

The *HERALD* is a Catholic Weekly of the Malaysian Church. It endeavours to communicate up-to-date news and Christian values and strives to dialogue with all sectors of society in order to build a harmonious community of believers in God. We support the formation of a participatory Church and encourage the laity and religious to make moral decisions in the marketplace.

TERHAD

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Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned — for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law.
Romans 5:12-13



Caring the Caritas way

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Working together for a better CMPC

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Paving the way for educating migrant children in Sabah

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We need to listen to Jesus

VATICAN: In his Lenten message, Pope Francis focused on seeing Lenten penance and the synodal experience both as arduous journeys that lead to the wondrous experience of Christ's divine light and splendor.

"Lenten penance is a commitment, sustained by grace, to overcoming our lack of faith and our resistance to following Jesus on the way of the Cross," said the Holy Father.

Pope Francis, likened the penitential season to the Transfiguration, saying that during Lent "the Lord takes us with Him to a place apart."

The papal message also likens the practice of penance with the experience of the Synod, saying that both "alike have, as their goal, a transfiguration, both personal and ecclesial."

The two essential elements of both penance and the Synod, the Pope says, are "to listen to Jesus," and "not take refuge in a religiosity made up of extraordinary events and dramatic experiences, out of fear of facing reality and its daily struggles, its hardships and contradictions."

The Gospel accounts of the Transfiguration of Christ offer an illustration of this, he said.

The Pope recalled "the command that God the Father addresses to the disciples on Mount

In his message for Lent this year, the Holy Father chooses the Gospel of the Transfiguration, inviting us to an experience of Lenten penance in which we are called to "ascend 'a high mountain' in the company of Jesus". Like the disciples who were led by the Master to Mount Tabor, we will not be alone on this uphill journey, but in the company of our brothers and sisters. This is the reason why, Pope Francis reminds us, our Lenten path is a synodal journey. At the end of a pathway that "requires effort, sacrifice and concentration", we will arrive to the summit, where "the panorama that opens up at the end amazes us and rewards us by its grandeur".

Tabor as they contemplate Jesus transfigured. The voice from the cloud says: "Listen to Him."

"The first proposal, then, is very clear: we need to listen to Jesus," he said. "Lent is a time of grace to the extent that we listen to Him as He speaks to us."

"During this liturgical season," he continued, "the Lord takes us with Him to a place apart. While our ordinary commitments compel us to remain in our usual places and our often repetitive and sometimes boring routines, during Lent we are invited to ascend 'a high mountain' in the company of Jesus and to live a particular experience of spiritual discipline — asceticism — as God's holy people."

Pope Francis said one of the ways Jesus speaks to us is through the Word of God, which

we can hear at Mass.

But if one cannot attend Mass during the week, it is a good idea to still read the daily readings of the liturgy, the Pope encouraged.

"In addition to the Scriptures, the Lord speaks to us through our brothers and sisters, especially in the faces and the stories of those who are in need," he added.

The Holy Father's second suggestion for Lent was to confront the difficulties of ordinary life remembering that Lent is a period that leads to Easter.

"Do not take refuge in a religiosity made up of extraordinary events and dramatic experiences, out of fear of facing reality and its daily struggles, its hardships and contradictions," the Pope said.

"The light that Jesus shows the disciples is an anticipation of Easter glory, and that must be the goal of our own journey, as we follow 'Him alone,'" he said. "Lent leads to Easter: the 'retreat' is not an end in itself, but a means of preparing us to experience the Lord's passion and cross with faith, hope and love, and thus to arrive at the resurrection," said the Pope.

The Lenten message was presented by Cardinal Michael Czerny, prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, at a Vatican news conference on February 17.

The cardinal said that the dicastery will hold a communication campaign based on Pope Francis' Lenten message whereby it would be relaunching elements of the Pope's message each week over the 40-day period of Lent to help parishes live their own "transfiguration" in a more practical way.

The campaign, *With Him on the mountain: Lenten penance and the synodal journey*, will include reflection questions based on Scripture passages and the Pope's message.

People are encouraged to follow the #Lent2023 campaign on the dicastery's Twitter and Instagram accounts and download new materials each week from its website: humandevelopment.va. — **Agencies**

Source photo: "The Transfiguration" by Danish painter Carl Bloch (1834-1890) Wikimedia Commons

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COMMENTARY

Natural vs Artificial Intelligence

The reaction to AI-generated ideas through such applications as ChatGPT (Chat Generative Pre-trained Transformer) is no different from the reaction to the use of calculators in schools several decades ago. Did it spoil human intelligence? Not really. It did make some people lazy, no doubt, but it sped up the calculation of complex equations that eventually paved the way for the age of computers.

AI (Artificial Intelligence) is nothing but a bi-product of natural human intelligence. Will its use be detrimental to human civilisation? That really depends on us. As is the case with most other scientific and technological inventions of humankind, it's really up to the user; but most of all, it depends on the technology's owner.

We have actually been living with AI for quite a long time already. The manner in which our searches and views are monitored by Google, Safari, or any search engine, should not make us wonder why we are automatically flooded by more of the same stuff on our social media newsfeed.

AI notes the kind of photos or videos that you've viewed, how long you viewed them, how often, etc. It keeps track of the kind of news sites that you follow, the kind of information that you enjoy, the kind that you like, comment on and share, the kind of products you purchase, yes, most anything about you.

Military Intelligence work has never been made so easy. You can easily pose as a psychic, a mind-reader or a spiritual medium and actually sound very convincing by blurting out some pieces of information that you have researched about people. With just a good internet connection and easy access to people's social media accounts, you can put up a booth and pretend to do fortune-telling, complete with a make-believe crystal ball and scam gullible people professionally. You can invent any fake news, make them go viral and get people to actually believe them. You can manipulate public opinion and get even morons elected into office.

The wealth of data stored up by the owners of these social media platforms easily translates into money for advertising agencies, or political power for troll agencies that flood the social media with disinformation. Like I've said, much depends on the owners. For instance, we don't own our accounts in any of the social media platforms, like FB, Tiktok, Instagram, etc. It is the owners of these platforms who own our data and have a right to do with them as they please. You use them; they use you. That's the symbiosis of modern digital technology.

Here's what Wikipedia gives as definition of ChatGPT. It is "a chatbot developed by OpenAI and launched in November 2022. It is built on top of OpenAI's GPT-3 family of large language models and has been fine-tuned (an approach to transfer learning) using both supervised and

reinforcement learning techniques."

One of my brothers asked ChatGPT to write a homily for the Mass on Valentine's Day. Here's what it generated:

"Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

As we gather here today to celebrate the feast of St Valentine, we are reminded of the beauty and power of love. Love, after all, is at the very heart of our faith. In today's first reading from 1 Corinthians, we hear St Paul's famous words about love: 'Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.'"

"On this Valentine's Day, we are called to reflect on the ways in which we can live out this kind of love in our own lives. So often, we associate this holiday with romantic love, but true love extends far beyond that. It is a love that embraces not only those closest to us, but all of humanity, especially those in need."

"As Catholics, we are called to love as Christ loved, to love sacrificially and selflessly. This means putting the needs of others before our own, reaching out to those in need, and treating all people with dignity and respect."

"Let us not forget that love is not just a feeling, but an action. It is not enough to simply say that we love someone. We must show that love through our words and actions. And as we show love to those around us, we will experience the joy and peace that come from living a life rooted in love."

"So, on this Valentine's Day, let us open our hearts to the love of God and let that love overflow into every aspect of our lives. May our love for one another reflect the love of God and bring joy and peace to all those around us."

Here's the exchange of conversation among my siblings about the ChatGPT-generated homily: "ChatGPT will render many people jobless. But note: even when it's talking about love, its message lacks depth and texture that only human experience can furnish."

Another brother replied, "I noticed that its writing style is based on systems approach. Very mechanical and predictable."

I told them in jest, "I dread to see the day when priests will simply generate homilies through ChatGPT! Haha." — **Bishop Pablo Virgilio David, LiCASnews.com**

● **Bishop Pablo Virgilio David of Kalookan is president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines.**

Recognise and reject temptation

"Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil." Now that's a mind-blowing sentence!

Was Jesus really tempted? Doesn't temptation imply a confusion or indecisiveness that seems uncharacteristic of Jesus? Was He really that human? Another question: Why did the Spirit lead Jesus to temptation? Didn't Jesus teach us to beg God not to do that?

In response to the first question, the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke all clearly say that Jesus experienced temptation in the desert. These three Gospels, called synoptic because they follow a similar pattern, paint a very human portrait of Jesus. John, in contrast, portrays Jesus as keenly aware of His divine origin and destiny.

In addition, the word 'tempt' has two related meanings: to put one to the test, or to manipulate someone in an effort to coach them into wrongdoing. Our opening line includes both definitions: The Spirit led Jesus to test His identity; the devil attempted to manipulate Him to be untrue to it.

What is at play here — and in the whole of the Gospels — is Jesus' identity as son of God. Matthew began his Gospel with the genealogy, a description of Jesus' origins in the people of God. Now 'diabolos' (the proper name of the chief of the demons) comes to direct Him about how to fulfil His vocation among them.

We should note that this scene comes immediately after Jesus rose from baptism and heard the voice of God say, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." It seems that, following His choice to be bap-



tised, Jesus' experience of the Spirit impelled Him to explore and clarify what it meant to be Son of God. Baptism led Him to confront everything implied in the word 'temptation'.

The temptations are archetypal with a great variety of interpretations and applications. For today, we might see them as tapping into the same confusing desires the snake used to snag Eve and Adam.

In the Genesis story, the snake told Eve that eating the forbidden fruit would make her like gods. The serpent mastered them, not because they were proud, but because they failed to recognise that they were already like the God who had breathed life into them and created them in the divine image. They got caught in a frenzy of trying to achieve for themselves what they had already been given for free.

Diabolos, a one-hit wonder, tried the same trick on Jesus. The first two temptations begin with the phrase, "If you are son of God," with the implication that the tempter could define what that meant. The third temptation drops all pretence of faithfulness and offers an alter-

native life. We might think of them this way:

Diabolos: "If you are son of God, get the rocks out of your head! Hunger, thirst, and dependence on others are beneath you!"

Jesus: "A son of God revels in relationship. Both sides feed on the risk of being vulnerable to want and thus find greater fulfilment."

Diabolos: "If you are the true son, God should keep you safe, even from your own pretentious foolishness."

Jesus: "A son of God seeks God's will — and that's worth dying for."

Diabolos: "Forget this God business! Look around and admit it. Mine is the only power that runs the world."

Jesus: "Stay in your own hell if you wish. I have no power to stop you."

Jesus' temptations were not a one-time event, nor simply an experience in the desert and then the Garden of Gethsemane. In some form, they summarise all the ways He, and any of us, can distort our vocation to be images of God.

Reflecting on our
Sunday Readings
with Sr Mary McGlone**1st Sunday of Lent (A)****Readings: Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7;****Romans 5:12-19;****Gospel: Matthew 4:1-11**

Diabolos' insistence that we need to assure our own bread and security diverts our attention from the truth that, when anyone is hungry or in danger, not only are all in need, but all have the ability to respond in a way that privileges solidarity over selfishness.

Diabolos' suggestion that religion is meant to be our safety net perverts Christianity, prioritising self-preservation over self-giving. The appeal to raw power promotes the sham of fear-induced unity and control; it betrays and rejects the ways of the God of love. Most of all, it cannot endure.

As we begin this Lenten season, let us pray that we may recognise and reject the ways we, our Church, and our society, are continually tempted to betray our vocation to be images of God. Lent is our time to re-appropriate our own baptismal commitment and to confront and expose diabolos' machinations. In the end, we hope to join Jesus in telling diabolos, "Dwell in your hell. We've got a better option." — **NCR**

Sr Mary M. McGlone serves on the congregational leadership team of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet.

IMPORTANT DATES

February 25 & 26:

Rite of Election

The Rite traditionally takes place on the first Sunday of Lent. This is where Catechumens affirm their desire to join the Catholic Church and are then called the Elect.

Number of Elect in Peninsular Malaysia

Archdiocese of KL: 450

Diocese of Penang: 294

Diocese of Malacca Johore: 202



KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

February & March

- 26/2 **Rite of Election – Church of the Holy Family, Kajang**
- 7/3 **Yayasan Tan Sri Vandergon Board Meeting**



PENANG DIOCESE

Diary of Bishop Sebastian Francis

February & March

- 26 **Rite of Election — Perak Deanery at the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Silibin, Ipoh, Perak at 5.00pm**
- 28 **Meeting — Menteri Besar of Perlis at Pejabat Menteri Besar, Kangar, Perlis at 3.00pm**



MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

February & March

- 23-27 **Asian Continental Assembly for the Synod – Bangkok**
- 1/3 **South Johor Vicariate Clergy Meeting – St Joseph Church, Plentong**
- 1/3 **Diocesan Finance Council Meeting – MAJODI Centre**
- 2/3 **Johor Bahru Pastors' Fellowship**
- 3/3 **Outdoor Way of the Cross – MAJODI Centre followed by Mass**
- 4/3 **Mass – St Mary Church, Ayer Salak for the Salvatorian Family**
- 5/3 **Misa Hari Tentera – Kem Terendak**
- 6/3 **MJD Pastoral Advisory Committee & MJ PMPT**

Bishop Sebastian appointed chair of Asian Social Communication office



KUALA LUMPUR: Bishop Sebastian Francis has been appointed Chairman of the FABC Office of Social Communication (OSC) effective January 1, 2023.

This was announced by President of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) Charles Maung Cardinal Bo, SDB in a letter dated Feb 11.

"On behalf of the FABC, I am happy to appoint you. Your first term of appointment is for three years. As per the statutes of the FABC, on completion of the first term, your appointment is renewable for a second term," wrote Cardinal Bo who is also the Archbishop of Yangon.

"I wish to thank you for your kind acceptance of this position of leadership in our collegial responsibility for the service of the episcopal conferences in Asia. I am sure, together with the other member bishops and the Executive Secretary of the OSC, you will be able to lead and guide the FABC OSC in furthering the mission of social communication in Asia."

One of the important responsibilities FABC has entrusted to its OSC is the man-

agement and governance of *Radio Veritas Asia* (RVA).

"I am confident that with your experience and competence, you will be able to guide and lead the RVA in its mission of proclaiming the Good News to the peoples of Asia."

"As the universal Church, through its magisterium, continues to give great emphasis to social communication in the mission of the Church, let us strive to make the FABC OSC a vibrant and effective instrument for strengthening the episcopal ministry of the Church in Asia in the service of the Gospel."

"I pray the Lord to grant you wisdom and courage to fulfil the responsibilities of this new Office," said the Cardinal.

Bishop Sebastian in response has asked for prayers as "I take on this new role and responsibility as Chairman of the FABC-OSC."

The bishop is also the current President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei.

Bishop Sebastian Francis was born on Nov 11, 1951, in Johor Bahru, Johor. From

1967 to 1970, he joined the St Francis Xavier's Minor Seminary in Singapore, before enrolling in College General, Penang from 1972 to 1976. He was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Malacca-Johor on July 28, 1977.

From 1981 to 1983, then-Fr Sebastian obtained a Licentiate in Dogmatic Theology from the University of St Thomas Aquinas, Rome, Italy. He also studied at the Maryknoll School of Theology, New York, United States where he obtained a degree in Justice and Peace in 1991.

In 2003, he was appointed as Vicar General for the Diocese of Malacca-Johor, a position which he served until he was appointed the Bishop of Penang on July 7, 2012, by Pope Benedict XVI. Bishop Sebastian's episcopal ordination was on Aug 21, 2012, at the now Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam.



Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #121

F12
NEWS
MJD
UPDATES

Earthquake in Türkiye and Syria.

The death toll has exceeded 44,000 (at press time) and thousands of others have been displaced. The freezing temperatures are adding to the suffering and impeding rescue efforts too. Continue to pray for the many who have lost their loved ones.

Be prepared to see big layoffs and re-trenchment exercises by many corporations. Dell and Disney have started.

Menu Rahmah Initiative offers RM5 meals to lessen the people's burden.

From race and religion in schools, now, we see this ugliness in the sports field.

Labouring Times. The Archdiocese of Seoul sees an all-time high of 1,000 priests this year, with the ordination of 24 new ones. There is a vocational boon in South Korea. A young Church needs the young ones for the Church to be relevant. The harvest continues to be plentiful but the labourers are few. The people, the flock and the Church need witnesses of Christ's love. Three temptations to be overcome by the reluctant or hesitant: spiritual mediocrity, worldly comfort and superficiality. We are called to be signs of how the Lord is, of His attitude to us: closeness, compassion and tenderness. The Lord calls us. What's our excuse?

A Thought for the Week:

Good people, bad people

An old man sat outside the walls of a great city. When travellers approached, they would ask the old man, "What kind of people live in this city?" The old man would answer, "What kind of

people live in the place where you came from?" If the travellers answered, "Only bad people live in the place where we came from," the old man would reply, "Continue on; you will find only bad people here. "But if the travellers answered, "Good people live in the place where we came from," then the old man would say, "Enter, for here too, you will find only good people."

A lesson from the old man: The colour of this world is based on the colour of your eyes, the colour of your glasses. It's the way you perceive things. You will find good and bad people everywhere in the world, in every country, in every society. What you see depends on what you are looking for.

Announcements for this Week

1. The Call to the Auxiliary of the Apostolate: Calling all single women, age 18-50 to explore a special lay vocation committed to the Bishop of the Diocese. "Discover Your Vocation", a programme facilitated by the Auxiliaries from the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur.

Call or WhatsApp: Clara Paul, +6012-250 9527.

Join us: April 29 – 30 (Saturday 3.00pm – Sunday 4.00pm) at MAJODI Centre.

2. A talk on Non-Heterosexuality by speaker, Bryan Shen, counsellor and supervisor with the Singapore Association for Counselling, will be held on March 11, from 8.30am-1.00pm at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, JB.

This week's Question and Query. The Q asks: Is the COVID-19 pan-

demic over?

1. Things are under control. No more *MySejahtera*. No more social distancing. No more calls for vaccinations. No more limits to crossing borders. Many have discarded their masks. There are continued incidences of COVID-19 positive cases. Herd immunity has been reached. No more restrictions on gatherings, worship and movement. People are careful, practising good hygiene, and self-regulating. Continue to be careful and safe.

2. According to Pope Francis, there is the on-going crisis from the COVID-19 pandemic. This pandemic has uncovered other pandemics. They are dysfunctional social systems, job insecurity, poor access to healthcare, food insecurity and corruption. The pandemic has made some very rich, and countless others poor. There was profiteering at the expense of the population.

3. For the Ash Wednesday-Lent-Easter season of 2023, the MJD continues to retain the dispensation from Sunday obligation till the Bishops' Conference decides. Except for giving communion in two species, other liturgical practices i.e. imposition of ashes, washing of the feet and baptismal rites will be restored.

The Lord leads His people. We can be one of the 99 or one of the stray ones but the Lord loves all. The love of God does not waiver even if we falter. Have a good weekend. He walks with you.

Bernard Paul

Bishop Bernard Paul



Caring the Caritas way

Caritas MJDOHD Assembly

By Karen-Ann Theseira

JOHOR BAHRU: The Caritas Malacca-Johore Diocese Office of Human Development (MJDOHD) Assembly was held on February 4-5 at MAJODI Centre.

The 61 participants — all of whom are involved in social mission work, had the opportunity to hear from the representatives of the various partners of Caritas MJDOHD.

The Caritas Internationalis Prayer, led by Deacon Steven Wong of the Church of the Holy Family in Ulu Tiram, was a fitting start as the prayer reminded us to, '...never turn away from our suffering brothers and sisters, but be compassionate to them'.

The Executive Director of Caritas MJDOHD, Andrew Leo, reassured all present of how God provides the necessary resources when we say 'yes' to Him.

After some icebreakers, Msgr Michael Mannayagam introduced Caritas MJDOHD. He challenged the participants to have the "smell of the sheep". They need to "turun padang" and get their hands dirty in solidarity with our sisters and brothers in need.

He also spoke on the structure required in an organisation like Caritas. The need for methodology should not be seen as a stumbling block but rather, to guide and facilitate. Msgr added that structure is necessary to account for monies received.

Henson Simyon from the Society of St Vincent De Paul (SSVP) of St James Church in Merlimau, echoed the need for accountability. Henson spoke of how, during the lockdown, individuals and families were provided rations without the required

background checks so as to not delay assistance, but some 'took what they did not need.'

Philip Packium from SSVP at St Philip in Segamat said his ministry provides spiritual formation for their members. Philip shared how 'helping the poor brings us closer to God as it is a vessel for self-sanctification'.

Hendrick Utoi from the Church of the Holy Family in Ulu Tiram gave a brief summary of activities for the needy by parishes in the South-Johore Vicariate. Visits to orphanages, providing laptops for disadvantaged students and Easter hampers for families were just some examples. Hendrick later shared that 'seeing the smiles on the faces of the children when they receive what, to us may be common things is wonderful.'

Migrants

Fr Laurence Motoyou, OFM, the Bishop's Delegate for the Diocesan Ministry for Migrants & Refugees, talked about the plight of migrants in our midst. Adding that we must acknowledge how migrants help build Malaysia and that we should accord them the dignity they deserve as children of God.

Creation Justice

Dr Maria Lee, Diocesan Team Lead of the Malacca Johore Creation Justice Commission, spoke about the need to be better stewards of God's creation through an ecological conversion — in accordance with the teachings and principles found in Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*. Dr Maria highlighted the current PROTEC Year 3 theme which is, 'Stop Plastic Pollution' and that parishes must move away from the use of disposable plastic plates and

cutlery. She also gave a rundown of some activities by Creation Justice Ministry in Sacred Heart Cathedral, St Theresa and Church of the Immaculate Conception, which included a collection of recyclable resources programme, growing vegetables on a wall using the hydroponics method and the launch of PROTEC Year 3.

Orang Asli

James Angus from Aru Bumi explained that the loss of land of the Orang Asli has resulted in the loss of their traditions, culture and way of life. As education is not a priority, many young Orang Asli drop out of school. When asked what his hopes for the Orang Asli were, James said, 'To see them accepted. To let them live where they have been living all their lives.'

Homes

Mdm Maureen Yoong provided an overview on Villa Paulos. Established in July 2010, the home provides care to children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The nurturing of the children includes counselling and character building. Mdm Yoong shared how her involvement with the home has 'made her more compassionate with the realisation that many children lack love and a loving home.'

Another home providing opportunities for a better future is the Fatima Home for boys and girls located on the property of the Infant Jesus Convent Primary School in Melaka Town. Msgr Michael Mannayagam mentioned the 'open house' with lunch gave visitors the chance to find out more about the home. Msgr added that 'quality education would break the chain of poverty.'



Demonstration on a Tzu Chi foldable bed for disaster victims.

Education

Education in the form of skills training, is also a priority at the Montfort Youth Centre located in Air Salak, Melaka. Deputy Director, Joseph bin Philip spoke about how the certified practical training programmes and courses provided for the 'differently abled youth' would increase their employment prospects. MYC has a spacious, beautiful and newly completed dormitory, training workshop and other facilities to accommodate more boys. Mr Philip adds that 'building trust with the boys takes time — a journey with them.'

Tzu Chi Foundation

Established in 1966 and guided by Buddhist teachings, Tzu Chi works towards relieving suffering and educating the rich while helping the poor. Chay Hong Choong from the Tzu Chi Foundation shared the five principles of disaster relief: directness, priority, respect, timeliness and practicality. He showed inventions by the foundation like instant rice, eco blankets made from plastic and water filter systems, provide care and comfort in times of disaster. Having been with Tzu Chi for 12 years, Chay feels that he 'is the fortunate one, being able to learn from the very people he wants to help.'

Disaster Response Teams

Deacon Steven Wong shared on the plan to form Caritas MJDOHD Disaster Response Teams, with an emphasis on floods, as a number of our parishes are located in flood prone areas. The teams would require cooperation and working relationships with government bodies like the Malaysia Civil Defence Force. Deacon Steven is in the process of forming core teams committed to, 'reducing risks, saving lives and rebuilding communities. The Tzu Chi JB Foundation is willing to share their expertise on the necessary training.'

Caritas Internationalis Management Standards

Andrew Leo spoke on Caritas Internationalis Management Standards. These standards must be satisfied before inclusion into the Caritas organisation can be considered. Each group had to go through a section of the document and later explain their set of standards to the other groups. A group prize of holy water bottles were given to the winning group that managed to break down very technical sounding statements into something clear and uncomplicated. Dinner and fellowship followed.

Working together for the common good

Fratelli Tutti

Fr Lawrence Ng, parish priest of Skudai Catholic Centre, started off day two with a talk on *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis' encyclical — a pastoral letter is addressed to the church, clergy and laity on a particular area, in the way *Laudato Si'* addresses the environment. *Fratelli Tutti* was written in the time of COVID-19 and like all past letters written by the Pope, is grounded in the reality of the times. It would be very easy to despair over the state of the world today. However, Fr Lawrence's cheerful delivery lifted our spirits and made us want to share in the Pope's dream, 'to forge bonds of unity, common projects and shared dreams...to build a better world, a just and peaceful world, a fraternity beyond culture, language and nationality.'

Activities and Programmes

The final group activity called for participants to share parish pro-

jects and programmes that encouraged the participation of parishioners; a Blood Donation Drive, a Coffee Corner for breakfast and Street Feeding Programme were just some examples. These activities showed how inclusiveness, being resourceful and innovative leads to better results.

Suggestions

Hugh Dason remarked that yes, life seems to have gotten back to normal, but there will always be people on the street to feed. So, the work continues even if the number of people has grown smaller.

Fr Martinian Lee, assistant parish priest of the Church of the Holy Family in Ulu Tiram suggests having Catechism students visit the less fortunate and the needy. This would expose them to how people with much less than them live.

Andrew added that as missionaries, we have the opportunity to bring prayer to those we visit — the *Friends In Need*, our neighbour.

Here I am Lord, send me

Having spent two days with the participants, Bishop Bernard Paul in his closing remarks and observations was both uplifting and thought-provoking. He reassured us that we possess the 3Gs:

Grace — the life of the Spirit of God living in us.

Goodness in us.

Good Works — as we are capable of doing good.

Bishop Bernard Paul called us to be cheerful givers, to be welcoming, show warmth in our work.

He also encouraged us to have bigger dreams — don't just feed



Bishop Bernard Paul in his closing remarks to the participants.

the poor but take them off the streets into jobs and homes!

The Assembly closed with Mass,



presided over by Bishop Bernard. From the Gospel reading of Matthew 5:13-16, the bishop asked the participants to think about whether they were light or salt. To understand who they are — their strengths and weaknesses. With this knowledge they would be better equipped to make better decisions and choices in their social mission work and as missionaries.

Bishop Bernard then invited the participants to say these words with a hand placed on the altar — simple, humble, yet powerful words that encompassed everything they had experienced over the two days, 'Here I am Lord, send me.'

Praying for the sick and the elderly

By Pauline Sundram

IPOH: The Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes was celebrated with Novena and Mass from February 3 to 11 at the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes. The principal theme was *Mary, Figure of Communion, Model in Participation, and Mother on Mission in alignment with the Universal Church*.

Masses over the eight days were celebrated in English by the Rector of College General, Fr Simon Labrooy, and the Church of the

Visitation, Seremban's parish priest, Fr Xavier Andrew. The preachers shared awe-inspiring and energising messages on *Mission, Marriage, Participation*, and various presentations in line with the main theme.

Mass for the Anointing of the Sick was celebrated on Feb 10, in conjunction with the World Day of the Sick. Parishioners from near and far registered for the anointing, administered by Bishop Sebastian Francis, parish priest, Fr Robert Daniel, Fr Eugene Fernandez CSsR, Fr Simon, Fr Xavier, and

Deacon Sandanasamy.

The general sentiment was they were happy to be remembered in prayer, even through the sufferings related to their illness.

The celebration climaxed on Feast Day, Feb 11, with Mass presided over by Bishop Sebastian Francis. He shared about the three Witnesses to Christ – the Spirit, the Water, and the Blood.

On Feb 12, Bishop Sebastian celebrated a Thanksgiving Mass, after which Deacon Sandanasamy burnt the petitions at the grotto.

A human tapestry of love

PENANG: The Cathedral of the Holy Spirit celebrated World Day of the Sick on February 11 with Mass for the home-bound, those unable to come for weekly Mass, and the unwell.

Caregivers and members from the Hospitality Ministry were seen assisting the elderly and infirm as they slowly made their way into the church. Parish priest, Fr Joachim Robert, celebrated Mass with priest-in-residence, Fr Francis Anthony, and Fr Esmond Chua from the parish of the Risen Christ, Air Itam, concelebrating.

The Gospel for the day was the wedding feast at Cana, where Jesus performed His first miracle and began His ministry. In his sermon, Fr. Joachim said that just as the guests were invited to the wedding, we too are invited to share in a feast with Jesus during Mass. He also highlighted the similarity between wedding guests meeting and catching up with family and friends after a while and the congregation at this Mass.

"This is a joyous occasion, seeing all of you after a long while."

He also reminded the afflicted not to take their caregivers and the others who assist them for granted. This happens either when we live in the past or too far into the future that we forget to be present in the moment and see the sacrifices and kindness shown by people around us.

"It's easy to be consumed by our

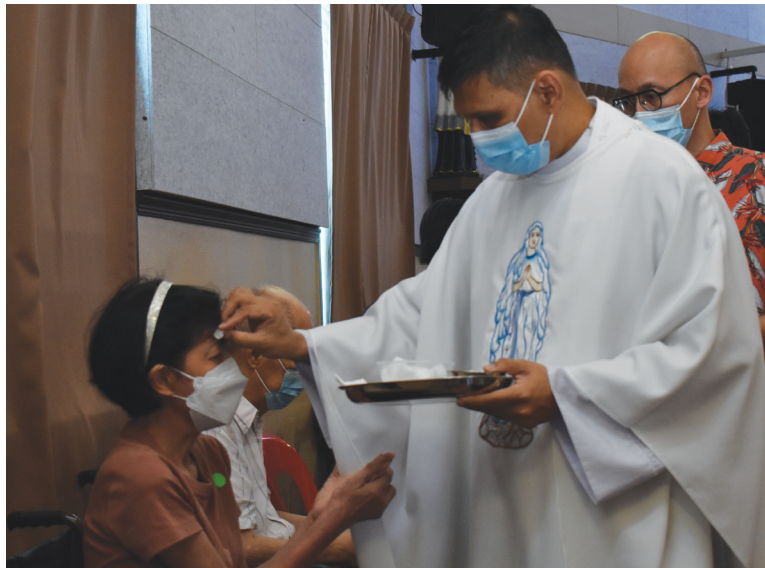
situation and pain that we forget to be kind to the people trying their best to make us comfortable," he said.

He added that when we gather for occasions like this, we realise how much we are connected and how much we need each other. He went on to say that sometimes, our challenging situations teach us to be humble and allow others to be a blessing to us when they offer their help and support. Often, we forget how much we are loved and appreciated, and God uses our circumstances to demonstrate His love through the kind acts of others. Fr Joachim ended his sermon by asking the congregation to spend some time in silence to

thank God for any two blessings He has bestowed on them in their affliction.

As a show of appreciation, the caregivers and those who see to the nitty-gritty to make things comfortable for the afflicted were asked to stand to receive a special blessing.

After the final blessing, Fr Joachim thanked everyone involved in making the special Mass possible and for assisting the caregivers in bringing in those who needed extra help. The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick was administered by the three priests, before everyone went for refreshments at the church café. — **By Carmel Dominic**



Fr Joachim Robert anoints the infirm.

Lenten Campaign launched



Bishop Sebastian Francis presents a mock cheque to the Caritas representative.

IPOH: The Lenten Campaign 2023 for the Diocese of Penang was launched on February 11.

Caritas Penang Chairman, Fr Joachim Robert, shared insights on this year's Lenten Campaign, before Bishop Sebastian officially launched the theme by unveiling the banners.

Bishop Sebastian also presented a mock cheque of RM145,000

to the Caritas representative from the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Stephen Arokiam, who received it on behalf of the 29 parishes. This special fund of RM5,000 is given to every parish in the Penang Diocese to promote and support *Kempen Kasih*, an initiative in the area of welfare and integral human development.

Surprise turnout at Pekan Nenas parish feast day

PEKAN NENAS, Johor: The parish of Our Lady of Lourdes saw double its usual attendees during the feast day Eucharistic Celebration February 12.

Parish Community Leader, Francis Pang, said, "The parish normally saw about 50 to 60 people attending its feast day. This year, we had over 100 people, exceeding the chapel's capacity. This is the first time we have had a crowd like this on a feast day."

Despite heavy rain throughout the day, Catholics from Skudai, Pontian, Kulai, Plentong, Ulu Tiram, and Johor Bahru came to the little town located between Skudai and Pontian.

Rose Chan came with several Chinese-speaking parishioners from Skudai. She said, "I came with my granddaughter because of my love for Mary. She is a constant presence in our lives." Collin Tan also came with the people from Skudai. He said, "Our BEC came to participate in this celebration instead of our usual gathering. Many of our elderly members wished to come and receive the Anointing of the Sick."

The programme for the simple celebration began with the Rosary, followed by Mass with the Anoint-



Fr Lawrence Ng during the homily.

ing of the Sick. The main celebrant was Fr Patrick Tyoh from Batu Pahat with parish administrator, Fr Lawrence Ng concelebrating. Fr Patrick wanted to explore the small chapels around the Diocese of Malacca Johore and took the opportunity to visit Pekan Nenas during its feast day.

He said, "I was touched by the number of people who came and prayed for healing. I pray that they find it and that the anointing they received will bring them peace and consolation." During Mass, Fr Patrick urged the people to make truth a part of their way of life because falsehood can disrupt and negatively affect our lives." — **By Y.K.Ng**



Bishop Simon Ju-young Kim of Chuncheon with Bishop Bernard Paul.

South Korean bishop visits Johor

JOHOR BAHRU: Bishop Simon Ju-young Kim of Chuncheon in South Korea paid a courtesy call to Bishop Bernard Paul at the MAJODI Centre on February 3.

The prelates met at Bishop Bernard's office, exchanged gifts, and had a brief discussion before visiting the diocese's Centre of Heritage and History of Malacca Johore, located in the MAJODI Centre premise.

Bishop Simon visited the Johor Korean Catholic community and celebrated Confirmation Mass for 15 confirmands. The Korean prel-

ate said, "I appreciate the hand of friendship and the welcome Bishop Bernard and the diocese have extended to the Korean Catholic Community in Johor Bahru. Many Koreans have made their home here, and we must take care of their pastoral needs."

Bishop Bernard said, "It is an affirmation of a friendship marked with love, understanding, and dialogue between our peoples and culture. This meeting expresses Pope Francis' call for us to be a 'synodal Church'. We must commit ourselves to be an Asian

Church that journeys together."

Bishop Simon was accompanied by his priests and some members of the Korean community in Johor. The leader of the Korean Catholic community of Johor, Simon Oh HyunSik said, "The Korean community is very happy with the Malacca Johore community. Today's meeting is not just about shaking hands and saying hello. It can deepen the relationship between our communities. Perhaps Bishop Bernard can visit Bishop Simon in Korea one day." — **By Y.K. Ng**

Couples renew vows on World Marriage Day



Lighting tea light candles at the Holy Family Fountain.

RAWANG: The Church of St Jude celebrated World Marriage Day on February 12.

In addition to celebrating Mass, the parish's Family Life Ministry created a photobooth and a Holy Family fountain beside the church office to mark the occasion. After Mass, parish priest Fr Vincent Thomas blessed the married couples and presented them with a flower and a candle, which the couples lit at the Holy Family fountain.

When asked about married life experiences, the Chans said, "Forty-four years of marriage is indeed a milestone. We made it through because of the love we share for one another."

Mr and Mrs Augustine, who are also celebrating 44 years of marriage, shared the same sentiments. When asked what advice they would give young couples, Mrs Augustine said there must be love, mutual respect, and understanding.

"Prayer life is another important part to support a couple in staying together," added Mrs Augustine.

Younger married couple, Gloria and Brandon Jude said, "It feels great to be living a life with someone on the same wavelength."

Brandon's sister, Lavanyah Ann, now married for one year, humorously said, "It feels like having an approved sleepover with your best friend."

They, like many other young married couples, said they were inspired by their parents who may not have had an easy life in the beginning, but through all their tribulations and problems, they stuck together, always lifting their families to God in their daily family prayer.

It was a beautiful sight to see the young and the senior married couples gathering around the Holy Family fountain, saying a family prayer together as they lit and floated their tea candles in the little pond, trusting that the Holy Family of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus will bless their families forever. — **By Mercy Almeida Stellus**

Working together for a better CMPC

By Danny Ong

PORT DICKSON: The first combined, multi-lingual Catholic Marriage Preparation Course (Weekend) retreat was held from February 4 to 6, at the IJ Centre. The presenters brought their children, turning it into a cosy family event.

The retreat aimed at the four major language groups getting acquainted and learning from each other. Each team shared their presentations, and everyone discussed the positive

points and what needed improvement.

After an impactful brainstorming session, everyone headed to the beach for fun and games with the children. The camaraderie and discussions continued during dinner before the retreatants recited the Rosary in the four languages.

The next day's session began with Mass at the Church of the Immaculate Conception, followed by more brainstorming before a second round of beach time. The evening ended with a

BBQ dinner.

Before dispersing on Monday, the different groups agreed to visit each other during their respective CMPC weekends to learn more and finalise improvements. They were thrilled that the Church of the Immaculate Conception's parish priest, Fr Jestus Pereira, graciously visited them over the weekend and plans to host this retreat annually.

If you are interested to join the team, contact them at cmcpw@archkl.org.



The CMPC presenters from the different language groups with their children at the retreat.

Focus on loving one another

KLANG: The Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur celebrated World Marriage Day (WMD) at the Church of the Holy Redeemer on February 11. Archbishop Julian Leow presided over the Mass with Family Life Commission (FLC) Ecclesiastical Assistant, Fr Andrew Kooi, con-celebrating.

After the homily, couples were invited to stand, face each other and renew their marriage vows. It was followed by a couple from Marriage Encounter reciting the Prayer of the Faithful in conjunction with WMD.

After the final prayer, Fr Andrew, who is the parish priest, distributed prayer cards to the congregation, encouraging married couples to say the prayer as a family often.

After Mass, the congregation enjoyed the dinner and entertainment provided.

The evening culminated with a closing speech by the archbishop, who sent out a message of love and harmony and thanked all who helped organise the event.

The theme for WMD has been permanently adopted as *Love One Another*. This phrase is the commandment given to us in John 15:12. It speaks to us in a simple but challenging way about how our Father wishes us to live. Loving one another is a daily decision, simple but challenging.

Pope St John Paul II imparted his apostolic blessing to WMD in 1993, and it has

been celebrated in the world's dioceses ever since. Its purpose is to honour husbands and wives for their mutual sacrificial love and fidelity, embodied in "their special sacrament". The Church has always believed and taught that marriage is the "image" of the union of Christ with his Church. The late Pope noted that "marriage is an act of the will that signifies and involves a mutual gift which unites the spouses and binds them to their eventual souls with whom they make up a sole family, a 'domestic church'." That expression continues to be widely used and applied.

WMD's purpose is to emphasise the beauty of marriage and honour husbands and wives for their faithfulness and sacrifices.

It highlights the promise of a marital union and the beauty of being a lawfully wedded couple under the eyes of Christ. It was brought into order by the Worldwide Marriage Encounter, an initiative aiming to improve struggling couples' married life. Catholic couples celebrate the day by attending Sunday Mass and recommitting themselves to the values of the institution of marriage.

It is also the celebration of emerging diversity in the institution of marriage and the incorporation of various heritages and ethnicity that add to the grandeur of God's creations. — **Family Life Ministry, Church of the Holy Redeemer, Klang**

Celebrating parish feast with games

TAIPING: The Taiping Catholic church, under the stewardship of parish priest Msgr Stephen Liew celebrated its parish feast day recently.

Formally known as the Church of St Louis, several games were arranged for the different age groups to participate in, such as carrom, lawn bowling, and badminton. There was also a Salad Preparation contest to draw crowds from the different parish groups.

Msgr Stephen was seen mingling with the parishioners and moving from one competition to another. The day ended with lunch for all present. We thank God for the fine weather. — **By Valerie Angus**



Trying out lawn bowling.

HRC seniors asked to cherish relationship and mend broken ones

KUALA LUMPUR: The Church of the Holy Rosary's Ministry of Senior Persons Circle (PAMSPEC) welcomed the Lunar New Year with Mass and luncheon recently.

Dressed in all shades of red, this was the senior group's first physical gathering since the pandemic.



The senior group with Archbishop Julian Leow and Fr Dominic Lim.

The Mass was presided over by Archbishop Julian Leow, with parish priest, Fr Dominic Tan, and former parish priest, Msgr Daniel Lim, concelebrating.

In his homily, the prelate reflected on the day's Gospel reading by telling everyone not to worry about tomorrow. "Each day has enough

trouble of its own. All of us have our crosses and concerns, we have so many things to worry about and yet, we are assured today that if we put our trust in God, He will take care of everything, and will accompany us all the way."

Archbishop Julian reminded the congregation to thank God for the relationships they have, for life itself, for the people in their lives, and for one another. He also asked them to be aware of the people around them, especially the poor and the marginalised, and to do what they can for the less fortunate.

"Life is short", he said, "and it gets shorter as we grow older." He urged them to build a good relationship with God, and with one another and to reconcile deteriorated relationships. He concluded by advised them to let the Year of

the Water Rabbit help them take a step forward in their relationships with the less fortunate; to pray for the victims of the recent earthquake in Türkiye and Syria and those suffering in war-torn countries and from natural and human problems.

After Mass, everyone was led to the church hall by Lion Dancers for a fellowship lunch. Once again, the archbishop reminded the seniors to treasure their friendships and relationships and pray for those who have gone before us. He then sang the famous Alleycats' song, *Andainya Aku Pergi Dulu* much to the delight of all present.

The afternoon ended with everyone singing *Give Thanks* with lots of gratitude and love for God. — **By Elena Chan**

New church for Coalfields

By Bernard Anthony

KUALA SELANGOR: A new church is in the works, to replace the 50-year-old Chapel of St Anthony in Coalfields.

Estimated to cost RM3.5 million, the church will be situated in Bandar Seri Coalfields, a short drive from the current chapel, along Jalan Kuala Selangor.

During the recent Feast of the Holy Infant Jesus, parish administrator, Fr James Gabriel who is the parish priest of the Church of St Paul the Hermit, Bestari Jaya, asked the congregation to pray for

the success of the project, which he hopes will begin soon.

A booth was set up to highlight the proposed new church and to seek funds from the congregation by selling items like candles, umbrellas, incense, and flowers. A donation box was also available.

Justin Joseph, a lay leader, said there are about 300 parishioners who worship at the Chapel of St Anthony in Coalfields, a predominantly Tamil-speaking community. There are also many Catholic migrants living in Coalfields and its surroundings.

In addition to the current chapel

sitting on estate land which sometimes floods, the property developer wanted the remaining portions of land for housing development. Thus, both parties agreed to exchange the existing plot with an acre of land in Bandar Seri Coalfields, to build the new church.

Justin said the Development Order from the Majlis Perbandaran Kuala Selangor has just been obtained; but the other agencies are still in the midst of processing the request. Once fully approved, the parish will obtain the archbishop's nod to carry out fundraising at other parishes in the archdiocese.



Fundraising campaign for the new church to be built in Bandar Seri Coalfields.

SFX parishioners urged to be disciplined disciples of Christ

MELAKA: "Come, let us listen to the Holy Spirit" is not a question of convenience but a necessity.

Parishioners, leaders of BECs and ministries from the Church of St Francis Xavier's three language groups came together for Parish Discernment Day on February 11.

It was a follow-up to last year's synodal exercise at the diocesan level. Before the gathering, participants were given the Diocesan Pre-Synodal report as preparation reading material. Equipped with this knowledge, the participants attended a half-day reflection.

Fr Moses Rayappan, in his opening address, reminded participants of the need to become disciplined disciples. It is not enough to just be a Christian today. What the Church needs is "disciplined disciples of Christ" who embrace a way of thinking, believing, and witnessing that flows from this

discipline. He also reminded them of the need to love and own the decisions made by contributing towards them.

The sessions were animated by Fr Moses and Fr Alexuchelvam Mariasoosai, during which they highlighted key points from the Diocesan Pre-Synodal report before posing the reflection questions to the participants. The questions covered the major issues that needed attention at the parish, BECs, and ministries levels.

The participants deliberated and proposed possible solutions which they later took on as their commitment and responsibility to ensure steps are taken to implement said proposals.

The sessions continued with participants drafting the parish's Vision and Mission statement before the gathering ended with a prayer in church. — **SFX Melaka**



Fr Moses Rayappan during his opening address.

Towards a synodal parish of Communion, Participation and Mission



Fr Valentine Gompok OFM Cap raising the monstrance during the celebration on February 11, 2023.

KLANG: With its trifold focus on *Family, Leadership, and Evangelisation* underpinned by the synodal principles of communion, participation, and mission, the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes celebrated her parish novena feast from February 4 to 12.

The theme was scriptural, based on *Salt of the Earth and Light of the World*, taken from Matthew 5: 13-16, with concurrent Masses celebrated in English, Tamil, Bahasa Malaysia, and Mandarin.

The feast day celebration began with parishioners and pilgrims getting to know the religious brothers and sisters of the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, followed by a commemorative Mass for the World Day of Consecrated Life on Feb 4.

The next day, the parish novena festivities saw the simultaneous launching of three events — the annual parish Youth Rally, an exhibition on *Understanding World Religions*, and the Lourdes Wash. The latter two were held throughout the novena days.

These events saw hundreds of parishioners and pilgrims learning more about other religions and experiencing various degrees of healing, especially at the healing Mass on the World Day of the Sick, Feb 11.

Exemplifying Mary, the perfect role model of discipleship, the parish's Legion of Mary and Catholic Charismatic Renewal jointly organised a symposium on Feb 11 afternoon and Feb 12 morning. This opened the doors to the

formation of a new junior prayer ministry, whose members consist of Catechetical students aged 13 years old and above. It is part of the ministry's efforts to establish prayer life amongst the younger and emerging members of the parish, with servant leadership as its benchmark.

The parish feast day celebration peaked with an outdoor Eucharistic and Marian procession on the evening of Feb 11. Many attendees expressing both relief and joy at being able to process with the Lord and Our Lady fulfilling a long-standing wish of being a parish and pilgrim family participating as leaders and being evangelising missionaries in the process. — **By Bernadette Anne Fernandez**

Malacca Johore Diocese Religious elect new committee

MELAKA: Ten congregations and religious orders from the Malacca Johore Diocese (MJD) gathered at the Montfort Youth Centre on February 2, to celebrate the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord and the 27th World Day for Consecrated Life.

The Celebration began with an input session by Fr Simon Yong, SJ entitled *Light and Salt of the World: The Religious Life* and a keynote address by Bishop Bernard Paul.

The Eucharistic Celebration was presided over by Bishop Bernard and con-celebrated by more than 10 diocesan and religious priests.

During Mass, the religious present recommitted themselves to the Lord, before the Bishop, by singing their rendition of *The Summons*,



The religious congregations in Malacca Johore Diocese.

originally composed by John L. Bell in 1987. The Montfort Youth Centre students, under the care of Bro Peter Kolandai Samy, SG provided the choir and musicians.

After Mass, guests, religious, and students enjoyed a lunch fellowship and Lunar New Year celebration. The students showcased their talents

and skills with several performances including a lion dance, skits, and singing.

The event concluded with the Association of Religious (AOR) of the Melaka Johore Diocese's Annual General Meeting to elect leaders for the new term of 2023-2025. After the election, Friar Joe Mathews,

OFM Cap was appointed chairman of the AOR, assisted by Bro Thomas Paul, SG.

Sr Santhamary, IJs assumed the role of secretary while Sr Monica Foo, FDCC was made treasurer. Friar Joe, in his appreciation speech, said he hopes to serve the commu-

nity as best but also needs the members to support him during his tenure as the chairman of the community.

Previous chairman, Friar Clarence Motoyoo, OFM, assured the new line of leaders of his willingness to accompany and journey with them. — **By Fr Sixtus Peter OFM**

Paving the way for educating migrant children in Sabah

By Peter Zeter

TATAL, KENINGAU: The local Church in Sabah came together at Tatal Retreat Centre from February 2 to 4 to discuss education for migrant children under the AMOS 5 programme. The Keningau Diocese hosted the programme, held once every two years.

The two-day session was attended by bishops, priests and religious, as well as 95 participants from three dioceses, representing those ministering to the migrant communities around the state. There were also representatives from the Indonesian and Filipino communities.

Keningau's Bishop Cornelius Piong began the session by presiding over a Eucharistic celebration, followed by a getting-to-know-you session.

On the second day, Dr Felix Tongkul, a member of the Kota Kinabalu Archdiocesan Pastoral Council, presented on *Upholding human dignity through education*. Dr Felix stressed that education is the starting point for a visionary and respectable community. Quoting from the *Book of Proverbs*, he said that since ancient times, education has been pointed out as a priceless treasure, more important than gold. "The technology we enjoy today is the result of progress in education," he said.

Next was a forum entitled *The Migrant Children's Education* in Sabah, featuring several distinguished speakers including, the



Participants of AMOS 5 at the Tatal Retreat Centre in Keningau

Commissioner of SUHAKAM, Prof Dato' Nor Aziah Mohd Awal, School's Administration Sector of State Education Department Chief Assistant Director, Haji Sani Bin Paijo, the University of Malaysia Sabah's Prof Dr Sanen Marshall and Collaboration Coordinator for Community Learning Centre (Kota Kinabalu region) from the Indonesia General Consulate of Kota Kinabalu, Nasrullah Ali Fauzi.

The insightful forum brought to light that the local and migrant children's education in Sabah is still far behind, compared to other regions in Malaysia. Haji Sani said for the local children, not having a birth certificate was the main reason they didn't attend school. To help overcome this issue, he hoped all community leaders would work together to have the marriages within their communities documented,

either through a letter from the Village Chief or from the Native Court.

Dato' Nor Aziah told attendees there were certain 'grey areas' in the guidelines to register and issue birth certificates, either by the National Registration Department or the Ministry of Home Affairs. Thus, not having a clear 'standard of operation' from the relevant departments contributed to the uncertain identity of many children, locals and migrants alike.

Most participants were surprised to learn from Nasrullah that there are 17,326 Indonesian children currently studying at 234 Community Learning Centres (CLC) around Sabah. Of the 234 CLCs, 94 centres have a government permit issued by the State Education Department. Nasrullah also said that during the pandemic, 500 students were sent

back to Indonesia via Tawau for further studies.

Armed with the above information, the participants regrouped according to their respective dioceses to discuss concrete action to be taken over the next two years regarding education issues for migrant children.

On the final day, participants were reminded to apply the methodology of SEE-JUDGE-ACT when embarking on the proposed actions agreed upon during the diocesan group discussion. The session was delivered by the Sabah Migrant Ministry Mobiliser Team (TPPMS) head, Dominic Lim.

The conference ended with a Eucharistic celebration, after which advisor for TPPMS, Bishop Julius Dusin Gitom, announced that the Diocese of Sandakan will host AMOS-6 in 2025.

Religious leaders come together for OLF's Diamond Jubilee celebration

KUALA LUMPUR: In conjunction with World Interfaith Harmony Week and as part of the Church of Our Lady of Fatima's (OLF) Diamond Jubilee celebrations, the parish held an interreligious celebration on February 12.

Hosted by OLF's parish priest Fr William Michael, the event was attended by religious leaders from 12 places of worship and associations around Brickfields.

Archbishop Julian Leow's presence further emphasised the importance the Catholic Church places on maintaining good relations with people of different faiths in the country.

The event began with singing the *Negaraku* and reciting the *Rukun Negara*. Fr William then welcomed the guests and shared a brief history of OLF. He highlighted how OLF evolved from being a parish originally built to cater to the Tamil-speaking Catholics in Brickfields to now being home to a diverse group of Malaysians and migrant Catholics from various countries, languages, and cul-

tures. He also spoke about the uniqueness of Brickfields, with its many places of worship and the constant promotion of tolerance, peace, and harmony among residents in the area.

The attendees were invited to pray in silence for the promotion of peace and harmony in Malaysia. This was followed by a short sharing by the Chairman of INSaF Dr Amir Farid Isahak, and a leader of the Baha'i community, Rane Sreedharan, regarding their aspirations for the country, in general, and for the interfaith community in Brickfields, in particular.

Before enjoying a light fellowship and renewing old friendships, Fr William handed out souvenirs to the participants to thank them for taking the time to participate in OLF's Jubilee celebrations.

It is hoped that this celebration will revive the interreligious fervor in Brickfields, hampered since the COVID-19 pandemic. — **By Ruben Soosay**



Invoke the Holy Spirit, lawyers told

KUCHING: Archbishop Simon Poh presided over the annual Red Mass for lawyers at St Joseph's Cathedral on February 11.

Some 25 lawyers gathered to mark this occasion by inviting the Holy Spirit to guide them at the start of the new year.

Archbishop Simon reminded them of the vital role the Holy Spirit has in the administration of justice with reference to the Beatitudes from the *Gospel of Matthew* Chapter 5.

He reminded the lawyers of the importance of being merciful, pure at heart, and righteous as they carried out their work. He shared several incidents where he relied on the Holy Spirit

to guide him, give him wisdom and lead him through delicate situations and encouraged the lawyers present, to learn to do likewise, to reverence and call on the Holy Spirit.

At the end of the Mass, tokens of appreciation were presented to Archbishop Simon and concelebrant Fr Galvin Ngumbang, for taking time to pray with and for the legal community. The gifts were presented by Datuk Seri JC Fong, the most senior member of the legal fraternity present.

This year, the Catholic lawyers were also joined by lawyers of other Christian denominations. — **By Christina Eng, Today's Catholic**



Lawyers with Archbishop Simon Poh and Fr Galvin Ngumbang after the Red Mass, February 11, 2023. (Today's Catholic Photo/Stephanie Chua)

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ROME: The Catholic cardinal of Quebec said that pastors are to be shepherds who help their people grow in a relationship with Jesus Christ, not “the boss” or manager of laypeople.

Cardinal Gerald Cyprien Lacroix spoke at a February 14 press conference previewing a three-day Vatican meeting on how to improve collaboration among laypeople, priests, and bishops.

Lacroix, the archbishop of Quebec and primate of Canada, gave a talk on the second day of the Feb. 16-18 conference on the role of pastors in effective co-responsibility.

“What is our role as priests and bishops in this beautiful adventure?” he asked. “Well, our main role is to be pastors. We’re not managers, we’re not the boss: We’re pastors, shepherds.”

“Helping the lay faithful,” he continued, “helping our Church to encounter the Lord and to grow in a relationship with God. That is our mission.”

Lacroix told journalists that part of effective co-responsibility is Catholics growing in love for the Lord together so that they can better fulfil their baptismal call to share the Gospel with others.

Within this, the role of pastors is, he said, “to make sure we are all walking together toward this same goal: to be missionary disciples of the Lord.”

The cardinal emphasised that pastors

need to be focused on the mission of helping people grow in holiness. “Evidently we’ve been working on this a long time — about 2,000 years I would say,” he added.

Lacroix said in his talk he wants to encourage priests to not only invite laypeople into their parish activities and programmes but also to ask how they can support parishioners where they are already present.

“The laypeople are not there at our service. We are there together at the service of the Church,” he underlined, noting that the Church needs “better formation, better awareness, and a lot of work” to bring this vision to fruition.

Lacroix recalled a time before he was a cleric, when he gave this advice to pastors: “Resist inviting us to come into your things. Recognise that some of us are in school, some of us are in our profession, and we need to be good disciples there.”

“You’re always asking how we can serve you, which isn’t a bad thing, but it needs to be more than that.”

Cardinal Kevin Farrell, Vatican’s Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life, told journalists “it is very important that we do not reduce the role of the laity in the Church to a mere functional participation or a mere functional involvement.”

“The laity have a lot more to offer than a mere function that they can perform. The laity are not just to take up the collection

at the Sunday Mass. They are to do much more.”

The Irish-born American cardinal said he hopes the conference can help nurture a much deeper understanding of what it means to be co-responsible for the life of the Church, adding that the conference theme works well within the Church’s ongoing conversation on synodality.

“I think that the question of synodality is extremely important for the Church,” Farrell said. “It was the style of the Church from the very beginning. The Church was founded in a synodal way and I believe the Church always functioned in a synodal way,” he said, before changes took place with the Reformation.

“Today we are headed back toward our founding principles: synodality,” the cardinal asserted.

Both Farrell and Lacroix emphasised the importance of personal conversion on the part of both pastors and lay men and women.

Farrell also said co-responsibility “doesn’t mean that laity have to become clerics and clerics have to become laity.”

Everyone has his or her own calling and gifts, he said. “I would caution against ... reducing the worth of the laity and the great gift they bring to the Church to just some ministerial role in the Church.” — **By Hannah Brockhaus, CNA**

Independent supervisory commission for Rome Diocese

ROME: Pope Francis created a new independent supervisory commission for the Diocese of Rome.

The commission will meet once a month and report directly to the Pope in a yearly meeting.

The oversight committee is part of the Pope’s reform of the governance of the Rome Diocese, a reorganisation that centralises more of the diocese’s activities under his authority.

In a document issued February 15, Pope Francis established norms for the commission and nominated its first members.

The six-member commission is intended to act as internal oversight on financial, administrative, and legal issues for the Diocese of Rome, as stated in the apostolic constitution issued Jan 6.

The members of the supervisory group are appointed for a three-year term. All six members are laypeople who come from the professional world.

The bishop of the Diocese of Rome is the pope. Under him, the diocese, run by the Vicariate of Rome, is led by a cardinal vicar, vicegerent (deputy), and auxiliary bishops.

Pope Francis on Jan 6 issued a constitution reforming the Vicariate of Rome in what he called a time of “epochal change.”

The apostolic constitution, *In Ecclesiarum Communionem*, replaces a 1998 constitution promulgated by Pope John Paul II. It went into effect on Jan. 31. — **Hannah Brockhaus, CNA**

Korea’s Church-run soup kitchens struggle amid price hike

SEOUL: Church-run soup kitchens in South Korea that offer free food to hundreds of hungry and homeless people are struggling to operate due to price hikes of daily essentials and the high cost of utilities such as gas, says a report.

Amid the crisis, the free soup kitchens that receive subsidies from the government are on the better side, and Church-run facilities that solely depend on donations from Catholics are facing difficulties.

Cheonan St Mary’s House, a free meal service for hundreds of people run by the Daejeon Diocese, continues to provide free meals with subsidies and operating expenses supported by the district office and parish.

However, due to the sharp increase in food material purchase and gas costs, the facility has been facing a hard time.

“We are trying to save more money than before,” an official said.

Thomas House in Yeongdeungpo, Seoul, is under severe financial pressure as it provides



Poor people receive free lunch boxes from volunteers at Thomas House in South Korean capital Seoul. (UCA News Photo/Catholic Times of Korea)

free meals to the homeless and the elderly living alone in the Yeongdeungpo area with only individual and group donations, from Monday to Friday.

Each day about 300 people get free lunches from the facility, but it does not receive any support from the government.

Teresa Park Gyeong-ok, the general manager of the house, said they have been under pressure due to a drop in donations and a price hike.

“The existing donations have decreased, and prices have continued to rise, so this year is especially difficult,” she said.

“There was no sponsorship for the ingredients, so we had to buy the ingredients with Thomas’ own budget and serve the rice cake soup,” she added.

“Everyone is struggling economically these days, so it would be difficult for the sponsors as well, but I hope many people will be interested in sponsoring the soup kitchen,” she said.

St Vincent’s House in the Diocese of Cheongju, which operates only with donations from Catholics, planned to resume face-to-face free meal services as it did before the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, it has run into trouble due to the high prices of daily essentials.

There are no exact figures available on the number of Church-run soup kitchens in South Korea. A Church source confirmed each of the three Catholic archdioceses and 14 dioceses and various religious organisations run such free meal services across the country. — **ucanews.com**

Filipino Catholic couples visit orphans on Valentine’s Day

MANILA: Filipino Catholic couples from a global Catholic lay movement visited 12 orphanages and offered food to children on Valentine’s Day, February 14.

A total of 123 members of Couples for Christ, an international Catholic lay movement focused on renewing Catholic values in the family, paid visits to abandoned children as part of their ongoing programme for the family.

“We have been building classrooms for children across the country. But this time, since it’s Valentine’s Day, we opted to visit them in orphanages to feed them and read stories with them,” said Couple for Christ project organiser Marife Ruiz, 38.

The members visited 12 orphanages that house about 500 kids, including victims of trafficking and abuse. They offered the children fried chicken and spaghetti.

Couples for Christ carries out activities and programmes to assist Catholic families.

Among these are *Kids for Christ* for the evangelisation of children through the family, *Youth for Christ* created to spread the love of Christ among young people, *Singles for Christ* founded to cater to the needs of single men and women who yearn to practise the Catholic faith, *Handmaids of the Lord* for renewal of single mothers, and

Servants of the Lord for men, Ruiz said.

“We always begin in the family because it is the basic unit of society. It is the bedrock of values. So, we want to form better Christians and people,” Ruiz added.

A report by Philippines Orphanage Foundation published in February this year says the country has 2 million orphan and street children in a population of about 109 million. — **ucanews.com**

“Tone at the Top” and the abuse of power in the Catholic Church

A few months ago, a book with an eloquent title was published: *Heillose Macht* — literally, “Power empty of salvation.” Many priests and laypersons, both Church employees and volunteers, relate here the abuse of power that they have personally suffered in the Catholic Church, which they have experienced “as a place of despotism and humiliation”.

Numerous reactions to these accounts show that they are talking about something with which many people in the Church are familiar — but something they don’t dare to talk about except in a “safe space”. The stories are about the abuse of power, about contempt for persons, about a lack of respect in the Church. Such experiences are not limited to the German-speaking area, but occur everywhere in the world, as I myself know from my involvement in international projects and worldwide networks.

Something is fundamentally wrong if people need safe spaces of this kind before they can talk about how they experience the abusive exercise of power in the Church. A culture of fear in the Church is a drastic negation of the self-understanding of a Church that is welcoming and cares for people. If the message proclaimed is contradicted by the reality people experience, the words that are used lose all credibility. Abuse of power, contempt for persons, and lack of respect not only harm and offend individuals. They also damage the religious and moral authority of the Church.

The gulf between rhetoric and reality

We cannot be indifferent to all these experiences of the abuse of power, because they expose in a terrifying manner toxic, contemptuous behavioural patterns, structures, and dynamics of power that make people ill — and that are still at work in the Church today.

All the endeavours to tackle sexualised violence in the Church will remain half-hearted, as long as the protection of the institution remains more important than an honest and self-critical discussion of the various types and the specific mechanisms of the abuse of power; as long as the protection of those in positions of authority is more important than uncovering abuses; and as long as loyal criticism is dismissed as disobedience.

The Church’s credibility sustains lasting damage. And the gulf between the rhetoric about tackling abuse and the reality people experience contradicts the mandate to spread the gospel. The bishops have a special responsibility here.

This is because the principle “Tone at the Top” applies to the Church, too. The leadership culture on the management level rubs off on the institution as a whole and on the persons who work within it. The behaviour at the top has an effect on the culture and the interaction in the Church as a whole — everywhere in the world. — **By Jochen Sautermeister, LCI** (<https://international.la-croix.com/>)

● **Jochen Sautermeister** is professor of moral theology and dean of the faculty of Catholic theology at the University of Bonn (Germany).

Pope Francis is the world’s pastor

By Michael Sean Winters

March 13, 2023 will mark the 10th anniversary of the election of Pope Francis. The first thing that distinguishes Pope Francis’ approach to the Petrine ministry is his pastoral sensibility. Indeed, this is what distinguished him that first night when he was elected in 2013. After greeting the crowd with a *buona sera* and telling them the cardinals had gone to the “end of the world” to find a new bishop for Rome, he asked the crowd to pray first for his predecessor, Pope Emeritus Benedict. He then led the people in the piazza in the Our Father, the Hail Mary and the Glory Be, prayers that even a child would know. He then asked the people to pray over him, their new bishop, before he imparted the blessing, bowed and let silence engulf the enormous crowd. Then he said the blessing and wished everyone good night.

The next day, we learned he would not be living in the apostolic palace but, instead, at the Domus Sanctae Marthae, a guesthouse for visitors to the Vatican. This was mistakenly taken as an indication of his preference for poverty. The papal apartment in the apostolic palace is, despite the name, not especially sumptuous. The Raphael stanze and the Borgia apartments, which a tourist can visit on a tour of the Vatican museums; those are luxurious, but the papal apartment was workmanlike. It was also remote, and Francis indicated that his move reflected his need to be around people.

Pope Francis caused a stir early in his pontificate when, during a press conference on the papal plane returning from Brazil, he was asked about gay priests. “If someone is gay and he searches for the Lord and has good will, who am I to judge?” Heads exploded! How could a Pope say such a thing? Conservative critics expressed “confusion” but the rest of us recognised a pastor more interested in encouraging people than judging them.

Homey, accessible, radical sermons

Pope Francis preached each morning at the chapel in the Domus, and the Vatican published a synopsis of the texts. The sermons were homey, accessible. There was a density to a Ratzinger sermon, but not to a Bergoglio sermon. That is not to say they were fluff. On the contrary, there is a radicalness to a Bergoglio sermon. He has a knack for getting to the heart of the matter, and doing so in a way that resonates with the person in the pew.

One of my favourite sermons from those early years came on Dec 15, 2014, when Francis preached on the chief priests questioning Jesus by what authority he taught. At one point, the Holy Father spoke about the character of scrupulosity in every age: “This is the drama and the hypocrisy of this people. And Jesus never negotiates his ‘heart of the Son of the Father’, but He was so open to the people, seeking paths to help them. ‘But this can’t be done; our discipline, our doctrine says this can’t be done!’ they say. ‘Why do your disciples eat grain in the fields, when they travel, on the day of the Sabbath? It can’t be done!’ They were so rigid in their discipline: ‘No, the discipline can’t be touched, it’s sacred’.”

He added a point of confession: “And sometimes, I confess something to you,



Pope Francis stops to kiss a child as he makes his way in the popemobile to Independence Hall September 26, 2015, in Philadelphia. (CNS/Reuters/Jim Bourg)

when I have seen a Christian, a Christian of that kind, with a weak heart, not firm, not fixed on the rock — Jesus — and with such rigidity on the outside, I ask the Lord: ‘But Lord, throw a banana peel in front of them, so that they will take a good fall, and feel shame that they are sinners, and so encounter you, [and realise] that you are the Saviour.’ Many times, a sin will make us feel shame, and make us encounter the Lord, who pardons us, as the sick who were there and went to the Lord for healing.”

I remember laughing out loud when I sat at my computer, reading about that banana peel!

His pastoral style

Sometimes, the Pope’s pastoral style leaves liberals feeling queasy. Early on in the pontificate, it became obvious that the Pope was mentioning the devil more frequently than his post-conciliar predecessors had done. Seeing evil as something personified is not the way most moderns tend to think about evil, but Jesus had no such compunction. Popular piety, especially among those who are truly marginalised, has always expressed the idea that evil is present in a way that suggests a transcendently powerful personification.

We no longer see the Holy Father mixing with crowds the same way he did in the early years. His bum knee makes it harder. But the images of him stopping the popemobile to allow a parent to hand him a child for a blessing, or stepping out of the vehicle to caress a man with a severely disfiguring disease, these images showed someone who engages the world with the eyes of Jesus. Hard to find a better definition of a pastor than that, engaging people with the eyes of Jesus.

It is a remarkable quality of this Pope that he only has harsh words for people who are hypocrites and stuffed shirts, better to say, stuffed cassocks. With the people of God, he is generous and sympathetic. With the intrigue of the Roman Curia, not so much.

Injustice, too, earns the Pope’s ire and that stems not from some lofty commitment to a different social order, but from his experience with extreme poverty, first

in the slums of Buenos Aires and now in the various worldwide *favelas* of the world, most recently in Africa. He denounces neoliberal economics, not from an economic standpoint but from a human one, from what it does, not its theories. He knows and loves the people who have been kicked to the side of the road after falling in with the robber barons on the road to the neoliberal Jericho. Is it just me or does he seem more at home in the midst of desperately poor people than he does at the airport welcoming ceremonies when he is surrounded by potentates and their handlers?

Through most of the last two centuries, the cardinals elected either diplomats or candidates with pastoral experience as pope. Ironically, the pastors tended to be more reactionary, such as Pius IX and Pius X, and diplomats such as Pius VII, Benedict XV and John XXIII were more pastoral. In our own time, the pastor Pope John Paul II was not reactionary, but he did lend a more conservative interpretation to Vatican II than many of his brother bishops. Benedict XVI had been at a desk in the Vatican Curia for 24 years when he was elected. Francis, a son of Latin America, has been the beneficiary of that continent’s reception of Vatican II, with its continuing determination to pose the question: What does it mean to exercise a preferential option for the poor? The struggle to answer that question has shaped his pastoral style immensely.

Pastor. It is the first word that comes to mind when we try to understand this papacy. Francis is theologically astute, to be sure, but he is as schooled in pastoral theology as he is in doctrinal or ethical studies. He is not afraid to engage the politicians of the world, but he lacks the discretion of a diplomat. He walks into the world with open arms and the world loves him for it. Pope Francis is the world’s parish priest, and that quality grounds and shapes every other aspect of his papacy. — <https://www.ncronline.org/opinion/ncr-voices/pope-francis-worlds-pastor>

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What it takes to evangelise

During the season of Lent, most parishes around the world, and especially in Malaysia, will be preparing its adult catechumens undergoing the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) for their sacrament of initiation on Easter Vigil night. These are moments of joy and jubilation, not just for the catechumens, but also for the many facilitators and sponsors who journey with these candidates.

The Rite of Christian Initiation (RCIA) landed on our shore in Malaysia in 1989, with the first formation for RCIA facilitators conducted in the then Majowe Centre (now known as Majodi Centre) in Johore Bahru. The formation team then proceeded to the Diocese of Penang and the Archdiocese of Kuching to introduce the programme there. I was one of those fortunate enough to have attended that initial formation.

From the first batch of new adult Catholics baptised on Easter Vigil night 1991, the Church in Peninsular Malaysia had recorded an average total of 1,000 new adults joining the Catholic church yearly (except during the COVID-19 pandemic where the numbers fell to below 1,000). Counting their families (spouses and children, if they were not already baptised), this would mean several thousand people are added to the Church yearly.

I have always wondered. Where are all these new Catholics today? What happened to them after they received their Sacrament of Initiation into the Catholic Church? Are they still in our midst? Have they moved on in their Christian faith? Have any relapsed into their previous life?

For many who are actively serving in the RCIA ministry — either as facilitators, coordinators, presenters, sponsors or godparents — surely you will want to know the



REMINISCING CHURCH

Richard Chia

progress or status of those who had undergone the one year RCIA journey and are now among us. I have tried to follow up in my initial decade with many of the newly baptised, but only if they choose to keep in touch or worship in the same parish, will I know their status.

In my experience, only a small percentage remain in the parish where they are baptised, others move on. Where they go, whether they still remain in their new faith or not, I will never know for sure. I can only trust in God that He will continue to guide them and be with them in their life. If ever I chance upon them, it is great to hear their stories and listen to their spiritual journey post-baptism.

This brings me to the point I wish to highlight. During my years attending the many RCIA coordinators meetings, we have constantly raised the issue of follow-up for these new adult Catholics. Who or which group in the church should be tasked to follow-up with these newly baptised Catholics and their families, especially if none of their family members are Catholics? The answer I commonly receive is, the Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC), or the local community where the neophyte (as the new Catholics are commonly called) lives.

Therein lies part of the problem. The follow-up by the BEC will only work if members of that community had begun journeying with these candidates at the start of their

RCIA journey, preferably long before the season of Lent. What if the candidate lives in a neighbourhood outside the area covered by the parish? What if the candidate has no family members who are Catholics and knows no Catholics in his/her neighbourhood? What if the BEC has no available person to follow-up with the candidate? Many issues. Many combinations of what-ifs. Ideally, the candidate is someone recommended from the BEC or has a family member who is a Catholic and willing to be his/her sponsor.

Looking at the positive side, I know of many new Catholics coming from the RCIA process who are actively serving in the church today. Their enthusiasm and spirit of serving sometimes puts many of the cradle Catholics to shame. They can be found in catechetical ministry, the music ministry, lectors, commentators and even in the ministry of the sick and poor. Some may continue to attend formations, retreats and spiritual sessions to enhance their spiritual thirst and knowledge. It is encouraging to see their passion and enthusiasm when serving in the church.

This brings me to my next question. Is RCIA a catechetical process or is it an evangelisation process? For decades, many churches have placed RCIA together with catechism (commonly called Sunday school) or catechetical ministry. The difference between treating RCIA as catechetical instead of evangelisation, is that the latter has the option for the candidate to say NO, I do not wish to proceed.

If we treat RCIA as evangelisation, the entire process and atmosphere should be welcoming, less bureaucratic and attractive to the candidate. Essentially, we are welcoming a potential member (and his or her

family) to join our universal Church, and we need to do everything we can to ensure their entry is smooth, pleasant and joyful. No doubt we have our policies, requirements and compliance to church schedules, timelines and standards. If the person is genuinely interested in the church but faces many obstacles in attending the one year sessions, attend all the rites, retreats and meet the criteria, surely we can handle these with love, care and compassion.

I recall the words my parish priest, the late Fr John Gnanapiragasam, said; “if God touches the person at any time, who are we to say sorry, we have closed our application, please join next year”. With this spirit of pastoral care, I have received and guided many “late applicants” and even those who “fail to meet the minimum attendance required” into receiving their Sacrament of Initiation. The joy and glow in their eyes on the night of baptism shows their love for Christ. The testimonies they give the following week on what they felt and how God had entered their lives is enough to justify our acceptance of them.

The Church’s call to mission and evangelisation is rightly so. This is what Church is all about. In Pope Francis’ Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, he says, “To be evangelisers of souls, we need to develop a spiritual taste for being close to people’s lives and to discover that this is itself a source of greater joy. Mission is at once a passion for Jesus and a passion for His people”.

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

Do I have to go to Confession during Lent?

Lent is an especially penitential season, meaning that during Lent we are called to make an extra effort to examine our lives and to strive to live in greater conformity with our faith, to imitate Jesus in a greater way.

Actually, the requirement for Catholics is to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation or Confession at least once a year, but it does not specify when that should be. Many Catholics, however, do receive this sacrament during the Lenten season, and for good reason: Lent is an especially penitential season, meaning that during Lent we are called to make an extra effort to examine our lives and to strive to live in greater conformity with our faith, to imitate Jesus in a greater way.

During Lent, we also take on some extra penitential practices in order to grow in holiness and be free from the bondage of sin. Because of this, it is fitting that many Catholics choose to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation during this holy season.

At the same time, the Church’s requirement to go to Confession once a year is only the bare minimum; we are highly encouraged to receive this sacrament regularly and often.

The essential purpose of confession is to free us from sin, mortal sin in particular. Jesus gave us this sacrament so we might have some means by which our serious sins can be forgiven and by which we can have certainty that the sins we confess are indeed forgiven.

While we can sometimes ask, “Do I have to confess my sins to a priest?” in truth our

response might be that “we get to confess our sins to a priest.” Remember, Jesus explicitly gave His authority to forgive sins to His Apostles: after He rose from the dead, He appeared before them, breathed on them, and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.” (John 20:22-23)

It’s certainly true that those who have not received the Sacrament of Reconciliation for a long period of time often find it difficult to receive the sacrament, and in many ways this is understandable: it is humbling to tell your sins to another person. But we can and must take solace in the fact that this sacrament is in fact a gift from God to us.

Just a brief moment of self-reflection is often sufficient to show us we do not live as we ought to, and in many cases, we cannot change ourselves... becoming the men and women we ought to be is impossible without the grace of God. And this sacrament in particular is given to us as the means by which we might be freed from the sins that weigh us down, that prevent us from being what we can be.

It’s for this reason it has been the practice of Catholics for many, many centuries to receive this sacrament in order to have each and every sin wiped away. Many saints and spiritual writers encourage all Catholics to receive this sacrament on a monthly basis, and in fact many people receive it on a weekly basis.

It’s worth noting that the form for the sacrament as we’ve been practising it since



HERALD photo

around the 11th century is far easier than it was in the early centuries of the Church. Back then, in many places, the norm was you confessed your serious sins in public, before the entire congregation, and the penances given were often not complete for weeks or months.

So instead of seeing the practice of going to Confession as a burden, ask God for the gift of seeing it as it really is: a great gift from Him. This sacrament is the means He has given to us, His beloved daughters and sons, as the normative means by which we might restore our relationship with Him when we’ve done it harm, and as the means by which we can, in fact, deepen that relationship.

By way of conclusion, consider the words of the great saint and spiritual writer St Fran-

cis de Sales in his classic work, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, regarding the gift of this sacrament.

“In Confession you do not only receive absolution for your venial sins, but you also receive great strength to help you in avoiding them henceforth, clearer light to discover your failings, and abundant grace to make up whatever loss you have incurred through those faults. You exercise the graces of humility, obedience, simplicity and love, and by this one act of confession you practise more virtue than in any other.” — **By Chris Burgwald (sfatholic.org/answer)**

● **Chris Burgwald holds a doctorate in theology and is the director of Adult Discipleship and Evangelisation for the Diocese of Sioux Falls.**

UNCLE GEORGE – BAKER WITH A CARING HEART

George Alexander Fernandez, 59, who is a skilled pastry chef with 37 years of experience in the industry, suffered the same fate as thousands of Malaysians when he lost his job during the COVID-19 pandemic three years ago. He later set up a home baking business and used a portion of the profits to feed the city's homeless, because he knows what's it like to struggle to bring food to the table. To the homeless in Kuala Lumpur, Uncle George, as he is affectionately known, is a man who brings them packets of food and drinks or the kind soul who assists them when they need medical treatment.

"Before I launched my business, I baked some cakes and distributed them to the homeless in Kuala Lumpur," he said. They liked it, so he



Uncle George distributing packets of food and drinks to the homeless.

took it as a signal that he should get his business off the ground. "I started by selling non-alcoholic fruit cakes, cream puffs and tuna puffs and later expanded the menu to include chicken curry puffs, and cookies sold during various festive celebrations," he said.

Soon things started kicking in when his niece, Elvina Fernandez, suggested her uncle start a baking business on Facebook. He took her advice and came up with an obvious branding — Uncle George Bakes. Later, his daughter Melissa, an experienced baker herself, joined him in the kitchen as a source of support and help when orders started picking up. George said when he started, his niece and children helped take a load of his shoulders by providing delivery services in the Klang Valley, but now this enterprising baker uncle has hired individuals who, like him, have lost their source of income to become his delivery riders.

George said he was inspired to do charity work as a 20-year-old after listening to a priest's sermon. "They would take care of the poor by collecting funds and purchasing provisions for 70 over families," George says of the priest and his congregation. Moved by their generosity, he joined them for all their charity work.

Later, as a youth leader, he raised funds for the poor by selling Hokkien mee, fried mee hoon, sandwiches and coffee, all of which he cooked himself. He would also regularly or-



Father and daughter duo, Uncle George and Melissa.

ganise car washes and when Christmas rolled around, he held concerts in his community area to raise funds to purchase school uniforms for poor kids. He says the concerts were an annual affair that he kept going for 20 years. The late King Abdul Halim of Kedah bestowed a medal of honour to Uncle George for his charity work.

His story is merely about someone who doesn't give up at any cost. He believes things will eventually turn out to be good and he also makes sure to strive for it. Not forgetting, one has to also give back one way or another.

His persistence and hard work are the rea-

son behind his success

in opening his own humble cafe located at Unit 3, Pusat Perdagangan Razak Mansions, Jalan Tun Razak, KL. The cafe serves his signature pastries, buns, fried noodles, burgers, sandwiches and drinks. George added that those working from home and students are most welcomed to sit in his cafe to work while sipping a hot drink and enjoying his fresh bakes. "Even when you don't have enough, know that Uncle George Bakes' doors are open for you."

The cafe opens from 7.30am to 5.00pm on weekdays, 7.30am to 4.00pm on Saturday and open only on the second and fourth Sundays of the month from 7.30am to 2.00pm.

Unapplied faith is meaningless

By Gwen Manickam

Naga DDB Tribal chief creative officer Alvin Teoh credits his parents, Andrew and Andrene Teoh, for instilling a deep-rooted Catholic faith in him by the way they live their faith.

Although the 55-year-old has cut back on serving in the church due to work commitments, he continues to lead the Fellowship of Praise (FOP) at the Church of the Good Shepherd, Setapak.

Established in 1997, the Fellowship of Praise is held in the church on Sundays after Mass, and everyone is welcome. Each 90-min session is engaging with Praise and Worship, the Word of God, and sharing of faith stories. It is aimed at drawing parents waiting for their children to finish catechism classes. Attendees per session range from 20 people to 60 or 70 sometimes.

"We don't start from a high place of theology. Instead, we start with humanity and work our way up," said Alvin.

The main focus is to create awareness about faith and application. It teaches participants how to apply faith to treat humans better. A combination of vertical and horizontal faith forms the cross, with our eyes looking towards heaven, feet firmly planted on the ground, and hands reaching out to help people.

The father of three exuberantly voiced his concerns about the larger group of faithful who focus on the vertical relationship with Christ but forget horizontal spirituality. He elaborated that vertical spirituality is the relationship between you and God — attending Masses and novenas, reciting Rosaries, going for Confessions, displaying holy pictures, etc. "But we need to remember, the purpose of vertical spirituality is horizontal spirituality. We should be useful people. Not just people who know the religion but behave self-righteously and judge people.

"Many of us are guilty of not witnessing properly. We tend to be very ritualistic; we



Alvin Teoh and some members of the Fellowship of Praise prayer group at the Church of the Good Shepherd, Setapak.

don't understand Scripture or how the Spirit works. When we are not grounded in faith, the things we say don't bear witness to the true beauty, power, and potential of the Catholic Church."

He added that we must be able to witness our faith to people of other beliefs by meeting them on common topics so there is understanding and unity, and we can draw them into our world rather than impose our faith on them.

"As St Paul says, if you obey the law, you are bound to sin but if you understand the spirit of the law, you don't need the dos and don'ts as you will practise it by conviction," said Alvin.

With FOP as his base, Alvin ran youth and confirmation camps at various parishes for about a decade. As he was a scout for five

years and a scoutmaster for six, Alvin incorporated religious teachings with a dose of scouting to try and highlight the beauty of the faith and its applicability to daily life.

Before work got the better of his time, Alvin worked on multiple short-term projects over the years.

One of them was *Kita Kawan Mah* — a social collective on Facebook, put together after General Elections 13 when racism became public and rampant on social media. He said it was intended to promote unity by getting people to be friends via projects and creating content promoting these themes. "In the early days, while attracting support, we were also harassed by people with very toxic and racist views and it caused me a lot of anxiety," said Alvin. The project was active for two years. Another project under *Kita Kawan Mah* was

Ride the Light.

Stop Nursery Crimes was an agency initiative for PS the Children, an NGO involved in the sexually abused underaged. To spotlight the taboo subject of paedophilia in Malaysia, a series of films and a website were used to raise awareness and ignite conversations. It was also to encourage parents to arm themselves with knowledge in the area and know how to respond, should they find themselves in this mess.

Another project Alvin served with for four years was the *Street Shepherd Outreach*, a ministry focused on helping people who live on the streets. Founded by Catherine Thong, this project spread to several other parishes and is ongoing.

He also ran Catholic cell groups at the advertising agency for about five to six years. They meet weekly for Praise and Worship, breaking of the Word, and intercession. As the sessions were open to non-Catholics and non-Christians, they managed to sign up five people for RCIA.

Alvin's parents are long-serving active parishioners of the Church of the Good Shepherd. They were part of the pioneer group that promoted Marriage Encounter throughout Peninsular Malaysia in the late 70s and early 80s. They are currently part of the Theology of the Body and Family Life Ministry where they help conduct Catholic Marriage Preparation Courses.

They led their four children — Alvin, his two sisters, and his brother by humble examples of living their faith, vertically and horizontally.

"Growing up, I witnessed how my parents, deeply hurt by individuals in the church, didn't retaliate but instead spoke about forgiving them and praying for them. They have borne the pain for a long time but their actions were never rooted in negative reactions, instead, it was rooted in grace."

While Alvin leant these graces at the feet of his parents, he didn't take on the faith like old clothes. He fought his way and continues to find his path.

Where is God in all our suffering?

The other day, I visited an elderly couple with various ailments who were looking after their unemployed grown-up son. The couple were well over eighty, while their son, in his fifties, had a disability that prevented him from going out to work.

Most people in their position would be forgiven for living in misery and hopelessness.

But what was inspiring was to witness this family's vibrant faith in God, a faith so strong and alive. Through their faith, they had experienced the love and compassion of the Father, who somehow provided for their basic needs and gave them the strength to go on, day by day.

We live in difficult times. The earthquake in Turkey and Syria has killed tens of thousands of people already and the death toll continues to rise.

The tragedy has drawn rescue workers with dogs from around the world. Aid and donations have poured in from around the world.

When a sudden tragedy strikes, it shakes us out of our complacency or daily routine and moves us to compassion. We realise then we are all part of one family, connected by an invisible bond. And that is inspiring.

However, there are other less dramatic, more long-drawn out threats to the human family and to the earth. Poverty, hunger and malnutrition, and disease. Unemployment, lack of welfare support, and under-funded hospitals and schools. Low-intensity conflict or war, and hopelessness among refugees and asylum seekers. Homelessness, loneliness and despair. Deforestation, loss of bio-



SUNDAY OBSERVER

Anil Netto

diversity and climate change.

These preventable tragedies are often hidden from our view. Few TV cameras and news portals shine their light on these people and places — for such long-drawn-out suffering is not considered sensational breaking news. The gossip tabloids are not interested either.

It is easy to ask where God is in all this suffering.

But the Gospels show us that Jesus focused much of His ministry on the suffering masses He encountered. Jesus spent His time far away from the centres of power of His time, whether it was Jerusalem in Judea or Sepphoris and Tiberias in Galilee.

Instead, He lived and worked on the periphery, in fishing villages and farmlands around Galilee and in little towns and hamlets that dotted the countryside — far removed from the centre of Empire of His time, Rome.

He moved among the teeming masses, many of whom had given up hope that God cared for them. Many were struggling, whether with debt, disease, heavy taxes, ostracisation from society.

Sometimes, we have preconceived notions of God. We may think of God as a divine

being who is vengeful, quick to anger and metes out punishment, someone distant who is far removed from humanity and the everyday suffering and concerns of the people.

But if we remove such unfounded notions of God and look at Jesus first, we will discover the actual nature of God and His spirit that moves among us.

In Jesus, we see God's profound compassion at work. Jesus was filled with divine compassion. All His actions, His miracles, His ministry were infused by this compassion.

Jesus gazed at the suffering of the masses. It moved Him to the core to see the sea of humanity before Him like lost sheep without a shepherd.

If we meditate on the deep divine compassion that enveloped and gripped Jesus, then we get an idea of what God is like.

If we know that God is pure love expressed through such compassion, then we will know He cares deeply for each one of us, no matter how desperate our situation is, no matter what the injustice we face.

This is what inspires our faith and hope — that we are not alone in this world, that we have a God that is deeply concerned about us, filled with so much compassion and love; someone who wants us to be part of the kingdom he is building.

Our faith should tell us we are loved beyond anything we can imagine, that God feels our suffering like no one else can, and it moves Him to compassion.

Our faith also tells us He wants to build a kingdom where everyone will have a place and no one will feel excluded, where justice

and love will triumph over oppression and hatred.

How was Jesus filled with this compassion? His insight into God's compassion and love emerged and grew through His deep sense of solidarity and communion with God (the Father). That is why He often withdrew to quiet places to commune with the divine, so that this deep sense of compassion and love could be nurtured and recharged.

Through this experience of solidarity with the divine, Jesus was able to express a similar solidarity with humanity and the rest of creation, which poured out through His compassion and love.

This deep solidarity gave Him inner peace during a storm, courage against abuse of power, a sense of outrage against injustice (witness how He lashed out at those who devour the property of widows).

This solidarity with the divine liberated Him from fear and the shackles of social conventions. It made Him a free being, able to express the same divine compassion to those whom society had shunned — the tax collectors, people with leprosy, prostitutes, those who had given up all hope they were special in God's eyes.

Through our faith in Jesus, let us each be infused with that same compassion for one another and for nature, so that we too can respond to the cry of the poor and the cry of the Earth.

● **Anil Netto** is a freelance writer and activist based in Penang. He believes we are all called to build the kingdom of God in this world.



WORD MADE FRESH

Nicholas Lye

Earlier this year, I travelled to Thailand for my personal retreat at the Seven Fountains Jesuit Retreat Centre in Chiang Mai. Arriving a day earlier, I sat in the chapel half an hour prior to prepare for evening Mass. Just as I was about to take out my phone to read the Scripture readings on my *Universalis* app as I would usually do in my attempt to prepare for Mass, God surprised me with an invitation to put that away and simply be PRESENT. He invited me to be present to the readings as they would be proclaimed later on, and to now be present to my present moment, and savour each precious moment as a wonderful present or gift from the Lord.

True enough, as I sat in my chair and remained still and present to myself, I not only began to sense God's presence more deeply, I also started feeling deeply moved and grateful for all that God has been doing for me in every present moment that has often been left unnoticed and unappreciated. While I still had my worries of how my future might look like, which was also the reason why I had come for this retreat, and while I still had my past regrets of what I could have done better, God was inviting me to savour the gift of the present, and how this present moment counts, and how every present moment matters.

When my retreat finally began, one of the Scripture passages offered to me by my Retreat Director to reflect on was the account of Moses' encounter with the Burning Bush. I was invited to spend the day keeping a lookout for my burning bush encounter, and allow God to speak to me through it. Excited for such an encounter, I spent the rest of

Being present to the present



the day sitting in the chapel, going out for a walk, and even went as far as the nearby waterfall, hoping for a dramatic encounter with God. Unfortunately, none of my efforts seemed to garner any powerful burning bush moments.

Later that day, as I sat in the chapel half an hour earlier once again before Mass, I stayed present to my feelings of disappointment, confusion, and even failure, thinking that it was my fault to have not had a burning bush encounter. In that moment, God suddenly impressed upon me once again that every present moment counts, and every present moment can be a burning bush moment, as long as I practise the Ignatian spirituality of

finding God in all things. While there can be obvious burning bush moments in my life where something deeply moving or amazing happens, even the seemingly disappointing, confusing, or painful moments can be burning bush moments, as long as I choose to recognise God in the midst of these moments, these 'burning bushes', and even see the situation through His eyes, like what He was inviting me to do in this present moment.

The other insight God revealed to me was that, just as Moses' burning bush moment was the beginning of God's plan to liberate the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt, so too is every present moment in my life

meant to lead me closer to my liberation from the things in life that still enslave me, in order to be more free for the life God had already planned for me. Therefore, even in my moments of disappointment, setbacks, apparent 'failures' in my life, I can still choose to find God in those moments, allow Him to speak truth to my life, and allow Him to set me free from the lies of not being good enough, of being helpless, of being a disappointment, in order that I may more freely respond to these moments with greater faith and trust in God.

Burning bush moments, I realised, are not simply meant to be feel-good moments alone. In fact, they are sacred moments in our daily, ordinary lives where God is constantly inviting us to take off the attachments we have clung so tightly to, such as worldly recognition, acceptance, or security, and allow the fire of His love to burn away these attachments so that we can more freely receive the true and life-giving gift of His love in every present moment.

It was with these insights revealed to me that suddenly the poem which my Retreat Director offered to me earlier that day began to speak so much truth:

*"Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God.
But only he who sees, takes off his shoes.
The rest sit around it and pluck blackberries."* (Elizabeth Browning)

As we begin this season of Lent, let us be led "far into the wilderness" the way Moses was led, and come to find God and be present to Him in every present burning bush moment of our lives, even in what seems ordinary or sometimes unpleasant, and allow Him to set us free for the new life He desires to lead us to.

● **Nicholas** delights in finding God in all things, especially through various creative ways, that reveal powerful truths and insights for us to live more fully and freely.



Fr Ron Rolheiser

A lesson from the Misfit

More than a half century ago, Flannery O'Connor wrote a short story, *A Good Man is Hard to Find*. One of the main characters in the story is an elderly woman who is difficult, stubborn, and not a particularly happy person. Travelling to Florida with her family, she is constantly whining and complaining. Then, thanks to some carelessness on her part, they get in a traffic accident and while their car is stalled, an escaped convict (*the Misfit*) chances on them and executes the whole family. Just before she is shot, the unhappy elderly woman, fearing for her life, reaches out and touches the Misfit and has a gentle moment with him. After killing her, he says, *she would have been a good woman, if there had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life*.

I suspect we would all be better persons if there were someone there to shoot us every minute of our lives. At least I know that I would because I once had someone there to shoot me and it made me a better person, at least during the time when the threat was there. Here's my story.

Twelve years ago I was diagnosed with cancer. The initial prognosis was good (surgery and chemotherapy and the cancer should be stopped). For a while it was. However, three years later it again made an unwelcome reappearance. This time the prognosis was not good. My oncologist, whom I trust, shared that the situation was grave. Chemotherapy would be tried again; but, he assured me, that barring the exceptional, this treatment would not be effective for long and would be more for palliative purposes than for any real hope of remission or cure. He felt it his duty to deliver that message clearly. I was facing the shooter. You have about thirty months to live!



As you can guess, this wasn't easy to accept and process. I struggled mightily to make peace with it. Eventually, through prayer, I wrote a creed for myself as to how I would try to live out those two years. Here's the creed:

I am going to strive to be as healthy as I can for as long as I can.
I am going to strive to be as productive for as long as I can.
I am going to make every day and every activity as precious and enjoyable as possible.
I am going to strive to be as gracious, warm, and charitable as possible.
I am going to strive to accept others' love in a deeper way than I have up to now.
I am going to strive to live a more-fully "reconciled life".
No room for past hurts anymore.
I am going to strive to keep my sense of humour intact.

I am going to strive to be as courageous and brave as I can.
I am going to strive, always, to never look on what I am losing, but rather to look at how wonderful and full my life has been and is.
And, I am going to, daily, lay all of this at God's feet through prayer.

For some months I prayed that creed intensely every day, trying to live out its every tenet. However, the chemotherapy treatments were, surprisingly, very effective. After five months of treatment, all the indications of cancer were gone, I was healthy again, and my oncologist was optimistic that, perhaps, his diagnosis had been too dire and that with some maintenance chemo, I might enjoy many more years of life. And, indeed I did for the next seven years.

However, during those seven years of

remission, feeling healthy and optimistic, with no one there to shoot me every day, I now prayed my creed less frequently and with less intensity. And even though its challenges were now more ingrained in me, my old habits of taking life for granted, of praying St Augustine's prayer (*Make me a better Christian, Lord, but not yet!*), of losing perspective, of impatience, of self-pity, of nursing grievances, and of not appreciating fully the richness of life, began to seep back into my life.

The "shooter" reappeared two years ago with another reoccurrence of the cancer. Initially the prognosis was dire (thirty months and chemotherapy for the rest of my life) and the creed again took a central place in my life. However, a new treatment unexpectedly offered a much longer future and, with no one there to shoot me every day, the creed again began to lose its power and my old habits of impatience, ingratitude, and self-pity began again to mark my days.

I am deeply grateful for all the post-cancer years that God and modern medicine have given me. Cancer has been a gift that has taught me a lot. Having my life parcelled out in six months chunks has me appreciating life, others, health, nature, the simple joys of life, and my work like never before. *I'm a better person when there is someone there to shoot me every day!*

● **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.

Lent – More for less or less for more

Many years ago, on Ash Wednesday, I shared my Lenten experiences with the group that I was giving the talk to. One of the things that I shared is that very often, my Lent is shot because there were so many things to do and so little time to reflect on what the true meaning of Lent is.

A few days after that, a friend of mine forwarded an article that spoke of doing less for more. That definitely struck a chord with me and certainly with her. Every year at Lent, we start planning for activities. We fall into the belief that in doing all these activities, we will be able to deepen our Lenten experience and therefore grow closer to God. But how true is that, really?

The writer, in his article, wrote that "Over the last few years, I've been struck by how much Lent has become something to do, something that requires action and energy from us, that requires thinking, planning, organising, and executing. I've seen some parishes where the handbook of Lenten activities looks like a prospectus for a graduate programme in theology, with Bible studies, book clubs, speakers, musical performances and the like."

Certainly sounds familiar, don't you think?

We treat Lent as a season where we must do something and very often, we forget that Lent is also a season of being. For many of

us, not doing anything is a sign that we are idle, that we are not making the best use of the season to get closer to God. One question that we need to ask ourselves is this: will doing more things bring us closer to God?

When we organise an activity, we expand a lot of energy and time, in the planning and also the execution of the activity. Very often, we end up getting frustrated and stressed. Speaking from personal experience, there were times when I just wanted to blow up. We always end up having the same people organising the same activity, one reason being "you've done it before, so you are more experienced". I find that reason very lame. To me, it's just a way of saying "I want the activity but don't ask me to organise it."

Lent is a time for our personal journey of conversion back to God. We begin our journey on Ash Wednesday, putting ashes on our forehead to signify our repentance and we rise again in glory with our Risen Lord on Easter Vigil. We die to ourselves and to our sins throughout Lent and are washed anew by the waters of baptism during Easter.

If we have so much to do and so much to attend to, how will we be able to make this journey of conversion and reconciliation? We rush here and there and end up tiring ourselves and having no energy to pray. Is



(Unsplash/Karl Fredrickson)

this an effective way of a Lenten journey?

Some years back, I wrote an article on the need for silence. We love to surround ourselves with sound and sight, anything that can drown the silence around us. But silence is necessary if we want God to speak to us. God cannot reach us when there is chaos and noise in and around us. If we fill up our space with activities upon activities, where will God fit in?

We define ourselves in terms of achievements and accomplishments. We live in a future-oriented culture that relates time largely to efficiency and productivity. We are more inclined than ever to use time to accomplish results than to enhance relationships.

The focus of the Christian life should not be deeds and actions, but a relationship; it is not centred on a product, but on a Person. It is a matter of abiding in Christ Jesus, rather than fulfilling a set of religious formulae.

If we truly want to deepen our relationship with God and our own personal prayer life, we need to learn to slow down, to learn to be comfortable with silence and inactivity. That is the challenge that lies before us this season of Lent and every season of Lent that is to come. The question then is, whether or not we dare to take up this challenge of doing less for more.

"In repentance and rest you will be saved, in quietness and trust is your strength" (Isaiah 30:15). — **By Fr Phillip Tay, OCD**

Little Catholics' Corner

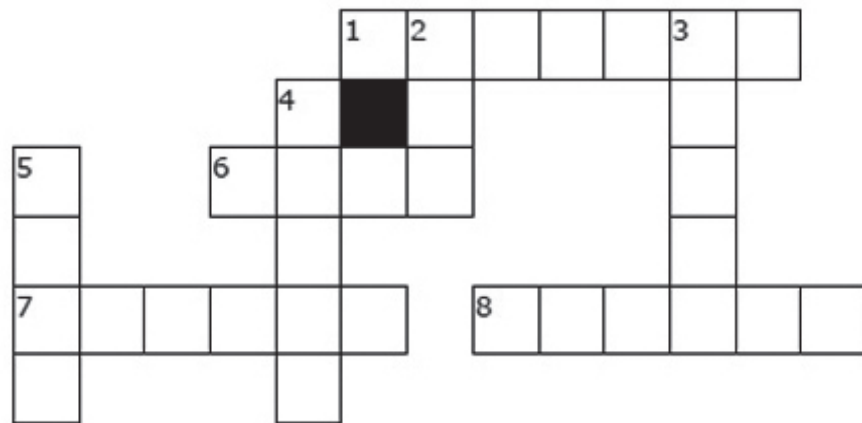
Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden. Find the hidden items and colour the picture.

Find these objects hidden in the picture below:
balloon, bird, bird nest, book, candy, fish, horseshoe,
needle and thread, snail and star



Who Me? Not Me!

And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" Genesis 3:11



Across

1. A snake
6. A tall, woody plant with a main trunk and branches with leaves
7. To be filled with fear
8. An area where flowers, fruits or vegetables grow

Down

2. The first woman
3. Not wearing any clothes
4. The product from a tree that can be eaten (apples, oranges)
5. The first man

Eve
Garden
Serpent
Afraid
Fruit
Adam
Naked
Tree

Hello children,

Reading for the First Sunday in Lent recounts how Adam and Eve were tempted by the serpent to disobey God. They ate fruit from the forbidden tree, and as a result, were banished from the Garden of Eden.

The second reading reminds us that even though we are sinners, we are saved through the obedience of

Jesus Christ.

The Gospel tells us how Jesus went to the desert to fast and pray for 40 days and resisted the temptations of Satan. During the 40 days of Lent, the Church asks us to fast, give alms, and pray.

What are some little things you could do for Lent? Try to do things that will help you think a bit more about God every day.

Love Auntie Gwen

The Temptation of Jesus

Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil (Matthew 4:1). Choose the word that best matches the definition.

1. To feel a need or desire for food
A. hungry B. thirsty C. tired D. tempt
2. A small rock
A. boulder B. mountain C. world D. stone
3. A food made of flour and water, shaped into loaves, and baked
A. pizza B. pie C. bread D. stone
4. To try to get someone to do wrong
A. worship B. tempt C. angel D. hungry
5. To show a strong feeling of love and respect for God
A. devil B. angel C. worship D. tempt
6. A heavenly being, often shown as a human figure with a halo and wings
A. fairy B. devil C. temple D. angel
7. The evil ruler of Hell, and enemy of God
A. angel B. world C. devil D. hungry
8. The entire Earth and all the places and things on it
A. space B. moon C. world D. galaxy

THE TEMPTATION OF CHRIST JESUS

Spot 8 differences between the two pictures.



YOUTH

FEBRUARY 26, 2023

ST PATRICK'S TO HOST DIOCESAN YOUTH CAMP

SOOK: The largest youth camp in Keningau Diocese will be held for five days from August 27 to 31 at the Church of St Patrick, Membakut.

On February 5, 150 youth from the different parishes and missions in the diocese gathered for the launch of the Sixth Keningau Youth Camp (KBK 6) with the theme *Mary arose and went in haste* (Luke 1:39) at Holy Spirit Church.

Bishop Cornelius Piong celebrated the Mass at the launch, with concelebrants Fr Ronnie Luni and Fr Boniface Kimsin.

Based on the Sunday readings, Bishop Cornelius Piong reminded them that we

have an identity as witnesses of Jesus to be salt and light for those around us. He also called on the people, especially the youth who are preparing for KBK 6, to continue the spirit of journeying together and to always focus on three main things:

1. Unity with Jesus,
2. Unity or team cooperation
3. Emulating Jesus' ministry.

Bishop Cornelius emphasised the role of Mary, her caring attitude. After hearing the news that she was to be the mother of the Messiah, Mary rushed to visit her sister Elizabeth, who was also pregnant. Mary hurried to Elizabeth with Jesus in her because she cared about the needs of others. "May this kind of spirit be with us in being a witness to bring light and salt to the world."



Bishop Cornelius Piong hits the gong to officially launch the Sixth Keningau Youth Camp.

Roney Alfred, Keningau Youth Coordinator and Coordinator for KBK 6, hopes that this upcoming KBK 6 will lead the youth to rise up like Mother Mary and be witnesses of faith to the youths out there. He also said the launch was carried out so that all preparations for KBK 6, such as venue preparation, registration, fundraising and so on, could be started immediately.

Due to unavoidable circumstances, the logo and theme song for KBK 6 could not be launched during the Mass. It will take

place at a separate event to be determined later.

Prior to the launch, representatives from each parish and mission gathered for a recollection at Holy Spirit Church, Sook.

Roney thanked everyone who was involved in making the 2023 TPBK Recollection and the launch of KBK 6 a success.

After the recap video of the last KBK, Bishop Cornelius launched KBK 6 with six strikes of the gong! — *By Caroline Liew*



EMBRACE A "CARLO ACUTIS LENT"



Lent is often a time when both adults and children choose a Lenten sacrifice, choosing something to give up for 40 days.

The traditional sacrifice for them has always been sweets — seeing if they can last until Easter Sunday without partaking in any yummy treats.

While that can often be a difficult sacrifice, have you ever challenged yourselves to give up video games?

A "Carlo Acutis Lent"

While many people hail Blessed Carlo Acutis as the "patron saint of video gamers," he actually had a much more complicated relationship with screens.

He certainly loved to play video games, but one day he was playing with his friends and became appalled by how aggressively they reacted after playing for several hours.

His friends all went home crying, and after that day he was determined to limit his video games to one hour every week.

Many young people are connected to screens for eight hours a day and play video games for at least three hours a day. That means some of them are playing video games for roughly 21 hours every week. In other words, almost an entire 24-hour day!

For many of them, this type of sacrifice will be the most difficult and it may cause many tears. However, if they are able to turn it into a sacrifice to God, uniting their pain to the pain of Jesus on the cross, their lives will be changed.

On a brief practical note, if you choose to challenge yourself to embrace this type of Lent, be sure to provide alternative activities without screens. If you don't, it will turn into a mess and you will be back to video games by Ash Wednesday evening.

Bl. Carlo Acutis, pray for us! — *By Philip Kosloski, Aleteia*

For Lent, here are other ways to fast which can help us prepare for the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ

ABSTAINING FROM GOSSIP

When I was in university, for Lent, I decided to give up gossiping. Before Lent I let my fellow housemates know of my intentions and they thought it was hilarious. I never made a big deal about it, but when we were sitting around socialising or playing bridge, etc., and the gossip inevitably started, I quietly got up and left the room.

Less than a week into Lent, everyone was aware of what that meant, and gossip in general diminished a great deal. In addition, I began to have visits with some of my housemates who would ask if they could talk to me. That usually meant revealing some problem they were having, sometimes with a boyfriend. But two women told me that their fathers had sexually abused them. They said they needed to tell someone and they knew I would keep their confidences. In both those cases I suggested they seek counselling services from the university.



When Lent approached during my senior year, many of my housemates asked me to do the same thing, as it inspired them to stop gossiping as well. — *By Judith Weigand*

A DIFFERENT FAST

SOLIDARITY FASTING

At my parish, we encourage parishioners to fast one meal every First Friday, even outside of Lent, to be in solidarity with the poor and those in need. We provide parishioners with a special envelope in their package for our First Friday Fast Fund in which they can donate the money saved.

This restricted fund is used to support local non-profits that care for the homeless, treat those with addictions, provide food for the hungry, give support to pregnant mothers, and help so many others in need in our community and globally. Our First Friday Fasts are a way of connecting our charity to a spiritual practice. It connects faith to real life and helps us cultivate the virtue of generosity. — *By Fr William Kunisch*



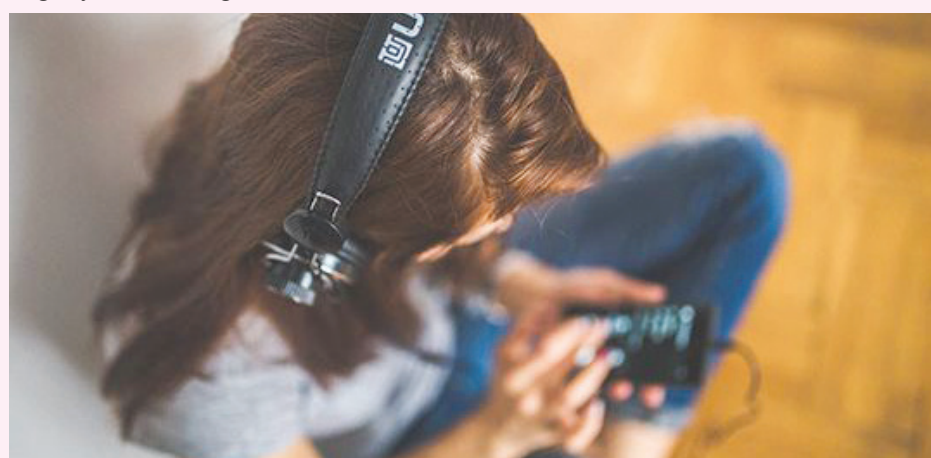
Street Feeders KL

CHANGING THE STATION

My first pick for what to listen to in the car is the Christian contemporary music station. (Talk radio, even Catholic or Christian talk radio, is not my jam.) While gritting my teeth through some of the rudest

and most impatient driver interactions I've experienced, I'd turn up the tunes and let the words of forgiveness, compassion and God's love wash over me.

I think listening to Christian music is even more important to me today because



I often have my kids in the car. So many times, when I've tried scrolling between stations, I'll hear DJs cracking crass jokes about dating, commercials shilling diet plans, and songs glorifying money and sex. Even the so-called Family Pop station on Apple Music slips some questionable songs onto its playlist. When you've got little ears in the car with you, all the lyrical minutiae you might have glazed over before really stands out.

So, this Lent, I'm going to fast entirely from secular music when I'm in the car by myself. My kids often request upbeat tunes from secular artists that help get them in better moods, so I won't force my fast on them. But I'll keep defaulting to the Christian contemporary station unless they ask.

I'm interested to see if this helps assuage my everyday angst a little more and focus on preparing for Jesus' death and resurrection. — *By Anna Weaver*

MEETING POPE FRANCIS 'A DREAM COME TRUE' FOR SOUTH SUDANESE YOUTH

ROME: After a journey of nine days and many miles, meeting Pope Francis in Juba, South Sudan, was "a dream come true" for many youths, an Irish religious sister said.

Sr Orla Treacy of the Loreto Sisters was one of the organisers of a peace pilgrimage in which 60 young people and 24 adults walked part of the way from Rumbek in central South Sudan to the country's capital city of Juba for the Pope's visit February 3-5.

"The young men and women on the pilgrimage had desired and prayed on the way to meet with Pope Francis. They were not sure they would succeed," Treacy said after the meeting.

But after his audience with South Sudanese priests and religious, the Pope greeted the group outside the Juba cathedral.

"The moment with Pope Francis was a dream come true for so many of the youth," the 50-year-old nun said. "They still can't believe they met the Pope, or that he had time to greet them and be photographed with them."

One of the young people gave Pope Francis an altar cloth made by some religious sisters of the Diocese of Rumbek.

The peace pilgrimage, an initiative of the Diocese of Rumbek, began from Holy Family Cathedral on Jan 25, the feast of the Conversion of St Paul.

In nine days, the students and staff covered approximately 250 miles — about half on foot and half in cars — before reaching Juba in the afternoon on Feb 2, one day before Pope Francis' historic visit to the war-torn country.

Treacy said the group attended every prayer event with Pope Francis, including the euc-

menical prayer service on Feb. 4 and Sunday Mass on Feb 5.

They returned to Rumbek by car on Sunday afternoon, arriving early the next morning after encountering some car troubles along the return journey.

Treacy is the director of the Loreto Mission, which runs a boarding school for high school girls, an elementary school, and a clinic in Rumbek.

She said the idea for the peace pilgrimage had started with a group of students in 2018, when they heard Pope Francis wanted to visit South Sudan.

"The visit at that time never materialised but we started an annual peace walk in Loreto; each year we would walk to a different county, parish and meet the people on the way," she explained.

When Francis' visit was officially announced, they started to organise the walk to see him in Juba; they were happy to be joined by other Catholics from the diocese, including Bishop Christian Carlassare.

Treacy said the stable situation in the Diocese of Rumbek — where a new governor has helped promote peace in the state — helped them to feel secure planning the walk.

"We were warmly welcomed in every village and parish as we passed through; we had no fear," she said.

"It has been an incredible experience for all of us on pilgrimage," the sister said, "to be united in such a way to one another and to the Church, to be joined and supported by so many people on the walk, to see that the world has



Pope Francis met young people and adults from the Diocese of Rumbek in Juba, South Sudan on Feb 4, 2023. (Vatican Media)

not forgotten South Sudan and that young people are important and can bring about change."

"The youth have also realised that in every village the people are the same, everyone is friendly and open, they have a new confidence in their own country," she added. "They have moved to new parts where they never imagined they could visit or stay."

Treacy said that the peace walk was "more than anyone could have expected."

Many of the young people on the pilgrimage had never left their hometown, let alone the county or state. So, it was a big deal for them to

go to "the big city" of Juba, she said.

"Everywhere we went people were coming out to greet us, to sing with us, to dance with us. The welcome was incredible," she said. "It's become much more than just meeting the Pope; it's been about discovering the love, the warmth, the hospitality that South Sudan can offer us."

"It started out very small. We thought we were just going to go and see the Pope. But actually it has turned into something life-changing for all of us who have taken part in it," she said. — *By Hannah Brockhaus, CNA*

Pope sends aid to quake-struck Turkey and Syria

'Don't forget those who suffer'



Crates of aid for quake affected people in Syria and Turkey at the Port of Naples.

VATICAN: Following the catastrophe caused by the earthquakes that struck Syria and Turkey on February 6, Pope Francis appealed for closeness and concrete support to alleviate the pain of those who are suffering from the disaster.

Nine days after the powerful earthquakes, the rising death toll has topped 41,000. Millions of people have been left without a home and a livelihood.

While the Pope issued his appeal during Sunday's *Angelus* on Feb 12, he too put words into action through the Dicastery for the Service of Charity.

Crates of aid departed from the Port of Naples on the morning of Feb 15 aboard the MSC Aurelia Cargo ship that was scheduled to dock in Iskenderum, Turkey within two days.

As well as aid from the Italian government and other NGOs, the ship carries 10,000 thermal jumpers delivered personally by Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, the papal almoner.

The thermal garments are destined for the Kilis

refugee camp in Turkey, 50 km from Gaziantep and 60 km from the Syrian city of Aleppo.

The distribution of aid will be entrusted to operators of the Rava Foundation, which has been present in the area for some time and provides food and shelter to thousands of homeless people.

Following the outbreak of war in Syria, the camp has expanded to accommodate some 60,000 refugees, but it is also home to many others who live in makeshift tents. As expected, the earthquake has aggravated the situation and hundreds of people are joining the refugee families.

As far as Syria is concerned, Cardinal Krajewski said the aid sent by the Pope through the Dicastery for the Service of Charity is in the form of economic aid entrusted to the Apostolic Nunciature.

It will be deployed in the territory to support a population that is already exhausted by years of war and whose suffering is now compounded by the consequences of the devastating earthquake. —

By **Benedetta Capelli**, *Vatican News*

When women were stronger than an earthquake

TURKEY: Running to save yourself? Or running to protect others? Amidst the images of devastation from Turkey and Syria, shattered by the earthquake of 6 February, there are also pictures that tell of gestures capable of shining a light in the thick darkness of this terrible tragedy.

This is the case of a group of nurses at the hospital in the Turkish city of Gaziantep who — when the earth began to shake — did not head for the exits, but ran in the opposite direction, towards the intensive care unit housing prematurely born babies. There, the nurses stayed beside the newborns until the earthquake was over, holding the incubators, which, swaying violently, were in danger of top-

pling over and crushing the babies.

Perhaps we would not have known anything about this extraordinary act of protecting life had the incident not been caught on some of the hospital's surveillance cameras. The nurses did not know how long the earthquake would last, let alone how destructive it would be. They did not know if having made that choice, they would be saved. They knew for certain, though, that if they did not intervene, those newborn babies would be in danger of death. And they chose to protect them.

In the course of the ten years of his pontificate — and most recently during his trip to Africa — Pope Francis has often reminded us: Women give life. Women

protect life. Women are bulwarks of peace, first of all because they know (in a profound way) that war destroys that very life that they have generated.

These nurses bore witness to precisely that strength, gentle and tenacious, of which the Pope speaks, a natural strength that does not seek power but manifests itself as a gift. The children saved on that tragic night were not their own children. Yet now they have become so, somehow, because they have been 'born a second time' thanks to their courage and love. "Whoever saves one life, saves the whole world," reads the Talmud. Those nurses saved the whole world. — By **Alessandro Gisotti**, *Vatican News*

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3rd March 2017

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Forgetting you never*
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Atlanta airport gets a 24/7 Eucharistic chapel

WASHINGTON: Archbishop Gregory Hartmayer of Atlanta dedicated and blessed his archdiocese's newest chapel while on his way to catch a flight February 13.

Airline workers and travellers flying through the busiest airport in the world can now spend time in the real presence of Christ, thanks to the efforts of the Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport's chaplains and the cooperation of the Archdiocese of Atlanta.

Located in the international terminal, the Eucharistic chapel will be a permanent fixture at the airport and is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

After receiving approval from the archbishop, the tabernacle was installed in November of last year. But because only travellers and airline workers can get past security to access the chapel, the archbishop was not able to officially bless it until Feb 13, shortly before his flight departed.

The chapel was sorely needed and perfectly located, given the sheer number of people arriving from all over the world to make connecting flights, said chaplain Fr Kevin Peek.

The Atlanta airport sees an average of near-

ly 300,000 passengers flying through daily, according to Business Insider.

"There are about 64,000 employees at the airport at any given time. That's like a small town or city," said Peek.

The chapel has already touched many lives, allowing them to encounter Christ in the most unexpected place, Peek said.

Since the Eucharistic chapel opened, Peek has already seen visitors weeping and even jumping for joy to find the presence of Christ in the airport.

The chapel allows airline workers and travellers to "bring Christ out into their lives and into the world," Peek said.

One of the greatest parts of having a Eucharistic chapel, Peek explained, is that it allows the airport's three other Catholic chaplains, who are deacons, to offer Communion services when a priest is not available to say Mass.

"I go out there and offer Mass on Saturday night and Sunday night for all the travellers in order to give them two opportunities to make their Sunday obligation. But I can't get down there every day," Peek explained.

Now the deacons hold Communion service-



Atlanta Airport's new Eucharistic chapel is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. (CNA photo)

es at 11.30am on Thursday and Friday, while Masses are offered at 4.30pm on Saturday and Sunday.

Blair Walker, head of the Atlanta Interfaith Airport Chaplaincy, worked closely with Peek to make the idea of a permanent Eucharistic presence at the airport a reality.

Because it is an interfaith chapel, Walker explained, the airport chaplaincy staff had to get creative in designing the space.

"The space is designed for shared sacred use so we don't want any one thing in there that overpowers the faith groups that are using it," said Walker.

Multiple design ideas were proposed but didn't work out. Finally, one day while Peek was reflecting in the airport chapel, he realised an area being used for storage that was covered by frosted glass could be used to house the Eucharist.

"We realised, 'Oh, we can remove the frosting off it,'" Walker said.

Now, just behind the cleared glass is a tabernacle and a lamp to signal Christ's pres-

ence.

The final design of the chapel serves the dual purpose of keeping the interfaith sense of the space while also protecting the Eucharist from any who would potentially abuse it.

For Peek, whose father, Joseph Peek, was an airline pilot, the project became a labour of love.

"I did it really for the airline personnel," Peek said. "My dad was a commercial airline pilot and flew out of Atlanta for many, many years. He had a great devotion to Our Lord in the Eucharist."

In the chapel's sacristy area, Peek placed a few pictures of his father, one of him with his mother in front of a statue of Our Lady of Fatima, another of him at the helm of a Boeing 727, and another shows his father giving Peek Communion.

"I put all that there, kind of as a statement to summarise how much he incorporated faith and family into his life and in his work, and to inspire other aircrew to do the same," Peek said. — **By Peter Pinedo, CNA**

Demolition threatens 400-year-old chapel in India

NEW DELHI: A 400-year old chapel in Daman, on India's west coast is facing imminent demolition as authorities plan to build a football stadium in the area.

The Capela da Nossa Senhora das Angustias was built in 1607 by Portuguese missionaries and has "great architectural, historical and cultural value," read a report on Radio Veritas Asia.

"The community people and leaders are totally against such demolition," said lawyer Mario Lopez. "We are ready to knock on every door to save the chapel if needed, and we are even ready to fight a legal battle for it," he said.

The *India Express* also reported that priests and members of the local Catholic community have launched a campaign against the BJP-run Daman (Union Territory) Municipality's decision to demolish the chapel.

They made a representation to Daman Municipality President Sonal Patel and handed over a memorandum seeking a review of the decision to demolish the chapel.

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has not declared it a heritage structure, "despite its architectural antiquity and unique wood carving, which should be preserved," said Rui Pereira, a local Catholic leader.

The fact that ASI has not categorised it as a heritage structure might embolden authorities to raze it to the ground, Pereira said.

"But this should not be done. We are with the Christian community," said Patel.

Pramod Rana, an independent member



The chapel of Our Lady of Remedios in Daman.

of the council, also echoes the president's sentiments, voicing support for the Catholic community.

"We adopted a resolution stating that local Catholics should be taken into confidence before carrying out any activity, or any decision that might impact them. We cannot allow the chapel to be bulldozed just like that," he said.

Fr Brian Rodrigues, who provides religious services at the chapel, said they "are preparing to take the case to the High Court in Bombay," said a report in *pontofinal-macao.com*, a Portuguese publication based in Macao. — **LiCAS/ucanews.com**

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