I want you to know that many of the gatherings you are involved in today - Sabah Youth Day, *Perhimpunan Belia Keuskupan*, Campus Ministry, and other initiatives are connected to a pastoral direction that was prayerfully discerned and commonly agreed upon by those who came before us.

In June-July 2026, as part of the preparation for the 30th anniversary of DOPP, I have called upon our parish priests, commission leaders and members of the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council to gather for a Study Days to deepen understanding on the DOPP. What we learned during those days truly opened our eyes. We were reminded again of how deeply God loves us and how His many graces have sustained us throughout the process of building a Christ-centred community in this Archdiocese.

I desire that the learning and reflection from the Study Days should not remain only with those who attended. It belongs to the whole Archdiocese and should be shared with all of you.

A Malaysia Church

The Catholic Church in Malaysia is starting to understand herself as one Malaysia Church. The sea in which we are called to cast our nets has become wider. Dioceses in Malaysia are diverse in histories and pastoral realities, and this diversity is a gift that enriches the life of the Church in Malaysia. For this reason, we need to be aware of the importance to deepen communion with our sisters and brothers outside of our Archdiocese. We are called to discover what it means to be part of one Catholic Church in Malaysia.

The recent Malaysia Pastoral Convention (MPC) 2026 was a particularly enriching experience where we discerned together four areas that are embedded deeply in the lives of everyone; the church, the family, the society and our common home, the ecology.

After three decades of walking with one Vision and Mission through the DOPP process, now MPC 2026 provides us with an opportunity to examine our pastoral journey afresh. In the light of MPC 2026, I believe it is time to deepen the "Spirit of the DOPP", to seek renewal in a new way of being Church, in order for us to respond to the evolving challenges concerning the four areas.

In the Archdiocesan Prayer, we pray through the intercession of Mother Mary that all of us will be constantly journeying together as one big Family in Faith, Hope and Love. In fact, the 4 areas of concern; the Church, family, society and ecology are already being prayed for. Let us continue to pray the "Archdiocesan Prayer" daily especially in our Sunday Worship.

2027, A Year to Celebrate, Listen, Repent and Renew

Rather than limiting the celebrations to one particular day, I desire that we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu and the 30th anniversary of DOPP, in every parish throughout the whole year of 2027.

I invite all of you to make 2027 a year of celebration, listening, repentance and renewal. The two anniversaries belong not only to the Archbishop, the clergy, or the diocesan offices. They belong to the whole People of God of the Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu.

During my pastoral visits to the parishes throughout 2027, I will be accompanied by an Archdiocesan Team that will conduct a special catechesis on these two important milestones. The catechesis will help us to understand:

- the origins of our Vision and Mission,
- the "Spirit of the DOPP" – *a new way of being Church*,
- our growth and progress during the past decades,
- where we have experienced gaps and challenges,
- what we are presently doing as a local Church, and
- moving forward together towards a Synodal Church.

I ask all of you, therefore, to make a special effort to attend. Please do not say, "This is only for parish leaders," or "This is only for the older generation," or "The young people do not need to know this." No. This is for all of us.

To our younger generation, come and listen. You are not merely the future of the Church; you are already an important part of the Church today. You need to know the story that has brought us here so that you can help shape the story of tomorrow. And to those who have been serving the Church for many years, I say: come and listen again. Perhaps the Spirit is inviting you to renew something that has become familiar or routine. When we understand where our Vision and Mission came from and what

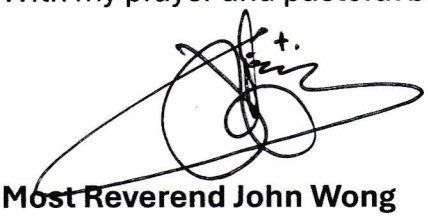
the "Spirit of the DOPP" means, we can better understand what God is asking of us today.

As we revisit our Vision and Mission, it is right and appropriate to envision a renewed Church with a renewed commitment. Renewal is not simply about introducing new programmes. The renewal of the Church begins with the conversion of the hearts of her people, which is the work of the Holy Spirit. Are we willing to allow the Holy Spirit to renew our relationship with God, to open our eyes to what we may have failed to see, and to change our attitudes? To live out the true "Spirit of the DOPP", we must remain open to the Holy Spirit. With this in mind, I intend to organize a session of renewal in the Holy Spirit at the end of 2027 because this will be an opportunity for us to open ourselves more fully to God's Spirit and receive His renewing grace.

And so, brother priests, sisters and brothers, let us come together in the parish celebrations and listen, not as separate groups pursuing our own interests, but as a Christ-centred communion of the People of God, guided by the Holy Spirit. Let us set aside personal interests and the temptation to work alone, and rediscover the strength of communion. "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3).

May the Lord continue to bless our Archdiocese and may He grant you good health. May Mary, Mother of the Church, accompany us on this journey.

With my prayer and pastoral blessing,



Most Reverend John Wong

Archbishop of Kota Kinabalu

Note: A dedicated website has been created for the Golden Jubilee and 30th Anniversary of the DOPP where everyone can learn more about these celebrations.