

## Think and feel with the Church

The chemistry of Discernment is not “my opinion versus yours” or “my interpretation versus yours”.

The chemistry of Discernment is *Sentire cum Ecclesia*. The closest English translation is “Think and Feel with the Church.”

This is possible because Jesus the Christ is RISEN and has entrusted His Mission to be continued by His Apostles and their successors, with the disciples and People of God entrusted to them in the Church and in the world.

So “be of good cheer for I have overcome the world” John 16:33.

Have a Cheerful Easter.

*Sebastian Francis*  
Rt Rev Sebastian Francis  
Bishop of Penang  
April 9, 2023



# One heart and mind with the Risen Lord

*Is Jesus reigning as God in our personal life, family, community, ecological matters and society?*

**A** blessed Easter my brothers and sisters who are companions on a journey with the Lord Jesus.

Alleluia, Jesus our Lord is Risen, after having suffered the Passion and Death which He prophesied to His disciples (Matt. 16:21, Mark. 8:31, Lk. 9:22).

As His followers, Christ's resurrection is the source and foundation of our faith, hope and love.

St Paul himself, in the beginning was an anti-Christ. However on his way to Damascus to persecute the followers of Jesus, he encountered the risen Lord. He converted, joined the disciples and even protected them. (Acts. 9:1-9).

As someone who personally experienced an encounter with the risen and living Jesus, St Paul, with confidence and conviction, gave

witness to God's people at Corinth. “If Christ has not risen, the Good News we proclaim and the faith you have in Christ is in vain.” (1 Cor. 15:14; 19).

Faith in the risen and living Christ is the source of joy and pride of Jesus' disciples, from then until now, who live “one in heart and mind” (Acts. 4:32).

Belief in the resurrected and living Christ is the source of commitment and steadfastness of Jesus' followers, even unto death, as witnessed by martyrs like St Stephen (Acts. 7:54-60).

What about us, the current followers of Jesus? Some of us were baptised at birth. Some were baptised more recently, and some baptised during the Easter Vigil.

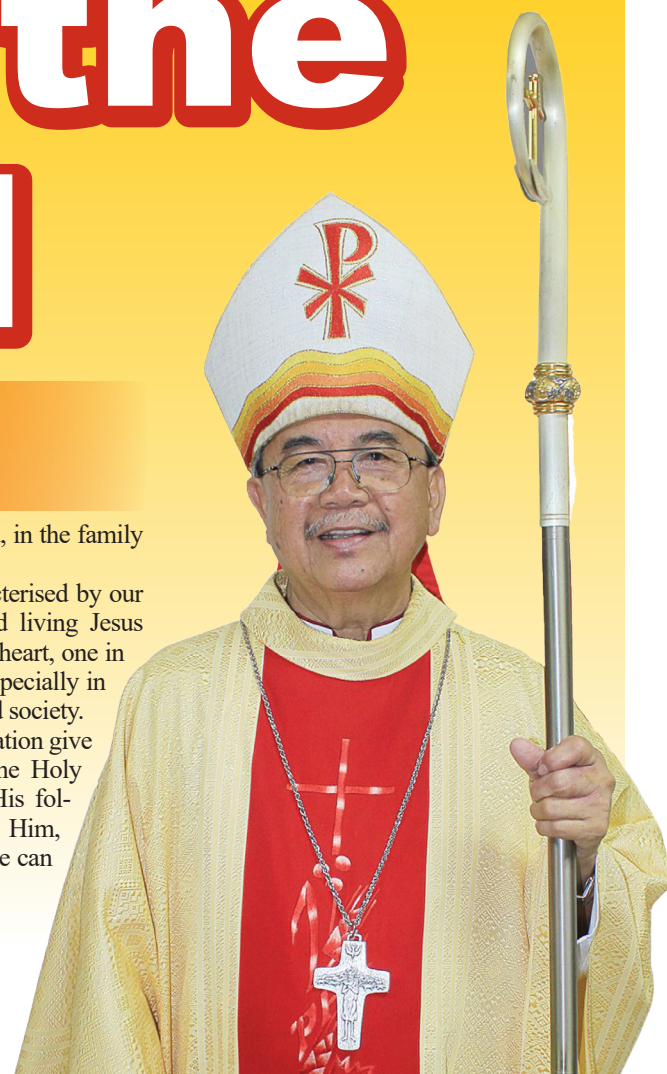
The Sacrament of Baptism is the manifestation of our faith, hope and love for Jesus, who is risen, alive and with us. Do we sincerely ac-

cept Jesus as our personal Lord, in the family and in the community?

True Christian faith is characterised by our relationship with the risen and living Jesus — influencing us to be ‘one in heart, one in mind’ with Him in all things especially in the family, Church, ecology and society.

May this year's Easter celebration give us a new zeal prompted by the Holy Spirit to journey together as His followers, to faithfully “Come to Him, listening to His Word so that we can do His Will.” (Lk. 6:46-48)

*Cornelius Piong*  
+ Rt Rev Cornelius Piong  
Bishop of Keningau  
April 9, 2023





# HERALD

ESTABLISHED 1994

Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre  
5, Jalan Robertson, 50150, KL  
Tel / Whatsapp: 03-20268291

Website : [www.heraldmalaysia.com](http://www.heraldmalaysia.com)  
Facebook : [www.facebook.com/heraldmalaysia](http://www.facebook.com/heraldmalaysia)

Jointly published by the  
Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur,  
Diocese of Malacca Johore, Diocese of  
Penang and Diocese of Keningau

## EDITOR

Patricia Pereira  
[editor1@herald.com.my](mailto:editor1@herald.com.my)

## ASSISTANT EDITOR

**Social Media Coordinator**  
Sandra Ann Inbaraj  
[sandra@herald.com.my](mailto:sandra@herald.com.my)

## WRITER

**Children's Section**  
Gwen Manickam  
[gwen@herald.com.my](mailto:gwen@herald.com.my)

## GRAPHIC DESIGNER

**Youth Section**  
Amanda Mah  
[amanda@herald.com.my](mailto:amanda@herald.com.my)

## BAHASA MALAYSIA

Melania Liza Magnus  
[liza@herald.com.my](mailto:liza@herald.com.my)

## MANDARIN

Adelina Wong  
[yin4482@gmail.com](mailto:yin4482@gmail.com)

## TAMIL

RK Samy  
[rksamy3@hotmail.com](mailto:rksamy3@hotmail.com)

## ADMINISTRATOR

Advertisements / Memoriam / Subscription  
[advertisement@herald.com.my](mailto:advertisement@herald.com.my)

## LETTERS

[letterseditor@herald.com.my](mailto:letterseditor@herald.com.my)

## EDITOR'S NOTE

When was the last time your Christian faith gave you comfort and eased the burdens of daily living? When was the last time you heard or read something about the Catholic Church that provoked lighthearted laughter? Do you truly walk with Our Lord during His Passion and Death and then rejoice at His Resurrection? Or, has it simply become just another liturgical season of prayer, fasting and almsgiving, after which you get back to the dreaded business of every day?

Many of us have become so comfortable with the Easter story that it somehow fails to surprise us anymore. We've heard the story too many times, we know the ending. We fail to stand amazed at the empty tomb. But it's so much more — deeper and broader and far more demanding than that.

The story of Jesus rising from the tomb should stop us dead in our tracks. We must unlearn our weariness with the narrative and hear it for what it truly is. We must follow and stand astonished with the disciples at the empty tomb, for truly, there is no such thing as a 'lost cause' in God's kingdom, nothing is beyond redemption. The Resurrection is anything but humdrum.

Resurrection isn't just God's business — it's ours too, if we choose to follow Him. An invitation to follow Jesus is an invitation to take up one's cross, to walk the dark and difficult road to where, apparently, it all ends. But it's also an invitation to share in Christ's resurrection, life and body. The Church is often referred to as 'the body of Christ'. If we are to take this seriously, we must act like the body of Christ — like those who have endured pain and suffering in the service of others, but who have also experienced God's resurrection, the transformation of our own lives. Such transformation is never a purely personal affair — it must be for the greater good, the wider community: transformed people naturally offer transformation to others. We are called to nothing less than this: to live

lives transformed by God's audacious love so that those around us may know resurrection, transformation and hope.

A word that has become a staple of Pope Francis' pontificate is "accompaniment", which implies "movement." Our call to discipleship means we cannot stay stagnant but must grow in our lives of faith to help others — be they family, friends, yes, and even strangers — to do the same. The Holy Father has reminded us again and again that we need to go out and be an evangelising Church. We must remember we are all catechists by virtue of our baptism, and that each day is an opportunity for evangelisation.

Since the beginning of his pontificate, Pope Francis has said the mission of the Church is "to heal wounds and warm the hearts of the faithful." Reflecting on what's transpired in recent decades, we are learning that there is a lot of brokenness in our Church. We must be a Church of mercy, and we need to accompany those who cross our path on their spiritual and human journeys. We need to make sure no one walks alone, and we need to be a Church that offers listening, understanding and patience.

Let us hope that this Easter season is a time of joy and laughter for all of us — individually, as families and parish communities, and as an arch/diocesan and universal Church. There is too much "heaviness" in our lives. Too much grief and sorrow and anxiety. Too much bad news. Too much sadness and sin. We need more laughter. More lightheartedness. More joy.

May this season of grace bring us such lasting joy and let us share this joy generously with others, especially those in the 'shadows' and on the margins of our society.

A happy and blessed Easter to you and your loved ones.

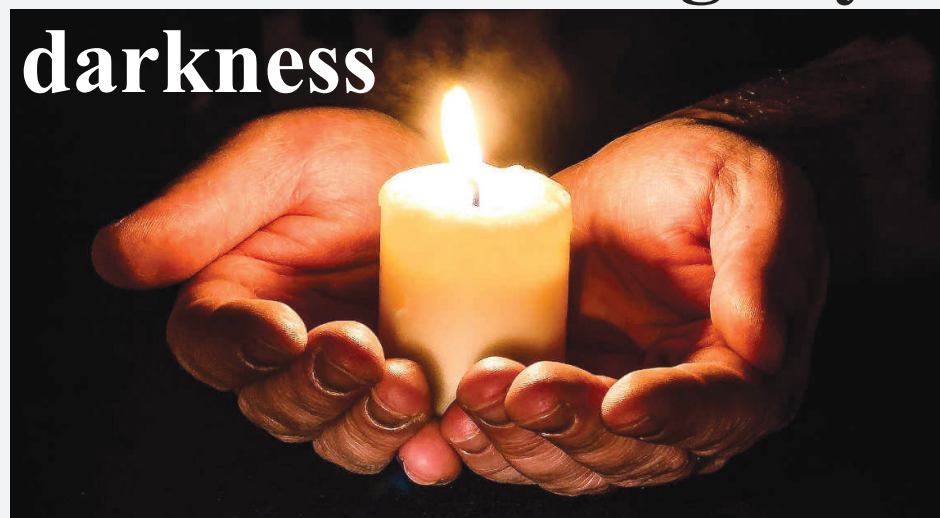
Patricia Pereira



# The light of Christ shines brightly through the darkness

In 2017, the DCEU (The DC Extended Universe) released a movie titled *The Justice League*. At the end of that movie, Lois Lane, the love interest of Superman, gave a short exposition as a conclusion to the movie. This is what she said, "Darkness, the truest of darkness, is not the absence of light. It is the conviction that the light will never return. But the light always returns, to show us things familiar — home, family and things entirely new or long overlooked. It shows us new possibilities and challenges us to pursue them. This time, the light shone on the heroes, coming out of the shadows to tell us that we won't be alone again. Our darkness was deep and seemed to swallow all hope, but these heroes were here the whole time to remind us that hope is real, that you can see it. All you have to do is look."

What does this have to do with our celebration of Easter? For the past three years, we've lived through a sort of darkness, the sort that nearly paralysed our lives and destroyed our hope. Many people were nearly convinced that there would never be a light at the end of the tunnel. Now, we emerge once again into the light of life. It's not that the light abandoned us, it is just that we were not able to recognise it in our lives. But as Lois Lane says, the light always returns to show us things familiar, things that we have overlooked during the darker times in our lives. This light, unlike the one mentioned in



the Justice League movie, is none other than the light of Christ that comes to us every Easter.

Light and water are central elements of our Easter celebration. The light of Christ shines out brightly through the darkness of our lives to bring to light what is hidden deep in ourselves. The Paschal Candle is lit to remind us of this eternal light. Other than lighting our darkness, the heat of the flame also "burns" away what is impure in our hearts and souls. As humans, we have to acknowledge that we always fall short of the glory of God and, very often, we live lives that are not in conformity with what God commanded us to do. Just like wax that is melted away from the candle, the heat from this flame, which is the pure light of God, "burns" away what is not pure within us so that we can emerge as chil-

dren of the light rather than as children of the world or children of darkness.

Of course, once these impurities are "melted" away from us, there has to be some means to cleanse it properly. This is where the waters of Baptism come into play. The water that we bless during the Easter Vigil is not just used for the Sacraments of Initiation, it is also sprinkled on us as part of the Easter Liturgy. Other than reminding us of our Baptism, it also "washes" away all the impurities that came from the heat of the flame of the Paschal Candle. This double effect of flame and water helps us to emerge out of the darkness of Lent and into the wonderful light of Easter, to remind us that we will never be alone. The hope that the light of Easter brings is real but are we able to see it as something real in our lives or are we just going through

## Reflecting on our Sunday Readings with Fr Philip Tay, OCD

### Easter Sunday of the Lord's Resurrection (A)

Readings: Acts of the Apostle 10:34, 37-43

Colossians 3:1-4;

Gospel: John 20:1-9

the motions of the celebration? If we truly believe in the hope of Easter, then the Paschal Candle is there to constantly remind us that the hope that it brings is entirely real and not a figment of our imagination.

As Andy Dufresne states so aptly in the movie *The Shawshank Redemption*, 'hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things. And no good thing ever dies.' We can find real hope if we know where to look; if we look for hope in the things of this world, then our hope will be nothing but a fleeting emotion. If, however, we look to Christ as our source of hope, then it is a hope that will never die because Jesus gave us the promise that He will be always with us until the end of time. That is a comforting thought indeed because it is with this hope that we continue our journey on this pilgrimage of life, until we reach our heavenly homeland.

Wishing all of you a blessed Easter.

Fr Philip Tay OCD is the assistant priest in the Church of the Visitation, Seremban.





## KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

### Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

#### April

- 9 **Easter Mass – Golden Jubilee, Church of the Risen Christ, KL**
- 10 **5th Annual General Meeting – Federation of Christian Mission Schools Malaysia**
- 11 **Meeting – Sri Seronok Board**
- 16 **Feast Day Mass – Church of the Divine Mercy, Shah Alam**
- 17-18 **Biennial General Conference – Christian Federation of Malaysia**
- 20 **Meeting – Archdiocesan Finance**
- 25-26 **Clergy Monthly Recollection**



## PENANG DIOCESE

### Diary of Bishop Sebastian Francis

#### April

- 9 **Easter Sunday – Mass at the Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam at 11.30am**
- 10 **Meeting – Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference – Office of Social Communications, ZOOM at 4.00pm**
- 15 **Mt Miriam Cancer Hospital (MMCH) Charity Dinner 2023 – 47th Anniversary of MMCH & 60th Anniversary of Franciscan Missionaries of the Divine Motherhood (FMDM) Sisters, G Hotel at 7.00pm**
- 18 **Council of Priests (COP) at 10.00am**
- 18-19 **Clergy Monthly Recollection (CMR)**
- 19-20 **Permanent Deacons' Formation**
- 22 **St George's Church at 3.00pm**



## MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

### Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

#### April

- 14 **Online Exco Meeting – Episcopal Commission for Migrants and Itinerants**
- 15 **Meeting – MJ Mission School Committee at Oasis, Kluang**
- 28 **Confirmation Mass – Church of the Holy Family Church, Ulu Tiram**
- 29-30 **Auxiliary of the Apostolate Weekend – MAJODI Centre**

# Evangelise to neighbours, society and the world

By Julie Lim

KUALA LUMPUR: The Institute for New Evangelisation (INE) recently organised a forum titled, *The Time for Mission ... is Now!* The panellists comprised the Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur, Most Rev Julian Leow, and the Bishop of Penang, Rt Rev Sebastian Francis. The forum was moderated by INE chairman, Michael Xavier, and emceed by INE administrator, Jeanne J Saw. More than 50 participants attended the forum, held virtually on March 18.

Bishop-in-Charge of INE, Rt Rev Bernard Paul of Malacca Johore Diocese, reminded that the Church exists to evangelise. He said that for the Catholic Church, evangelisation takes three shapes, i.e., to evangelise to those who know not Christ and the Gospel; to re-evangelise to Catholics who have left the Church, and to awaken an evangelising Church with the remnants through ongoing Catechesis and a deepening of faith.

During the forum, Bishop Sebastian said he does not see mission as primarily happening within the Church, where the people serve in the various ministries. Instead, he sees mission as being sent to society, to the

The Time for Mission...is Now! with Archbishop Julian Leow (KL) & Bishop Sebastian Francis (Penang)



world, and to where one lives. "I believe many of our Catholics are on mission wherever they are in the world. Whatever they have received in Church by way of formation, by way of the Word of God and the sacraments, have empowered them to go on missions," he said.

Archbishop Julian said the mission is about discovering "God's will for me and finding one's mission and purpose on earth". He said a person can be a housewife, a businessman, or a priest, but most importantly, "be the best that you can be in whatever role God put you in."

When asked his thoughts on Catholics who have disengaged themselves from the

Church after the pandemic, Bishop Sebastian said he is a great believer in freedom. "Anything to do with faith, religion, and a conscience is a matter of freedom, and the Catholic Church is the first to uphold that." He said his focus is no longer on Church membership and trying to maintain the numbers. While traditionally, people thought of the Church as clergy, religious, and the laity, Bishop Sebastian sees a gradual shift in the Church becoming a Church of Apostles, a Church of disciples, and a Church of the People of God.

To watch this forum, go to: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HIUfnq7rxYY>



## Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #127

F12  
MJD NEWS  
UPDATES

### Greetings again dear people of God.

The Ramadan month is here. The Chinese will be visiting the graves of their dearly departed during this season of *Qing Ming*. Many homes, schools and clinics are in need of repairs after the floods in Johor. Abuse of children, power and position and environment still continue. *Menu Rahmah* or mercy provides affordable meals. But the price of food items have gone up manifold. Will we ever see the end to poverty, joblessness and homelessness?

**Reflecting on Current Times.** Lent is that time for us to slow down, eat less, pray more and care more. More so, it is time to reflect, to listen, to learn and be led by the Spirit. Quietening of self helps us hear our thoughts, our stirrings and our feelings. What does it indicate about ourselves? How nice that this month, the Christians, the Chinese and the Muslims look at self, the faith, the good deeds, the dead and dying, and the quality of life. May our religious preparations attune us to perceive the ways of God in our multiracial, multicultural and multi religious nation. Let love cast out fear. Let love and mercy heal.

### A thought for the week: Pond of Milk.

A king told some of his workers to dig a pond, and announced that each household was to bring a glass of milk during the night and pour it into the pond. One man prepared to take the milk to the pond that night. Later, he felt that he would discreetly pour in a glass of water instead, since the others would be bringing milk. He went and did his duty quickly.

The next day, the king found a pond full of water, not milk. The others too, had thought like that man; "I don't have to put the milk, someone else will do it".

**Lesson from the pond:** Be honest regardless of what others think or do. Honesty is related to the character. Do your part. Do not leave the care of the poor to others.

### Announcements for this Week

1. On April 29 and 30, the auxiliaries from the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur will be conducting a **vocation camp for single ladies**, from the ages 18-50. Contact Clara Paul for more info, 012-2509527.

2. **Kursus Evangelisasi Peribadi** organised by the KEP formators team of MJD begins on April 15 in Kluang and Muar; and April 16 at MAJODI Centre and Krubong.

3. **Formasi Untuk Pemudahcara, Lektor dan Pemazmur**, organised by the BM Liturgical Ministry of Malacca Vicariate, is happening on April 15 at the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Krubong.

4. **Open for Registration. The Montfort Youth Centre, Melaka offers courses in automotive engineering, information technology, general maintenance and agriculture. The admission date is July 23. Contact the MYC Office.**

**This Week's Question and Query.** The Q asks: Many are reluctant to be generous. What's their fear?

1. People are *afraid of not having*

**enough.** Creation gives generously of itself to provide for us. But humankind hoards or grabs, rather than share. This is called **scarcity mentality**.

2. The opposite of a scarcity mentality is an **abundance mentality**. With an abundance mentality we say: "**There is enough for everyone, more than enough:** food, knowledge, love ... everything." With this mind-set, we give away whatever we have, to whomever we meet. When we see hungry people, we give them food. When we meet ignorant people we share our knowledge; when we encounter people in need of love, we offer them friendship and affection and hospitality and introduce them to our family and friends.

3. When we live with this mind-set, we will see the miracle that **what we give away multiplies:** food, knowledge, love, blessings and graces. There is enough for everyone in need.

Remember the five loaves and two fish miracle:

Take. Bless. Break. Give.

The Easter Resurrection is a "COME OUT ORDER" to all of us. These words resounded at the tomb of Lazarus. Just like Lazarus, it is a call to leave our tombs of darkness, decay and death. Pick out His Voice as it floats to you. Listen to His Word; not the words that kill you. Let His Helpers unbind you, when you cannot do it yourself.

A blessed Easter to you

Bishop Bernard Paul



This year, 852 Elect were baptised during the Easter Vigil. In the next few issues, some of them share what led them to the faith.

## Wake-up call from the Lord

“I was born and raised in a loving Christian home, and my parents instilled the knowledge of Jesus and His love for me. Although I learned about our Lord, I did not have a healthy relationship with Christ, nor did I try to know Him personally.

“As I grew older, religion no longer played an active role in my life, and the lines between right and wrong blurred.

“Fast forward a few years into a strongly Hindu-based marriage, and blessed with three beautiful kids, I fell deep into temptation and sin. I got lost in the ways of the world, and my life was full of strife and misery. I had forgotten how to pray and how to seek His mercy.

“In 2021, at the peak of my divorce, my kids had a calling. They asked if I could teach them about Jesus. I was taken aback because, till that point, I had never convinced or persuaded them about Christianity.

“It was my biggest wake-up call. I had forgotten about Christ all those years, but He had not forgotten me. It took me long enough to figure out that His love endures forever.

“Upon coming home to Perak with my kids, I joined the RCIA course at the Church of the Sacred Heart, Kampar as I believed Catholicism is a strong foundation for my kids and me to grow in Christ.

“I am grateful for the help, and overwhelming support from Rachel, Leon, and Fr Simon Anand. I believe this is going to be a wonderful journey of learning, thinking, praying, and understanding. It is also a great opportunity to experience the Catholic faith.

“God repeatedly drew me back to Him. He showed me that I cannot do this life on my own, nor am I made to. He taught me to surrender everything to Him. I know God’s plans are what is best for me and my little ones.”

**Christine Jasmin Wong, Church of the Sacred Heart, Kampar**



## Finding Christ in adversity

“My journey into Christianity began when I decided to surrender my beloved child to Mother Mary. My daughter was in a coma after an accident and no amount of prayers in my previous faith had assisted or given us any hope. We were so heart broken and were at a loss, when my heart suddenly thought of Mother Mary. Initially, I encountered some challenges, when I approached the Church in Batu Pahat to accept my daughter as a Catholic. God’s grace came in the form of Fr William Pillay, who came to the hospital and anointed and baptised my beautiful daughter. A week later, my daughter Veronica made her final journey home to Lord Jesus.

“I was amazed at the peace of heart I felt after her baptism and the way her Mass was assisted by new friends of faith. The Mass in church was an eye opener to me, as well as how Catholics pray for the souls of the departed. I felt the mercy of Mother Mary who had kept my family together in the most challenging period of our life. All these events convinced me that Jesus is the Way of Life and Light. We are at peace, knowing our daughter’s soul is with Jesus in eternal light and in Mother Mary’s loving prayers.

“Judy Raj from the Church of the Sacred Heart welcomed us with a loving heart and introduced my wife, daughter and I, to the way of becoming Catholic. Our

RCIA journey began last Easter and we are on the way to becoming part of this beautiful community soon. Amen.”

**Isaac Ravendran, Church of the Sacred Heart, KL**



# Penang Diocese welcomes two new priests

By Carmel Dominic

BUKIT MERTA JAM: The Minor Basilica of St Anne played host to the sacerdotal ordination of Deacons Raymond Raj and Desmond Jansen on March 28. Bishops, priests, religious and seminarians, and about 1,500 lay Catholics, attended the sacerdotal ordination and Chrism Mass.

After the Calling of the Candidates, Bishop Sebastian Francis welcomed them into the order of priesthood. Then he began his sermon on the significance of the Chrism Oils.

The Chrism Mass is celebrated to consecrate the three Holy Oils — the Oil of Catechumens, the Sacred Oil of Holy Chrism and the Oil of the Sick. The Chrism Mass is also an expression of the fullness of the bishop’s priesthood and signifies the unity he shares with the priests that are entrusted to him.

Bishop Sebastian explained the meaning of his Coat of Arms, how the martyrdom of St Sebastian inspired it and that each of its five elements — love, truth, sacrifice, freedom and beauty are what motivates him to keep serving as the Bishop of Penang.

Then, he spoke about the goodness and beauty of the Holy Oils. It begins with the fragrance of the oils. Each oil has its own fragrance which entices both the minister and the recipients. Next is the feel of the oil. The soft and gentle nature of the oils. These are the physical attributes of the oils. Its spiritual attributes and the truth of these oils are grace, healing, anointing, consecration and forgiveness.

He went on to remind the two candidates of the identity and responsibilities that have been entrusted to them — as ministers of the Word and being in the service of the Eucharistic table which is the table of sacrifice.

He also emphasised that he, as a bishop, is incomplete without his priests and deacons.

The Chrism Mass is also an opportunity for ordained ministers of the Catholic Church to renew their vows to the bishop and Mother Church. He also explained the essence of the New Testament priesthood of Jesus Christ



The candidates reciting their Promise of Obedience to the Bishop. (photo/MBSA team) Pic inset from left: Fr Desmond Jansen and Fr Raymond Raj.

and quoted Isaiah 63:4. In a nutshell, the verse explains that those who hold the office of priest, take upon themselves the sins of the people that have been entrusted to them by the bishop.

This he said, is the ultimate challenge for all priests who represent Christ as a Shepherd. He added that the priesthood is not an individualistic order but rather, one that is universally shared with all those who have taken their vows for Holy Orders.

He reminded everyone to not put limits on God’s glory. He also encouraged everyone to not be left behind as we journey towards the Synod and the Jubilee Year of Hope 2025, as proclaimed by Pope Francis.

The Rite of Ordination continued after the blessing of the Holy Oils.

After Communion, the newly ordained priests gave their speeches. Fr Raymond spoke in Tamil and English. He thanked his family, formators and the friends he made while serving as a brother. He was touched by all those who came from near and far to witness his ordination. He said he shared a personal story with each one of them. They were all stepping stones to his becoming a priest.

Fr Desmond also thanked his fam-

ily, friends, formators, and all those who had inspired him by their faith. He thanked his late uncle who was the main catalyst in giving him the push he didn’t know he needed into the priesthood, by secretly signing him up for a vocation camp. Both the new priests gave God all the glory and honour for granting them their hearts’ desire.

What could be described as a profound and emotionally moving moment was the presentation of the ‘holy cloth’ by the newly ordained to their respective mothers. The presentation of the *Manutergium* is an old custom where the cloth that is used by the newly ordained to soak up the Holy Oil from the anointing of the hands is presented to the mother. This is to signify that everyone in Heaven and on Earth will know that she is a mother to a priest on the Day of Judgment.

The bishop later announced that Fr Raymond Raj will be assistant parish priest of the Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam and Fr Desmond Jansen will be assistant parish priest of City Parish, Penang

● Read how they were called by God in the Vocation Supplement out on April 23, 2023.

## We are all chosen, imperfect as we are

SIBU: For the love of their shepherds who dedicate their lives to serving the people, the faithful brushed off the drizzle to fill the Sacred Heart Cathe-

dral for the Chrism Mass March 29.

Better known as the Priest Day Mass here, the congregation prayed for their beloved priests, thanking

God for them and their dedication to their ministry.

Bishop Joseph Hii, in his homily, stressed on the common priesthood of the people of God. Through baptism, all the faithful share in the priesthood of Christ. The Chrism Mass, he said, is not just the Priest Day for priests.

Adding that we are all chosen, imperfect as we are, Bishop Joseph called for mutual forgiveness and reconciliation for both parties the clergy and the faithful — for shortcomings, weaknesses and expectations-not-met, more often than not due to lack of understanding, to look at the good side of one another and to always pray for one another to let the Holy Spirit work through everyone to build up the Church. — By Pauline Ho



The clergy renewing their vows.



# At Baptism we are all anointed to serve

By Gwen Manickam

MIRI: The diocese's annual Chrism Mass was held at the Cathedral of St Joseph on March 29. Faithful from the 14 parishes in the diocese filled the cathedral for the 7.30pm Mass.

Bishop Richard Ng was the main presider. Present for the first time at the Chrism Mass were four priests from the Vicariate of Brunei Darussalam, led by the vicariate's administrator, Fr Robert Leong. Also in attendance was the Claretians Provincial Superior of the Province of Chennai, India, Fr Jesu Doss CMF, who was visiting Miri.

Bishop Richard, in his homily, quoted from the day's reading from the Prophet Isaiah, "The spirit of the Lord has been given to me for He has anointed me."

He said the key word is anointing – the Lord anoints those He has chosen for a specific purpose, and that anointing gives the person the power, wisdom, and courage of the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus began His public ministry, He was anointed, empowered, and enriched by the Holy Spirit so He could preach and bring the Good News to the poor. We too received this anointing with Chrism Oil at Baptism. It sets us apart; it gives every Baptised person, not just the priest, a special character, that we are the anointed of the Lord.

The prelate added that there are two levels of priesthood – the common



Bishop Richard Ng consecrating the Oil of the Sick.

priesthood, shared by every baptised faithful, where we are anointed to be teachers, priests, and shepherds. From this common priesthood, God chose a few to the ministerial priesthood, which are the priests, who serve in a more specific way.

On the common priesthood, the prelate said, our anointing gives us the wisdom, courage, and knowledge to be God's instruments. We also need to sanctify (make holy) and enrich our lives and the lives of the people around us.

In the ministerial priesthood, the bishop said that the diocese is facing a vocation crisis due to the shortage of local priests and religious. The diocese currently has 15 local and 10 foreign priests. Sarawak is the only state in

Malaysia that gives visas for missionaries to work here, but the prelate isn't sure how long that arrangement will last.

Bishop Richard appealed to the congregation, "Unless you offer your children up as priests and religious, we will not have enough priests and we will be deprived of many things, including the Sacraments.

"If we cannot help ourselves, who can help us? If we don't stand up for our needs, don't expect others to come and help us. Please encourage and pray for more vocations to the priesthood," said the prelate, before proceeding with the Eucharistic part of the Liturgy.

After Mass, the parish priests from the various churches received their box of Holy Oils

## Do not let pride be your downfall

CHERAS: The Church of St Francis of Assisi organised the *Most Excellent Lenten Healing Rally* led by the Sisters of Putri Karmel @ Daughters of Carmel Sabah, March 24-26. The rally, spanning three days, featured talks on spiritual, emotional and physical healing through faith in God. Some 280 people from various parishes registered for the rally. A larger number of people joined on the last day for the Adoration and Healing session.

On Friday, participants were encouraged to come for the Stations of the Cross and Mass. After a pre-packed dinner, the rally began with an energetic Praise and Worship session by the choir and Fr Valentine Gompok OFM Cap.

Sr Maxim Soon, the main speaker, started off by introducing the Seven Deadly Sins and how the greatest of

them was pride. Through the course of the next three days, Sr Maxim, together with Sr Gerardine and Sr Giselle, spoke to the people about the dangers of committing the Seven Deadly Sins and how to resist temptations.

Sr Maxim said our sword and defence against temptation lies in the Word of God and we are called to contemplate verses from the Bible and to use them to battle temptations and unholiness. Although this sounds like a heavy topic, the Sisters' sessions had charisma and were light-hearted, making their talks enjoyable and engaging at the same time.

The three highlights of the rally would be the *Lectio Divina*, the *Seven Last Words* and the Adoration and Healing on the last day. *Lectio Divina*, which translates to Divine Reading,

is a method of reading the Bible that should be practised by all Christians. It requires the reader to read, contemplate, meditate and pray on the Word of God or our daily Bible readings.

The Sisters encouraged us to read the text from St Paul's *Letter to the Galatians* (5:16-22) and to contemplate a verse that touched us. *Lectio Divina* is a personal encounter with the Word of God and is one of the most effective ways to read the Bible which should be practised by all.

Sr Maxim then shared on the Last Seven Words of Jesus which she connected to the Seven Cardinal Sins (pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony, wrath, and sloth). Participants also spent time reflecting on their own sins. Sr Maxim encouraged the attendees to go for Confession.

The rally came to an end with an Adoration and Healing session which was open to everyone at the church. Participants were encouraged to bring their family members and friends and many people were healed as the Sisters and community prayed before the Blessed Sacrament and the Holy Spirit. More than 700 attended. Many were instantly healed of neck and shoulder pain, leg pain etc. while the Sisters continued to pray for those who were suffering from all kinds of bodily illnesses.

The session concluded with laying of hands on the participants and everyone left with a better relationship with God, fortified faith and a healthier body. — By Maria Faustina



The Putri Karmel sisters and participants during the Praise and Worship session.

## Never too late to know about Him

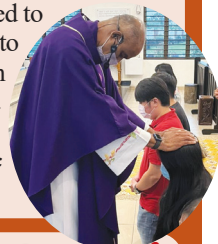
"I've always felt a spiritual presence helping make every wrong thing right for me, to the extent that I dream of mistakes I made and have time to rectify them before the errors are irreversible. Little did I know that it is He who has been paving the path, making everything happen the way it was planned while protecting and taking care of me and my loved ones.

"In December 2015, when I was at the lowest point in my life, Jonathan Wee invited me to church on Christmas eve. That was my first encounter with our Lord Jesus Christ. I started attending Mass on Sundays and eventually decided to become fully initiated into the Catholic faith.

"I am glad I joined this RCIA course to get an in-depth knowledge of Catholicism. During the RCIA classes, Fr Neville Arul Sinnappah and facilitators, Simon Wee and Theresa Sia, taught us about Our Father, Our Lord Jesus Christ, the history of our faith, the life and teachings of Christ, and the many struggles and sacrifices He endured and made for us. The knowledge about Him is endless, and I have learnt a lot about moral values. The faith journey of each of my fellow 'catechumens' adds something new to my own. My sincere gratitude to everyone who has been on this journey with me.

"The RCIA sessions have just concluded, and I can't wait to be baptised, confirmed, and can receive the Holy Eucharist. As I go through life after baptism, I may stumble and fall, but I believe without the low moments, I won't have the strength or stamina to go where He is calling. It is never too late to know Him. I am blessed to have Him with me and He is ever ready to pull me up when I reach out to Him with a contrite heart. This is not an end but a new journey with Our Lord Jesus Christ."

Yap Fong Leng, Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Krubong, Melaka



## Bible led me closer to God

"As a child, I was always fascinated by Christianity. Fast forward to 2021, I reconnected with a long-lost ex-colleague who shared his faith in Christianity. Since then, I started reading the Bible, and it led me closer to God.

"As I wanted to know more about God, I walked into churches and eventually joined a cell group for a deeper understanding. Meanwhile, my husband, who is a convert, enrolled me in the RCIA course at the Church of the Holy Redeemer Klang (HRC) as he believed it was a good platform for all my queries. It marked the beginning of my faith journey.

"The RCIA classes helped clarify my doubts and queries, and I felt a deeper connection with God. As I tried to build a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, I faced a lot of challenges in life, but I was blessed to have people surrounding me at HRC who guided me throughout my journey. They are my Guardian Angels! With God's grace, I began to understand the significance of prayers, especially the Rosary, which helped me on my spiritual journey.

"I feel more at peace now, and I hope to strengthen my Catholic faith through regular conversations with God. I can't wait for the day to receive my Sacraments."

Clare Josephine Ng, Church of the Holy Redeemer, Klang



## Want to live as a Catholic

"Praise be to the sweet name of Jesus Christ. I stepped into the Catholic Church for the first time in 2021 and as days went by, I began to feel the love and affection of the Lord Jesus Christ. I wanted to live as a Catholic woman and joined the RCIA course a year ago.

"Learning about Catholic teaching brought me closer to the Lord and I gained a deeper understanding of the faith. I would like to express my gratitude to the Lord, the parents, and the teachers who journeyed with me this past year, as I completed my course."

Victoria David, Church of St Anthony, Teluk Intan





# Dealing with death and dying

By Gwen Manickam

KUALA LUMPUR: *Catholics@Home*, in collaboration with the Archdiocesan Office for Human Development (AOHD), hosted a podcast on one of the most painful experiences human beings endure — grief.

Can we prepare ourselves, mentally and emotionally, for the ultimate passing of a loved one? And if so, how?

Fr Dr Clarence Devadass highlighted that pain, suffering, and death are real human experiences.

“When someone is in pain and grieving for the loss of a loved one, it is easy to say ‘I’ll pray for you. You must trust God’ but when it’s you ... the emotions are real, very different, and we cannot run away from it,” said Fr Clarence.

Even Jesus went through it. However, it is what comes afterwards — in the eyes of faith, that is important — death heals us from our earthly pain, our hope is in the resurrection, and eternal life helps arrest the fear of the unknown in the next life.

Guest speaker, Dr Koh Wai Keat, a geriatrician at Hospital Fatimah, Ipoh, said we prepare for

many events in our lives — like the birth of a child, a wedding, and examinations. However, death is often a taboo subject and not discussed. And because we don’t talk about it, we don’t prepare for it, and there is a lot of uncertainty about what may happen.

“When we talk about it, it helps reduce our fear,” said Dr Koh.

Fr Clarence chipped in, “Sometimes fear is something we must befriend. It is not easy because of the things in life we hold on to like loved ones, nor do I have a magic wand to wish it away, it is something we must go through.

“From the faith perspective, Jesus often says, ‘Do not be afraid,’ and it’s something we must learn — how to trust in the Lord. We are afraid of the unknown, and faith gives us the perspective that someone is there waiting to welcome us.

“Yes, theoretically, I understand it sounds nice, but I also know how difficult it is. When a young person comes with a terminal ail-

ment and faces the reality of leaving their young family, I feel lost too. Sometimes even I ask God, ‘Why?’” said Fr Clarence.

The geriatrician said that when facing patients who are beyond medical help, his advice is to keep hope in certain perspectives and for them and their families to live in the present.

“The fear is always about what

may or may not happen in the future, and that hinders living fully in the present,” said Dr Koh, who deals with patients and families coping with unfavourable diagnoses and outcomes regularly.

We should be aware of the emotional transitions that can happen with anyone receiving bad news. Dr Elisabeth Kübler-Ross in her book *On Death and Dying*, says there are five common emotional responses to receiving bad news — denial, anger, bargaining, depression and, finally, acceptance. Everyone is different and may not go through all five. As family members, we need to be aware and understand why, when someone receives unpleasant news, they respond in a particular manner.

Showing empathy is very important. Being there for them, lending a listening ear, telling them you are there to support them and giving hugs goes a lot further than telling the person to stay strong or lying that everything will be alright, said Dr Koh.

Remember, when patients complain, cry, or are angry with the doctors or God, they are not looking for answers, it’s just a coping mechanism to relieve their stresses. Once they reach acceptance, they can think of the next practical steps to take, and we can be there to help.

Fr Clarence added that our faith and relationship with God are also being challenged during such times. Being angry with God is part of the process of dealing with a trying situation. Telling someone at that point that ‘it’s God’s will’, ‘pray more’, and ‘don’t be angry with God,’ may not be the best advice.

In caring for our elderly, it is important to look into their needs, especially medications, and their communicative health like meals, hygiene, mobility, home safety, and social support.

Simultaneously, as a caregiver, it is vital to look after your needs so your mental, physical, and emotional health is not compromised.

To listen to the full podcast, visit Catholics at Home on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8hYEHhLhSCVI&t=207s>



## Regional guests visit Assumption Learning Centre

PRAI, Penang: Memories of the enriching and fruitful exchange on facilitating language and life skills will long be etched in the minds and hearts of those involved in a meeting held between Assumption Learning Centre (ALC) and visitors from Singapore and Chiang Rai. The meeting was held at the ALC in the Church of Saints Chastan and Imbert (SCIC), Chai Leng Park, on March 18 and 19.

Initiated by Anne Louisa and founded in 2022, ALC engages volunteers to teach 3R skills to school students facing learning challenges so they may acquire the basic proficiencies. The methodology used is an adaptation of Bro John De Cruz’s *La Sallian Approach - A Different Way of Learning*. It is based on a personal touch approach, with no syllabus. Lessons are drawn up based on the students’ ability, pace, behaviour, and interests. The team innovates and improvises according to students’ needs and keeps a record and progress chart of each student.



The visitors with Fr Dominic Santhiyagu and the team from the Assumption Learning Centre.

Fr Raphael Pavesi from the Foreign Missions of Milan (PIME), who led the Chiang Rai group, kicked off the two-day visit with a prayer and thanks to God for the opportunity to meet.

The Chiang Rai guests were a young group of volunteers struggling to teach the basic skills of three languages namely Thai, Myanmar, and English, hence, their visit to the ALC whose mission overlaps in some areas. In addition to teaching basic skills to school-going children and youths,

the Chiang Rai team also teaches those who cannot be registered in schools, migrant workers, as well as adults. Their work includes health care and pastoral care for accident cases and those bedridden.

Anne’s husband, Joseph Vairapan spoke briefly about the inception of ALC, its aim, methodology, and how ALC is run. Next, the Chiang Rai visitors gave their presentation, and the ALC team felt they had a lot to learn from them.

Christopher Cheong, leading the

Singapore team, shared how his trip to ALC was the work of the Holy Spirit. Their initial plan was a visit to the Penang Learning Centre but they couldn’t be reached. He learnt about ALC and made contact. He felt encouraged and touched by the warm hospitality of parish priest, Fr. Dominic Santhiyagu, who has taken a personal interest in the project and the “efforts and collaboration of young and old volunteers, priest and lay people.”

Christopher opined that it would be good if the team included an oc-

cupational therapist to help correct difficulties in motor skill development and posture that manifest as behavioural issues in some of the children. He was also happy to see a mix of young and old facilitators. He shared that if this project is to be sustainable, more young people must be involved. His team also gave a generous donation to ALC.

Fr Dom welcomed the teams from Singapore and Chiang Rai. He touched on how the ALC is a project started from the grassroots and not from the top down. He is grateful for the dedication and hard work of the initiating team and its volunteers. He pledged the parish’s support for this project, financially and otherwise, as a ministry started by lay people in response to a need in the community. He also suggested a physical exchange of facilitators, networking, and continued virtual meetings with Fr Raphael’s team in Chiang Rai and Christopher’s team from Singapore. At the end of a fruitful visit, the groups exchanged souvenirs. — *By ALC*

## Pilgrimage to Banting church

BANTING: Members of the Silver Liners Ministry from the Church of St Francis of Assisi (SFA) made a Lenten pilgrimage to the Church of Sts Peter & Paul (SPP) with parish priest, Fr Paul Cheong, OFM Cap, and Fr Michael Teng, OFM Cap, March 23.

The 44 pilgrims departed SFA after breakfast with Fr Michael leading them in prayer and the Rosary during the journey.

Upon arrival, SPP parish priest, Fr Richard Anthonysamy, SJ,

parish personnel Angeline Das, and Datin Helen Duraisingam were on hand to welcome the group before they proceeded to the church for Mass.

Some members of the Silver Liners served at the Mass as lectors and choir. During the homily, Fr Richard spoke about seniors during Lent and explained the origins of Lent. The pilgrims’ intentions were offered during Mass.

After Mass, Fr Richard shared the history of SPP and took the



The Silver Liners with Fr Michael Teng OFM Cap, Fr Richard Anthonysamy SJ and Fr Paul Cheong OFM Cap.

pilgrims on a guided tour of the new and old church (which is now the parish office and used for Sunday school), Our Lady’s grot-

to, and the Langat River which runs parallel to the church.

At noon, the pilgrims left SPP for a vegetarian lunch in town.

As seniors, we always look forward to such trips, sightseeing, and good food. — *By Julian Philips*



# First information, then formation for diploma graduates

By Lucille Dass

PENANG: An intensive weekend-retreat was held at Stella Maris, with Fr David Reegon, OFM, Cap as retreat master, for the recently graduated batch of diploma students (see *HERALD* March 26).

In his usual earnestness, Fr David averred, the diploma course provided information; the retreat centred on formation. When queried about his choice of the sombre topic, *The Afterlife*, soon after our graduation-jubilation, the retreat master revealed his intent to stir and make faith and hope come alive in us. The personal tragic storms that beset his life during the COVID-19 pandemic must have surely enlightened him about what it meant to “have been to hell and back.” Indubitably, his steadfast hope, faith, and spirituality prevailed. After researching and studying the



Fr David Reegon, OFM Cap with the participants of *The Afterlife* retreat at Stella Maris, Penang.

topic for a full year while on sabbatical, he formatted it into a study-in -application that could benefit others.

It was a Lenten-appropriate deep dive. Matt Maher’s “40 Days ... to die to the self” came to mind for therein “lies the storm of conver-

sion” that Fr David was awakening us to!

Using a context-rich introduction drawn from *Luke* chapters 14-16, he gently led us to the ‘burial ground’ and revealed how we could “rise again.” Parables and stories (he made a distinction there) of the LOST formed

the basis of his input on holiness-mercy-forgiveness-perfection FOUND in God. Being the ‘Bible bee’ that Fr David is, we buzzed alongside, lingering over telling verses from the Old and New Testaments.

The input was grounded in Scripture, Tradition, and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Revelations and contemplations of mystics, saints, Church Fathers and scholars helped open our minds to both objective truths and subjective submissions.

In short, it was a pensive 5Ws 1H journey towards eternity, halting to examine our life with the eyes of truth and a just heart about “What I have done and what I have failed to do” to avoid becoming the living dead, lost in “distant country” (LK 15:13), the Greek *chora makra* meaning “the great emptiness.” I was reminded of Henri Nouwen’s *Finding My Way Home*.

## SIC leaders reminded that Church is the people, not the building

FRASER’S HILL: Eighty lay leaders from the Church of St Ignatius learnt that teamwork is about opening their hearts and minds.

Parish priest Fr Lawrence Ng, CDD, told the leaders at the start of the three-day retreat that “the Church is not a building but you, my brothers and sisters in Christ, as the salt of the earth and light of the world.” Assisting Fr Lawrence was Fr Martin Then, CDD.

Leaders had their teamwork ability tested when they were asked to pitch a tent together with a member blindfolded and another’s hand tied.

Fr Lawrence added the two challenges to “reflect that we may be differently abled but we are all loved by God, Who gives us the strength to work in His vineyard”. He stressed that teamwork was best served by

a desire to truly complement each other’s strengths and weaknesses.

Each group had to get its members inside the tent once it was pitched. When the smaller tents could not fit all, Fr Lawrence encouraged the leaders to always unlock their creativity to enlarge the given space and “never to give up easily in our desire to be inclusive”.

He asked the leaders to reflect on how Moses and his people lived in tents in the desert for 40 days during the Exodus. All activities for the lay leaders, who came from the three languages apostolates — English, Mandarin, and Bahasa Malaysia — were to infuse team spirit and bonding in problem-solving.

It was the first SIC retreat where all three language groups were brought together. The

participants represented the various ministries and BECs. As a self-introduction, the leaders brought an item that best described them.

Their connection with their items was written down and presented for all to see and for the leaders to know one another better.

The other team-building activity was the ping pong ball challenge which required members to work as one, pulling the strings attached to a ring in the centre. The strings were like the spokes of a wheel joined to the hub. Working in perfect unity, they had to manoeuvre the strings to move the ping-pong ball onto the ring. Fr Lawrence said the focus should be on teamwork in moving the ping pong ball, not on the ball itself.

The parish priest asked the lay leaders to write affirmations on each other’s positive traits, inspiring one another to be exemplary servants of God’s people.

The retreatants also observed 18 hours of silent reflection on God’s affirmation (Isaiah 43:1-5) on the first night. Participant Kim said, “when we observed silence, we enjoyed the outdoors more since we couldn’t chitchat so much.”

On the second night, Fr Martin led the silent Eucharistic Adoration. After the Rite of Eucharistic Exposition and Benediction, the priests presented the St Benedict Crucifix, symbolising their send off on a mission after their “road to Emmaus”, which was the theme of the retreat. — *stignatiuspj.org*



Working together as a team to move the ping pong ball.

## Lenten visit to Church of St James

TAWAU: The Children’s Liturgy Team of the Holy Trinity Church visited the Church of St James in Rangu on March 19.

The programme included an introduction to the role of the Children’s Liturgy in Tawau, the children’s Easter Cards project for Tawau Christian prisoners, and an upcoming workshop in November.

Sr Mary How delivered a brief sharing on *What is Lent* to the 40 children from St James, between the ages of seven and 15. The children were later entertained with songs and games.

St James chairman, Thomas Temu, and Yasinta Sipa Herin were happy with the visit and urged the team to come again to give the children more exposure.

The children’s participation and openness made it a touching experience. — *By Mary M Rendal-Carreón*



### Letters to Editor

#### Camino Walk

Dear Editor,

I read with interest the article about the Camino Walk to Santiago de Compostela in Spain (*HERALD* March 19, 2023). I did the walk myself some years ago so I can share some other information.

I lived in Spain for many years and it was always an ambition. I was lucky to find a group of friends to join and we walked some 300 km from Leon to Santiago. In our case, it was high summer so we started at first light and arrived at our hostel by lunchtime.

Staying in hostels, I found that volunteers were needed to work there and so I had further experience working in a hostel on some subsequent years. This was very rewarding, though hard work because we had to be on duty all day except for a few hours in the morning when the pilgrims left by 8.00am and we welcomed the next ones after midday.

As *hospitaleros* (the hostels were like hospitals in the past when pilgrims became sick) we registered the arrivals and looked after them, supplying information as needed — where to eat, post office, health centre, church Mass times, etc. Of course the pilgrims were from many countries and it was useful to speak other languages, English and Spanish primarily.

The best part was staying for two weeks in a different town and getting to know it. We had plenty of opportunities to chat with the pilgrims and encourage them, solving their problems and advising them to rest if they really needed it.

I have done voluntary work in many fields over the years which always gave some satisfaction, but this, I think, was the most enjoyable.

It goes without saying that the Camino de Santiago is a wonderful thing to do, and you can do as little as 100km or start from anywhere in Europe.

Valerie Black, Penang

Send your letters to ►  
letterseditor@herald.com.my

The Editor, *HERALD*, 5 Jalan Robertson, 50150 KL  
Please include your name and address. Letters without name and address will not be entertained.



# Bangladesh Church to tackle abuse against women

DHAKA: The Catholic Church in Bangladesh is in the process of forming a team to tackle increasing abuses women face in their homes, workstations, and other places, says a Church official.

Catholic bishops have verbally agreed to form the team, led by the Women's Desk of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Bangladesh, to tackle abuses against women, says the desk's convenor and social activist, Rita Roselin Costa.

"We are discussing setting up a team to take action, including legal action, at the earliest if any women are subjected to any form of abuse," said Costa on March 29.

Costa said their team is expected to start this year but did not provide a definite date for the launch.

The team will have representatives in all eight dioceses and cover all Christian denominations, she said.

Costa spoke a day after the country office of the international development organisation, Oxfam, released a report that said the majority of Bangladeshi women in the workplace are subjected to abuses.

About 72 per cent of women workers face mental violence, with 74 per cent verbal abuse, 31 per cent physical violence, and six per cent face sexual violence, said the study report launched in the capital, Dhaka,

on March 28.

The study found that 81 per cent of women workers had poor physiological conditions, and only one per cent received paid maternity leave. Additionally, 76 per cent did not receive social security support at work.

The study covered 1,507 women from different areas of Bangladesh.

In Bangladesh's religiously and socially conservative family system where patriarchy still dominates, women remain vulnerable to abuses, reports say.

In 2021, World Health Organisation ranked Bangladesh fourth, jointly with the Solomon Islands, among 61 countries with the highest prevalence of violence by intimate partners.

Costa says due to male dominance, fear of losing jobs, and a lengthy legal justice system, often women do not report and seek redress for abuses at homes and workplaces.

"Women won't speak up if there is no guarantee that action will be taken against the offender, and they might lose jobs for making a complaint," she said.

In the case of Christian women who seek redress for abuse at home or the workplace, the Church team will act immediately, Costa added. — **By Stephan Uttom Rozario, ucanews.com**



About 72 per cent of women face various forms of abuse at the workplace, says a report from Oxfam. (UCA News Photo/Stephan Uttom)

## Vietnamese diocese protests against invasion at Mass

HANOI: A diocese in Vietnam has strongly protested against government authorities for breaking up a Mass held in a house.

In an official letter to Kon Tum provincial and Ngoc Hoi district officials in Vietnam's Central Highlands, Kontum diocese strongly condemned what it called the "heinous offence against the sanctity of the Mass."

"Their actions are deeply distressing and hurting our brothers and sisters from the sub-parish, as well as all priests and laypeople in the diocese and other places," Fr Peter Le Van Hung, head of the Office of the Kontum Bishop's House, said in a statement on March 27.

Local government officials, accompanied by security staff, stormed a house where Fr Francis Xavier Le Tien was celebrating a Mass attended by many Catholics on March 22.

The officials accused Tien, pastor of Dak Giac parish, of celebrating religious services at an unrecognised chapel.

Religious activities are restricted in the mountainous province of Kon Tum, home to tens of ethnic groups. Many in the province, bordering Laos and Cambodia, live in poverty and far away from parish churches.

Most churches in the area were ruined during the Vietnam War (1955-1975).

Fr Hung called on authorities "to recognise temporary chapels in the province."

He said the diocese registered its protest after Bishop Aloisius Nguyen Hung Vi of Kontum visited Tien and local Catholics to show his solidarity.

Kontum diocese covers the two provinces of Gia Lai and Kon Tum, serving 380,000 Catholics out of a population of 2.5 million. — **ucanews.com**

## Chinese Catholics help elderly, students during Lent

BEIJING: Catholics in communist-ruled China have engaged in various acts of charity, including free medical care for elderly and disabled people and scholarships for students from poor families, during the Season of Lent.

Churches and lay associations in various dioceses have participated in corporal and spiritual works of mercy for needy people, Vatican's *Fides* news agency reported on March 24.

The St Francis Foundation in Beijing operates with support from the parishioners of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal Church and extends its support to those in urgent need and facing a cash crunch.

This year's Lenten alms collections — which include financial aid among others — will go to the communities in the Miao Autonomous County of Pingbian in Honghe Prefecture, Yunnan Province.

The group also prepared for two charity sales on Palm Sunday, April 2, which aims to raise funds to support 19 university students belonging to the Miao ethnic minority.

Other parishes and organisations are also actively contributing toward supporting students in need of financial assistance.

Within two years of its establishment, the Group of Volunteers at the Immaculate Conception parish has managed to support 41 students from cash-strapped families to obtain higher education.

In 2023, through the priests and nuns working in the region, the group received around 58 scholarship applications from students belonging to economically backward communities.

The group plans to raise funds through donations from able-bodied members of the Catholic community in the region.



The volunteers giving hair cuts to the poor families. (Fides photo)

However, the Catholic community in Shanghai and Zhejiang have assisted those in need of healthcare.

This year, the Association of Catholic Intellectuals in Shanghai provided free medical examinations to intellectually disabled people in the region through donations collected from kind-hearted individuals.

The Provincial Catholic Charitable Health Counselling Service Team in Zhejiang Province provided free medical services to Catholics and non-Catholics at Fenghua Church in Ningbo Diocese.

Hundreds of people in the area, including those suffering from various illnesses, received free medical check-ups from 30 volunteer Catholic doctors who were part of the counselling service team.

This year, the Diocese of Ningbo supported the team with logistics and other resources.

Parishioners from Xiangzhou Church, Zhuhai City took to the old-age homes this Lent to provide emotional support to the elderly. — **ucanews.com**

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# Vatican says 'no' to laity preaching homilies

VATICAN: The Vatican's liturgy czar has intervened against the implementation of resolutions of the German Synodal Way that demand laypeople should be able to regularly baptise and preach the homily at Mass in churches across Germany.

In a letter to the German Bishops' Conference president dated March 29, Cardinal Arthur Roche said neither was possible — despite at least one German diocese already announcing both practices.

The written intervention by the Vatican's prefect of the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments was addressed to Bishop Georg Bätzing of Limburg, reported *CNA Deutsch*, CNA's German-language news partner, which has obtained a copy of the document.

Apart from covering the question of homilies and baptisms by laypeople, the seven-page letter also reminded the German bishops that liturgical translations must be confirmed and approved by the Vatican.

On the issue of homilies, Roche wrote that the reason why laypeople cannot regularly preach at Mass is not due to their need



Archbishop Arthur Roche

for "better theological preparation or better communication skills." Nor is the intent to create "inequalities among the baptised."

Instead, the cardinal pointed to "distinctions made by the Spirit, who produces different charisms that are distinct and complementary."

Roche wrote that well-formed laypeople should contribute, for instance, as catechists or by conducting conversations about sa-

cred Scripture.

However, he added that laypeople could not give the homily at Mass since only someone ordained "sacramentally represents Christ by virtue of the *sacra potestas* [sacred power] conferred on him at ordination."

Explaining that the issue of preaching at Mass was, in other words, a sacramental rather than an educational matter, Roche warned of "misunderstandings" about the figure and identity of the priest, who is the only one who can act *in persona Christi capitis* [in the person of Christ, the head of the Church] by virtue of the sacrament."

The cardinal also rejected the introduction of laypeople regularly administering baptisms, something already in practice in some German dioceses. He wrote that justifying this with a lack of priests, for example, was not possible under canon law.

Laypeople could only validly perform baptisms in exceptional circumstances, such as in danger of death or "in painful situations of persecution, but also in mission areas and in other cases of special need,"

the cardinal explained.

Roche reminded the German bishops of Pope Francis' 2019 letter regarding the direction of the Synodal Way process. "The universal Church lives in and from the particular Churches, just as the particular Churches live and flourish in and from the universal Church; if they were separated from the universal Church, they would weaken, decay, and die," the Pope wrote at the time.

Responding to Roche's communication, a spokesperson for the German Bishops' Conference said the bishops would continue to seek dialogue with Rome on these issues.

Earlier this month, several German bishops announced plans to implement several resolutions passed by the Synodal Way.

Bishop Franz-Josef Bode of Osnabrück — then vice president of the German Bishops' Conference — said laypeople could baptise babies and "regularly" preach at homilies in his diocese.

About one week later, on March 25, the Holy See announced that Pope Francis had accepted Bode's request to resign. — **By AC Wimmer, CNA**

## Nigerian archbishop optimistic about new president

KADUNA, Nigeria: A senior Nigerian bishop has expressed hopes that the country's incoming president Bola Tinubu will promote inter-religious harmony.

Archbishop Matthew Man-Oso Ndagoso of Kaduna (*pic*) said that as Tinubu comes from a region where members of different faiths live side-by-side, Christians hope he will be an improvement on President Buhari, who has been accused of turning a blind eye to Is-

lamist radicalism.

Archbishop Ndagoso told Aid to the Church in Need (ACN): "He is from Yorubaland, which has a significant population of Muslims. But in Yorubaland it is usual to find Catholics, Protestants and Muslims in the same family, and they get on well. Tinubu's wife is a practising Christian, so we are hopeful."

According to Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission, Tinubu received 8,794,726 votes in February's presidential election, putting him ahead of main challenger Atiku Abubakar who came second with 6,984,520.

Archbishop Ndagoso said: "He has been declared the winner, but the results have been challenged in court."

Concerns were voiced over the voting process, leading to the main opposition groups, Peoples Democratic Party and the Labour Party, disputing Tinubu's victory and calling for a fresh round of voting.

According to internal electoral observers led by Dr Joyce Banda, former President of Malawi, polling stations opened late and a new electronic system designed to make public the results from each polling area suffered severe delays.

Archbishop Ndagoso added: "However, if at the end of the day he wins in the court and is sworn in, given the part of the country he comes from, and his background, I think he will behave differently [to Buhari]. We hope that he will be able to bring that kind of attitude into our polity, so that we can all enjoy that."

Archbishop Ndagoso stressed that it was possible for Christians and Muslims to co-exist together. He said: "In every pastoral visit I make, especially to rural areas, I visit the Imam or other pastors. Our priests do the same."

"Ordinary Muslims and Christians go to the same market, their children attend school together, they live together — this is the dialogue of life," added the archbishop. — **ICN**



## Fewer South Korean youngsters attending Sunday Mass

SEOUL: The number of young Catholics at Sunday mass in South Korea dropped by 17 per cent compared to years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, says a survey.

The survey by the Korean Catholic Research Institute of the Catholic Bishops' Conference found that 36.1 per cent of Catholic youth in their 20s join Sunday Mass in 2023 compared to 53.2 per cent before the pandemic, Catholic Peace Broadcasting Corporation (CPBC) reported on March 23.

The online survey was conducted from Jan 10-16 among 1,063 Catholics over the age of 19.

Among the respondents in their 20s, one out of four said they only participate in Mass on

special occasions or do not participate at all.

The various reasons for skipping Sunday Mass were also captured by the survey.

"I'm used to not attending Sunday Mass" occupied the top spot with a majority of 58 per cent of respondents choosing it as a reason for skipping Mass on Sundays.

Among other multiple choices selected by the respondents, lack of confession, fear of COVID-19 infection, and "participation in mass is no longer an important criterion for the faith" each accounted for 30 per cent of the responses.

The survey also revealed a general picture of continuous Sunday Mass attendance in comparison to the pandemic period

and of late.

Among the respondents who stated that they were avoiding Sunday Mass around 70 per cent were women.

According to the survey, 58.8 per cent of Catholics above the age of 50 in North Gyeongsang Province and Seoul reported that they were not attending Sunday Mass.

The survey also revealed that 13.6 per cent of Catholics who participated in Sunday Mass regularly throughout the pandemic period attended Mass on special occasions or do not attend at all.

The trend of avoiding Sunday Mass is high among believers who have lived a religious life for more than 31 years and high-income households, CPBC reported.

The decline in Mass attendance is viewed as an alarming sign as the Korean Church has been recording a drop in priestly vocations due to a decline in birth rates and an increasing lack of religiosity in the country.

The number of newly ordained priests dropped to 87 in 2023 from 131 in 2011, a decrease of 35 per cent, according to the Statistics of the Catholic Church in Korea, media houses reported.

Despite the decline in vocations, the church data showed that the number of Catholics in South Korea increased from 5,442,996 in 2013 to 5,938,045 in 2023. — **ucanews.com**



Young Catholics pray as they participate at a Mass presided over by Pope Francis to conclude the Sixth Asian Youth Day in Haemi. (UCA News photo)

## Strife-torn Loikaw diocese gets new bishop

LOIKAW, Myanmar:

Pope Francis has named Msgr Celso Ba Shwe (*pic*) as the new bishop of Loikaw diocese — the worst affected diocese in civil war-torn Myanmar.



Bishop-elect Shwe succeeds Bishop Stephen Tjephe, who died in December 2020.

Bells rang at the Christ the King Cathedral in Loikaw, capital of eastern Kayah State, bordering Thailand, on March 29 when retired Bishop Sotero Phamo revealed the new appointment.

Over a thousand faithful, including many internally displaced persons (IDPs), gathered at the cathedral to hear the news about the new 58-year-old Bishop-elect Shwe.

"We thank God as we are in a very challenging time as IDPs are thirsty for spiritual and moral support from the bishop, the clergy and religious," said Shwe.

He further said, "I am not worthy of receiving this position, but I believe God has a plan to use me for his people despite many challenges."

The new bishop played a leading role in providing humanitarian assistance to IDPs in Loikaw diocese where 16 parishes out of 38 are severely affected by a longstanding conflict which has intensified since the junta ousted the elected government in a coup on Feb 1, 2021.

When clashes and protests started in Loikaw in May 2021 following the military coup, he played a mediator role between unarmed protesters, who also included Christians, and the security forces.

"Becoming a bishop is for the poor and for those who are most in need, including IDPs. So, I will prioritise it," Shwe said.

Shwe was born on July 22, 1964, in Momblo village and was ordained a Loikaw diocesan priest on April 16, 1994.

He has served as general procurator of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Myanmar (CBCM) for nine years and was vicar general and parish priest of Christ the King Cathedral from 2010 to 2020. — **ucanews.com**





# Church of Asia: 'Taking off our shoes' expresses synodal journey

Home to 4.6 billion people and the majority of the world's billionaires, Asia also hosts a sizeable Catholic population, estimated to be around 150 million people, or 3.31 per cent of the total population.

Although a minority, the Final Document states at the outset that the Catholic Church "contributes greatly to the fields of education, healthcare, social welfare and reaching out to the poor and marginalised groups in society."

The synodal process in Asia coincided "providentially" with the FABC 50 General Conference held in October 2022. Some of the countries were able to "involve many people from different walks of life while others were only able to gather smaller groups of people," the document notes.

One limitation contributing to this was "the inability to translate the Document for the Continental Stage (DCS) into the many vernacular languages" spoken in Asia.

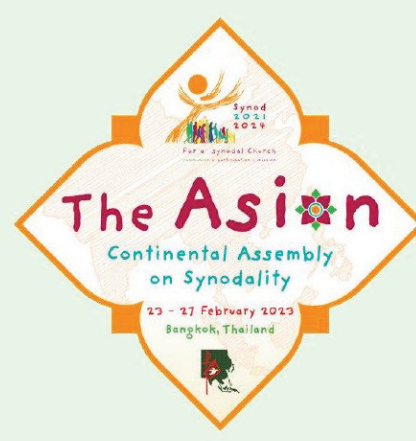
## Asian resonances to the DCS

A "deep love for the Church", expressed through "varied emotions like joy, sadness, vulnerability, and woundedness" is present as the first resonance with the DCS.

The synodal process also allowed the local Churches in Asia become more aware of "their unique contexts and rich cultures," as well as the fact that many Christians in Asia "suffer from various threats because of keeping their faith" to the point of suffering "new forms of 'martyrdom'."

Among the wounds resonating with the Church in Asia are: "abuses related to finance, jurisdiction, conscience, authority, and sex," "lack of sufficient inclusion of women in governance and decision-making," "lack of understanding and failure in providing sufficient pastoral care to some groups of people who are part of the Church but are often struggling to feel welcomed," "the infiltration of ideologies such as individualism, consumerism and materialism," and the silencing of the Church's voice by "oppressive regimes."

*The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) released the Final Document of the Asian Continental Assembly on Synodality on March 16. The document is the fruit of a synthesis of the responses of the 17 Episcopal Conferences and two Synods of Oriental Churches, as well as the input of Episcopal Conference presidents and delegates in the Continental Assembly that took place in Bangkok from February 24-26.*



## New pathways

It is these very "joys and wounds" that can become "opportunities" toward a "new vision in the pastoral vision of a...synodal Church," the Final Document continues.

"The Church must begin in a spirit of inclusion where everyone feels both welcomed and has a sense of belonging inside the tent. As a people of God, no one should be excluded; even if they are frail and weak; inclusivism within the Church is a must for the synodal Church."

Several Asian realities, such as the diversity of religions, "compels" the Church to engage in dialogue, peace building, reconciliation and harmony. In fact, the document notes that "in some places, this push for dialogue has been the initiative only of the Catholic Church and there are times when reciprocity is not forthcoming."

The Document also notes some reservation expressed in the Churches in Asia regarding dialogue. Nonetheless, there is a "strong sense" than the "inward-looking

Church" in Asia needs to move toward a "mission ad-extra" through a "more missionary, communitarian and integrated approach."

## Common tensions in Asia

The Final Document notes that there is a "divide" among the various realities making up the Church, often fostered by "leadership styles that prevent (sometimes even exclude) others from living out their baptismal call to be authentic disciples."

This can be overcome through "expanding spaces for possible lay ministry," implementing the ministry of Catechist, requiring accountability and transparency with the exercise of power, re-evaluating phenomena such as the lack of priestly vocations and the absence of youth in the Church, and incorporating people experiencing various "poverties" into the life and mission of the Church. Other tensions the Final Document touches deal with religious conflicts and clericalism.

## Asia's contribution to the new evangelisation

While acknowledging the large numbers of Asians experience migration, are refugees or displaced persons, the Document acknowledges that many of them have thus "become missionaries of the Gospel as they bring not only their lived experiences but also their faith."

Thus, one way the Church can include them is by "integrating and accompanying them on this journey as new evangelisers."

Six priorities have been identified in the Final Document presented to the Synod for the continent of Asia: Formation, Inclusivity and Hospitality, Missionary Disciples, Accountability and Transparency, Prayer and Worship and the Environment.

Each of these areas identify a facet necessary for a synodal Church that "seeks to renew the face of the earth" in imitation of Jesus who "came to redeem and reconcile all things."

## Taking off your shoes

In summing up the synodal process in Asia, the Final Document alludes to the cultural practice in Asia of removing footwear prior to entering a house or temple. It is a "sign of respect," and an awareness of "the others whose lives we are entering into."

Deeply evocative of the theophany Moses experienced, it reminds us that we "stand on holy ground," thus making us "aware of the earth" that "we are called to protect and care for." For Asia, this is a "beautiful symbol" of the synodal journey they are experiencing. It reminds them of the respect necessary to listen without prejudice, of the need to remove status symbols that create division rather than unity. Thus, for the Church in Asia:

"Taking off your shoes"... articulates our experience of the Church as relational, contextual and missional, journeying together in humility and hope." — *By Sr Bernadette Mary Reis, fsp, Vatican News*

## South Korean Catholic bishops entrust synodal process to Virgin Mary

SEOUL: The Catholic bishops of South Korea have entrusted to the Blessed Virgin Mary the synodal path and the general assembly of the Synod of Bishops in Rome this coming October.

At the end of their assembly on March 16, the Korean bishops called on Catholic communities to join in two "field experiences" that they described as opportunities for evangelical witness and mission.

The first initiative, on May 16, will be a visit to the Gangwon-do site, near the city of Samcheok, where in recent years the construction of a coal-fired power plant has been underway.

The Church leaders noted the power plants "significant negative impact" on the surrounding environment and local fishing communities.

A major pilgrimage organised by the National Commission for Reconciliation on June 6 will visit the Catholic Church in Paju, on the border with North Korea, where a Mass for peace and reconciliation will be held.

The bishops said the "common path" for the Korean faithful starts from "recognising and loving" the Koreans in the North who are members of the same people as "brothers and sisters".

On May 31, the Catholic faithful are also encouraged to gather in a solemn prayer vigil to mark a "Day of Prayer to the Blessed Virgin Mary" in their parishes.

During their assembly, the South Korean bishops reviewed the "Pastoral Guidelines for the Catholic Church in Korea" that was first published in 1995.

They noted the many changes that have taken place in the Church and proposed to review and update the "Pastoral Handbook," which has been a reference for parishes, religious congregations, and Church movements in the country.

The bishops described the updating process of the handbook as "the synodal face" of the Korean Church that is "ready to walk together and to share joys and sufferings with the men and women of the third millennium." — *LiCAS*



Korean Catholics attend Mass at the Seosomun Shrine in Seoul City on September 14, 2018. (CBCP News/Roy Lagarde)



# Why the makers of ChatGPT care what Pope Francis says about AI

VATICAN: The people behind chatbots are asking questions of priests and ethicists rather than turning to their artificially intelligent creations. They want to know: What is consciousness? What is the nature of humanity? What is the purpose of life?

According to Fr Phillip Larrey, dean of the philosophy department at Rome's Pontifical Lateran University, Silicon Valley techies are posing those questions to ethicists and religious leaders as artificial intelligence develops rapidly and is used in myriad ways impacting people's daily lives.

In a conversation with *Catholic News Service* March 21, Fr Larrey, a native of Mountain View, California, and author of two books on the rise of AI, reflected on how society should engage with AI as it becomes increasingly embedded in the lives of ordinary people through accessible technologies.

AI-operated programmes such as ChatGPT, a popular software created by the software company OpenAI, "can access data to an enormous extent that for human beings is no longer possible," said Fr Larrey. "That is why as a species we tend to look at AI with a certain fear, because we fear the unknown."

An artificially intelligent chatbot, ChatGPT uses learning algorithms to consume, produce and infer information for human users. The software is intended to mimic human conversation and can instantaneously produce essays and articles, write programming code and give people advice based on information input by users.

Its most sophisticated model, GPT4, was released for public use March 14.

Fr Larrey said there are several "catastrophic risks" to unchecked and widespread AI use,

such as its potential for spreading disinformation and creating code that can be used by hackers.

He also identified potential adverse effects of AI for everyday users, noting that minors can ask chatbots for advice in committing illicit activities and students can use them to complete their assignments without performing the work of learning.

A major downside of AI, he said, is that "we become dependent on the software, and we become lazy. We no longer think things out for ourselves, we turn to the machine."

Yet Fr Larrey said that rejecting AI technology is a mistake. In particular, he pointed to the decision of some universities to ban the use of ChatGPT, noting that educators "are going to have to learn how to incorporate this into how they teach, what they test for, and how we can use these tools to our advantage."

"I don't think you can put the genie back in the bottle," he said. "The market motivation is so strong that you're not going to stop it."

In January, Microsoft announced a multi-year investment in OpenAI, which the *New York Times* and other media reported would total \$10 billion (RM44.15 billion). Other tech companies, including Google and Amazon, are testing their own AI-powered products to compete with existing software on the market.

That's why, Fr Larrey said, conversations on AI must shift to what Pope Francis calls "person-centred AI." The Pope, he said, "is insisting that you need to put the human person at the centre of this technology."

In January, Pope Francis addressed tech-industry leaders from companies such as Microsoft and IBM as well as members of the Jewish and Muslim communities during a



conference on ethics in AI at the Vatican.

The Pope urged them to "ensure that the discriminatory use of these instruments does not take root at the expense of the most fragile and excluded" and gave an example of AI making visa decisions for asylum-seekers based on generalised data.

"It is not acceptable that the decision about someone's life and future be entrusted to an algorithm," said the Pope.

At the end of the conference, Catholic, Jewish and Muslim representatives signed a declaration calling on AI researchers to engage with ethicists and religious leaders to develop a framework for the ethical use of AI.

"On social media and other technologies that came very quickly, we were trying to catch up and we weren't exactly sure how to do this," said Fr Larrey.

But with AI, he said, the tech companies themselves are "beginning to think about how to structure some guidelines and some concerns so that this technology will be used for human well-being and human flourishing."

Tech companies such as Microsoft are "looking for philosophers and theologians" to respond to those questions, he said. "They are looking for people who know how to think."

"These people, who are really changing the future of humanity, they want to talk with

us, they want to talk with priests, they especially want to talk with Pope Francis," he said. "They're looking for guidance and they're looking for support. They're looking for some way to make this help people and not harm people."

Some of those guidelines, he noted, include adding parental controls to technology so that parents can monitor how their children are using AI-powered devices, or establishing structures so that human decision-making is not cut out of the equation when AI is also used, such as when making a legal decision using generalised data.

Aware of the challenges AI poses to society, Fr Larrey said he is still optimistic people can use AI responsibly and for the betterment of humanity if it is developed properly.

"I think that people will win over the technology," he said. "It's not without perils, it's not without difficulties."

And within the church, Fr Larrey said he thinks "priests will be one of the last to be substituted (by AI), even though they have AI's that will hear your confession and celebrate Mass."

"People want to talk with a priest or a sister, they want the experience of the religious person that they can't get in an AI," he said. — **By Justin McLellan, CNS**

## Pope image — first real mass-level AI misinformation case



AI-generated image of Pope Francis. (Reddit)

VATICAN: A stylish Pope Francis became the topic of conversation recently after images of the pontiff wearing a white puffer jacket began circulating online, bringing in fashion-related compliments.

But the Pope actually never wore the jacket-and-cross-necklace combination; the photos that circulated weren't real.

Those images, created through artificial intelligence (AI)-generator model Midjourney, were uploaded to Facebook and Reddit groups dedicated to AI-generated images and art. They were then posted on other social media sites without the context of the groups.

While the images were taken as a light-hearted joke by some, cybersecurity expert Chester Wisniewski warns eerily convincing AI-generated photos could further exacerbate misinformation.

"We've kind of crossed an uncanny valley now," Wisniewski told *CTVNews.ca* in a phone interview on March 27. "I don't know that there is a way for people to tell the difference between a real photo and a fake one and this is going to have deeply troubling societal ramifications."

In the earlier days of AI-generated images, Wisniewski explained, there were many telltale signs to distinguish a real photo from a

computer-generated one. For example, limbs and fingers are often distorted in AI-generated images, hair appeared to be unrealistic and extremely airbrushed or teeth in portraits looked exaggerated.

Today however, the technology has improved incredibly quickly, making these red-flags not easily distinguishable to an everyday online user.

Since the coding behind computer-generated images, voices and video is public knowledge and doesn't belong to a single company or person, anyone who is technologically savvy can create anything or pay to use one of the various AI-model apps or websites.

Web culture expert Ryan Broderick has called the pope image "the first real mass-level AI misinformation case". But the issue has actually been brewing for a few weeks, following an update to Midjourney that significantly improved the standard of output. Earlier in March, Midjourney-created images of former US president Donald Trump being arrested similarly went viral.

Fears of AI fakery aren't new. For several years, we have faced the threat of deepfaked images of people's faces, produced by earlier generations of AI trained on smaller volumes of information, but they have frequently had

telltale signs of fakery, such as non-blinking eyes or blurred ears. Midjourney still struggles with hands, often adding additional fingers, but when confronted by an image where hands aren't the focus, such as the AI pope, people can be fooled.

There is also an issue of scale, says Agnes Venema at the University of Malta. The *r/midjourney* subreddit where the pope images were posted has examples of other, equally convincing AI-generated images produced by its 143,000 members. The top-voted comment on the post reads: "People in 2025 are going to have a real difficult time with misinformation. People in 2100 won't know which parts of history were real..."

Though the Pope did not address the photos directly, he spoke about the use of artificial intelligence, saying its power can only help humans if it's used ethically.

"I am convinced that the development of artificial intelligence and machine learning has the potential to contribute in a positive way to the future of humanity," the Pope is quoted as saying in a Vatican news release. "I am certain that this potential will be realised only if there is a constant and consistent commitment on the part of those developing these technologies to act ethically and responsibly." — **Agencies**



# Teacher finds right chemistry with God and students

Amanda Horan is in a self-described place of “contentment and happiness,” so it may seem unusual to start this story about her by focusing on what she calls “a dark period” in her life, a time when she was angry at God.

Still, that time offers a defining insight into Horan, who is this year’s recipient of the *St Theodora Excellence in Education Award*, the highest honour given to an educator in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis.

That dark period is such an important part of her faith journey that she shares the details of it with the students in her chemistry classes at Bishop Chatard High School in Indianapolis—and with other students when she gives her personal testimony during their spiritual retreats.

“Every day, I start class with prayer. And there’s one or two reflections that come up every year that talk about how, sometimes, when God doesn’t answer your prayers the way you think they should be answered, He’s actually answering your prayers in a way you don’t expect,” she says, as she sits in her classroom on a sunny March morning.

“Whenever that reflection comes up every year, I always pause to talk about the years I prayed that I would have a baby and I was angry at God because He wasn’t doing what I thought should be done or the way I thought things should be.”

She then shares with the students how that heartbreaking time of infertility for her and her husband of 16 years, Loren, led to their life-affirming decision to adopt two children who have added so much love to their lives.

“I tell them that now, looking back, I would go through it all again to be a parent to the two kids that I get to be a parent to. I share that they might be feeling like there’s something in their life that isn’t going the way they think it should. I tell them I hope that someday they’ll



*Amanda Horan shows the joy that teaching brings her as she works with students during a lab session in the Honours Chemistry class she teaches at Bishop Chatard High School in Indianapolis. (Criterion Photo/John Shaughnessy)*

be able to look back on times like that — like I can now — and realise that God was answering their prayer and preparing them for something they didn’t even anticipate in their life.”

## The coolest thing happened

The study of chemistry is often measured in exact numbers, and numbers support Horan’s success as a teacher. In her tenure teaching Advanced Placement (AP) Chemistry, she has doubled the number of students taking the college-level course. And the students in the course pass the challenging, comprehensive, end-of-year test at a rate of 89 per cent.

The study of chemistry is also often touched by elements of wonder and beauty, and those qualities can also mark a different definition of chemistry — the relationships that connect people in a special way.

The chemistry between Horan and her Advanced Placement students showed when the

class celebrated her selection as the St Theodora Award recipient by having a breakfast party in her honour.

“They had a griddle in here, and they were cooking pancakes,” she says, smiling. “They all contributed food and threw a party for me. Of all the recognition for the award, that breakfast meant so much to me. All of my other classes were very excited too when they heard I won.”

“She makes all of her kids feel welcomed,” says Jackson Herrera, a senior AP Chemistry student and a member of St Thomas Aquinas Parish in Indianapolis who has been accepted to Harvard University. “She knows the stuff we’re learning is really hard, and she is very good at explaining it to us in a comprehensible and understandable way.”

“She’s genuinely a highlight of everyone’s day,” says Maci Knoll, a senior AP Chemistry student and a member of St Pius X Parish

in Indianapolis. “She helps kids realise what they’re interested in, and she cultivates questions and curiosity.”

“Chemistry is a class that is sometimes really difficult, and there are classes that, when they’re difficult, they’re not enjoyable,” says Claire O’Gara, a senior AP student from St Pius X Parish. “But she’s such an amazing teacher that I’m always looking forward to learning the material, and I’m excited to go to class.”

Horan approaches her teaching from a combination of caring about her students and challenging them — reflecting St Theodora’s approach to “Love the children first and then teach them.” She has a special fondness for her sophomore chemistry students, especially the ones “who don’t have that confidence and belief in themselves.”

“My most significant accomplishment is the countless students who have entered my class believing that they are bad at science or do not like science, but leave loving science and believing in their own ability,” she notes. “I believe in my students until they come to believe in themselves.”

A moment later, Horan’s face glows as she says, “The coolest thing happened this year.” She then shares the story of a young woman who took Horan’s Academic Chemistry class as a sophomore, followed Horan’s encouragement to take AP Chemistry as a senior last year, passed the AP test, and is now taking a freshman chemistry class as a student at Purdue University.

“She sent me several notes saying she was so prepared, but the coolest thing was that one day, the guest lecturer for her freshman chemistry class was another one of my students — a senior there doing chemistry research. I got some pictures that day. That was one of the coolest moments, seeing two of my kids being so successful.”

## They taught me so much

Beyond the St Theodora Award, her impact as a teacher has also led to the recent announcement that she has been chosen as one of Indiana’s three finalists for the *Presidential Award for Excellence in Science and Mathematics Education* — with the winner from each state receiving \$10,000 (RM44,065) and a visit to the White House.

Still, fans of Horan believe there’s another part of her involvement at Bishop Chatard that is just as impactful as her teaching.

The two children that she and her husband adopted — Sybil, seven, and Collin, four — are Black. That choice has led to another choice that Horan made five years ago when the teacher who served as the moderator for Bishop Chatard’s Black Student Union left the school. Horan, who is white, stepped into the role, motivated “by my faith and the love of my two children.”

“I want my kids to have positive Black role models in their lives,” says Horan, a member with her family of St Joan of Arc Parish in Indianapolis. “And I want the school to be a place that affirms the value, yes, of all people. But sometimes we have to be a little bit more intentional about affirming Black students. There’s no one they can look to and say, ‘I can be just like that person,’ because we don’t have any Black adults in this building.”

“I want to give them a sense of community in their club. I want them to also feel it’s a

place where they feel like their voice can be heard, and they’re the majority. They have taught me so much. We do things together as a club to learn about Black history here in Indianapolis. I love being part of the group. I love them accepting me and welcoming me into their culture.”

The appreciation is mutual, says Samantha Byrd, a junior who is one of the three presidents of the school’s Black Student Union.

“She understands that, being a white woman, she can never understand what it’s like to be a Black person. With having Black kids, she definitely advocates for us and uses her voice to try to advocate for Black people,” Samantha says. “Being a Black person in the world we live in, knowing there’s a person who’s willing to fight for your rights and fight for you, is important. It means a lot.”

## Another reason to smile, another nod from God

Horan never strays from being positive as she leads a lab experiment for the sophomores in her Honours Chemistry class on this morning.

As she flits from one station of students to another — helping them, guiding them, answering their questions — it’s hard to imagine she didn’t always set out to be a teacher. The story of how she became one leads to another smile from her and another nod to

God’s guidance.

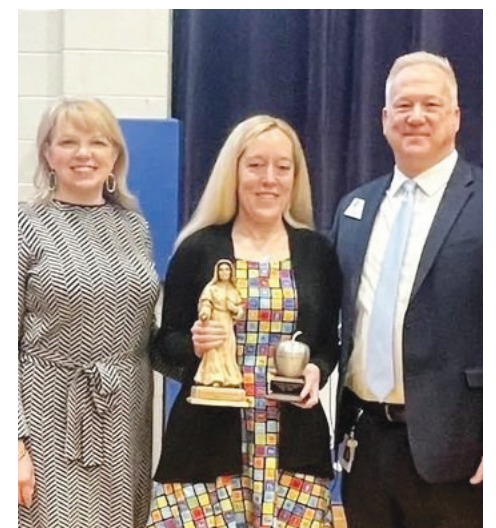
After graduating from Purdue with a degree in chemical engineering, she worked for five years with Eli Lilly & Co., doing good work and making good money. But there was always the thought in her mind about teaching — a thought reinforced by two moments of providence.

First, when she previously was a parishioner and a lector at St Monica Parish in Indianapolis, she heard a homily that, she says, “made me think this was God speaking to me, telling me I should be a teacher.”

“Shortly after that homily, a man comes up to me in Home Depot and he says, ‘You lector at St Monica, don’t you?’ I said, ‘Well, yeah.’ And he said, ‘With a voice like that, you must be a teacher.’ It was like, ‘Whoa!’ It felt like God saying, ‘Amanda, you should be a teacher.’”

“I gave my two-week notice to my bosses, which was terrifying because I was leaving this good-paying job to go to a not-so-good paying job, and it seemed like a crazy idea, but I did. Now I feel like I’m doing what I should be doing with my life. It gives me a lot of contentment and happiness.”

That contentment and happiness grows every time she helps her students overcome their fears and challenge themselves, lets them know she cares about them, and helps them move closer to an understanding of how God touches their lives.



*Amanda is this year’s recipient of the St Theodora Excellence in Education Award, the highest honour given to an educator in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis (Pic courtesy of Amanda Horan)*

Now, in her 12th year of teaching, she has found those touches of beauty and wonder — of a chemistry with God — in her own life.

“I would like to hope that God would look down and be proud of all the chances I’ve taken in my life and be proud of what I’m doing. Because I think I’ve responded correctly to all the calls in my life.”

“I feel this sense that I’m where I’m supposed to be, that I’m doing what God made me to do.” — **By John Shaughnessy, *The Criterion***



# Cool and uncompromised

The need for validation is the strongest it has ever been now, more than at any other time in human history. Blame it on the explosion of social media, and media sharing networks like Tik Tok and Instagram.

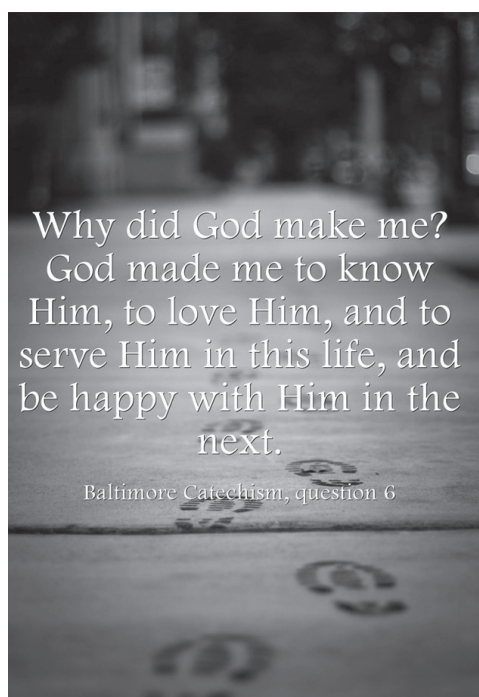
Public spaces these days are rife with people purportedly living their best lives, or learning how to live again after trauma. Everyone with a story to tell (as well as those with nothing much to say), is jockeying for space on media feeds.

Anyone with a social media account is a consumer, willing or not, and it is easy to feel bewildered or lost after protracted amounts of time trawling through Facebook and its affiliates. Like insidious sugar, social media has insinuated itself into our lives, and many times, not for the best.

Is it any surprise, then, that people have begun revisiting that age-old question: what am I here for? It's ironic that in these days of excellent satellite navigation systems, and apps like Waze, that people appear to be more lost than ever.

In view of this, I take so much comfort in the assured security and infallibility of the *Baltimore Catechism*, which queries, "Why did God make me? and answers, "God made me to know Him, to love Him, and to serve Him in this world, and to be happy with Him forever in the next." Some may scoff at the infantile innocence of this question and answer, but I believe some things need to be simplified in order for their impact to be felt.

I turn to the *Baltimore Catechism* in times where the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*



feels more apt as a cockroach killer than a beacon of faith. The *Baltimore Catechism* is what drew me, as a primary Convent schoolgirl, to the faith. It was so simple, but so sure. There is a profoundness in such a simple faith, and I find that, as life gets more complicated, it serves as a reminder of the simplest tenements of my faith.

My media training and work in mass communications has made me privy to how insidious the media can be at implanting suggestions of values and perceived worth. How else can one explain the explosion in whitening products which play on the belief

## WORD IN PROGRESS

Karen Michaela Tan

that being darker complexioned is bad? The proliferation of body positivity media personalities who trumpet 'big is beautiful' is also something I look askance at, because as a plus-sized person, I know it isn't fun or glamorous to live with aching knees. And should I ever be idiotic enough to buy some of the lingerie designed by larger-than-life Lizzo, I would be in grave danger of needing surgery to extract those bits of string she calls panties from my rather deep, personal crevices!

With so many voices saying so many contrary things ("thin is still in", "fat is the new fit", "it's okay to be the gender you think you should be"), it is no wonder that people are confused. How far can self-expression go until it infringes on another person's standard of morality, or freedom of choice? This is an argument which can go on ad infinitum, unless it is given a context.

And how grateful I am that I have the yardstick of my faith. It seems laughably archaic to pin my social orientations on to the Word of God, but I truly believe, as I tell my teenaged daughter, that if one does not stand for something, they will fall for anything.

I am so grateful for the profusion of Catholic priests who have undertaken to engage

on social media, because they believe — rightly so — that this is the new battlefield. Faith is at war with the rest of the Internet, and thankfully, we have charismatic men of God like Frs Mike Schmitz, Cedric Pesigna, and David Michael Moses who fly the flag of cool good for Catholicism.

And yet, even their fun, upbeat, personal, God-driven sharing can pale in comparison to influencers who can be bought; whose opinions can vary, depending on who pays them to say what.

How does an unchanging faith like ours compete in a space like this? The simple answer is, it does not. Our faith is as unchanging as it is uncompromising. It does not suddenly decide that gender can be selected, nor chastity compromised. In a world where the goal posts of some values seem to be moveable, the Catholic Church remains firm.

And it is in this that we find our security, our infallibility, and our worthiness. Just as "Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8), the Church He founded remains unbending to societal pressure and the whims and fancies of trends and fads.

So, when we are tempted to wonder why we are here, perhaps it would do us good to remember John 10:10, "I came so that [you] might have life and have it more abundantly."

● **Karen-Michaela Tan** is a poet, writer and editor who seeks out God's presence in the human condition and looks for ways to put the Word of God into real action.



## FAITHFULLY SPEAKING

Julie Lim Seet Yin

The joy of the Risen Lord was felt on Palm Sunday when two developments took place in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur.

Firstly, on March 17, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia announced that the general dispensations from Sunday and holy days of obligations would be lifted starting from Palm Sunday 2023. Secondly, on March 21, the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur announced that it would no longer be compulsory to wear a face mask when entering a church to attend liturgical celebrations. The ruling took effect on Palm Sunday too.

Whilst I welcome both announcements with gladness, I look back at a few happenings during the pandemic.

### Mask up

Allowing church-goers to attend Mass without having to mask up is a great joy. Certain churches can be hot, humid and stuffy. Therefore, having to mask up throughout Mass is suffocating.

The archdiocese's decision to drop the mandatory use of face mask in church could have been made sooner, the Malaysian Government had already announced in September 2022 the optional use of face mask whilst indoors.

Just before the archdiocese made the announcement, I had wanted to attend Mass elsewhere because certain ministers of hospitality were tough on those who don't mask up. There is a particular minister of

hospitality who gestures fiercely at people to put on their masks when they haven't even stepped into the church. In the March 19 issue of *HERALD*, a reader had written to the Letters to Editor that he was told to leave a religious bookstore in a church because he was not wearing a mask. So much drama and hostility just because of a mask.

### What dispensation?

When the announcement was made that the general dispensation from Sunday and holy days of obligation would be lifted, I notice that people were generally uninterested in the announcement. Unlike other news that gets forwarded to instant messaging chat groups quickly and furiously, this time very few took the trouble to do so. Some of us had even forgotten there was a dispensation.

The general lack of interest was because those who read the announcement are already regular church goers. When churches reopened and Masses had resumed after the pandemic, this group of people had gladly returned to church. Some of us had shed tears at our first physical Mass (after the pandemic) because we had been deprived of receiving the Eucharist for so long. Therefore, the lifting of general dispensation does not change anything. The regular church goers will continue attending Masses and serving in ministry.

### Mass attendance

Time and time again, I hear lamentations and read comments that people are not returning to Church even though churches are open and Masses have resumed. This topic has also been discussed in other Christian churches who are facing the same situation.

## Leaving the past behind

Personally, I don't think the lifting of the dispensation will create a significant difference to Mass attendance. People who have stopped coming to church will continue to do so due to their own reasons. And the lifting of Mass dispensation is not going to change anything. In my BEC, a few members have stopped attending BEC gatherings and activities even though the core team had invited them numerous times. Soon, they exit the BEC group chat and we don't see them anymore. We don't know whether they have left the BEC but are still attending Masses, or they have completely left the Church. Even though it is sad to see members leaving, at the end of the day, everyone has their own free will to make their own decisions.

### Angry with the Church

During a social communications workshop that I attended in December last year, the presenter said that the main reason people stopped coming to church is because they're angry with the Church. That reminded me of pandemic times when the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur had suspended Masses during Christmas 2020, whilst the other dioceses in Malaysia had carried on with their Christmas Masses. That decision sparked a lot of anger and certain Catholics had voiced out their dissatisfaction by writing to the mainstream media. My family members, friends and fellow parishioners also asked amongst ourselves why such a decision had been made by the Archdiocese.

Throughout the pandemic, when Masses were suspended for too long, I too contemplated attending services at other Christian churches, one of which was the HTBB

church in Lot 10, Bukit Bintang. The church looked cool on social media, and I wanted especially to see how they worship.

There are probably many other Catholics who had left the Church during the pandemic. They may have joined other Christian churches, or they may have become agnostic, or they may have decided that they have had enough of religion, etc. If their reason for leaving is because they're angry with the Church (during the pandemic), then it is ironic because the very decisions that the Church had made to protect the flock from the virus became the reason that drove people away. Talk about a double-edged sword.

### Moving on

Now that the pandemic is no longer a looming threat, it is time to forgive the Church for the decisions that she made during that time. God forbid, if another pandemic arises, the Archdiocese will be more experienced in managing the crisis.

The Church has now embarked on a synodal journey where all of us are called to be in communion with one another, to participate in the life of the Church and to be on mission. Let us immerse ourselves in the synodal journey and move forward together

● **Julie Lim Seet Yin** believes that a satisfied life measured by one's heart, mind and soul is better than a successful life measured by worldly yardsticks. She works for a Japanese bank and is responsible for its Public Relations and Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives. She can be reached at: [limseetyin@gmail.com](mailto:limseetyin@gmail.com)





Fr Ron Rolheiser

# Choosing our own storm

**“We only live, only suspire, consumed by either fire or fire.”**  
T.S. Eliot wrote those words and, with them, suggests that our choice in this life is not between calm and storm, but between two kinds of storms.

He is right, of course, but sometimes it is good to vary the metaphor: We live in this world caught between two great gods, very different from each other: chaos and order.

Chaos is the god of fire, of fertility, of risk, of creativity, of novelty, of letting go. Chaos is the god of wildness, the god who brings disorder and mess. Most artists worship at his shrine. He is also the god of sleeplessness, of restlessness, and disintegration. In fact, chaos works precisely by disintegration of what is stable. Chaos is the god more worshipped by those of a liberal temperament.

Order is the god of water, of prudence, of chastity, of common sense, of stability, of hanging on. He is the god of pragma. He likes systems, clarity, and a roof that doesn't leak. He is more worshipped by those of a conservative temperament. Few artists pay him homage, but the corporate and ecclesiastical worlds more than compensate for this. By and large, he is their God. He can also be the god of boredom, timidity, and rigidity. With him, you will never disintegrate, but you might suffocate. However, while he does not generate a lot of excitement, this god keeps a lot of people sane and alive.

Chaos and order, fire and water, don't

much like each other. However, both demand the respect accorded a deity. Unfortunately, like all one-sided deities, each wants all of us, but to give that submission is dangerous.

Allegiance to either, to the exclusion of the other, not infrequently leads to a self-destruction. When chaos reigns unchecked by order, moral and emotional disintegration soon enough unleash a darkness from which there is often no recovery. That's what it means to fall apart, to become unglued. Conversely, when order totally dispels chaos, a certain self-annihilating virtue, posturing as God, begins to drain life of delight and possibility.

It is dangerous to worship at only the shrine. Both gods are needed. The soul, the church, practical life, the structures of society, and love itself need the tempering that comes from both fire and water, order, and chaos. Too much fire and things just burn up, disintegrate. Too much water and nothing ever changes, petrification sets in. Too much letting go and the sublimity of love lies prostituted; too much timidity and love shrivels up like a dried prune. No, both gods are needed — in practical life, in romantic life, in ecclesiology, in morality, in business and in government. Risk and prudence, rock music and Gregorian chant, both contain some whisperings of God. It is not by blind chance that we are caught between the two.

This should not be surprising because God, the God of Jesus Christ, is the God of both — fire and water, chaos, and order, lib-

eral and conservative, chastity and prodigal love. God is the great stillpoint and God is also the principle of novelty, freshness, and resurrection.

Thomas Aquinas once defined the human soul as made up of two principles, the principle of energy and the principle of integration. One principle keeps us alive and the other keeps us glued together. These two principles, while in tension with each other, desperately need each other. A healthy soul keeps us energised, eager for life, but a healthy soul also keeps us solidly glued together, knowing who we are when we look at ourselves in a mirror. Our souls need to provide us with both energy and integrity, fire, and glue.

God is love, and love wants and needs both order and chaos. Love wants always to build a home, to settle down, to create a calm, stable and chaste place. Something inside us wants the calm of paradise and thus love is about order. It wants to avoid emotional and moral disintegration. But love is also about chaos. There is something in love that wants to let go, that wants to be taken, that wants to surrender its boundaries, that wants the new, the foreign, and that wants to let go of its old self. That's a fertile principle within love that has kept the human race going!

Our God hallows both of these gods, chaos and order, and that is why it is healthy that both be kept in a healthy tension. To be healthy, we need to bring them together within ourselves and we need to bring them



together not as we would bring two parties to meet at a negotiating table, but as a high and a low-pressure system meet to produce a storm. After a storm, the weather is clear.

In the tempest there is life and there is God. In it we are initiated, initiated through immersion into the intense fires of desire and the ecstatic waters of surrender.

● **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](http://www.ronrolheiser.com).

## A place to redeem hearts broken by abortion

**R**achel's Vineyard, or RV, is a safe place to renew, rebuild and redeem hearts broken by abortion. Often, this pain remains suppressed for many years or decades, even as it begs to be heard and healed. RV's weekend, Scripture-based retreats offer a supportive, confidential, and non-judgemental environment where women and men may express, release and reconcile painful post-abortion emotions to begin the process of restoration, renewal, and healing.

A recent session was held from March 10 to 12. Below are four inspiring and courageous RV retreatants sharing their reflections on the suffering and pain endured and their experiences of God's mercy, compassion, love, and healing grace. Their names have been changed to protect their identities.

**“I** was extremely cautious about attending RV. But I felt a strong nudge from God leading me in that direction. I finally said 'yes'. RV helped my healing process tremendously through forgiveness, mercy, and compassion. It's the start of my path to freedom. God also revealed other areas in me that needed healing. The



### Rachel's VINEYARD

Healing the pain of abortion - one weekend at a time

beautiful part of the retreat was sharing our feelings and emotions, as we never had the opportunity to do it anywhere else. It was done in a non-judgemental environment of acceptance. I GAINED so much from this retreat. I felt like I am finally released from prison, after years of harbouring the pain and guilt of abortions in my heart.” — *Song Leh*

**“N**o one understands the trauma and suffering after an abortion, in addition to the physical and emotional pain that comes with it. I felt isolated from God and others. Some preaching I heard was hard-hitting - condemning the sinful act. RV was a weekend of healing and new hope. I could share my deepest wound with other women in a safe space and listen to their stories too. Here, I encountered the mercy and love of our Lord Jesus. I also rediscovered God's love and peace - and how precious I am to Him. No sin is too great for Him to forgive me if I am willing to run back into His loving arms.” — *Cora*

**“A**s a Catholic, I always felt God would not forgive me for this terrible sin. Before attending Rachel's Vineyard, I was not sure what to expect. But the love and support I received from the team members and the retreatants helped me during the many sharing sessions. As I spoke of my abortion story and the trauma I went through, the deep impact it had on my

marriage, and my sense of unworthiness before the eyes of God, I felt this heavy burden lifted off me. Now, I feel I am still loved by God and that He has been with me every minute, even during the times I felt unworthy of His mercy. I hope more sisters and brothers in Christ will come and be healed of their pain.” — *Pai Tyn*

**“I**t was a good retreat. The RV team was very supportive and caring. I felt safe sharing my story. I felt released after bottling up my emotions for so many years. Thank you, God, and the RV team.” — *Azalea*

**“I** thank God for the healing ministry of RV, and the people in it. (At RV) I had to be truthful and tell my story in all honesty. This brought me closer to seeking God's forgiveness and learning to forgive myself. With the counsellor's help, I also worked out childhood hurts and pain. I acknowledged the babies I aborted, named, and loved them, before releasing them into the hands of my loving Lord. It brought closure, peace, and forgiveness. I feel free from the burden I carried and the memory of my children in God's loving arms will always be with me.” — *Khaleeza*

If you need support, contact Mary at 016-4190538 or email [healinggracerachelvineyard@gmail.com](mailto:healinggracerachelvineyard@gmail.com). All conversations are confidential.





# Little Catholics' Corner



Dear Children

Jesus is Risen!! Today is the biggest feast of the year for us! Jesus rose from the dead on the first Easter Sunday. Easter is all about God's love for us.

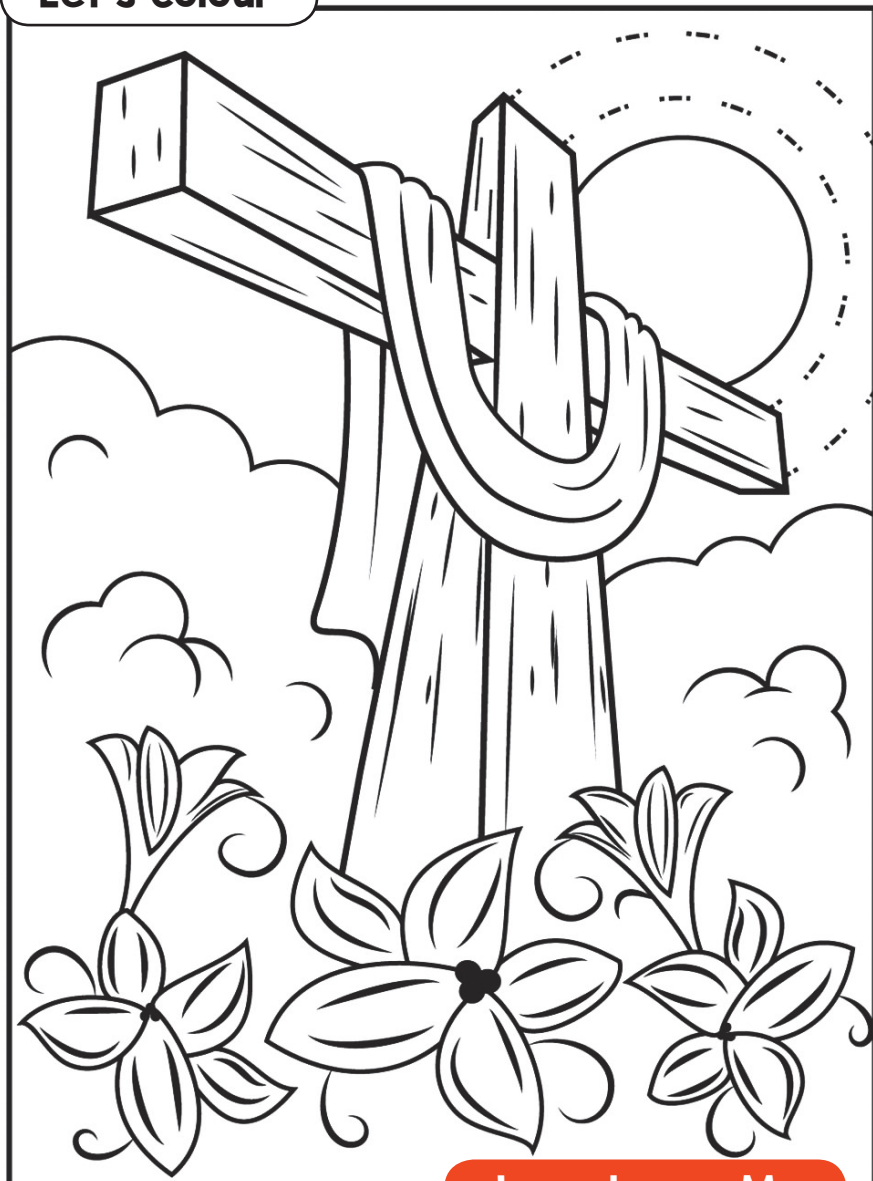
At Easter, we celebrate Jesus' defeat of death. He's alive and will live forever. He wants us to be His friend and have the power to live forever, too.

We do this by telling God we believe Jesus is alive, by telling God we love Him, and by telling God we're sorry for the bad things we've done. We ask for forgiveness and promise to follow and love Jesus every day. When we do this, we have put our faith in Jesus. When we put our faith in Jesus, we have God's power with us every day to help us. And, like Jesus, we too will live forever.

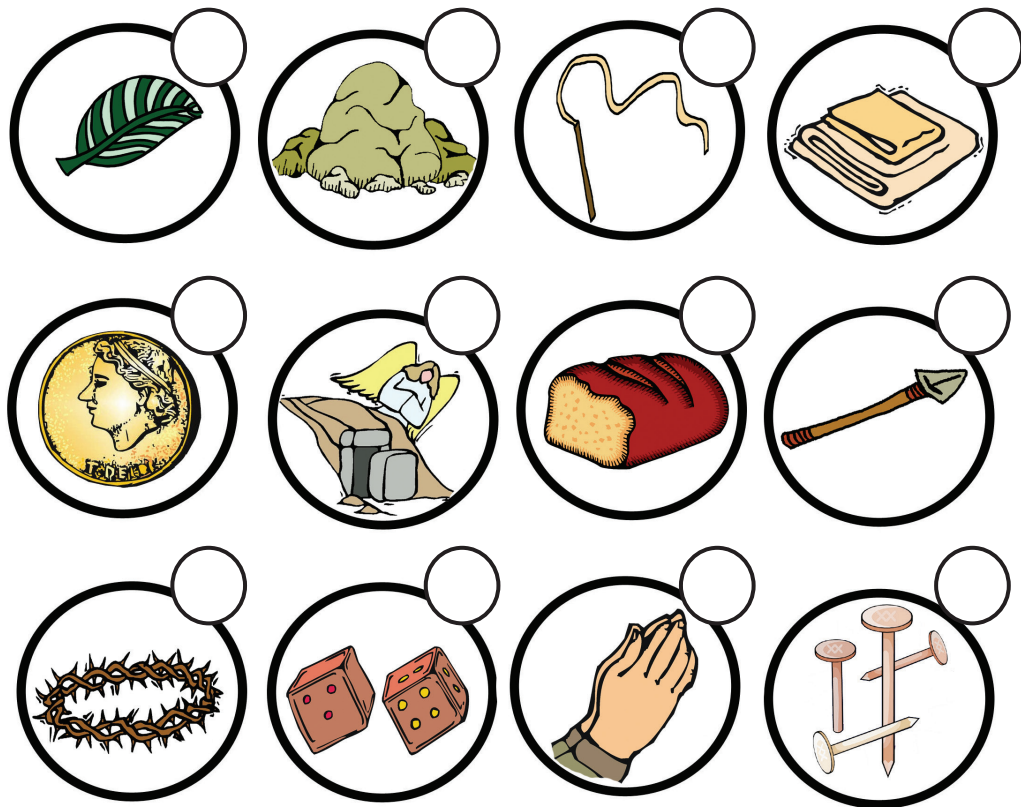
Wishing you and your family a Blessed Easter!

Love Aunty Gwen

## Let's Colour



Jesus Loves Me



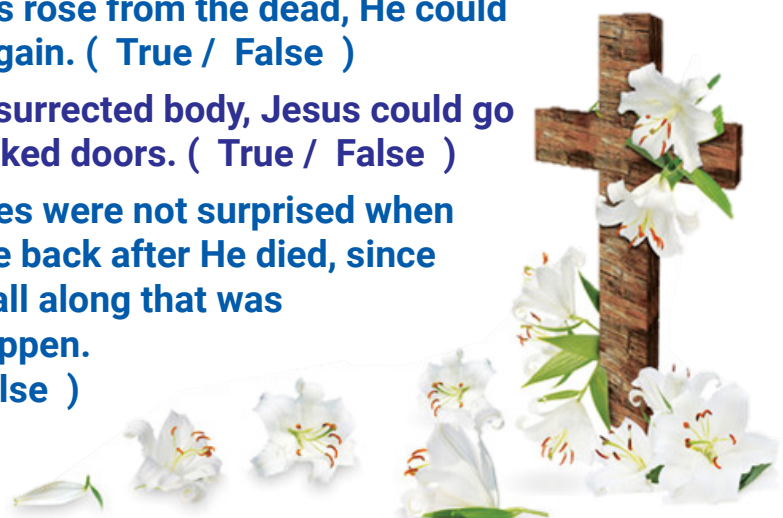
Match the numbers with the images above.

_____ 's Easter Story	
1. Palm Branches (Mark 11:8)	7. Nails John 19:16
2. Silver Coins (Matt 26:14-15)	8. Dice (Mark 15:24)
3. Bread (Mark 14:22)	9. Spear (John 19:34)
4. Praying Hands (Mark 14:32)	10. Cloth (Matt 27:59)
5. Whip (Matt 27:26)	11. Stone (Mark 16:4)
6. Crown of Thorns (Mark 15:17)	12. Empty Tomb (Matt 28:5-6)

## How well do you know the Easter story?

See if you can figure out which of these are true and which are false and circle them.

1. After Jesus died on the Cross, He was buried in a tomb for four days. ( True / False )
2. The first time the women went to the tomb on Easter morning, they saw Jesus' dead body in it. ( True / False )
3. Nobody went to Jesus' tomb until the afternoon on Easter Sunday. ( True / False )
4. At first, when she saw Him, Mary Magdalen didn't recognise Jesus. ( True / False )
5. When Jesus rose from the dead, He could never die again. ( True / False )
6. With His resurrected body, Jesus could go through locked doors. ( True / False )
7. The disciples were not surprised when Jesus came back after He died, since they knew all along that was going to happen. ( True / False )





# YOUTH

APRIL 9, 2023

## YOUTH EXPERIENCE PERSONAL ENCOUNTER WITH CHRIST'S PASSION

SHAH ALAM: The Church of the Divine Mercy was lit by candlelight as 190 young people gathered to experience a personal encounter with the passion of Christ via the Way of the Cross specially for youth.

Parish priest Fr Alan Pereira and assistant priest Fr Michel Dass had expressed their desire to have a reflection of Christ's journey up Mount Calvary that was relevant to youths, one that helped them connect with Jesus' passion and death.

Fr Michel said youth may struggle to connect with the conventional Way of the Cross devotions, and that this prayer session was a way to address that. Recognising the unique struggles and hardship faced by young people, Fr Michel was moved to help youth embrace prayer and find rest in the Spirit, especially in these days leading up to Holy Week.

Youth from neighbouring parishes such as Our Lady of Lourdes and St Thomas More as well as students from CDM's catechism class and Catholic Varsity Students (CVS) were also present for this event.

The event started at 8.00pm, with an opening prayer led by Fr Michel. He then gave a brief reflection, tying the lives of the youth to Christ's act of salvation on the cross. In between reflections and prayers,

hymns were sung. The combination of reflections that the youth could relate to and affirming songs of Worship enabled the young people to fully participate in this one-of-a-kind journey towards self-acceptance and forgiveness.

As the evening drew to a close with the hymn *Goodness of God* (theme song for last year's Youth Camp), there was a sense of oneness and compassion in the atmosphere. The youth then gathered for a mamak-themed dinner and fellowship.

The 190-strong crowd was unexpected, a sweet realisation that our young are physically making that journey back and finding their place in CDM.

Ronald, a participant, said it was the simplicity of the event that moved him.



"It was easy for us youth to relate the Way of the Cross to our daily lives, be it at school, college or even at work. It not only brought together youth but did it in a way that put Jesus in the centre of it all," he said.

Adrienne said she loved how each prayer felt personal, which made it meaningful for her. "With everyone coming together to pray, it felt easier to pray."

Several other youth who were present that night also shared how the personal

reflection on the Way of the Cross, coming just days before Holy Week, would help them embrace Christ's passion and death. One student from CVS who attended the event questioned if she should join the Catholic faith. After the final hymn, this student approached the KUBM pastoral worker and confirmed her admission into the RCIA programme.

At the end of the night, youth were seen sharing their goodbyes and parting ways with a new-found sense of belonging to the community and a faith strengthened by their participation in the Way of the Cross.

The CDM Youth Ministry would like to thank all the participants for being a part of this wonderful Journey. Special thanks to the youth's parents for their support. Last, but not least, kudos and thanks to Frs Alan and Michel for their conscientious effort in putting together this meaningful event.

Heads up to the young people: Keep an eye out for our upcoming event in the next few weeks! See you then, God bless.



## 'The least accessible' given broader perspective

By Peter Zeter

**KOTA KINABALU:** About 186 representatives from parishes within the Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu attended the PBK Preparation Programme held at the Msgr Watcher Centre, This

on March 3 and 4. The primary topic discussed was *Who are the least accessible of our youth?*

The programme was intended to mentally and spiritually prepare the Parish Youth Team Ministry (PYTM) for the coming 14th Archdiocesan Youth Festival or better known as 'PBK 14', which will be attended by young Catholics in Sabah. This



Brainstorming on how to reach out to the least accessible youth.



The youth leaders during the Praise and Worship session.

year, Holy Rosary Limbahau Parish will host 1,200 youth at the three-day event from August 27 to 30.

The long-awaited youth festival, which began in 1983, is held once every four years. St John Tuaran parish hosted PBK 13 in 2018. PBK 14, was planned for early 2022 but rescheduled to 2023 to adhere to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions.

During the two-day preparatory programme, the various parish youth leaders were guided to understand the situation the present Catholic youth are in, as a result of the pandemic. Hence, "least accessible" was chosen as the keyword and central framework to help assess the attendees and

capture their pastoral situation.

Employing the 'SEE - JUDGE - ACT' methodology, the youth leaders were grouped and guided to discuss the realities faced by youth in their respective parishes, brainstorming on the possible and applicable approaches to the situations before deciding on the action plan to reach out to the least accessible youth.

The young parish leaders were also told that least accessible, among others, were the central issues discussed during a recent meeting at the national level. At the end of the programme, the youth leaders were sent back to their respective parishes and asked to start an out-reach programme.



# Teachers and students gain insight into Bible Knowledge



Fr David Reegon OFM Cap with the participants.

CHERAS: Bible Knowledge (BK) is not a new term in the Malaysian education system. It has been around since the 1940s. On average, there are about 500-700 candidates per year. To encourage young students to take the subject a BK seminar for BK teachers and students in the KL South District was held at the Church of St Francis of Assisi on March 18.

The seminar began with an introduction by the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur SPM BK Coordinators chairperson, Dr Irene Leow. She highlighted the dwindling number of students taking the subject and how more students have scored 'A's on the paper in recent years. There is also a lack of teachers willing to teach BK as it is an SPM subject, and the stakes are high. Dr Irene shared ideas on how to combat these issues, mainly by encour-

aging students and church members to get involved in teaching and learning BK.

The next session, by Fr David Reegon OFM Cap, took the teachers and students through the story of St Paul's conversion. It focused on God's message through the conversion story of St Paul and his journey to conversion. This was related to how we view God and our call to conversion and repentance. Students and teachers were invited to a sharing session to ponder and answer questions together and to meditate on the Word of God.

Moving on, we heard from Dr. Peter Pereira, who is a master and student himself. Dr Peter sat for the BK paper last year and once again this year. Students gained first-hand knowledge of the type of questions that could be asked, as well as a detailed compilation of parables, stories,

and events in both the *Gospel of Luke* and the *Acts of the Apostles*. In addition, the new format of BK papers was discussed, whereby opinion questions now were included, to assess the students' ability to relate biblical events to their everyday lives. The students greatly benefited from this session as they now know what to expect and how to answer questions more confidently.

The seminar ended on a promising note with a BK camp scheduled for students taking the subject. Plans for the camp are ongoing and should be finalised sometime later this year. Students and teachers are excitedly looking forward to this camp, which aims to give an in-depth teaching of both books, to prepare students for the upcoming SPM BK exams. — **By Maria Faustina, BK teacher, SFA**

"In comparison to other seminars I've attended, the Bible Knowledge seminar was most impressive and inspiring. As a BK student, I listed it among my 'study and score subjects'. I assumed Dr Peter's session would be just another tip for scoring in the BK exam, but as he began, I learnt that BK is not just about learning and getting good results but about the journey of faith.

"It has since been my mission to learn BK and not memorise it. As an alternative, I have tried to understand it by putting myself in the shoes of Jesus and His disciples in every situation they were involved in. I hope to become a BK teacher in the future.

"In addition to helping future students achieve 'A's in their BK examinations, I also wish to deepen young people's faith in God, for His path is the path one must follow. To other students, I recommend taking the subject. Don't worry, you will not regret taking it, trust me on this one!" — **Raphael Nair, Church of St Francis of Assisi**

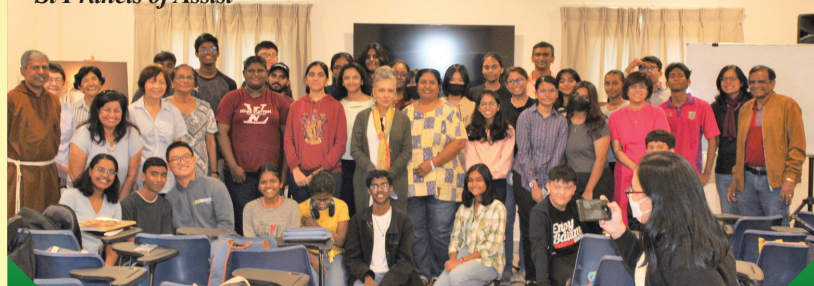
"This was an amazing seminar, with ample information. Thank you for the wonderful experience that was extremely beneficial in learning more about the *Gospel of Luke* and the *Acts*. As a result of attending the seminar, I attained some great tips and answering techniques. All in all, it was fantastic!" — **Sandra Anne Raj, Church of the Holy Family**

"I found the seminar quite meaningful and beneficial for my upcoming BK paper.

The seminar outlined all of the important details and techniques when answering the paper, especially for the essay questions.

After attending the seminar, I feel confident to sit for the SPM BK. If there was a chance to attend another seminar, it would be delightful to join and learn more.

Maybe the next seminar could revolve around Paul's Missionary Journeys as it can be quite overwhelming to understand and memorise. — **Benjamin Chew Fong Meng, Church of the Sacred Heart**



A group photo the BK teachers and students.

## Pilgrimage to Nulu Sosopan



The campus students with Seminararian Nelbert Peter.

KENINGAU: Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. — Matthew 7:7-8 was the theme of the pilgrimage visit to Nulu Sosopan.

Organised by the Catholic Students' Group – University Malaysia Sabah (CSG-UMS), the pilgrimage was one of the programmes planned for the 2022/2023 session at the last Planning Camp.

The visit aimed to aid students in deepening their faith and building relationships with those outside their community. The visit was also to help students who experience

spiritual dryness due to the busyness of their church and campus activities.

Besides visiting Nulu Sosopan, the programme was filled with sessions for the growth of the participants' faith.

On the first day, participants were given the do's and don'ts of the place.

The Praise and Worship session was one way to fill the emptiness and dryness of the participants' hearts while helping them to deepen their understanding of the songs.

This was followed by the introduction of the programme and a Question and Answer session and sharing about the pilgrimage.

The team from the pilgrimage also shared about the statues in Nulu Sosopan, namely the statues of the Holy Family, Mother Mary and Msgr August Wachter.

Seminararian Nelbert Peter led the participants in the Holy Hour.

The candlelight procession to the Bonda Maria statue was an opportunity for the participants to reflect on their prayer intentions.

The second day focused on the procession to the Cross Tower.

The Cross Tower was not just a destination but for the participants to reflect on the sacrifice and suffering of Jesus Christ for the salvation and atonement of our sins. — **Catholic Sabah**

## YOUTH GO GREEN

PARIT BUNTAR: Youth from the Church of Our Lady of Good Health organised a Lenten programme *Go Green* on March 19.

They planted more than 40 plants on the theme *Renew our Hearts to Care* in the church's backyard.

The following week, they organised a clean-up of the church. More than 20 people attended the three-hour programme. By the time the clean-up ended, some of the members were worn out but the church was spick and span.

They gathered at the hall for refreshments provided by the sponsors. They were happy that the church exterior looked nice and clean again. They have promised to take a good care of their beloved church exterior.



Youths cleaning up the church compound.





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## MEMORIAM

## In Loving Memory of

16th Anniversary

6th Anniversary



**Mr. A Savarinathan**  
25/10/1921 to  
14/04/2007



**Mrs. Anamah Savarinathan**  
29/09/1938 to  
12/04/2017

*You were both very special people to us.  
You were individuals of few words,  
but by your actions and deeds,  
you radiated your warmth and love for us.  
Thank you for your loving and thoughtful  
deeds which are still afresh in our memories.*

*We miss you.*

The 16th and 6th Anniversary Memorial Service for our beloved parents will be celebrated at St. John's Cathedral (parish hall), Jalan Bukit Nanas, Kuala Lumpur on 12th April at 6.30am and 14th April at 1.00pm. Prayers will also be held at our residence, No. 22 Jalan 9, Ampang Jaya, Selangor on both days at 8.00pm.

Your prayers and presence will be much appreciated.

From: Loving Children, Daughters-in-law, Grandchildren, Relatives and Friends.



**Majorie De Costa**  
Called Home to the Lord on 11 April 2015

Lovingly remembered and deeply missed by husband, children, grandchildren, siblings, relatives and loved ones.

## 8th Anniversary In Loving Memory

*Your thoughts were all so full of us,  
You never could forget;  
And so we think that where you are,  
You must be watching yet,  
Each time we look at your picture  
You seem to smile and say,  
Don't be sad but courage take,  
And love each other for my sake.*

*"When doubts filled my mind,  
your comfort brought me joy"*  
**Psalm 94:19**

## 14th Anniversary In Loving Memory of



**Mdm Elizabeth Samy Raj (PJM)**  
(Ex-teacher of Mak Mandin Tamil School)  
Departed: 09-04-2009

Deeply missed and fondly remembered by Sons, daughters, sons-in-law, daughters-in-law, grandchildren, relatives, friends and loved ones.

## 2nd Anniversary In Loving Memory of



**Marianthony Peter s/o Marianthony**  
21/11/1925-09/04/2021

*No matter what we do to move on from this pain,  
deep inside, we always know death leaves a heartache no one can heal and love leaves a memory, no one can steal.*

Deeply missed and cherished by loved ones.

*1st year Anniversary Invitation*  
IN LOVING MEMORY OF  
OUR BELOVED AMMA  
*Rosalind Michael*

NOVEMBER 18, 1949 - APRIL 05, 2022  
WIFE OF THE LATE MR SOOSAI INNASI @VICTOR

MEMORIAL MASS WILL CELEBRATED IN ST IGNATIUS CATHOLIC CHURCH, TAMAN MAYANG, P.J  
ON THE 15TH APRIL 2023 AT 6PM.  
THEREAFTER FOLLOWED BY DINNER AT THE FAMILY'S RESIDENCE AT NO. 11A, JALAN SS 5C/12, KELANA JAYA, 46301 PETALING JAYA, SELANGOR AT 7.45PM.

VALENTINA ANNE 0125078213 / ADELINA ANNE 0123500685 / CELESTINA ANNE 0163054465

*55th Year Anniversary*

In loving Memory  
*Innasi Mariarajoo*  
04th April, 1968

You will always be among us,  
Forever in our heart

From loved ones and everyone in the Innasi family

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.  
And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Philippians 4: 6-7

## In Everloving Memory of



**Alfred Satayendra Nicholas PJK, KMN**  
15.9.1921 – 5.4.2013  
Beloved Husband,  
Loving Father and  
Devoted Grandfather

**Mary Celine Rasamah Manuelpillai**  
11.3.1933 – 8.4.2021  
Beloved Wife,  
Loving Mother and  
Devoted Grandmother

*Loving and kind in all their ways,  
Upright and just to the end of their days,  
Sincere and true in heart and mind,  
Beautiful memories they left behind.*

Always in our thoughts, forever in our hearts.

## 4th Anniversary In Loving Memory of



**Soosaimanikam@ Sam s/o Joseph**  
(Ex-Military Navy Officer)  
Departed: 19th May 2018

*Listen to me, my people;  
hear me, my nation:  
Instruction will go out from me; my justice will become a light to the nations.*

Isaiah 51:4-5

In Loving Memory Of  
**Mdm. Indra Thavy @ Mrs. Peter**  
(Ex SK Tarcisian Convent Teacher)

**February 01, 1943 - March 08, 2023**

*40TH DAY MEMORIAL*  
THE FAMILY INVITES YOU TO JOIN US FOR PRAYERS AND LUNCH, IN HER HONOUR.

DATE: SUNDAY, 16/4/2023  
TIME: 12:00 PM  
VENUE: NO. 12, SOLOK SEGAR, LIM GARDEN, 30100 IPOH.

DEEPLY MISSED AND FOREVER CHERISHED

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# Pope sends 10,000 medical kits to earthquake victims in Turkey

VATICAN: The Dicastery for the Service of Charity, headed by Polish Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, has sent more than 10,000 medical kits to Turkey on behalf of Pope Francis, said a statement published by the Dicastery on March 28.

This aid is intended to support those affected by the earthquake that struck Syria and Turkey on February 6. Since then, there have been numerous aftershocks and around 50,000 people have died.

The medicines were delivered over the past two days by two airliners, in collaboration with the Turkish Embassy to the Holy See. The Holy See had already provided immediate relief in the aftermath of the tragedy by sending canned foods, diapers, and other

urgently needed materials.

In late February, about 10,000 thermal shirts had also been sent to be distributed between Turkey and Syria, to help the population face the cold winter. A shipment of three medicine pallets were also sent on Feb 23.

In addition to the more than 45,000 deaths officially recorded, the Feb 6 earthquake caused the displacement of nearly two million people in Turkey. Cities such as Antioch (Antakya) were particularly hard hit, with Christian heritage sites taking a heavy toll.

Several thousand people have also died in neighbouring Syria, adding to the trauma of over 12 years of war and deprivation. However, as an indirect consequence of this tragedy, the country has started to open up



in recent weeks, and its reintegration into the Arab League could follow the re-establishment of diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia, scheduled for next April. — *Aleteia*

lishment of diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia, scheduled for next April. — *Aleteia*

## Vatican lauds Timor-Leste for annual aid to Church

TIMOR-LESTE: A senior Vatican official in Timor-Leste has lauded the government's commitment to providing annual financial assistance to the Catholic Church, calling it a long-term investment in people rather than a donation.

Msgr Marco Sprizzi, charge d'affaires at the Apostolic Nunciature in the capital, Dili, said such support, aimed at helping the Church's social services, is important to address poverty and reach out to those who have been excluded so far.

The government approved an annual subsidy

payment of US\$15 million (RM66.135 million) on March 22 to the Timorese Bishops' Conference (CET).

Msgr Sprizzi said that the Vatican "is grateful to the government of Timor Leste for this annual contribution."

He admitted that in the early years, there were a number of difficulties with the utilisation of the funds, with financial reports that "were not so detailed, not so transparent, not so accountable as it should be".

Therefore, the Vatican diplomat said, when he arrived in 2019, his first task with bishops was to push for accountability. So, now the report is "very serious and professional."

For example, he said, last year's report consisted of 1,200 pages, accompanied by supporting documents such as photos and invoices.

He explained that nearly 40 per cent was dedicated to education, 30 per cent to social activities, 20 per cent to the governance of the Church, and 10 per cent was set aside for the management of

the fund.

"The money that the government gives to the Church is really an investment [on the people]. It is not just a kind of donation," he said.

Msgr Sprizzi said the Vatican also continues to provide financial assistance to the country.

"We are supporting dioceses, seminaries, and giving extraordinary subsidies to specific projects such as the building of chapels, churches, schools and houses for the poor," he said. — *ucanews.com*

## Countdown begins for launching of Vatican's satellite

ROME: The Vatican will soon have its own satellite orbiting around the Earth. About the size of an American football, the *Spei Satelles* (Latin for *Guardian of Hope*) will carry a record of Pope Francis' *Statio Orbis* from March 27, 2020, the extraordinary *urbi et orbi* blessing he gave before an empty St Peter's Square at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to a note published by *Vatican News*, "the *SpeiSat* 3U CubeSat will launch June 10, 2023, from Vandenberg Space Force Base in the US state of California, aboard a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket, which will place it in Low Earth Orbit (LEO) at an altitude of 525km."

The satellite carries a nano version of Pope Francis' book, *Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?* — a collection of images and selected fragments from the 2020 *Statio Orbis*.

The nano book, which is about the size of the tip of a pen, was made in the Polytechnic Uni-

versity of Turin, and can only be read by nanotechnology-reading devices. But anyone who owns a regular UHF-band radio "can pick up a broadcast beamed from the satellite on 437.5 MHz to hear excerpts from the Pope's book as it passes overhead," *Vatican News* explains.

The satellite also has its own website, from which anyone can follow the mission's progress. One can also have one's name inscribed in a dedicated memory chip aboard the satellite: It is a virtual boarding pass.

"In order to obtain a virtual boarding pass, those interested will be asked to pledge to do a work of mercy on behalf of peace and hope," the website reads. "Each person involved can thus become a concrete seed of hope in their daily lives."

The satellite will stay in orbit for up to 12 years — but the radio transmitter only broadcasts for six months to a year, due to battery-induced limitations. — *Agencies*



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