



(SIC photo/John Ragai)

Those who greeted Jesus in exultation as He entered Jerusalem shouting "Hosanna," were also the ones who cried in indignation: "Release Barabbas" and "Crucify him!" after a few days.

But it is not only the public who changed. Those closest to Jesus also did. Peter, who promised to be loyal to his Master, denied Him three times shortly after, not to mention Judas whose feet the Lord also washed. The other disciples slept while He was praying and eventually abandoned Him, except for the disciple "whom Jesus loved."

Why the sudden change? From gratitude to hatred; from peace to violence; from hospitality to rejection; from solidarity to self-preservation; and from a community of believers to an unruly mob of skeptics and deserters. Is it really our human nature to regress?

But there were also a few who changed for the better. One of them is the condemned thief hanging on Jesus' side who was remorseful and begged for remembrance. And the women at the foot of the cross who remained steadfast in their faith. Foremost of whom was Mary, our Mother.

So, what has changed in you over time?

Give generously for Good Friday collection

VATICAN: As in past years, a special collection will be taken in Catholic churches throughout the world on Good Friday to support Christians in the Holy Land.

The Vatican has overseen the annual Holy Land — "Pro Terra Sancta" — collection since 1974, when Pope St Paul VI established Good Friday as the day for it to be taken up by parishes and bishops around the world. This year, Good Friday falls on April 7.

The collection is traditionally split, with 65 per cent going to the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land, which has maintained the Holy Places of Christianity in the region for more than 800 years. The remaining 35 per cent is given to the Dicastery for the Eastern Churches to support seminarians and priests, as well as educational and cultural activities. Last year the collection brought in over RM39 million.

As the annual collection for the Holy Land

approaches, Pope Francis has called on the Dicastery for the Eastern Churches "to revive the invitation to solidarity with the Christian community of the Holy Land."

In a letter addressed to bishops throughout the world, the Prefect for the Dicastery, Archbishop Claudio Gugerotti wrote, "As the prophet Isaiah recalls: 'Consider the rock from which you were hewn' (Is 51:1). The Church spread throughout the world with the preaching of the Apostles, and each of us, through baptism, has become a stone called to remain united to the foundation, which is Christ the Lord, in order to construct a spiritual building. In Jerusalem are our wellsprings, and we want to remain united with the brothers and sisters who continue to testify to the Gospel there."

Archbishop Gugerotti said the massive February earthquake in Syria and Turkey — which was felt in Jerusalem — has led to a renewed need for the charity that Christians in the Middle East and the Holy Land provide. Christians in the Holy Land "remain sources of hope by caring for the littlest ones, educating school children and youth, accompanying

mothers in difficulty, attending to the elderly and the sick, as well as offering housing projects for new families and creating jobs, so that it is worthwhile continuing to stay in the Places of Salvation."

Apart from the recent difficulties caused by war and the earthquake, the prelate also recalled a recent incident whereby a vandal desecrated an image of Jesus in a Catholic church in Jerusalem.

"That mutilated crucifix invites us to recognise the pain of so many of our brothers and sisters who have seen the bodies of their loved ones tortured under the rubble or hit by bombs," wrote the archbishop.

"The precious presence of the Friars of the Custody of the Holy Land not only guarantees the maintenance of the sanctuaries but also safeguards the life of the Christian communities, often tempted to lose their vocation to be Easter people in the lands blessed by the presence of the Redeemer."

In past years, the collection has been used to finance numerous projects in the Holy Land, including renovations of historic buildings,

scholarships for students, housing for the needy and young couples, and emergency assistance for victims of war. The territories benefitting from the donations include Jerusalem, Palestine, Israel, Jordan, Cyprus, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Turkey, Iran, and Iraq.

In a report on its activities in 2021, the Custody of the Holy Land noted the strain on its finances caused, in part, by a precipitous drop in tourism numbers due to the pandemic.

It said: "Ever since the end of February 2020, we have found ourselves without pilgrims, and this means serious economic difficulties for the local Christian communities, for the Christian families, and also for the Custody."

"In the meantime, we are trying to continue the mission that has been entrusted to us, knowing that Divine Providence which has willed our presence here, will continue to take care of us." — **Crux**

For Malaysia and Singapore, the Collection for Holy Land is on Holy Thursday.

Who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

Phil. 2:6



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Christians and Muslims: Promoters of love and friendship

Dear Muslim brothers and sisters,

The month of *Ramadan* is important for you, but also for your friends, neighbours and fellow believers of other religions, in particular Christians. Existing friendships are reinforced and others are built, paving the way for more peaceful, harmonious and joyful co-existence. This corresponds to the divine will for our communities and, indeed, for all the members and communities of the one human family.

We are aware, dear friends, that peaceful and friendly coexistence faces many challenges and threats: extremism, radicalism, polemics, disputes, and religiously motivated violence. The threats are fuelled by a culture of hate. We need, then, to find the most appropriate ways of countering and overcoming such a culture and instead, enhancing love and friendship, in particular between Muslims and Christians, due to the bonds that unite us. This is why we deemed it opportune to share some thoughts with you in this regard, hoping to receive yours as well.

All begins with our attitude towards each other, in particular when there are differences between us in religion, ethnicity, culture, language, or politics.

Differences can be perceived as a threat, but everyone has the right to his or her specific identity with its diverse components, yet without ignoring or forgetting what we have in common: "One is the community of all peoples, one their origin, for God made the whole human race to live over the face of the earth. One also is their final goal, God. His providence, His manifestations of goodness, His saving design extended to all men, un-

On the occasion of the month of *Ramadan* and for the feast of *Aidil Fitri* 1444 H. / 2023 AD, the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue has sent a message of good wishes to Muslims around the world, urging the promotion of a culture of friendship.

til that time when the elect will be united in the Holy City, the city ablaze with the glory of God, where the nations will walk in His light" (Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*, October 28, 1965, n. 1).

Negative attitudes and behaviours towards those who are different from us are, unfortunately, numerous: suspicion, fear, rivalry, discrimination, exclusion, persecution, polemics, insults, and backbiting, to name a few.

Social media platforms are common spaces for such harmful behaviours, perverting their role from being means for communication and friendship, to being instruments for enmity and fighting. In this regard, Pope Francis has said: "Even as individuals maintain their comfortable consumerist isolation, they can choose a form of constant and febrile bonding that encourages remarkable hostility, insults, abuse, defamation and verbal violence destructive of others, and this with a lack of restraint that could not exist in physical contact without tearing us all apart. Social aggression has found unparalleled room for expansion through computers and mobile devices" (*Fratelli Tutti*, October 3, 2020, n. 44).

The opposites of the above-mentioned negative behaviours are respect, goodness, charity, friendship, mutual care for all, forgiveness, cooperation for the common good, help

to all those who are in any kind of need and care for the environment, in order to keep our "common home" a safe and pleasant place where we can live together in peace and joy.

We cannot prevent and counter the culture of hatred and, instead, promote a culture of love and friendship, without a sound education for future generations in all the spaces where they are formed: in the family, at school, in places of worship, and on social media.

A world where justice, peace, fraternity and prosperity reign pleases the Almighty and brings joy, calling, therefore, our sincere and shared engagement.

Dear Muslim brothers and sisters, may you enjoy the Almighty's abundant blessings during *Ramadan* and celebrate *Aidil Fitri* in the joy resulting from fidelity and love for the Almighty and all persons you live with or meet.

From the Vatican March 3, 2023,

Miguel Ángel Cardinal Ayuso Guixot,
MCCJ
Prefect

Msgr Induni Kodithuwakku Janakarathne
Kankanamalage
Secretary

The Glory and the Cross

Today we recall how the mystery of our salvation is accomplished by our Lord Jesus Christ through His Passion, Death and Resurrection beginning with His messianic entry into Jerusalem. As Jesus entered the city on a donkey's colt, the crowd that went before Him laid palm branches and spread their garments on the road while shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David!"

In Greco-Roman culture, palms were a symbol of triumph and goodness in the royal household e.g., King Solomon had palm branches carved into the walls and doors of the temple (1 Kings 6:29). Palm branches were also customarily used for all festive occasions to symbolise joy (Neh 8:15). The spreading of garments was carried out for the kings, as was done for King David. When a leader chooses to ride in on a donkey, he is declaring that he comes in peace.

Thus, Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on a donkey's colt was one of triumph that affirmed His messianic royalty and as one who had come to bring peace to His people. The crowd that shouted "Hosanna to the Son of David..." which means "save us, our deliverer!" was acknowledging Jesus as Lord and King who would deliver His people from the oppression of the Roman authority. However, the people looked to Jesus as more of a political conqueror to crush the oppressive Roman Empire — someone to fight their battles in a temporal world. They failed to understand that God's ultimate plan was sending His Son to fight the final battle over death. Jesus, as Messiah,



came to save souls, to give eternal life to all who believe in Him. He came to defeat Satan, to claim victory over sin and death once and for all. This is our belief — this is our faith and we are eternally grateful to God for claiming us as His own through His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

In the liturgical celebration of "Palm Sunday of the Passion of our Lord", the Church enters into Holy Week — the faithful throughout the world carrying palm branches, commemorates Jesus Christ as Lord and King. We commemorate Christ's victory over evil and that Christ revealed this victory through His passion and death,

that is, His acceptance of the cross through His ascent to Mount Calvary.

The procession with palm branches into the church also reminds the faithful of their "pilgrimage to heaven". The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* #2691 states: "Pilgrimages evoke our earthly journey toward heaven and are traditionally very special occasions for renewal in prayer." The procession to the sanctuary of the church symbolises the glory of God (heaven) where Jesus is present in the Blessed Sacrament and where the celebration of the Eucharist: the source and summit of all Christian life takes place. In the celebration of the most Holy Eucharist, we are drawn to a full, conscious and active participation of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ. All our senses are engaged in giving glory and praise to the Lord of Lords and the King of Kings.

On another note, the blessed palm branches are taken and kept in the home, to serve as a witness to faith in Jesus Christ, the Messianic king, and in His Paschal Victory. They are therefore not to be thrown away or discarded for the *Code of Canon Law* #1171 states: All blessed items are not to be discarded in a trash can but treated with respect.

At the Eucharistic celebration, the priest blesses the palm branches to become sacramental. Sacramentals are anything set apart or blessed by the Church for the purpose of sanctifying our lives and leading us to the sacraments. They are sacred signs and pro-

Reflecting on our
Sunday Readings
with Fr Leonard Lexson

**Palm Sunday of the
Lord's Passion (A)**

Readings: Isaiah 50:4-7;

Philippians 2:6-11;

Gospel: Matthew 26:14 – 27:66

vide for us grace (spiritual help) through the intercession of the Church. Blessed objects are symbols expressing and stimulating faith, hope and love and they are not magic. The palm branches are symbolic of life, hope and victory, especially that of the final victory Jesus would fulfil over death.

When we hold high these palm branches to hail Christ in His triumph, let us also be reminded that it was with Christ's ultimate act of sacrificial love on the cross that we are free from death. Palm Sunday celebrated in one day prepares us to participate in the one great event that will be solemnly celebrated over three days, namely Mass of the Lord's Supper, Good Friday and Easter Vigil. The greatest mysteries of our redemption of the crucified, buried and risen Christ. We remember Christ's sacrificial death on the cross, praise Him for the gift of salvation, and look expectantly to His second coming.

Fr Leonard Lexson is the parish priest of the Church of the Assumption, Petaling Jaya



**ARCHDIOCESE OF
KUALA LUMPUR**

CHAN/CD/01/2023

Chancery Notice

Guidelines concerning attendance at Mass in churches and other church-related events

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

In light of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia's decision to revoke the general dispensation to attend Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation with effect from Palm Sunday 2023, the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur has updated its guidelines concerning the attendance at Mass in churches and other church-related events. The following adjustments will also take effect from Palm Sunday, April 2, 2023:

1. Face Mask

It is no longer compulsory to wear a face mask to enter the church for liturgical celebrations and other events. However, using a face mask is strongly encouraged for persons who may be vulnerable to the coronavirus, as well as those with flu-like symptoms.

2. Holy Water Fonts

The holy water fonts will be refilled beginning with the Easter Vigil service, when water is blessed. To prevent contamination of any form, the holy water fonts must be cleaned regularly.

3. Holy Communion

Holy Communion will continue to be given on the hand until further notice.

4. Holy Communion to the Sick and Homebound

Priests and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion may resume home visitations to the sick and homebound to administer the sacraments. To safeguard the elderly and the vulnerable, they are kindly requested to wear face masks when they visit these homes.

5. Catechism Classes

There is no requirement for Catechism students to wear face masks for classes.

Those who wish to wear a face mask may do so. Where possible, teachers must ensure that the classrooms are appropriately ventilated with fresh air.

6. Other Activities

Other activities, such as coffee mornings, fellowships, gatherings, and processions are permitted. It is advised that these gatherings take place either outdoors or in sufficiently ventilated rooms or halls.

7. BEC Gatherings

BEC gatherings may resume with the homeowners' consent. Smaller gatherings are recommended, especially in confined settings.

8. Easter Triduum

The liturgies of Holy Thursday, Good Friday, the Easter Vigil, and Easter Sunday will be celebrated as prescribed by the Church. The only exception is that, on Good Friday, when approaching the cross individually for Adoration, kissing the cross is not permitted. Instead, reverence to the cross may be shown by a simple genuflection or bow.

9. Public Safety

Those who are feeling unwell, especially those who have a persistent cough or the flu, should consider staying at home and participating in an online Mass.

As for the *MySejahtera* App and Social Distancing requirements, we have also updated the guidelines to reflect the following practices, which are already in place:

a. MySejahtera App

Those entering the church do not need to check in with the *MySejahtera* App. Temperature checks and displaying of

vaccination status are not required to enter the church.

b. Social Distancing

There is no need for social distancing when seated in the church. It is recommended that the churches, even those with structural limitations, find ways to have adequate fresh air ventilation.

Recognising the continuing presence of COVID-19 in our midst, we encourage appropriate self-precautionary measures, as outlined above, to be taken while keeping in mind the needs of the most vulnerable members of our parish community.

With you, we rejoice in the return to gathering in person to worship our Lord on Sundays and holy days of obligation.

Clarence Devadass

Fr Dr Clarence Devadass
Chancellor
Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur

March 21, 2022



**KUALA LUMPUR
ARCHDIOCESE**

**Diary of Archbishop
Julian Leow**

April

- 9** *Mass – Golden Jubilee, Church of the Risen Christ, KL*
- 11** *Meeting – Sri Seronok Board*
- 16** *Mass – Feast Day, Church of the Divine Mercy, Shah Alam*
- 17&18** *Christian Federation of Malaysia - Biennial General Conference*



**MALACCA JOHORE
DIOCESE**

**Diary of Bishop
Bernard Paul**

April

- 7** *Outdoor Way of the Cross – MAJODI Centre, Plentong followed by Good Friday Service*
- 14** *ECMI Exco Meet – online*
- 15** *MJ Mission School Committee Meeting – Oasis, Kluang*
- 28** *Confirmation Mass – Church of the Holy Family Church, Ulu Tiram*
- 29-30** *Auxiliary of the Apostolate Weekend – MAJODI Centre*



Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #126

F12
MJD NEWS
UPDATES

“Greetings again dear people of God.” “I was blind but now I see”, said the blind man in the *Gospel of John* (9:1-41). With effect from Palm Sunday, the dispensation from Sunday obligation for Catholics will cease. The in-person presence at Mass is encouraged. *Jom Ziarah* initiatives and interfaith efforts at bridge-building have sparked fears and police reports. The PM has warned against inciting and sparking fires of racism and religious intolerance. Attempts to undermine the unity government are obvious. “I was blind and I like my blindness”, the disruptive seem to say.

Unsettling Times. An aged man, once a national leader, has embarked on another round to destroy the PM, the unity government and the nation. Reports on abuse of power and nation's assets and wealth have surfaced. The opposition's stance to wreak havoc with lies, half-truths and *Tik Tok* is unimaginable. Making false police reports amounts to a criminal act. But out there, countless police reports were made against anyone or everyone, on pretence, incitement and perceived wrongs. False accusers remain untouched. If justice is not blind and the rule of law is enforced, the police will have fewer reports and more work to keep the peace. The Scripture does not compromise on false witnessing. Be-

ing blind to the truth, to goodness, to the facts of the matter and reality is disconcerting. What blinds us?

A THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK:

A farmer was walking down the street, when he came across a large stone in the middle of his path. The farmer complained: "Who could be so careless as to leave such a big stone on the road? Why does someone not remove it?" And he went away complaining. The next day, a milkman came by, grumbled and left. Then one day, a student came across the stone. Worried that someone may fall over it and hurt himself, he decided to push it to the side. Slowly, he managed to move the stone. Then he noticed a piece of paper where the stone was kept. He picked the paper and opened it. Inside was written, "You are the true wealth of this nation."

Lesson from the student: Don't complain. Do something about it. The Good Samaritan responded to what he saw. Engage! Intervene! Do something! Change begins with you and I.

Announcements for this Week

1. On April 4, Chrism Mass 2023 will be hosted by the Church of St Francis Xavier, Melaka at 8.00pm.

2. On April 29 & 30, 2023, the auxiliaries from ArchKL will be conducting a vocation camp for single ladies, from the ages 18-50. Contact Clara Paul 0122509527

This week's Question and Query.

The Q asks: The Cross! What is my cross?

1. Bonhoeffer, while reflecting on Lent and Easter said: It is that cross which is already there, ready, from the very beginning. Take it up! But to keep us from believing that we must simply choose any arbitrary cross, or simply pick out our suffering as we will, Jesus emphasises that each of us has his or her own cross, ready, appointed, and appropriately measured by God.

2. Those who have found God in the cross of Jesus Christ know how wonderfully God hides Himself in this world and how He is closest precisely when we believe Him to be most distant.

3. Self-denial is a necessary aspect of a Christian life; that the cross is central to human understanding; and that, without atonement, every one of us would stand forever in the role of Judas.

(Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *God is on the Cross*)

God bless you all as you enter Holy Week. It is a journey with the God of Love, who is never far from us, especially in our moments of darkness. Be brave. He walks with us.

Bernard Paul

Bishop Bernard Paul

Caritas Disaster Response Team's maiden effort: clean up in Chaah

By Rayvinshie Selvadurai

CHAAH, Johor: Caritas Malacca-Johore Diocese Office of Human Development (Caritas MJDOHD) undertook its first Disaster Response initiative recently.

Some 53 volunteers from several parishes across the diocese responded to a call to assist flood victims in Chaah and Yong Peng, severely affected by massive flooding. They gathered at the Church of St Stephen, Yong Peng on March 8, to be briefed by project leaders from CREST (Crisis Relief Services & Training) Malaysia on details and precautions for the clean-up activities.

Equipped with galoshes (rubber boots), gloves, and cleaning equipment, the volunteers proceeded to Chaah in a vehicle convoy — braving foot-deep water on parts of the journey.

Reaching Chaah, they were shocked at the sheer amount of damaged furniture and household equipment piled on the side of every road — testimony to the scale of damage and loss to all.

The area surrounding the main police station resembled a war zone, with badly damaged fences, uprooted lamp posts, and rubbish strewn all over.

The volunteers' first stop was SJK (C) Chaah, where the ground-floor classrooms were covered in mud and furniture damaged by the floodwaters. Using high-pressure water jets, the teams (which included volunteers from other Christian Churches and NGOs) methodically cleared and washed the classroom floors and furniture — guided by experienced disaster management volunteers from Kuala Lumpur.

They were welcomed by the school authorities, who expressed their profound gratitude to all who came to help prepare the classrooms for use again.

After lunch, they split into three groups. One group packed provision to be distributed to needy families; a smaller group visited two families traumatised by the deluge to provide a listening ear and support with their presence. The third team embarked on cleaning the Church of St Anthony, Chaah. Parishioners from St Anthony joined the clean-up and helped sustain the effort with snacks, drinks, and welcome fellowship for



Volunteers from various parishes cleaning up the Church of St. Anthony, Chaah.

the tired volunteers.

At St Anthony's, all the mud-soaked pews were removed from the church before the floor could be cleaned with three high-pressure waterjets, and a water sweeper to clear out the excess water.

In the evening, volunteers distributed packed provisions to 30 needy families identified by the parish. They then headed to Labis for dinner before overnighting at our rented homestays.

The next day, they formed two teams: The first headed to Yong Peng to help clean houses while the other was tasked with completing the cleaning of St Anthony's Church Hall in Chaah, and the parish building.

Again, the pews needed a good douse with soapy water before being dried and rearranged inside the church. Cleaning activities on Day Two continued till evening, to complete as much as possible.

Life-Changing Volunteer Experiences

Volunteer Grace Sebastian reflected on the clean-up initiatives, highlighting the dire need for rehabilitation of the school classrooms which were full of mud and ruined materials. Grace and her team went on to visit the families of Mrs B and Mrs V, who had lost all their belongings in the flood. Both families wept over their losses, but professed faith in God — which Grace found inspiring.

She recounted the story of Mrs V's harrowing experience during the flood and

her efforts to save her elderly neighbour, which eventually led to her near-drowning as her rescue boat capsized. Grace's stories reminded us of the incredible strength and resilience of people faced with disaster.

Karen praised the diverse group of volunteers who worked together effectively to achieve the best outcomes in the short time available. She was heartened by the unity displayed in serving the flood victims.

First-time volunteer, Dass, was saddened by the situation, but grateful to be able to help. He thanked the Caritas MJDOHD Disaster Response Team for their work and hoped to participate in more such efforts.

Myriam spoke about the impact the volunteers had on the families they visited. She shared how families were touched by efforts to restore their homes using jet pumps, sweepers, and brushes to clean mud-coated floors and furniture.

Volunteers also lent words of comfort and prayed with affected families, before handing out groceries and dry provisions.

Our gratitude to Caritas MJDOHD, for covering the meals, accommodation, and transportation for the volunteers.

The Caritas MJDOHD Disaster Response Team has, in a small way, helped restore hope to families badly impacted by the flood. We are reminded of the importance of compassion, charity, and outreach — critically so in times of crisis.

The volunteers were in turn, blessed by humbling, enriching experiences of faith, hope, and perseverance in adversity.

MJ Diocese aims to be a participative Church

KLUANG: Seventeen members of the Malacca Johore Pastoral Team (MJPT) met at the Church of St Louis on March 18 to discuss and strategise plans for the diocese.

The MJPT meet is organised twice annually, usually at the beginning and at the end of the year. It comprises the bishop's delegate, directors, heads, assistant heads and directors, pastoral workers and lay leaders serving in Malacca Johore Diocese (MJD) ministries, united under the umbrella of Mission Pastoral Institute (MPI) of MJD.

Vicar of Pastoral Affairs, Fr James Rajendran, gave a welcoming address to start the meet, followed by Praise and Worship and a moment of silence to ponder on the Gospel reading for the day.

Head of MPI, Fr Paul Sia, presented an overview on maintaining continuity from the first five-year Pastoral Plan i.e., the 4E spirituality, the Communion of Families that seeks to be Creative, Inclusive, Bridge-Building, Visionary and Missionary. In order to achieve it, we must relook the current pandemic situation, re-design strategies and action, and re-direct to become a light of Hope.

Ministries took turns presenting their proposed plans for 2023 and the challenges faced. The common challenges include meeting the cost of providing training, formation, and programmes (financial constraints), clashing of events, getting new and younger members and leaders, and weekend rest day issue (Malacca and Johore have different rest days and public holidays).

Bishop Bernard gave his input by emphasising on:

- 1) Pastoral priorities for all ministries
- 2) Principles of pastoral care
- 3) Being ministries in a Synodal Church
- 4) Needing a Synodal Conversion
- 5) Cultural image for the local Church
- 6) Communal discernment

In his closing address, Fr James thanked everyone present for the memorable and fruitful meet, highlighting the importance of being a participative Church with a renewed sense of mission that journeys together as one body of Christ without losing anyone along the way.

Together Building His Kingdom!

Legionaries renew consecration to Mother Mary

CHERAS: Members of the Legion of Mary (LOM) from the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur gathered on March 19 at the Church of St Francis of Assisi to renew their consecration to Mary, Queen of the Legion.

The Acies, which is the most important Legion function of the year, began with a procession of officers and members carrying banners bearing the name of the Praesidia and Curiae under the Kuala Lumpur Regia. This was followed by the recitation of the Rosary in five languages.

The Regia President, Ignatius Wang, welcomed all and noted that the turnout of the approximately 800 legionaries was evidence of their strong devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. The legionaries were joyful for this opportunity to reconnect, and to reflect on whether they have been Salt of the Earth and

Light of the World and to renew themselves to be better disciples.

Fr Paul Cheong OFM Cap, Ecclesiastical Assistant of the LOM, exhorted on the importance of the Acies. Legionaries have a special consecration to Mary which calls them to live out their daily lives of holiness and mission, following the Legion spirituality; commitment in reverence, obedience; work in union with and in dependence on Mary and with open hearts to her so that she may care, protect and guide us throughout the year.

At the heart of this vocation is the consecration for the sanctification and evangelising mission, of helping to build the Church filled with committed Catholics, invited to be involved in the life and mission of the Church and the diocese through loving service of God and the Church.



Legionaries renewing their commitment at the Acies held at the Church of St Francis of Assisi on March 19, 2023.

Frs Paul Cheong, Martin Then CDD and Simon Lau led the renewal of the individual consecration expressing publicly the condensed and beautiful formula; "I am all yours,

my Queen, my Mother, and all that I have is yours." The Acies ended with benediction, followed by light refreshments. — **By Cynthia Fernandez**

Equipping catechists to support learners with special needs

By Angelica Bateman

KUALA LUMPUR: The Archdiocesan Catechetical Centre organised a workshop recently aimed at creating awareness among catechists about special educational needs and strategies for supporting learners with special needs.

The *Reach Out!* workshop was conducted by three catechists from the Church of the Holy Family, Kajang: Constance Yuen, Tiffany Kannapathy and Peggy Sim, who have been supporting learners with special needs in their parish since 2016.

The workshop covered three key topics focusing on neurodiversity, an introduction to special educational needs, and strategies for supporting learners with special needs.

The full-day workshop, held at



The catechists learning how to support learners with special needs.

the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus on March 18, had a positive impact on the participants who came from various parishes across the diocese. The participants consisted of catechists, parents, guardians or family members of children

with special needs. Most expressed their appreciation for how the workshop changed their perspective on learners with special needs.

It was an insightful workshop for Jennifer Deravassoo from the Chapel of Christ the King. "The

session has taught me to celebrate these children's strengths so that they can shine. Every child is unique and special and it is our job to provide an environment that is fit for these children".

"The workshop was great and informative; I did not expect to learn so much but I gained a lot," said Christine from the Church of the Good Shepherd, Setapak. "The term 'neurodiversity' is an eye-opener for me. Awareness to society, especially parents, is important. Children deserve a free environment, regardless of whether they are normal children or children with special needs," she added.

Ilein Roberts shared similar sentiments. "I found the session very interesting and engaging. It was an eye-opener for some of us on matters we had not understood before about special learners. We

have at least a basic understanding now that will enrich our time with special learners. I found the strategies to be used in class particularly useful," said the parishioner of the Church of Jesus Caritas, Kepong.

Kudos to the speakers and the Archdiocesan Catechetical Ministry for this wonderful effort. The aim of the *Reach Out!* workshop is to reach as many as possible and create awareness on the topic has been met. Though this may be the first workshop, it's a huge step for our community, with the increasing number of individuals with special educational needs. We hope through programmes and workshops like these, we will be able to extend our love and support to parents, caregivers, and educators who have dedicated their time and efforts towards the future of learners with special needs.

St Thomas' catechism students attend Lenten camp

KUANTAN: The catechetical team of the Church of St Thomas organised a day camp for its catechism students at the parish community centre on March 18.

A total of 115 students, ranging from Standard One to Form Five, attended the camp themed *The Light of Life*, in line with the Lenten campaign theme of the Archdiocesan Office for Human Development.

The aim of this camp was to help students learn more about the significance of Lent and how they could contribute to others and to nature, as well as to know more about the Lenten practices of prayer, penance and fasting.

The camp began with morning prayer, praise and worship, an ice-breaking session, followed by input from catechists.

The sessions were divided into two groups — primary and secondary levels. The catechists were creative in presenting their given topics with a lot of activi-

ties in relation to the Lenten season — on the temptation of Jesus in line with today's challenges, the Lenten observances and reflections and the Stations of the Cross.

The children participated fully and enjoyed all the lessons and activities. They had fun with outdoor and indoor games such as football, badminton, captain ball and chess which kept them engaged with one another and created an environment of friendship.

All the lessons and activities were drawn up to help them discover the person of Christ Jesus who is the Light of Life, as they grow in their knowledge of faith.

The parish catechetical team expressed their gratitude to all parents, students, catechists and volunteers for supporting and working together to make this camp a successful and a meaningful one for the students in preparation for Holy Week.

Spending time at a children's home

KUALA LUMPUR: A Lenten outreach by members of the Parish Integral Human Development Ministry (PIHDM) of the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist, resulted in a day of fun and food for residents of The Comforter's Hope (TCH) home recently.

Established in 2016 to help at-risk children move out of a po-

tential life of crime and/or abject poverty, the Home, run by Pastor Esther and husband, consists of 15 residents whose ages range from six to 25. Of the 15 residents, 13 of them are students.

The day started around 9.00am. The 'little' residents of the Home were thrilled to see 10 adults visiting them with a promise of fun,

food and more fun.

After an opening speech by the PIHDM representative and a prayer by Pastor Esther, a breakfast of doughnuts, curry puffs, banana cake, Milo and packet juices was served to the children.

This was followed by games and the making of Easter candles. The highlight of the day was the 'beading' session taught by Lilian Goh who is a beading enthusiast. The younger children made bracelets and the older ones were taught to make earrings as well.

Next on the agenda was the presentation of gifts and a set of activity books to each child. A lunch of KFC, chocolate cake and ice-cream followed.

The outreach ended at 1.00pm with the children smiling from ear to ear, enjoying their presents. Seeing the happy and excited children brought much satisfaction to the PIHDM members.



The children learning how to bead bracelets.

Prayer, fasting and almsgiving help purify the soul

KLANG: Carmelite Friar Nicholas Hoh OCD presented a retreat on *Lent — Meaning and Practices* for parishioners of the Church of the Holy Redeemer on March 11 and 12.

Fr Nicholas told the attendees that the Lenten practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving should work hand in hand to gain full redemption in our lives.

Prayer is a conversation between God and the inner you, fasting helps you focus on the time spent in prayer, not on earthly food and pleasures, while almsgiving brings us nearer to God as He wants everyone to have a fair share of the earthly treasures He created.



Fr Nicholas Hoh OCD at the Church of the Holy Redeemer.

The friar's use of Scriptural references from the Old and New Testaments was an excellent way to enrich our connection with Jesus and God, our Father, and deepen our understanding of the Lenten practices.

It is a great reminder that Lent is a time for reflection, sacrifice, and renewal, and that by engaging in these practices, we can become better versions of ourselves and grow closer to God. — *By Jessreena Michael*



The catechism students enjoying their camp.

Unravelling Holy Week through a book by Benedict XVI

By Julie Lim

KUALA LUMPUR: During the season of Lent, the Kuala Lumpur Archdiocesan Biblical Apostolate Commission (KLABA) organised two sessions on Pope Benedict XVI's book, *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week – From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*.

During the first session held on March 4, Fr Eugene Benedict presented on *Chapter 1: The Entrance into Jerusalem and the Cleansing of the Temple*. This was followed by Fr Michael Chua who provided interesting insights to *Chapter 3: The Washing of the Feet* and *Chapter 5: The Last Supper*.

The second session was held on March 18. Fr Nicholas Hoh, OCD gave participants an overview of *Chapter 6: Gethsemane*; followed by Msgr James Gnanapiragasam who unpacked *Chapter 8: Crucifixion and Burial of Jesus*.

More than 35 participants from various



Participants engrossed in the group sharing.

parishes in the archdiocese attended the sessions held at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre.

Msgr James, the Ecclesiastical Assistant for KLABA, said that the sessions were organised to encourage the faithful to read good Catholic literature.

"As Catholics, it is not enough to read devotional books. We have to read something more serious and something that helps us to reflect. And because of this, we are presenting this book written by Pope Benedict XVI which might pose a challenge to some of us," he said.

Msgr James said that Pope Benedict did not only use Scripture in his book, but he also used Church documents, Church traditions and teachings of the Church Fathers.

One of the participants, Angeline Lee from the Church of Our Lady of Fatima in Brickfields said, "I find that Pope Benedict's insights has helped me to understand certain Bible passages better and to know their deeper meanings. He does a wonderful job of showing how various passages of the Bible are brought together in parts to form the life of Christ."

At the end of the sessions, participants were requested to submit their reflections on the readings. These will be uploaded to the KLABA website.

Apart from this session, KLABA has planned other activities for the year which includes sessions on the module of Genesis and Infant Narratives, as well as a study of the Youth Bible.

Reflecting on St Luke's Passion and Death of Jesus

BUKIT MERTAJAM: The Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem (*Ordo Equestris Sancti Sepulchri Hierosolymitani*) held their Lenten recollection and Annual General Meeting (AGM) at the Minor Basilica of St Anne recently.

Themed *Reflections on St Luke's Passion and Death of Our Lord*, the recollection was conducted by the Prior of the Order, Fr Michael Cheah, KCHS for the Mandarin-speaking and English-speaking members.

Fr Michael took the 43 members present through a spiritually-filled Lenten journey focusing on the following aspects:

- The four elements — Plan of the Father; Martyrdom; Plot against an innocent man and the Suffering of a royal and prophetic figure.
- The Agony of Jesus (Lk 22:40-46) — His inner struggle and Jesus' prayer in the garden.
- Lucan Way of the Cross (Lk 22:47 — 23:31).
- The Crucifixion (Jesus speaks three times) (Lk 23:32-46):
 - a. "Father, forgive them for they

know not what they do (forgiveness);
b. "Today you will be with me in paradise"
c. "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."

- The Death and Burial of Jesus (Lk 23:47-56).

The participants were invited to reflect on our Lord's passion and death based on the following questions: Emotionally, did they pity Him? Intellectually, was it injustice to Him? Theologically, as a plan of God? Politically, as a plot against an innocent person who does not defend or retaliate but simply suffers?

The group then examined how prayers helped resolve their own moments of agony and inner struggles; how they experienced falls in life and whether they experienced the strength and transformation during and after moments of prayer.

Fr Michael also encouraged the participants to see the spiritual value in Jesus' suffering and death and draw strength from it. He asked each participant for their own response to the death and burial of Jesus and to see if they could see them-



Prior of the Order, Fr Michael Cheah, KCHS with the members of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem.

selves at the foot of the cross in the roles of the women, the centurion, the crowd or Joseph of Arimathea.

He ended the recollection by asking the participants to reflect on the following:

- whom would they like to forgive before they leave this world?
- what makes it difficult for them to forgive;

- whom would they like to take with them to the joys of heaven?
- whether they commended themselves into the hands of God as they retire to bed at night?

After a spiritually refreshing session, the members attended the AGM during which the Executive Committee for the 2023-2026 term was appointed.



The women receiving a blessing in conjunction with International Women's Day.

Mary, a model for women today

BUTTERWORTH: The Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary celebrated International Women's Day by reflecting on Mary, the model of womanhood and motherhood.

Approximately 150 people attended *An evening with Mary* on March 13, which commenced with a multilingual recitation of the Rosary, followed by a talk on Mary by Deacon Lazarus Jonathan. Using quotes from the Bible, excerpts from Catholic tradition, as well as personal anecdotes, Deacon Lazarus presented Mary as an icon of love, through her role as woman and mother.

Asking those present whether their understanding of Mary had grown over the years, Deacon Lazarus invited them to re-examine the openness of their hearts and minds to God's message and plan. He then spoke of how Mary's life was dramatically changed after her "yes" to God, and how that "yes" required her to have complete

trust in God to help her through immense challenges.

For Deacon Lazarus, the motherhood of Mary came alive in seeing his daughter become a mother. He shared about the unconditional love exhibited by his daughter, leaving no stone unturned to do what is best for her child. So too it would have been for Mary, and much more, knowing that the child she bore was the Son of God. She also underwent deep sorrow watching her Son being rejected, mocked, and crucified.

Relating to International Women's Day, the deacon invited the men present to reflect on how they have treated the women around them, and to remember to always honour the dignity of all women.

The session concluded with a blessing for the women by parish priest, Fr Dominic Santhiyagu, a cake-cutting ceremony and fellowship. The women were also presented with a medal of our Blessed Mother as a gift. — nbvmisc.org

Eucharistic Ministry is a vocation

By Gwen Manickam

KUALA LUMPUR: Being an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion (EMHC) is a vocation. It is a calling to live a holy life as the Lord says in Leviticus 19.2, "You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy."

Fr Vincent Thomas shared this message with 60 EMHCs at the Church of Our Lady of Fatima during the ministry's half-day formation on March 11.

Holiness is a gift from God and it is to live as a child of God. Holiness is also to look into your heart for areas in which you need to grow, said the parish priest from the Church of St Jude, Rawang.

To serve in the ministry, we must have faith and conviction that we are bringing Jesus and healing to people.



Fr Vincent Thomas giving a session to the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion.

More than 2,000 years ago, Jesus celebrated the first Mass at the Last Supper. Now, at every Mass celebrated, we bring the past into the present. Jesus' wounds bring healing when we remember He died for you and me. We also have to accept our weakness, surrender to Him and connect with Jesus, to be open for healing.

"Why does God call? In Scripture, we see God calling all those 'tak boleh pakai' (unworthy) said

Fr Vincent, "we are all not worthy, but God makes us worthy."

Many are ready to serve in every other church ministry except EMHC because they feel unworthy. But each ministry is just as important.

We must also remember that serving as EMHC is not an entitlement. Grace, compassion, mercy, and love are our only entitlement from God.

We have to live in union with

the Trinity, and live in the community while working towards our final destiny – heaven.

Fr Vincent told the attendees, "When giving Holy Communion, we are preparing the people to be in a state of grace for their final destination – heaven."

He also explained that ordained deacons, priests, bishops, and cardinals are ordinary ministers. Extraordinary ministers are an extension of the ministry to as-

sist in giving the Eucharist to other members of the faithful, or to the sick, who are confined to their homes. This appointment is made to cater to the shortage of ordained ministers.

Taking Jesus to those longing to receive Him (the home/hospital bound) is a great calling. Fr Vincent told attendees we are Ambassadors of Christ and when we visit the home/hospital bound, pastoral skills we should project include hospitality and friendliness, expressing empathy, not sympathy, learning silent presence, and practising active listening.

As he ended the session to adjourn for Holy Hour before the Blessed Sacrament, Fr Vincent reminded the EMHCs to have a personal commitment to prayer as we need God's strength to do things.

Reaching out to friends that keep our roads clean

KUALA LUMPUR: The Archdiocesan Prayer Ministry arranged a social outreach to provide grocery assistance to our brothers and sisters who help keep our roads clean.

Individuals, families, and well-wishers dropped off bags of rice, oil, biscuits, noodle packets, canned food and eggs, at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Institute over a couple of weeks. Several BECs also took up the activity as part of their Lenten initiative.

On the day of the outreach, members gathered at the Church of St Anthony's grotto to pray the Rosary before starting their mission. Volunteers packed 70 indi-

vidual bags of items and secured 100 crates of eggs before ending the session with the *Angelus*.

The packed groceries were handed out at different locations in the city, including the Lake Gardens, Bangsar, and Brickfields. Recipients welcomed the groceries with warm smiles and a grateful attitude. Some even gave praise and thanks to God aloud. A batch was also delivered to the Samaritan Hope Home in KL.

The Archdiocesan Prayer Ministry's Ecclesiastical Assistant, Fr Andrew Manickam OFM Cap, and members, took the opportunity to thank those who contributed, prayed, and helped make the



The team packing the items to be donated to those who keep our roads clean.

mission a blessing to our neighbours.

The members meet regularly

to pray for the sick and for the needs of our nation, the Church, and the world. If you are inter-

ested to join the Prayer Ministry, kindly contact Fr Andrew at 016-5216510.

Visit helps foster understanding between religions

KUALA LUMPUR: Twelve members from AJK Ulamak PAS Malaysia paid a courtesy visit to Archbishop Julian Leow at Cardijn House in Bukit Nanas, March 20.

The entourage was headed by Yang Berhormat Ustaz Datuk Dr. Haji Nik Muhammad Zawawi Salleh from the Majlis Syura Ulamak PAS.

On hand to welcome the guests were several clergy and members of the Archdiocesan Ministry of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs.

Discussions were centred around current issues with regards to Islam and some of the challenges faced by the other religions in the country.

It was proposed at the meeting, that both parties i.e. PAS members and Catholic leaders have continuous engagement and dialogue sessions to enhance and foster more understanding between the religious groups and to create a more harmonious and value based society. — **By Victor Soosai**



Archbishop Julian Leow and some of the clergy with the members from AJK Ulamak PAS Malaysia at Cardijn House on March 20, 2023.

No need for blanket ban on church, temple visit, says interfaith group



A file photo of a group of muslims visiting Church of St Joseph, Sentul.

PETALING JAYA: An interfaith group has called on the government and Islamic authorities not to impose a blanket ban on Muslims from visiting non-Muslim places of worship.

Instead, the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism (MCCCBCHST) suggested that authorities make it clear that there should not be any attempts to propagate other faiths to Muslims.

The council was responding to the Selangor government's recent move in prohibiting Muslims from entering non-Muslim hous-

es of worship.

Selangor religious affairs exco Zawawi Ahmad Mughni was reported to have said that while Selangor welcomed programmes organised by NGOs to foster tolerance, such activities should adhere to guidelines set by the Selangor Islamic religious department (Jais).

He added that Jais will monitor and take action against those who violate this rule under Sections Five and Six of the Non-Islamic Religions (Control of Propagation Among Muslims) Enactment.

However, MCCCBCHST said these programmes aim to foster an

understanding of different cultures and involve zero propagation of religion.

It also said that the enactment cited by Zawawi was enacted under Article 11(4) of the Federal Constitution which only prohibits the propagation of any religious doctrine or belief among persons professing the religion of Islam.

The group said if there was no propagation of other faiths to Muslims, then there would be no offence committed.

"Therefore, the mere act of visiting a (non-Muslim) house of worship cannot be an offence," it said in a statement. — **FMT**

French diocese holds first ever Theology Festival

LYON, France: “When you hear about an evening of theology, you expect to sit down and listen,” says Michelle, an 84-year-old woman from Lyon, France. But then she smiles and exclaims: “There, we write, we share, we take the microphone!”

Michelle is describing the event that took place in her parish recently, which was called, “Do you have to understand to believe?” But this was not a conference or lecture. Instead, the 70 or so people registered — people of all ages and diverse backgrounds — were invited to give free rein to their thoughts, during what amounted to a vast “brainstorming” session and “ongoing debate”.

The evening was part of the first-ever Theology Festival, a weeklong series of gatherings hosted by the Archdiocese of Lyon and the Lyon Catholic University (UCLy) to basically make theology more user-friendly to ordinary believers.

“Our objective is that everyone leaves with a taste for further reflection,” said Bénédicte Della Faille, director of UCLy’s Pastoral Institute for Religious Studies, and Élie Ayroulet, a priest of the St Joseph’s monastic community and a UCLy professor. The two theologians devised this interactive format for the Theology Festival with Fr Franck Gacogne, the man



Formation on the sacraments of Christian initiation by Father Etienne Roche (left) on the roof of St Bonaventure’s Basilica, March 21. (LCI Photo/Noémie Marijon/Diocese Of Lyon)

responsible for overseeing the archdiocese of Lyon’s synodal process.

“We need to show that theology, which has a reputation for being a cold and difficult science reserved for intellectual or religious elites, can speak to everyone and shed light on the world!” said Fr Bertrand Pinçon, a biblical scholar who serves as the archbishop of Lyon’s vicar for faith formation.

Beatrice, a 63-year-old participant, said the exposure to scriptural analysis, reflections by specialists and a re-introduction to the foundations of Christianity have given her “the feeling

of consolidating” her faith. She registered for a dozen events, one of which invited her to explore the meaning of baptism beyond the rite.

This science of theology, which is confessional by definition, reaches even the peripheries of the Church. Fr Daniel Molinet, a theology professor at UCLy, opened his course on “the contemporary history of the Church” — which is usually attended by consecrated persons and a few committed lay people — to about 15 new faces.

Among them were two 20-year-olds named Margot and Alexia. Only one of them is a

baptised and practising Catholic. She came to deepen her “understanding of the texts”. The other young woman, who is more distant from the Church, said she was attracted by the “cultural, historical and philosophical” contribution of this field of study to her daily life. Both could consider enrolling in formal courses “as early as next year”.

“Theology responds to a fairly universal demand: it can nourish a spiritual quest, but also help us to confront questions that are omnipresent in our existence and in current events, whether it is a question of violence or of love and well-being,” said Fr Pinçon, the biblical scholar and archdiocesan vicar for faith formation.

But he said that, in order to do this, there are other challenges that must be met. The discipline, which remains complex, must also be the object of a work of popularisation and updating, “like redefining vocabulary that is sometimes misused, such as charism, dogmas, or even sin”.

Pinçon said in order to fulfil this mission, theologians must be constantly driven by one question: “How can we give an account of the relevance of the Word by using the words of today and for today’s world?” — **By Eve Guyot, LCI** (<https://international.la-croix.com/>)

Durham University theologian to work at Vatican Synod Secretariat

DURHAM: Professor Anna Rowlands (pic) has been selected for a secondment that will see her spending two years working at the Vatican with the General Secretariat of the Synod, and the Dicastery for Integral Human Development of the Holy See. Professor Rowlands will be participating in the two major Synodal world meetings in Rome in October 2023 and October 2024.



Professor Rowlands is the St Hilda Professor of Catholic Social Thought and Practice, in Durham University Department of Theology and Religion, and a member of the University’s Centre for Catholic Studies.

A political theologian who works at the interface of political and social theory and Christian theology, her original training was in the social and political sciences, followed by postgraduate degrees in theology.

She has worked for two decades on the political philosophy of Gillian Rose, with additional interests in Hannah Arendt and Simone Weil. These interests coincided with research over the last 15 years in two other areas: the study of forced migration and the ethics of migration, and the tradition of Catholic Social Teaching. She has published in all these areas.

Professor Rowlands said, “I am delighted and naturally feel very privileged to be involved in the extraordinary process of preparing for the various synodal activities of the next two autumns. This is a critical time to be involved in this way in the life of the Church, and I hope I can serve the process to the best of my ability.” — **ICN**

Chinese parents ordered to denounce religion

WENZHOU: Chinese authorities have asked parents of children in kindergartens to sign a pledge denouncing religious beliefs, a directive that violates the right to religious freedom guaranteed in the communist nation’s constitution, says a rights group.

Kindergartens in Longwan district in Wenzhou city of the Zhejiang province in eastern China issued directives to the guardians of students to sign a “Pledge Form of Commitment for Family not to hold a religious belief,” *China Aid* reported March 20.

A kindergarten teacher in Wenzhou on the condition of anonymity stated that the mandate came as a surprise as religious restrictions were placed only on kindergartens and not on the parents or children.

“In the past, the higher-level education department made it compulsory for kin-

dergartens not to be superstitious and not to participate in cult organisations but did not mandate kindergarten children’s families not to believe in religion or participate in any religious activities,” the teacher said.

According to the conditions of the pledge, parents undertook to not hold any religious belief, participate in any religious activities, and “not propagate and disseminate religion in any locations.”

The pledge also stated that parents would engage in “exemplary observance of the [Communist] Party discipline and the country’s laws and regulations, never join any Falun Gong and other cult organisations.”

In Wenzhou, where Christians make up a sizable chunk of the population, the government unleashed a flurry of restrictions and persecution against the community, media

reports say. As of 2018, the city is home to some 150,000 Catholics.

The censorship of the local authorities has even made it illegal to organise religious activities for minors in the area.

The order to sign a pledge denouncing religion was also issued in Xiaoshan district of Hangzhou city in Zhejiang on Feb 15, *China Aid* reported.

In the government-run Tianle Kindergarten, the teachers were encouraged to “stay firm to [the Chinese Communist Party’s] ideals and beliefs, do not hold a religious belief, and do not propagate religious beliefs.”

The teachers signed a pledge form stating that they will not believe in religion and will put an end to religious beliefs, media reports say. — **ucanews.com**

Emigration, low admissions force HK Catholic school closure

KOWLOON: A Catholic school in Hong Kong announced it will wind up operations gradually by 2028 due to a decline in student admissions caused by a falling birth rate and a staff shortage resulting from an ongoing emigration wave, says a report.

The 63-year-old Tak Nga Primary School in the Kowloon area issued two separate notices to parents and alumni on March 21 to inform them about the decision, *South China Morning Post* reported on March 23.

This is the first school in the former British colony that is likely to close since the authorities enacted the Beijing-imposed national security law in 2020 to suppress dissent and a strong pro-democracy movement, media reports say.

The school, run by the Sisters Announcers of the Lord, said that the decision was made as the school has been grappling with low student admissions and recruiting qualified staff to manage it.

“Since 2018, the school has failed to admit sufficient pupils because of the falling birth rate in Hong Kong, and the problem is



Students of Church-run Tak Nga Primary School in Hong Kong are seen in this file image. The authorities decided to close the school gradually by 2028 due to a decline in student admission and lack of qualified staff caused by an emigration wave. (UCA News Photo/Tak Nga Primary School website)

further aggravated by an emigration wave in recent years,” reads a notice.

“We have no choice, and are reluctant, to finally bid farewell to fellow residents after more than 60 years,” the notice said.

Established in 1960 by Salesian Priest Fr Joseph Cucchiara the school is run by nuns who belong to the Salesian congregation and were engaged in missionary activities in Hong Kong since 1954. — **ucanews.com**

Brazilian priests struggling with stress, loneliness

SÃO PAULO: Most Brazilian priests are stressed out and many of them have developed psychological issues, according to an unprecedented survey of the South American country's clergy.

Between 2020-2021, Fr José Carlos Pereira, who is also a sociologist, conducted interviews with 1,858 Brazilian priests. The questions covered a wide range of topics, from their perceptions concerning their own health conditions to their political views.

The study was released in February.

There are around 27,000 active priests in Brazil. Almost 73 per cent of them are under 55 years of age.

According to Pereira, complaints about an arduous daily routine appeared in most interviews, many times accompanied by the description of associated psychological disorders like depression and anxiety. Among the respondents, 43 per cent said they have already received psychological treatment. About 10 per cent have seen a psychiatrist.

"The inadequate distribution of priests in Brazil is historic. Most of them are concentrated in the

southern and southeastern parts of the nation, while the north largely lacks them," said Pereira, adding that the obvious consequence is that clergy are overburdened in many regions.

"Even in areas with good numbers of priests, pastors are frequently alone in their parishes – and at times they celebrate six Masses on the same Sunday," he said.

To make things worse, most of the interviewees are not physically active and do not have a balanced diet.

The combination of those elements may lead to serious consequences. Between 2021 and the beginning of 2022, at least 10 priests took their own lives in Brazil.

"That is a subject that is always dealt with in a concealed way, but it is connected to that state of affairs," Pereira said.

Most respondents told him that they feel lonely, despite the fact that they are part of a community and work with a team of laypeople.

"The study shows that priests have few friends. Most of them do not have someone to share a beer

with and to have a relaxed conversation," he said.

But loneliness has not caused Brazilian priests to criticise celibacy, according to the survey. More than 86 per cent of them support it.

"I suppose, however, that a lower rate lives in chastity," Pereira said.

More than 94 per cent of the respondents said they are in good terms with their orientation, either heterosexual or homosexual.

"In my own experience with clergy members, my perception is that more than half of the priests in Brazil are homosexual. Of course, that does not mean that they do not live in chastity," Pereira said.

The research also showed that most priests tend to have a conservative religious view, in line with Charismatic Catholic Renewal movements, for instance. At the same time, most respondents manifested great identification with Pope Francis.

"I think the Pontiff's clear speech, which everybody can understand – as opposed to Benedict XVI's more sophisticated manifestations – is the reason behind the priests' approval of his figure. And he mentions every now and

then the problems they face," he said.

Talking about the hardships of priesthood is a very important step in the way of healing, said psychologist Fábio Geraldo da Costa, a former priest who has worked for many years with members of the clergy.

"The bishops' conference has been discussing such issues and that is significant. Realities are manifold, so the solutions also must be," he said.

Da Costa, who authored the forward of Pereira's book, thinks that it is important to debate the Catholic imagery concerning priesthood, something that, in his opinion, is the cause of much suffering.

"The priests' stressful lives are connected to the image the community has of his role – and also the one they themselves have of their own priesthood. It is one of perfection," he said.

Unconsciously, da Costa continued, priests try to adhere to that ideal of faultlessness, something that is impossible to achieve and that limits their lives to attending the expectations of other people – not their own.

"As a psychologist, I've heard



many priests complaining about the institutional weight they had on their backs, about their loneliness, about the pressures they had to deal with," he said.

Such are the consequences of the Church's notion of the calling to priesthood as "a full donation of a person to the mission" – a donation that begins with the spiritual dimension.

"But a priest is not only the spirit. He is also a social being, a psychological being, a physical being who has sexuality. And all that is repressed, affecting his psyche," he said.

Da Costa thinks that more and more priests have been trying to find forms of dealing with such challenges in a more balanced way. Maybe that is the reason why, despite so many problems, more than 94 per cent of Pereira's interviewees declared to be happy in their lives as priests. — **By Eduardo Campos Lima, Crux**

Holy See: Racism still plagues our societies

VATICAN: As the World observed the *International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination* on March 21, the Holy See reiterated its strong condemnation of any form of racism which, it says, should be countered by promoting a culture of solidarity and authentic human fraternity.

Addressing the UN General Assembly, Vatican Observer Archbishop Gabriele Caccia stated that racism is based upon the "distorted belief" that one person is superior to another, which starkly contrasts the fundamental principle that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights."

The nuncio lamented that "despite the commitment of the international community to eradicate it", racism continues to re-emerge like a mutating "virus", resulting in what Pope Francis has called "a crisis in human relationships."

"Instances of racism", he said, "still plague our societies", either explicitly as overt racial discrimination, which is "often identified and condemned", or at a deeper level in society as racial prejudice, which though less evident, still exists.

"The crisis in human relationships resulting from racial prejudice", Archbishop Caccia stressed, "can be effectively countered by the promotion of a culture of encounter, solidarity, and authentic human fraternity" which "does not mean simply to live together and tolerate one another". Rather, it means that we meet others,



Vatican News

"seeking points of contact, building bridges, planning a project that includes everyone," as Pope Francis calls for in his Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*. "Building such a culture is a process that stems from recognising the unique perspective and invaluable contribution that each person brings to society, the *Vatican Observer* added.

"Only the recognition of human dignity can make possible the common and personal growth of everyone and every society. To stimulate this kind of growth it is necessary in particular to ensure conditions of equal opportunity for men and women and guarantee an objective equality between all human beings."

Archbishop Caccia concluded

his remarks by expressing the Holy See's concern for the racism and racial prejudice targeting migrants and refugees. In this regard, the Vatican nuncio highlighted the need for a change "from attitudes of defensiveness and fear" towards attitudes based on a culture of encounter, "the only culture capable of building a better, more just and fraternal world."

The *International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination* was established by the United Nations in 1966 and is observed annually on the day the police in Sharpeville, South Africa, opened fire and killed 69 people at a peaceful demonstration against apartheid "pass laws" in 1960. — **By Lisa Zengarini, Vatican News**

Nigerian bishops to plant 5.5 million trees in just five years

ABUJA: As Nigeria contends with increased levels of Christian persecution, in the forms of killings, kidnappings, and destruction of church facilities, there is little the Church's leaders can do as they work for government intervention and social reform. While there are many problems in the country that they cannot fix, however, they are now taking action on one issue they can help to correct: the environment.

According to the *Guardian*, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) is to plant 5.5 million trees over the next five years to mitigate the effects of climate change in the country. The cause, called the Green Revolution Campaign, is being championed by Caritas Nigeria, which hailed the bishops' actions.

At the project's launch, CBCN president Lucius Ugorji explained that the workload will be split among 50 dioceses of Nigeria, which will each plant 20,000 trees over the course of five years. It is estimated that 1.1 million trees will be planted annually through this division of labour.

The prelate went on to explain that the plans will work towards saving the environment and reducing the damage caused by climate change, which in Nigeria leads to excessive rainfall, rising sea levels, floods, severe droughts, and desert encroachment in 12 Northern states.



(Shutterstock/Saengla)

He also noted that Nigeria is in need of more efficient waste management services, citing rampant plastic pollution — although the trees are not expected to help in this regard. The trees will, however, help to combat greenhouse gases, a leading cause of climate change. Ugorji noted that there is work to be done to improve water quality in the African nation as well.

Several other speakers took to the podium during the announcement. Executive Director of Caritas Nigeria, Fr Uchechukwu Obodochina, said that the intervention would be a boon to the ongoing farmer-herder crises, reducing environmental threats to both humans and animals. Meanwhile, director-general of the National Agency for Great Green Wall, Dr Yusuf Maina-Bukar, said that the planting of 5.5 million trees could increase the quality of life for some 40 million Nigerians. — **J.P. Mauro, Aleteia**



Synodality

is there only one way?

The recent criticism of the German Church and its decisions on *Der Synodale Weg* (Synodal Path) raises starkly the question about the ambit of permitted discernment and whether there are unspoken rules about the limits of synodality.

It's easy to react, with confident assurance, that the Holy Spirit may not be limited and that synodality is really a process so such a question cannot arise. But there are too many reports of reservations by the Roman Curia to be daunted by such confidence. I am not suggesting that the Holy Spirit can be enlisted to support opposite sides of the same topic despite the risk that some may try that appeal. Likewise, we accept synodality is not a numbers game as superficially convenient that approach may be.

When Pope Francis announced that the Synod of Bishops would hold an assembly on synodality this coming October (since extended to a second assembly in October 2024), he called for all the People of God to be "walking together and listening to one another but above all to the Holy Spirit". He stressed that the "upcoming Synod (assembly) is unlike any previous one. It starts with and involves all the faithful at local Churches across the world, promising to listen to all, especially to laypeople".

Such an ambitious vision necessarily anticipates, even welcomes, variance among the estimated 1.4 billion Catholics across the world to whom Francis is appealing. Communion, Participation, and Mission are unlikely to be identical in every place in every region. Surely we do not seek that. We do know from the *Acts of the Apostles* that the unique group Jesus chose, small and dedicated as they were, did not suffer blind uniformity, a single attitude or undue distraction from the disagreements that occurred.

The need for a unified Church

Pope Francis cautioned that, in making the journey together, we must receive and live the gift of unity and be open to the voice of the Spirit. In so speaking the Pope highlighted the unique character and need for a united Church.

History has amply demonstrated that disunity and schism are paralysing and have often sponsored over reaction and regrettable outcomes. We cannot ignore the result of disunity in other



Pope Francis greets people during a meeting with representatives of bishops' conferences from around the world at the Vatican. (Vatican Media)

Churches, in governments, political parties and closer to home – in families. The need for unity is not in question.

But recent statements from the Vatican suggest that the spectre of a monarchical Church is abroad and certain topics are not permitted, let alone decisions about them, despite deliberation by the German Church with a wide representative group of 200 clergy, religious and lay people, over a three year period. My inquiry is not to argue the case for the German Church but to consider what limits if any apply to this momentous movement in our Church.

Aggiornamento (bringing up to date) may have slipped from recent memory but synodality builds on that foundation commenced 60 plus years ago by the clarion call of John XXIII and in effect reignites the journey on the endless pathway. Why endless? Because, as Richard Lennan explains in *Tilling the Church*, the Church is an unfinished project, tilling with God's grace as it seeks conversion with the specifics of its future to remain unknown. "Trust in God's grace propels the tilling of the Church," Lennan writes. The outcome of the way God communicates with us over time can be known only to Him.

We well know the Church has changed, often ever so slowly. Some may think 100 years to achieve the liturgical changes of Vatican II

was far too long. There are now topics in that category.

Who can speak?

So who is permitted to invite the grace of the Spirit, even to articulate the perceived understanding and proffer the imagined guidance? Is this limited to bishops, or other clergy or lay people or approved prophets?

The Pope provided a very clear answer to that on March 15 during his general audience in St Peter's Square. He reminded that being apostles concerns every Christian, each one of us. "Lay people, the majority of people in the Church, share in the priestly, prophetic, and royal office of Christ and have their own share in the mission of the Church," Francis said.

The gratuitous call from God "is a call that concerns both those who have received the sacrament of Orders, consecrated persons, and all lay faithful, man or woman: it is a call to all". Then quoting from *Ad gentes*, the Pope said, "The Church has not been really founded, and is not yet fully alive, nor is it a perfect sign of Christ among men, unless there is a laity worthy of the name working along with the hierarchy."

Francis was obviously emphasising the role of the laity when he asked, "Who has more dignity in the Church: the bishop, the priest? No, we are all Christians in the service of others.

Who is more important in the Church: the religious sister or the common person, baptised, not baptised, the child, the bishop...?"

So we are clear. All of us — clergy, religious, lay people — whether we have a title or not, are called by our baptism to conversion. We are made by a God of love, graced in abundance, called to live in hope and to embrace missionary conversion.

But how to speak?

Our synodal journey will require dialogue, prayerfully considered and developed by the many and diverse members of the apostolic Church. The biggest consultation in the history of the Church is actually happening. Once the global breadth of the Church is accepted, we must anticipate difference, lots of agreement but also disagreement and even change. But there is little place for wholesale rejection of collective views. They may not ultimately turn out to be right or right for this time, but synodality essentially allows and welcomes the right to their expression. How else can the *sensus fidelium* be known?

That undoubtedly means we must be open to more dialogue about the inevitable chestnuts, including the role of women and their ordination (both to diaconate and priesthood), optional celibacy, our structures for decision making (not by bishops alone but by the community as a whole as found in both *Acts* and in the *Pauline Epistles*), and the embrace of homosexuals and divorced people.

The unthinkable alternative is that the Vatican alone engineers the specifications for the journey — but that would be a denial of synodality.

As already mentioned, the Church's teaching and its unity must be accepted. But a wise arbiter will be reluctant to intrude personal position or prejudice as the journey progresses. If it were different, the Second Vatican Council could never have given us the legacy with which we have been blessed. — **By Justin Stanwix, LCI** (<https://international.la-croix.com/>)

● **Justin Stanwix is a deacon at St Mary Star of the Sea Parish, Milton in the Diocese of Wollongong, Australia.**

Is the priest listening to you?

Indian diocese surveys families for synod

ALAPPUZHA, India: An Indian diocese used its existing small Christian communities to train lay leaders to reach out to a wide variety of Catholics — including broken families — ensuring that everyone had a voice in the listening process for the upcoming Synod of Bishops on synodality. Some participants said they already have seen changes.

Almost 70 per cent of parishes completed the initial reflection within three days, said Msgr. Joy Puthenveetil, vicar general of the Diocese of Alleppey.

"We have tried to let every family have the experience of the synod," he said in early March. "The process of listening is what is important for the synodal Church."

The Diocese of Alleppey has more than 1,200 small Christian communities, and leaders of those communities trained about 70 members of the diocesan synod team.

Synod leaders prepared handouts for each family, asking questions such as "Is the parish priest listening to you," as well as questions about their dreams for the church, said Msgr Puthenveetil. Families responded anonymous-

ly and put their answers in the synod box in each parish.

"They expressed their honest opinions," said Msgr Puthenveetil. Although some people gave examples of good things happening, others gave examples of priests who did not welcome people, he said.

To give parishioners a taste of the synodal process, each parish synod group collected and synthesised opinions and discussed the results with members of the small Christian communities in a one-day session.

Using the diocesan commissions — such as education, family, youth, social justice and lay ministry — the diocese also reached out to other groups.

"Educators have a great role in forming the community," Msgr Puthenveetil said, so the diocese met with about 100 representatives of elementary, high school and college teachers, since the government was discouraging large gatherings during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Towards the end of the pandemic, the diocese created a social experience for elders, who shared their worries of being abandoned

and concerns about changes in the mentality of new generations.

"They were very happy and recommended more experiences like that," said Msgr Puthenveetil.

Alleppey Visitation Sr Janet Klappanakkal, a lawyer, was among those who reached out to broken families. She said families' primary problems are money, followed by alcohol abuse.

Although the diocese already had offered counselling sessions to troubled families, since the synod listening process, they have begun offering a "school of parenting," under the auspices of the diocese's family commission.

Maria Genevieve Isaac works as a volunteer in the music ministry at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Cathedral and also assists the sacristan in the bishop's house. She said during the listening sessions, she was impressed by the priests and by Bishop James Anaparambil.

"It was their humble attitude to listen to the common laity, though holding a prestigious position. They were very thoughtful to know about our difficulties facing the ministry we

are doing. The question that the church leader asked that impressed me was what we can do for the better functioning of the ministry, instead of imposing their decision and ideas," she said.

Before the listening process, only one man and one woman were allowed to sing during Communion, she said.

"There was a complaint about it by the congregation and from the other members in the choir. This was discussed in the (synodal listening) meeting, and we were provided more mics and cables, new song books so that all can see; we formed a WhatsApp group to share the songs so that all can learn the song and all were allowed to sing. We choose the songs which all the members present know as well as (are) able to sing. Before it was not like this. So now it sounds very beautiful," she said.

Msgr Puthenveetil said once results from all of Asia were consolidated, the priests gathered for a three-day consultation, since many of the answers involved priests. He said one concern was the need for more collaboration from the laity. — **By Barb Frazee, OSV News**

We are only young once

One of the outcomes of the Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Convention I in 1986 was the inclusion of the youth ministry as one of the five core groups needed towards building a Christ-centred community (the rest were Unity among bishops, priests, religious, laity; Formation for all; Integral human development of the poor; Dialogue with Christians and non-Christians). Youth were (and still are) seen as one of the components towards building a Christ-centred Church.

Prior to 1986, many parishes already had youth groups actively serving in their church. Those were the days when international groups like Young Christian Workers (YCW) and Joyful Vanguard, and many more, were active in Peninsular Malaysia. At the parish levels, youth groups were mainly focused on activities, events and playing a role in the parish life (e.g. providing manpower resources during feast days, participating in choirs, the music ministry, etc.). As the young people grew up, received their Sacrament of Confirmation, completed their catechism and moved into young adulthood, these church activities gradually became secondary to their career and tertiary studies.

I received my Sacrament of Confirmation at the age of 13 (today, the sacrament is given at age 17). Back then, those of us fortunate to be schooled in Christian schools, continued to attend Catechism in school, taught by the religious sisters and brothers, until we finished our secondary education. In total, we received 11 years of Catechism. Today, Catechism is imparted at the parish level, taught by many lay volunteers — parents, single adults and anyone available to teach. In order to ensure the children received the same 11 years of faith education, the Sacrament of Confirmation is only conferred to them at age 17 or thereabouts.



REMINISCING CHURCH

Richard Chia

Back in the late 1980s, several initiatives were started in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur. The *Life and Love Seminar* programme (later renamed *Love & Life*) was initiated by the then Archdiocesan Pastoral Institute Director, Fr Paul Tan SJ (now Emeritus Bishop), for youth who had completed Form Five or Six, getting ready to move into tertiary or working life. Later, the late La Salle Bro Damian Oliver launched his Search programme for young working adults.

At the national level, *Choice* programmes (an offspring from the *Worldwide Marriage Encounter* programmes) were also introduced in Malaysia, targeting any single Catholic youth aged 18 years and above (later, raised to 21 and above).

On Palm Sunday, March 1985, Pope John Paul II, in his Apostolic Letter *Dilecti Amici*, to the youth of the world, officiated the World Youth Day (WYD). Youth in the Church were now elevated to a pastoral priority level. In 1986, the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur formed an International Year of the Youth Celebration Committee to organise events and activities to celebrate that special year. I was part of that committee. We organised youth events, visited many parish youth groups, created a network of youths, produced a youth magazine with circulation of almost 2,000 copies, and invited each other for parish youth events. The other dioceses in Malaysia also initiated their own programmes.

The outcome of the highly successful

first WYD in 1986 brought about a new tradition when the second event and first international WYD took place in Buenos Aires, Argentina. There have been 15 International World Youth Day celebrations thus far, where the youth continue to answer the invitation of the Holy Father in staggering numbers. Many youths in Malaysia have been participating in these events since.

At the Asian level, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, Office of Laity & Family and the Youth Desk have also initiated Asian Youth Day (AYD), held every three years. The first AYD was held in 1999 at Hua Hin, in south Thailand. Many youths from all over Malaysia travelled by train and bus for the six-day event, participated by a large gathering of young people from Asia.

Today, the youth ministry is found at almost every parish church in Malaysia. It is integral to the life in the parish, and youth representation is also found at the parish pastoral council level. Youth are no longer seen as a workforce for the Church to use, but a pastoral priority whose needs are essential for the growth and sustainability of the Church.

The response from each parish church towards the pastoral needs of the youth differs, depending on the types of youth, language groups and age. Despite the parish's best efforts in catering to their needs, the nature of youth is transient. Meaning, whatever efforts the parish makes will never be long term. The reason being the young person will eventually move on — either to tertiary level, go overseas for education or work, or to another location to pursue his or her career. Some may find their life partner and pursue the vocation of the married life. Whichever path the youth take, the Church recognises this, and facilitates to their pastoral and spiritual needs as best possible,

not to hold them back, but to plant the seed of Christ and God in their hearts, so that their faith will be nurtured wherever they move next.

At the diocesan and archdiocesan levels, the response differs too, depending on availability of resources. Kuala Lumpur has Archdiocesan Single Adults & Youth Office, Penang has Penang Diocesan Youth Network, Malacca-Johore has Malacca Johore Diocese Young People Network, Kuching has Kuching Archdiocesan Youth Commission, Kota Kinabalu has Archdiocesan Youth Commission, Miri has Miri Youth Commission & Campus, Sibul has Sibul Diocese Youth Apostolate, Sandakan has Sandakan Diocesan Youth Office and Keningau has Catholic Youth Commission. All these youth offices, commissions, networks or ministries are headed by a priest, aligned to the bishop or archbishop in-charge of the Episcopal Commission for Youth & Campus Ministry (currently it is Archbishop Simon Poh of Kuching).

For the young readers in our midst, I strongly encourage you to connect, if you have not already done so, with the youth ministry near you. Be assured that the Church needs you, and has your pastoral and spiritual needs in mind. In today's highly globalised and consumer-oriented world, it is easy to be drowned in the high energy pulsation of the world. But as the years go by, you will soon learn that the Church, as the people of God, will always remain, and that our spiritual and faith needs must be re-energised ever so often. I know this from experience.

Richard Chia has been actively involved in Church since young. He held full-time corporate jobs while serving in ministries and groups at various church levels for the past four decades.

Seeing the Catholic Church through the eyes of a global news aggregator

At some point over the last six months, I started hearing again about *Flipboard*, a news aggregator that I've had on my iPad for ages, and maybe you have, too. The app has been around since 2010, and while it may not have exactly invented the idea of being a one-stop spot for all the news you want to see, it certainly did turn it into a big business. It was Apple's *App of the Year* in 2010, and *Time* named it one of the year's best inventions (alongside Google's driverless car, Kickstarter, the iPad and spray-on fabric).

Today, *Flipboard* has upwards of six million readers a month, almost half of them under 35. More intriguing to me, almost 60 per cent of its users — all of whom have the ability to boost content by reposting it — live outside the United States. Obviously, as a tech business, the company has its own agenda (a.k.a. algorithm). But still, learning a little more about it got me wondering what kind of vision of the Catholic Church you might find when the audience creating it is from around the world.

Over the last week, I've been popping in on the Catholicism feed on *Flipboard*. At first what I found was a lot of pretty ugly stories. The top articles a week ago were about a queer comedian in Australia who made a joke that had offended Catholics, and how various Catholics, including the archbishop of Sydney, responded. There were also many stories from around the world about child sexual abuse — the Portuguese Conference of Bishops saying they and only they would decide whether

priests who are convicted of abuse are dismissed from the priesthood; an Irish priest who was convicted of abuse but not sent to jail; a new Polish documentary accusing Pope John Paul II of protecting paedophile priests when he was archbishop of Krakow, which was a news item that actually hadn't even broken in the States yet.

The fact that so many stories from around the world were about abuse was sadly unsurprising, but also pretty brutal to see. It has been 21 years now since *The Boston Globe* first broke stories of abuse in the Archdiocese of Boston, and yet the cascade of revelations, lawsuits and bankruptcies continues. And stories related to abuse and L.G.B.T. issues in the Church would remain persistent topics throughout the week. Even on the 10th anniversary of Pope Francis' papacy, while the front page of *Flipboard* included a story from the *Guardian* about the Pope, it also had a story about the soon-to-be-released report on sexual abuse in the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

One definite trend that you see on *Flipboard* is the conflicts that surround the Church throughout the world: women asking for a greater voice in the Australian Church; sad news of the closing of Mount Alvernia High School in Newton, Mass.; Christians contributing to hatred around the world etc.

But over the course of the week, the app also presented many other kinds of glimpses into the Church. First and foremost, there were stories of the global

Church that you don't often hear about in the United States. There was the story of Filipino Catholics protesting the recent murder of a governor and five others in the Visayas region; the staff of the Diocese of Makurdi in Nigeria who had to evacuate their offices in the wake of anti-Christian violence sweeping the area following national elections; Argentinians wishing that Pope Francis would come visit them.

There were also human interest stories from around the world: A Derry priest who discovered a shipwreck; a sick young woman whose example bore witness to God's love; the Sisters of Mercy's contributions to New Orleans.

I found some great pieces to chew on, too, like Elizabeth Bruenig's beautiful piece about Lent in the Atlantic or a recent *Religion News Service* piece about J. Edgar Hoover's commitment to Christian nationalism or our own Molly Cahill's recent article on trying to become more like the prodigal son. (Also, many, many think pieces from around the world on Pope Francis' 10 years in office.)

After a week of using *Flipboard* for this story, I'm honestly sold on its value for Catholics. On any given day, it gives you a snapshot of the Church in the world, both at the macro and the micro levels. In a sense, the Church gets smaller using *Flipboard* but in the best way. I am made aware of the struggles and witness of Catholics all around the world in a way that no one publication or country's publications could ever accomplish.

Keeping in mind that *Flipboard* has its own algorithms at work (and also so do each of us reading, including myself), you nevertheless begin to see broader patterns, too. Much as is the case in the States, the Church in the world seems to struggle any time it has to deal with issues of sex and gender. Our language and practices around attraction, intimacy and bodies, perhaps even the physical world, seem to create a lot of conflict around the world and sometimes pain. Maybe we would argue that being Catholic often means being counter-cultural. Still, it's noticeable just how persistent and strife-ridden these issues are.

But there are other patterns here, too, more subtle, but still present. Most especially, reading *Flipboard* you learn of Catholics putting themselves on the line for others, working for justice, trying to make things better. Sometimes their actions are big and dramatic, front page news, like the Filipino Catholics condemning violence. But quieter moves from Catholics resonate with people as well, like the Irish bishops' recent decision to give a third of their grounds back to nature to create more space for pollinating bees and biodiversity. Among a hundred big stories about Pope Francis recently, their decision clearly grabbed the attention of *Flipboard*'s readers as well.

Maybe there is a lesson to be taken here, too, about where the Church's message actually reaches people and what we should be concentrating on. — **By Jim McDermott, America**

By Gwen Manickam

Performing arts polymath Michael Xavier Voon, has multiple local and international accolades under his creative arm.

Sputtering into the arts scene in the 90s, Michael is known for directing, coaching, and choreographing television and stage shows like *So You Think You Can Dance*, *Dreamgirls*, and *Shout! The Mod Musical*, *HipHopera the Musical*, and *Realiti* (8TV). He also trained local vocal bigwigs like Jaclyn Victor, the first *Malaysian Idol* and first *Ikon Malaysia*, Faizal Tahir, Dina, Dayang, and Daniel Lee.

From dancing to the theatre, and directing to lecturing and beyond, the 59-year-old was drawn to the arts from age three.

"I recall standing before the altar at our home with a fruit in my hand, waving my arms as a dance offering to the Lord," said the second-generation cradle Catholic. He believes that was the start of his life-long tango with the extensive world of art.

Why the performing arts? Michael said than in anything that permeates through his life, be it temporal or spiritual, movement plays a big part and it is his creative intelligence.

"The creation of the world in Genesis is a movement to me, similarly, John 1:1 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word is God'.

"I was also drawn to how the universe came into being and civilisation, as described by Eastern and Western philosophy, took form.

"When I was struggling with the ideology of Adam and Eve, Joseph Campbell's *The Power of Myth* taught me that the truth is bigger than our logic. It goes back to movement, a common thread that weaves through my vocation, performing arts, and journey."

A lecturer for over 20 years, Michael said, "It is through my faith that I recognised my brokenness and it was my brokenness that guided me to God. As I look back at all the times that I could have left the Church, God, and my faith, it's during those experiences that I see God never left me."

This propels Michael to collect the broken pieces of himself from the common stories of others, thus making him whole.

In the late 60s, Michael, his parents, three sisters, and younger brother lived in a wooden house where they drew water from a well, and the lavatory was an outhouse within the compound.

"I only experienced indoor plumbing at age 11, after our home was torn down for development and we moved to another house," said the former performance coach of *Malaysian Idol* and *One in a Million* reality shows.

"I never had any performance training as nobody in my family was inclined that way nor could we afford it. It was my interest that led me to imitate and perform."

An ardent fan of short-wave radio, the SMK St Michael's student listened to *BBC*, *Voice of America*, and *Radio Australia* regularly in the early 80s. Since the movie *Fame* had just been released, he used to write to the stations to enquire about the performing arts schools in the US. His letter was once featured on *Voice of America* by actress and host Arlene Francis.

"Since my question was picked, they sent me gifts including a hardcover copy of *America the Beautiful* by Reader's Digest Editors. I was particularly drawn to the pictures of



Colorado and longed to visit someday."

Learning about Michael's passion for the arts, the people he interacted with on the airwaves encouraged him to study in the US. But at that point, he was not in a financial situation to comply.

"In 1982, I received an invitation letter from Mesa State College Colorado, saying they'd found a sponsor for me. I assumed it was for one semester, similar to the AFS student exchange programme.

"Our family didn't have the funds, but we managed to pull some money together and submitted my application and affidavit of support to the US Embassy – which, as expected, was immediately rejected.

"Next, the school telexed a note to the embassy with something to the effect of 'Michael is coming here to study and I am the foreign student advisor, etc,' signed Tilmon M Bishop, State Senator of Colorado. My application was immediately approved," said the former Sunway College lecturer of performance and media for musical theatre.

"It is through my faith that I recognised my brokenness and it was my brokenness that guided me to God. As I look back at all the times that I could have left the Church, God, and my faith, it's during those experiences that I see God never left me."

Michael, who has a black belt in Karate, boarded a plane for the first time and spent the next six and a half years in the US acquiring multiple undergraduate degrees. He worked part-time and gave tuition to American students to top up his education sponsorship and living expenses.

"I used to paint native American jewellery featuring Kokopelli on belt buckles and earrings and earned enough from its sales to send money back, with which I eventually bought my parents' their first home in Ipoh."

Armed with two bachelor's degrees and an Associate of Art in Dance at the end of four years, Michael returned to Malaysia in 1987.

A local print media got a whiff that Michael was on the



BOH Cameroonian Arts Award winner Michael Voon directed *"Shout! The Mod Musical"* (top) and *"Dreamgirls"* (below).

Who's Who in America list three times and featured him on its centre spread.

Shortly after landing his first job in Malaysia with Genting Berhad, Michael suffered from depression. "Having recently returned from the US, I found myself in very unfamiliar surroundings — incongruence with self, home and the state of politics in the nation."

"I was hospitalised for 12 days as my fever refused to break. I eventually flew back to the States but the depression got worse. I was let go from my job and my previous scholarships revoked. I didn't have enough funds to fly home," said the now Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Peel Road parishioner.

After listening to a talk by an American priest who'd just returned from Medjugorje, God began playing a significant role in Michael's life again.

"I learned to say the Rosary correctly for the first time, and after I started listening to Our Lady's messages from Medjugorje my life seemed to get back on track — I regained my job and my scholarships. I also started volunteering at the soup kitchen and Catholic outreach.

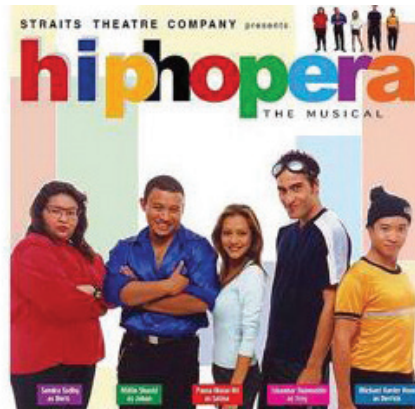
"As I listened to people share their brokenness, I felt their similar pieces fit into my brokenness and I experienced healing.

"My faith was invigorated and I felt I was already dancing within, not necessarily on a stage. Performance became 'prayformance,'" said the US award-winning choreographer.

This was further emphasised after he left the States for good and went on a one and half month pilgrimage to Europe in 1990. During a papal audience, Michael thinks he heard the now St John Paul II say, "Prayer is the dance of God," and it resonated with his state of mind and views at that time.

Michael believes that when we pray, regardless of how small our prayer is, it is Jesus who prays in us.

Semi-retired, Michael has taken a step back from serving in ministries but continues to facilitate creative workshops for LaSalle schools, youth, parishes and ministries.



It is well with my soul

*When peace like a river attendeth my way
When sorrows like sea billows roll
Whatever my lot
Thou hast taught me to say
It is well, it is well
With my Soul*



FROM THE OTHER SIDE

Regina William

During the times in my life when I feel that life is throwing me a curve ball at every corner, reading about the life of hymnist Horatio Spafford always brings me back to reality. One of my favourite, go to inspirational, real life, Christian stories, at times when I'm feeling low and life seems to take a tumble towards a bottomless pit, is about the life of the author of the hymn *It is well with my Soul*. My life doesn't seem so bad after all, compared to the trials and tribulations that Horatio went through, and many other people go through, every day of their lives.

Why Horatio Spafford?

Horatio, a devout Christian, was a lawyer and a senior partner in a large law firm in Chicago. In 1870, Horatio's only son was killed by scarlet fever at the age of four. A year later, fire ravaged real estate holdings along the shores of Lake Michigan where Horatio had heavily invested in. Each and every one of these holdings were destroyed by the great Chicago Fire of 1871.

After the devastating toll these disasters had taken on his whole family, Horatio decided to take his wife and four daughters on a holiday to England. It was supposed to be a combining holiday for the family while helping his friend, DL Moody, who was a preacher and evangelist, as he travelled around Britain on one of his great evangelis-

tic campaigns.

Horatio and his wife Anna planned to join Moody in late 1873 and the Spaffords travelled to New York in November to catch the French steamer, 'Ville de Havre' across the Atlantic. Just before they set sail, a last-minute business development caused Horatio to delay his voyage.

Instead of letting the developments throw a damper on the family holiday, Horatio persuaded his family to go as planned and he would follow later. Anna and her four daughters sailed East to Europe while Horatio returned to Chicago. Nine days later, Horatio received a telegram from his wife in Wales. It read: "Saved alone."

On November 2, 1873, the 'Ville de Havre' had collided with 'The Lochearn', an English vessel. It sank within 12 minutes, claiming the lives of 226 people. Anna Spafford had stood bravely on the deck with her four daughters aged between 12 years old and 18 months old but all their four children perished in the incident.

Upon hearing the terrible news, Horatio boarded the next ship out of New York to join his bereaved wife. During his voyage, the captain of the ship had called him to the bridge and told Horatio that the ship was now passing the place where the 'Ville de Havre' was wrecked. Horatio returned to his cabin

and penned the lyrics of the great hymn.

The words which Horatio wrote that day reveals a man whose trust in the Lord was unwavering. How would we react or respond in such overwhelming circumstances? Who would we blame first as the source of all our troubles or have the grace to believe that God is not responsible for all our troubles?

Would we be able to say just as Horatio had said that "It is well with my Soul"? It is easy for us to be grateful and thankful when everything is good in our lives but when faced with challenges, often, we falter.

Despite all that his family had gone through, when they got back to Chicago, the Spaffords tried to get on with their lives. In 1878, a daughter was born and the couple had another daughter in 1881. After contemplating on his tragedies and life, he decided to seek solace in the holy city of Jerusalem with a group of friends where they carried out charitable works.

He did not write the words 'It is well with my Soul' because of his great success. They came as a reflection at a time of great personal tragedy from a man whose commitment to the Lord was unwavering.

I've had my fair share of personal tragedies which have made me at times waiver in my faith and question why these things happened in my life.

I was widowed at the age of 30 in 1994, when my husband passed away two months after being diagnosed with lung cancer at the age of 37. I was questioning why my children, who were aged seven, four and two had to lose their father at such a tender age.

After he passed away, I was even more paranoid about even the slightest pain, fear-

ing that my children would be orphaned if something happened to me. Throughout the short period that he was ill, the hymn *God gives His people strength* kept reverberating in my head and when the hymn was sung during his funeral, I broke down when I realised God was preparing me for that exact moment.

My eldest daughter, then aged seven, asked a priest why God had let her father die when he knew that Appa had little children who needed him around in their lives. Even the priest had no answer for her then.

Six years ago, when I was diagnosed with endometrial cancer, I was much calmer and took it in my stride. I am thankful for God's abundant blessings during those trying years which enabled me to give my three daughters the best in life without ever having to feel short-changed since their father was no longer around.

Every curve ball or personal tragedy in our lives presents an opportunity for us to learn something. Life would be easier without curve balls. Curve balls don't have to take us out of the game and we do have a choice in how we respond to the challenges thrown our way.

For me, it is my faith in God that has brought me thus far, and I hope that, like Horatio Spafford, I will always remain spiritually committed and unwavering in my faith, come what may.

● Regina William is an ex-journalist turned head of communications, now full-time grandmother to three, crisscrossing the globe to play the role. She can be reached at regina.william1223@gmail.com.



THE MUSTARD SEED JOURNEYS

Joanne Wong

He is at the entrance, let Him in



Today we celebrate Palm Sunday, the first day of the holiest of weeks. It is a day when our Lord Jesus Christ humbly made His royal entrance into Jerusalem on a donkey all those years ago.

He entered the city with shouts for joy and rejoicing amidst a parade-like atmosphere, a celebration of sorts. A day that turns so very drastically as we journey with Him towards the end of the week.

And we all know how the story goes — the same people who welcomed Him into the city, also called out for Him to be crucified.

And then finally, we end this Passion Week with His triumphant resurrection where He is installed and reigns today as King over all the earth and heavens.

I read in an article some words that vividly describe the emotional highs and lows of this Holy Week: hosanna, confrontation, betrayal, denial, scourging, crucifixion, tomb and resurrection — "He is not here! He is risen!" — the glory of Easter.

So, perhaps Palm Sunday is a timely moment for us to pause and remember Jesus and His selfless love as He prepared Himself to die on the cross for our sins.

I wonder how Jesus must have felt, knowing that even as He rode into Jerusalem with people waving palms around Him joyfully, that He was riding to His suffering and death on the cross. If it were me, I would have turned the donkey around and headed as quickly as I could in the other direction. But such is the unfathomable love and sacrifice of Jesus.

Palm Sunday also means that we are near the end of our 40 days of Lent and, unlike previous years, I decided this year to reflect on how this Lenten season has been for me.

I think too often we set our sights on very lofty goals during Lent. We want to abstain from everything we like. We want to attend all the Masses, novenas and Stations of the Cross that we can fit into our schedules. We want to give more alms and donations to those in need.

And when we fall short (as we so often do as humans), we feel bad for not keeping up to all that we have planned and berate ourselves for not being holy enough, not being good enough.

Or we could maybe overplay our 'holiness card' and be the perfect Christian during these 40 days, only to revert to our old ways and overindulge once Lent is over, forgetting the Lenten call to pray, fast and give alms.

So, what has my journey been like this Lenten season? Has Jesus made His royal entrance into my heart? Have I become closer to Him during these 40 days?

Have I shared my gifts of time, money, love, and attention with those in need? Have

I used the Gifts of the Spirit gifted to me? Have I abstained and fasted enough? Have I prayed or read the Bible enough?

And I find myself sadly coming up short. I have had trouble keeping the simple goals I have set.

But this year it's different. I am not beating myself up about not having such good Lent grades.

I am, instead, revelling in how much closer I am to Him. I am remembering the moments when I felt Him during my moments of prayer, the moments when I sat alone to hear Him. I remember giving thanks and praising Him in song. I remember packing soap to sell at church for almsgiving, the fellowship and friendship made with other sisters in Christ. I remember giving time for my family, friends and children, doing things they want instead of doing things I want.

This Lenten season has also revealed my weaknesses, the areas that I can improve on, not only during these 40 days, but each and every day.

Indeed, this season is showing me more clearly that it's not just about the 40 days of Lent. Lent is a journey that we all must take

daily.

It is about working on all the different parts of us that are not that Christ-like, to acknowledge them and work on overcoming them.

It is showing me the need for me to continue to seek God's voice daily and to be kinder and more generous with the time and gifts He has given me. It has taught me to judge myself less harshly. To be patient with myself and to try and see myself as how God sees me.

It is a reminder to realise my biases, imperfections and blind spots and seek to change myself. It is about acknowledging my sins, letting go of the things that bind me and realising that I can be redeemed by His death on the cross.

And I think most importantly, it is the calling to give everything I have to Him, to draw closer to Him and seek Him and to encounter Him and His love and forgiveness. It is embracing His salvation and seeking His reconciliation, and freedom.

Without God, we cannot make our life work. Our lives will always be meaningless and empty.

So, as we prepare ourselves for the week ahead and focus on the most important events in history, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, let us remember that He is at the entrance of your heart.

It is never too late to open the door of your heart to welcome Him, despite what you have or have not done — you just have to let Him in.

● Joanne Wong is on a journey towards having faith the size of a mustard seed. She welcomes thoughts and suggestions on how to have a closer walk with God. Email her at joanne.wpm@gmail.com



Fr Ron Rolheiser

Binding and loosing

Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. These words of Jesus apply not just to those who are ordained to ministry and administer the Sacrament of Reconciliation, but to everyone inside the body of Christ. All of us have the power to bind and to loose.

What is this power? How do we bind and loose each other on earth in a way that engages heaven?

One part of this allows for some easier explanation. Here's an example: If you are a member of the Body of Christ and you forgive someone, Christ forgives that person and he or she is loosed from sin. Likewise, if you, as part of the Body of Christ, love someone and remain connected to him or her, that person is connected to the Body of Christ and, through you (biblically), touches the hem of Christ's garment, even if he or she is not explicitly confessing that. That is one of the incredible gifts given us in the incarnation.

But what about the reverse? Suppose I refuse to forgive someone who has wounded me in some way; suppose I hold grudges and refuse to let go of the wrong that another has done to me; am I binding that person in sin? Does God also refuse to forgive and let go because I refuse to forgive and let go? How does the Body of Christ work regarding the "binding" part of the power that Jesus gave us?

This is a difficult question, though a couple of preliminary distinctions can shed some light on the issue.



To begin with, the logic of grace — and grace, like love, has a logic — only works one way. In grace, just as in love, you can be gifted beyond what you deserve, but the reverse is not true. The algebra of undeserved grace works only one way. Love can give you more than you deserve, but it cannot punish you more than you deserve. God gives us the power to set each other free, but not the same kind of power to keep each other in bondage.

Second, in this life, as C.S. Lewis used to say, hell can blackmail heaven, but this is not true in the other realm. Thus, while we can hold each other captive, psychologically and emotionally, on this side, God does not ratify those actions.

When we bind each other here in this world by refusing to forgive each other, that refusal does not bind God to do likewise. Put more simply, when I hold a grudge against someone who has wronged me, keeping him constantly aware that he has done wrong, I

am keeping that person tied to their sin — but God isn't endorsing this. Heaven will not go along with my emotional blackmail.

These distinctions though provide only an ambience for an understanding of this. What does it mean to bind a person?

The Christian power to bind and loose is the power to bind and loose in conscience, in truth, in goodness, and in love. When I refuse to forgive another, when I hold a grudge, I am acting not as the Body of Christ, nor as an agent of grace, but precisely as part of the very chain of sin and helplessness that Christ was trying to break. When I act this way, it is I who need to be loosed from sin since I am acting contrary to grace. My non-forgiveness may well bind another person emotionally, keeping her bound in that way to her sin, but it is the very antithesis of the power that Christ gave us.

Biblically, we bind each other when, in love, we refuse to compromise truth and

when we refuse to give each other permission to take false liberties and make bad choices. Thus, for example, parents bind their children when they, lovingly but clearly, refuse to give them permission to ignore Christ's teaching on marriage and sexuality. We bind a friend when we refuse to give him our approval to cheat in his business in order to make more money. A friend binds you when she refuses to bless your moral compromises.

In Robert Bolt's play, *A Man For All Seasons*, we see Henry VIII literally beg Thomas More to bless his marriage to Anne Boleyn. Henry appeals to their friendship, appeals to their shared humanity, and tries to morally bully Thomas by telling him that his refusal to approve is timidity and arrogance. Yet Thomas refuses to approve. He binds Henry in conscience and Henry knows he is bound. In the end, he kills Thomas for his refusal to compromise and give permission, to (biblically) loose him.

Ever since God took on concrete human flesh, grace has a visible human dimension. Heaven is watching earth — and is letting itself be helped by the best of what we do down here, but not by the worst of what we do down here.

● **Oblate Fr Ron Rolheiser**, theologian, teacher, and award-winning author, is President of the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, TX. He writes a weekly column that is carried in over 90 newspapers around the world. He can be contacted through his website www.ronrolheiser.com.

Why you should go on a retreat

Seek the blessings of a time of holy rest with Our Lord, for 'There is no one gentler than God in revealing ourselves to ourselves.' Every retreat we take is a kind of practice for what we will be doing for all of eternity: worshipping and resting in the Lord.

"On my second day, God healed my marriage in the hermitage."

Given that her husband wasn't present, this female retreatant's statement confirmed for me not only that miracles still happen, but that one potential blessing of retreats is healing — whether physical, emotional or spiritual. Some of the blessings that result from a faith-based retreat are tangible; others are perceptible only in the soul.

When most people are asked why they don't go on retreat, they'll respond that they just don't have the time. It's an interesting response, given that God has given us all the time that we have. When we take time for a faith-based retreat, we are really giving back to God that which already belongs to Him. The blessings that flow from that conscious engagement with God are plentiful.

The foremost blessing of a retreat is the recognition that God is God, and we are not. Going on a retreat demonstrates a posture of humility. We approach the Holy Trinity, on our knees, acknowledging our place in the universe before God.

If we desire authentic friendship with Christ, we must spend time with him. A retreat is a wonderful, uninterrupted way of doing so.

A retreat offers the blessing of getting to know Christ better. Whether a silent or guided retreat, we are giving back to God the gift of time. The spiritual movements, stirrings,

communion and prayer that happen during that blessed time are a conversation that can last a lifetime. The Holy Spirit is our primary spiritual director, and through our time of contemplation, we come not only to know God better, but also ourselves. One retreatant once told me, "There is no one gentler than God in revealing ourselves to ourselves."

We are a wounded people. Each of us has been hurt in life, and we carry these wounds with us. A retreat offers the opportunity for a soul to be nourished and tended to by the Divine Healer. Repeatedly, as the executive director of a retreat centre, I encounter guests who describe how God has provided healing during their time of retreat.

One guest described the emotional healing she experienced from the ravages of breast cancer and chemotherapy while on retreat. Another guest described how the beauty of God's creation outside her hermitage window reminded her of a similar view from her childhood and provided some level of healing from previous abuse. Others have described God's assistance in helping to overcome addictions. Others describe a kind of healing that comes in the form of clarity or direction, or the removal of anxiety, as the Holy Spirit reveals God's will in profound, new or interesting ways.

Our ways are not God's ways.

Another blessing of retreats is that they offer a time of holy rest. In Mark 6:31, Jesus invites His disciples, and us, to "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while." Amidst the pace of our often-hecked, overscheduled, hyper-connected lives, retreats offer an invitation and an opportunity for a reset. We often live under the illusion that all that happens is because of our doing,



America photo

We invert reality. It is precisely when we are busiest and believe we cannot withdraw that we should. It is then that we need a reminder that we are not the centre of all things.

Retreats offer a pause from technology, social media, schedules, screens, work, shopping, even interacting with other people. Every retreat we take is a kind of practice for what we will be doing for all of eternity: worshipping and resting in the Lord. Like the white space in art, or the pause in music, retreats offer us a space for reflection and renewal. They allow us to be transformed by Christ.

It's good to remember that we "retreat" because God did so first. On the seventh day, God rested. Christ routinely went off to a solitary place to pray and told His followers to do likewise. If Jesus did so regularly, who are we to think it's not necessary for us? Only one thing is necessary. In Luke 10:42, Christ tells Martha that only one thing is needful: to sit at Christ's feet and listen to His word. There is no better place to do that than on retreat. It is there, before God, where we experience Christ's tender mercy, peace and love.

Just as exercise is a way to form our bodies, and remain healthy, a retreat is physical exertion for our souls. Retreats are how we work on the interior life, the life of the soul. They are vital for our own spiritual growth, renewal, transformation and development. Psalm 46:10 tells us, "Be still, and know that I am God ..."

Ultimately, though, we do not go on retreat for ourselves alone. While we do go to better ourselves, and strive for sainthood, we should leave our place of retreat and re-enter the world better: better wives and husbands, mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, friends, co-workers and parishioners. We should take the peace that God provides on retreat and bring that peace to our families, communities, churches, states, countries and world — for it is only through our own holiness, reflecting Christ, that we can leave the world a better place. — **By Tim Drake, Register**

Tim Drake serves as executive director of Pacem in Terris Hermitage Retreat Centre located near St Francis, Minnesota.

Little Catholics' Corner

HOLY WEEK

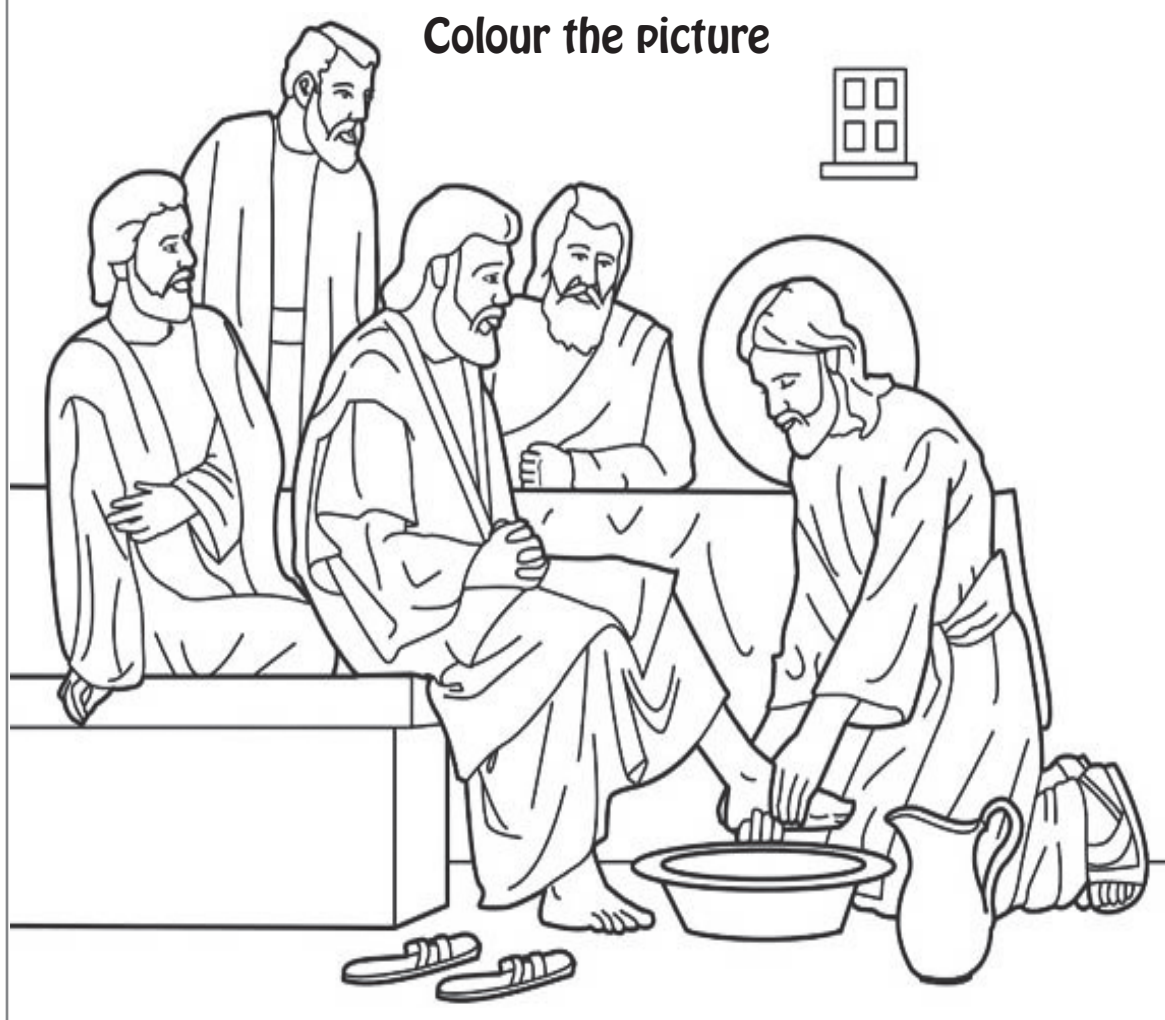
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PASSION
 LAST SUPPER
 NAILS
 CRUCIFIXION
 THORNS
 EASTER
 PALM SUNDAY

PASSOVER
 RELIGIOUS
 RESURRECTION
 CROSS
 GOOD FRIDAY
 VICTORY
 HOLY THURSDAY

AROSE
 JESUS
 JERUSALEM
 TOMB
 CHRISTIANITY
 PIERCED
 CALVARY

Colour the picture



Hello children,

Holy Week is the last week of Lent, and it recounts the final days of Jesus' life, including his death, burial, and resurrection.

It starts with Palm Sunday and ends with Holy Saturday. Holy Week has not always been celebrated. It was first observed about 600 to 1,000 years after the death of Jesus.

Palm Sunday is a celebration of Jesus fulfilling the prophecy from Zechariah with his triumphant entry into Jerusalem. We celebrate Christ as king on Palm Sunday.

Maundy Thursday, or the Last Supper, is when Jesus said the first Mass and made His Apostles the first priests. Jesus turned bread and wine into His body and blood so He could still be with us after He returned to His Father. We also remember Jesus' humility as He washed His disciples' feet.

On Good Friday we recollect Jesus' suffering and death on the cross for our sins. He offered His life, even though He never sinned, so we can go to Heaven. That's why we call it "Good" Friday.

Easter Sunday

Holy Week leads to the celebration of Jesus' triumph over death on Easter Sunday. His resurrection gives us hope that one day we will have eternal life with God!

Love, Aunty Gwen

Holy Week Symbols

Draw symbols that best describe the day.



YOUTH

APRIL 2, 2023

MISSIONARY WORK FEED THE HUNGRY

TAMPIN: The Lenten period is a sacred time in which Christians are encouraged to spend more time in prayer, missionary works and fasting, before Easter. This is what the youth ministry of St John Vianney put into practice.

The first week of Lent was about 'Visiting the Sick' while the second week brought them closer in faith by 'Praying for the Living and the Dead'. For the third week, the youth participated in 'Almsgiving' while the fourth week has been chosen to 'Feed the hungry'.

The youth gathered in the Casa de Vianney hall right after Sunday breakfast. They spent time chit chatting before gathering in a circle. The person in charge then gave a short briefing on the task for the week which was quite challenging as they had to go house to house to give food to the indigenous families.

The youth reached the indigenous village around 11.00am and visited a few houses. They made small talk to know the wellbeing of the indigenous people.



After reciting a decade of the Rosary and a prayer for the needy, the youth gave out a packet of chicken rice to each family member.

They also visited a few church members who were in need. Every person felt acknowledged to be visited and appreciated being included in the Lenten mission.

The youth returned to church around 12.30pm and ended the last Lenten mis-

sion with a prayer by the youth leader.

Feeding the hungry is truly one of the most compassionate works of mercy and it truly helps those in need. There are tons of people who are in need of basic necessities and food but are not being helped. This missionary work builds compassion and empathy to care and help those in need and also strengthens their faith in God. — **By Arianne Abigail D'Costa**

Finding love through God

PUCHONG: The Theology of the Body (TOB) for confirmands was held on March 18-19 at the Pastoral Centre of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Conducted by the archdiocesan team led by Sr Retta Savariannan, FdCC, it was a weekend of learning about oneself and an

eye opener for the 17-year-olds.

TOB is most often cast as an extended catechesis on marriage and sexual love. Introducing this at an age when these young teenagers are easily influenced, helps answer questions that have been on their minds. It certainly is that, but it is also so much more. Through the mystery of the Incarnate person and the biblical analogy

of spousal love, this catechesis illumines the entirety of God's plan for human life, from origin to its present state, with a better and clearer understanding.

TOB offers a fresh outlook of God's love that leads to deep awareness of human dignity, identity, and purpose. This vision produces wonder, peace, joy, and a sense of reverence for oneself and others.

TOB instils confidence, in one's ability to live life as a gift to the world.

Throughout the two-days, the confirmands were introduced to FTFF (Free, Total, Faithful and Truthful) and this was constantly repeated. The first speaker's topic, *Finding love through God*, was an eye-opener to many. Each speaker used personal experiences to relate to the 17-year-olds and this helped them reach out on a more personal level.

Towards the end of the first day, the participants were encouraged to attend the Sacrament of Reconciliation before participating in the evening Mass together with their respective families.

On the second day, the topics covered were: *Finding your vocation*, *Dating with a purpose* and *Purity and Living the Good (and Free) Life*. Many were particularly interested in the second topic and sharing with them the various examples of how to identify the red flags in a relationship and learning to know what is of God and what is not, had the impressionable young teenagers attentive and even openly engaging with the speakers.

There was also a separate session for the parents, conducted by Sr Retta in the afternoon, before concluding the two-day TOB seminar. — **By Bridget Antoinette Pereira**



Brian Jude Lazaroo presenting to the confirmands.

YOUNG ADULTS CALLED AND ENLIGHTENED with CYAN KL

KUALA LUMPUR: Young adults, like everyone else, are facing challenging times. In addition to their daily battles, these youngsters are also striving to discover their place in the world. They often lose track of making time for themselves, their families, friends, and God.

As a chance to pull young Catholics away from their busy jobs and campus lives into a contemplative time before the Lord, the Catholic Young Adults Network (CYAN KL) recently organised and hosted a stay-in retreat themed *God Calls and Enlightens Us* at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre March 3–5. The retreat also served as a gentle reminder that it's alright to take a break sometimes.

Facilitated by the Archdiocesan Single Adults and Youth Office

(ASAYO KL) Pastoral Team, the group was taken through a reflective activity based on the reading from Genesis 12:1-4 on the first night. The theme of blessings and potential growth (fresh start) for new opportunities and hope served as the basis for the reading.

Retreatants saw how Abram demonstrated his confidence in God by obeying His request. He accepted a task that would change his life and, even though he was advanced in age, did not let that keep him from carrying it out. Participants were asked to reflect on their feelings of anxiousness and worries and to associate them with Abram's feelings in the reading, where he didn't fear the adventure he was to embark on. They were encouraged to be attentive and to put their faith in the living God and the Holy Spirit, to find their calling and mission.

They headed to Sisiran Floria, Putrajaya to witness the sunrise the next morning. The young group also enjoyed a picnic by the lake and learnt some self-care techniques to manage their well-being.

Later, they discussed the passage from Timothy 1:8–10 and were asked to remember the kind of friendship Paul and Timothy shared, and how they should try being Paul or Timothy to their friends.

Their final reflection session was on the Gospel of Matthew 17:1-9 where they had to jot down their feelings or emotions if they were to witness the Transfiguration of the Lord. — *ASAYO KL*



Young Catholics enjoying the value of a strong youth group.

“After reflection, some said they experienced a sense of renewed faith during the retreat. Others spoke of the value of having a strong youth group that could routinely plan retreats, camps, or even get-togethers to prevent them from drifting away from God. New acquaintances and connections were forged throughout the retreat.” — *By Anita Fernandez, Church of the Holy Family*

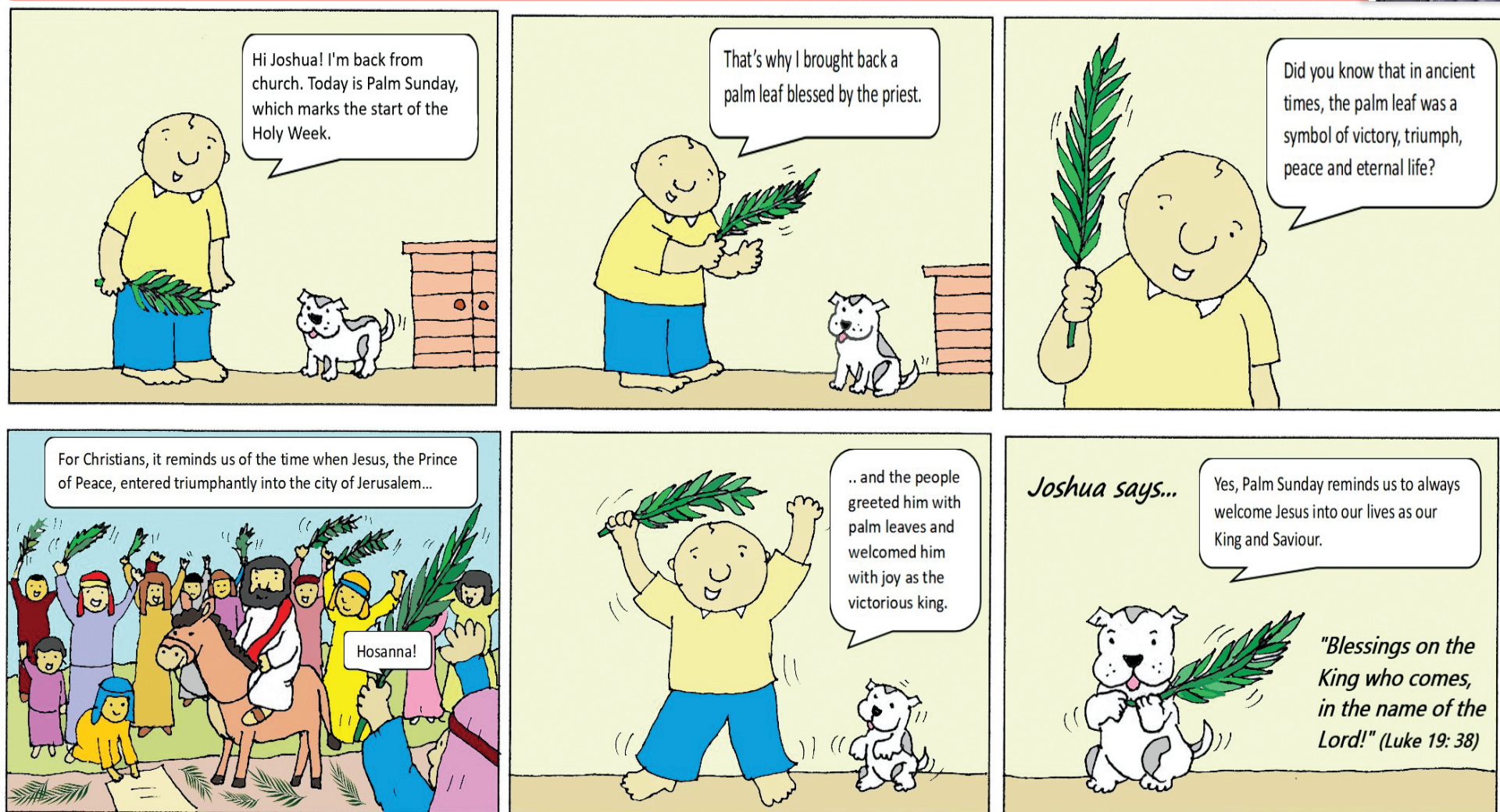
“It was an opportunity to let go of my daily life tasks and spend more time (than usual) with God. While waiting for the sun to rise, I reflected on my life.

“It felt like time had slowed down at that point and I had a clearer view of what was happening in my life. I had fun and it was nice meeting everyone at the retreat.” — *Joanne Lim, Church of St Francis of Assisi*

THE SIMPLE LIFE... by Dr Steven Selvaraju



Created by Dr Steven Selvaraju, this is a comic strip that wishes to tell simple stories of life and faith.



For enquiries, please contact:
Email: advertisement@herald.com.my
Tel: 03-2026 8291

MEMORIAM



**Remembering
you on your
birthday**

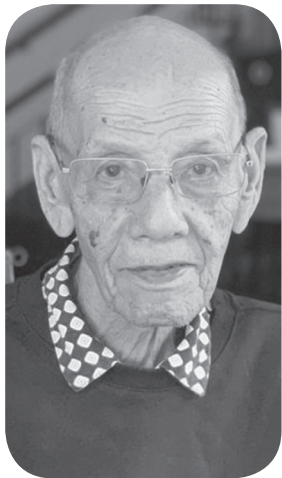
**Sherril Louisa
Netto-Vijayan**

April 4, 1985 –
Feb 22, 2023

*Though her smile is gone forever
and her hand we cannot touch;
We still have so many memories
Of the one we loved so much.*

*Her memory is now our keepsake,
with which we'll never part.
God has her in His keeping;
She'll live forever
locked safe within our hearts.*

40th day memorial Mass will be celebrated
at the Church of the Divine Mercy, Shah Alam
on Sunday, April 2 at 10am.



**Born to life
May 15, 1933
Called to the Lord
December 27, 2022**

**100th Day Memorial
In Loving Memory**

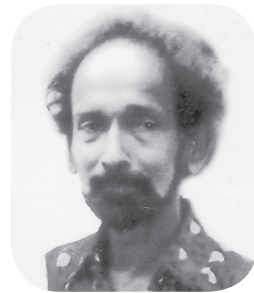
**May Jesus have mercy on the soul of
JAMES FERNANDEZ**

O Loving and merciful God,
we entrust the soul of our dearest Papa.
Through your Divine Mercy,
forgive his sins and grant him peace
and joy in your Holy Kingdom.
May the intercessions of Our Blessed Mother,
ever Virgin and all the Angels and Saints
accompany Papa safely
into your loving arms and light.
May his soul attain eternal happiness.
Rest in Peace dearest Papa.

Mass will be offered every Sunday at 9:30 am
at the Church of St Joseph, Sentul.

Deeply missed and forever cherished by
beloved Wife, Maria Fernandez
Children, In-laws
Grandchildren & Great Grand-Children.

**13th Anniversary
In Loving Memory of**



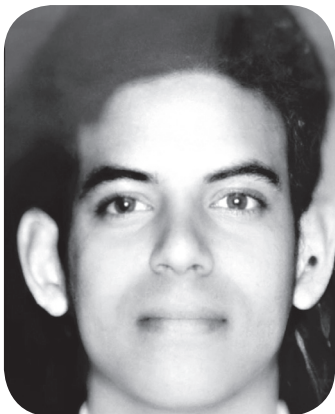
**ANTHONY
SATHIANATHAN S/O
R. P. ALWAR**

**19 August 1949 to
8 April 2010**

*"Miss you Papa"
I miss you more than ever.
Your guidance and your love.
But, I know you're still watching silently from above
The love you gave still warms me the way it always will
But leaving left an empty space that time can never fill
From heaven you're still giving the love you always had.
I know you hear me talk to you.
I will always love you Papa.*

Fondly remembered by your daughter, Maggie S.

**23rd Year Anniversary
In Loving Memory of
Our Beloved Brian Fernandez**



*Twenty-three years have passed
since God took you home.
Time has still not healed
our infinite sorrow.
Our hearts will always
cherish fond memories of you.
You are loved beyond words
and missed beyond measure.*

*Eternal rest grant unto him O Lord,
and let your perpetual light shine upon
him. May his soul rest in peace. Amen.*

**Departed:
14th April 2000**

Deeply missed and loved by,
Dad, Mum, Sisters, Brothers-in-law,
nieces, nephew and all loved ones.

**7th Year Anniversary
In Loving Memory of**



**MADAM
MARIAMMA
THOMAS**

From the Lord :
29th Oct 1938
To the Lord:
2nd April 2016

*In life we loved you dearly
In death we love you still
In our hearts we hold a place
That only you can fill.*

A Memorial Mass will be celebrated at the
Church of St Joseph, Jalan Sentul, K.L.
on Sunday, 2nd April at 9.30am.

Deeply loved and forever cherished by
Children, Grandchildren and loved ones.

**In Everloving Memory of
Our Dear Parents**

35th Anniversary 46th Anniversary



**Santiago Arokiasamy
s/o Santhanam Pillai** **Jeevaratnam d/o
Balevendram**
21.03.1903 - 10.04.1988 17.05.1909 - 05.04.1977

*Years have passed yet the pain of your loss remain.
You will always be our precious till we meet again.*

Always remembered by
loving daughter, grandchildren & great grandchildren.
(Queenie Sylvester)

*My flesh and
my heart may
fail, but God
is the strength
of my heart
and my
portion
forever.
Psalms 73:26*



**In loving memory of
FATIMA FRANCESCA
ANTONIA JOTHI**



**Returned
to the Lord on
8 April 2022**

Eternal rest grant unto her,
O Lord and let Perpetual
Light shine upon her.
May her soul Rest in
Peace, AMEN.

Dearly missed and
fondly remembered by:
Son: Nicholas
Nephew: Simon &
Dominic
Brother: Andrew
Family & Friends

*Jesus said to her,
"I am the resurrection
and the life. The one who
believes in me will live,
even though they die".
JOHN 11:25*

34TH ANNIVERSARY



**CHARLES MUTHU
(12.5.1916 - 8.4.1989)**

*Wonderful memories
woven in gold
These are the treasures
we tenderly hold
Deep in our hearts
you will always stay.
Loved and remembered
everyday.*

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☎ Trinity Funeral Services
✉ trinityfuneralservices3@gmail.com

REST IN PEACE

*So that Christ may
dwell in your hearts
through faith — that
you, being rooted
and grounded
in love.*

Ephesians 3:17

**40th Day
Memorial Service
In Loving Memory of**

**Ferry Burthis
Fernandez**
(Former Chief Clerk Ladang Sungai
Simpang Kiri Chaah, Johor)

March 16, 1950 – February 21, 2023

*"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that
whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life"*
John 3:16

Deeply missed by son, daughters, sons-in-law,
daughter-in-law, grandchildren and loved ones.

**Join us in the Memorial Service.
Celebration of Life**

**at the Church of the Assumption, No. 70 Jalan Templer 46050
Petaling Jaya, Selangor on Saturday, 1st April 2023 @ 6.00pm.**

Memorial Services will also be celebrated at the following Churches:
Church of the Visitation, Seremban on 1/4 @ 6pm & 2/4 @ 9am.
Church of St Thomas More, Subang Jaya on 1/4 @ 6pm & 2/4 @ 8.30am
Church of Holy Redeemer, Klang on 1/4 @ 6pm & 2/4 @ 11.15am



Catholic climate group urges faith values in finances

VATICAN: Faith-based groups, including Catholic dioceses, universities, schools, and religious congregations, should align their financial activities with their faith values for sustainable development, says a global Catholic climate group.

The *Laudato Si'* Movement (LSM), a global network of Catholics working for climate and ecological justice released four guides with the aim to ensure sustainable banking, investing, divesting, and insurance, the group said in a press release on March 22.

These guides have been prepared in collaboration with UK-based *FaithInvest*, a nonprofit organisation that empowers faith-based organisations to invest in line with their values.

The LSM is named after Pope Francis' celebrated environmental encyclical *Laudato Si'* published in 2015.

The movement's executive director, Tomás Insua, said the guides support the "ecological conversion" that the Pope has called for.

"*Laudato Si'* Movement has created these financial guides to support the ecological conversion that Pope Francis calls us to in *Laudato Si'*. Many have wondered how to take action on ecological economics. We hope that these guides, created with input

from partners around the world, will help point the way forward," he said.

The financial guides take a three-part "See-Discern-Act" approach, helping equip dioceses, universities, schools, and religious to analyse and take action, the LSM said.

FaithInvest chief executive, Martin Palmer, said, "Research shows major faith groups run half of the world's schools, a quarter of its colleges and universities, and a third of its hospitals."

"Collectively, they own a 10th of the world's forests and manage billions of dollars of investments. So, what they do with their assets and investments matters," he pointed out.

The guide seeks to educate concerned people about sustainable outcomes.

Firstly, a better understanding of why sustainable finance is vital to "correcting models of growth which have proved incapable of ensuring respect for the environment." (*Laudato Si'*, 6)

Secondly, a review of current financial practices to help determine if they are supporting unethical and unsustainable businesses.

Thus, these guides seek to advise on how to move forward to a more sustainable model of banking, investing, divest-



The *Laudato Si'* Movement in partnership with *FaithInvest* has launched a series of resources that seek to integrate the principles of ecology and economics to create a more sustainable and equitable future. (UCA News Photo/*Laudato Si'* Movement)

ing, and insurance.

They recommend establishing a committee of leaders who contribute to financial and social decisions; determining the right sustainable institution that meets their goals, with a suggested checklist to create profiles for easy comparison; making a final decision based on their process of approval;

and monitoring for the long term.

However, these guides are for educational purposes only, the LSM said.

"The guides do not constitute or intend to constitute investment advice or any investment service and are not a substitute for professional investment advice," it added.

— ucanews.com

Donors pledge to help rebuild Türkiye and Syria

VATICAN: Donors at a European Union-led conference have pledged seven billion euros (RM33.5 billion) to help rebuild Türkiye and Syria after last month's devastating earthquakes.

Although the donation will be welcome, according to Turkish calculations, the cost of the destruction caused by the earthquake will reach 104 billion dollars (RM460.36 billion).

The UN Development Programme (UNDP) also estimates the total financial burden for Türkiye will be around \$103.6 billion (RM458.6 billion).

The tremors on February 6 were the worst natural disaster to strike this region in recent times — more than 56,000 people killed in Türkiye and Syria.

With so many survivors turned into refugees, the primary goal is to urgently cover such needs

as shelter, food, and schooling.

More than one million people were left homeless in Türkiye alone, and aid agencies say over five million people need shelter assistance in Syria. This number comes to a population already suffering mass displacement.

UNICEF says shelter, water sanitation facilities, healthcare including mental health and psychosocial support, protection and continuity of learning remain a priority need.

According to the World Health Organisation, about 26 million people have been impacted by the disaster.

Separately, heavy rainfall and storms on March 15 resulted in flooding in Adiyaman and Sanliurfa, exacerbating the situation for vulnerable children and families living in informal settlements. — **By Nathan Morley, Vatican News**



A woman walks on the rubble of a collapsed building in southeast Türkiye.

St. Peter's Church, Melaka EASTER TRIDUUM

(6 – 9 April 2023)

*** No Parking within the Church Compound on Holy Thursday & Good Friday
due to the Procession route & tentage ***

Thursday of the Lord's Supper (6 April)

8.00pm to midnight Mass of the Lord's Supper followed by procession to the Altar of Repose for Vigil until midnight.

Good Friday: Service of the Lord's PASSION (7 April)

For the Evening Procession, candles purchased from outside are not allowed in the Church Compound. Only candles with cup holders which will be sold within the Church Compound are allowed

7.00 am Gate will be open for veneration in the "Passion Room" in the Church.

1.00 pm Veneration ends. Church Door will be closed in order to prepare for Good Friday Service.

2.00 pm Church Door re-opens to allow people to be seated for Good Friday Service.

3.00 pm The enactment of the Crucifixion of Our Lord will take place at the Altar followed by Divine Mercy Chaplet, Stations of the Cross, Good Friday Service and Veneration of the cross.

Thereafter there will be a Procession from St. Peter's Church to Jalan Bendahara, Jalan Bunga Raya Pantai and back to the church.

Holy Saturday (8 April)

10.00 am Church will be open till 12 noon

8.00 pm Easter Vigil Mass @ St Peter's Church

Easter Sunday (9 April)

8.30 am Mass @ Immaculate Conception, Portuguese Settlement

10.30 am Mass @ St Peter's Church

5.00 pm Mass @ Assumption Chapel