

# The Catholic Weekly HERALD

## Mission Statement

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.

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You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.  
*Rom 8:9*



Renewing our commitment for the environment

■ P4



Focusing on spiritual well-being of ministry members

■ P5



Sixty years of FMDM presence in Malaysia

■ P12



## Dwindling vocations in Asia?

**CHIANG MAI, Thailand:** Church leaders have called for collective actions to address issues including economic development, changes in family structure, technological and ideological impact, poverty, and migration that contribute to a decline in priestly and religious vocation in Asia.

"In the last decades of the last century, vocations increased in Asia, but with the new century, the trend changed," said Cardinal Charles Maung Bo, president of the Federation of the Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC).

Bo spoke about challenges the church is facing across the world, particularly in Asia, during his keynote address at the 80th convention of Serra International, a global lay apostolate, June 22-25.

About 450 vocation animators including priests, religious and laypeople from various countries attended the programme.

Bo said that the number of vocations in Asia increased in the 1970s and the subsequent 30 years, though the "phenomenon" was not seen across Asia.

However, several countries with higher

Catholic populations, such as India, Vietnam, Timor Leste, and the Philippines would nurture more vocations than others, he pointed out.

The archbishop of Yangon said that the number of men and women responding to God's call has decreased worldwide including in Asia, adding that even countries that once boasted a good number of vocations are seeing a "downward trend."

"We hear of dioceses that struggle to replace their aging priests and houses of formation downsizing because there are no new people to continue their ministry," he said.

"Throughout the Church's history, we have seen the decline and revival of vocations. Perhaps we are now at a crossroads where even maintaining the existing numbers is becoming far more challenging now than before,"

Bo presented five major challenges driving the downtrend in priestly and religious vocations.

Rapid economic development in Asia has seen a corresponding decline in vocations in many developing countries, he said, adding that individuals now become "obsessed" with the power of wealth and greed.

"Such a mindset makes individuals think less of generosity and self-giving," he said.

Changes in family structures, from the

traditional family to newer forms of family: single mothers, unmarried couples (cohabitation), working parent families, childless couples, interfaith-intercultural families, and others cause a drop in vocation.

Such changes result in low birth rates, increasing divorce rates, raising the average age of marriage, single-parent families, and children raised by grandparents in the absence of their working parents, he noted.

"What we used to consider as the norm in the past, today, we see newer challenges. Some of these new challenges are caused by choice, and others out of necessity," he added.

Besides, poverty and migration that force people to move from one place to another, Bo pointed out that a "lack of role models" among priests and religious also hurt vocations.

"The scandals of sexual abuse, financial misappropriation, abuse of power (clericalism), and corruption that come to light so often in the media do not portray the life of a priest and consecrated man/woman as an attractive way of life. It has become hostile in some places more than others," he said.

In coming years, there might be a further decline in vocations in today's socioeconomic and political contexts, but we "cannot sit back and wait for it to happen and only then

move towards action," he insisted.

Cardinal Marc Ouellet, the former prefect of the Vatican's Dicastery for Bishops, insisted that "communion of vocations" can be a new way of evangelisation and a strong incentive for vocations.

"I am convinced that the 'communion of vocations' is a new formula for our times and all cultures, including Asia. This is because individualism, indifference, and loneliness, common features of global culture, are taking hold everywhere, even in Christian environments, through the influence of the media and fashions," the prelate said.

Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, the prefect of the Dicastery for Evangelisation, urged Catholics to share stories of vocations to inspire others.

"A Christian vocation is always a mission to share with others our experience of Jesus. It is up to us to continue the story of vocations through our mission. A vocation crisis is often rooted in a missionary crisis," said Tagle.

Serra International is a Vatican-recognised voluntary lay apostolate promoting vocations. Founded in 1935, it has about 20,000 laymen and laywomen as members in up to 1,109 Serra Clubs across 46 countries. —

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## OPINION

## On communications, have Popes become too much Paul and not enough Peter?

On June 29, we celebrated the great Roman feast of Sts Peter and Paul, the patron saints of the Eternal City. The double feast is of ancient origin, but the link between the two saints has taken on even greater significance with the modern papacy.

It was the late Pope John Paul II who once said that he considered himself not only the successor of Peter but, to some extent, of Paul too — meaning as the great communicator of the Church as well as a tireless missionary.

Modern popes have become, in effect, the Evangelist-in-Chief of the Catholic Church, using the media of their day, just as Paul did in his, to spread their message.

Like John Paul II before him, Pope Francis too has engaged the media with gusto. For one thing, he's given more interviews to journalists than anyone can count, so much so that whole sections of libraries probably could be filled with the transcripts.

Yet the towering irony is that while John Paul II and Francis both became media sensations, demonstrating an instinctive genius for gestures and soundbites, that success hasn't always been translated into the effectiveness of the Vatican's own institutional communications.

Indeed, in a recent interview with the Ukrainian news outlet *Glavcom*, Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk of Kyiv, leader of the Greek Catholic Church, said something out loud that many observers have long mumbled sotto voce — to wit, the Vatican's communication system is bad and getting worse, not better.

Referring to Pope Francis's efforts to reform the Vatican, Shevchuk said "we're in a moment of transition in which the institution is undergoing changes, which, however, aren't improving its efficiency."

The Greek Catholic prelate pointed to com-

munications in particular as a problem area. Here's what he said:

"The biggest problem I see today in the machinery of the Vatican is communications, communication with the world, especially through the media. In reality, today the Pope doesn't have a spokesperson who can act as constant communicator with journalists when we don't understand the Pope or his statements aren't entirely clear. Naturally, everyone wants to understand exactly what the Pope said and what he meant by it. If it's not understood, who can you go to for clarifications? It used to be the Vatican spokesperson who took care of it, but not today. I don't know why, and I can't understand it by myself. [It seems] the Pope wants to be his own spokesperson."

Therein lies the heart of the problem: Francis may be a great communicator himself, but he has not, in the eyes of most observers, created a great communications system.

As Shevchuk indicated, during the John Paul II years there was at least a powerful spokesman in Spanish layman Joaquin Navarro-Valls, who was a genuine insider with unrestricted access to the Pope, and who therefore could issue clarifications, based on his own access and standing, which people took seriously.

It's not that all was sweetness and light in the Navarro years — it was often hard to know, for instance, where John Paul's thinking ended and Navarro's spin began. Moreover, the dynamic duo of John Paul and Navarro often obscured the fact that the Vatican's communications system, as opposed to the personalities at the top of the pyramid, remained seriously dysfunctional.

Since Navarro stepped down in 2006, no spokesman has enjoyed anything like his direct personal relationship with the boss. As a result, directors of the Vatican Press Office

have become more akin to employees of the Secretariat of State, and are able to release only the information provided to them by the powers that be.

Indeed, as Shevchuk suggested, the problem actually has been compounded under Francis's reform with the creation of the Dicastery for Communications, which has, in effect, created another layer of bureaucracy through which a spokesperson is compelled to wade before he or she can say anything useful.

In part, this is a question of personal style. Francis is legendarily allergic to being "handled," and thus resistant to creating the impression that anyone else is truly able to speak definitively in his name.

Whatever the explanation, the plain fact is that there's a clear imbalance between the personal and the structural when it comes to communications by, and about, popes.

Somewhat cheekily, we might say that when it comes to communications, modern popes have got the Paul part down.

They've embraced the tools the media offer to spread their message, often to astonishing personal success — Pope Francis, for example, was the third most followed world leader on Twitter in 2022, behind only US President Joe Biden and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

What's missing to some extent is the Peter element, meaning the governance challenge of not merely being a great communicator, but of building a great communications system. — **By John L. Allen Jr, *Crux***

**John L. Allen Jr. is the editor of *Crux*, specialising in coverage of the Vatican and the Catholic Church. He has written 11 books on the Vatican and Catholic affairs.**

## Harmonising Science and Faith

Learned people are those who have knowledge. Their knowledge comes from their learning; that is why they are called learned. Learning is a process of picking up lessons from sources of all kinds: creation and nature, people around, life's experiences, schools, all fields of sciences, academic resources, and so forth.

Whatever the sources of knowledge, all of them derive from one common origin: God. He communicates knowledge in myriads of ways, even those that seem to be totally from human efforts. For sure, this is a declaration of faith. Unfortunately, however, there are negative attitudes towards faith.

Two are singled out for mention. The first is that Science does not need God. Science is no longer Science if God has to be brought into the picture.

The second is a corollary of the first: divine revelation cannot, and must not be accepted since it cannot be scientifically proven or its claims are unscientific. These negative trends enunciate the strong belief that Science and Faith are unbridgeable poles.

In today's Gospel, Jesus addresses the issue in His prayer to the Father. On the surface level, He seems to be endorsing the strong belief behind the negative attitudes singled out above, but in favour of revelation. For He thanks His Father "for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to mere children." He reiterates, on grounds of the mutual knowl-

edge between Him and the Father, that He Himself reveals His Father to those of His choice. These "children" and people chosen by Him are those open to revelation. Those who rely on their own knowledge are excluded.

If this was Jesus' meaning in His prayer, He would clearly be very exclusive. His whole mission would be very lopsided, partial and sad. A fundamentalist interpretation of Jesus' prayer from the standpoint of Faith and Science being irreconcilable would be to take the "learned and clever" to represent scientists while "mere children" to refer to people of faith. But happily, Jesus' mission was inclusive and universal. He had come to save all humankind. No one was, is and will ever be excluded.

What did Jesus mean by "these things" that the Father has revealed and the "mere children" He has revealed them to? Jesus' meaning must necessarily have to do with all that He had come into our world to do. His call at the very start of His public ministry was: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near at hand" (Mt. 4:17). His entire ministry, all that He taught and did, was about the kingdom of heaven. His call was meant for everybody. Thus "these things" must necessarily refer to Jesus' ministry. He proclaimed the coming of the kingdom of heaven and demonstrated His authority through the miracles He worked. These miracles were signs of the dawning kingdom. He called all to the kingdom. Their response was to "repent", to

turn away from sin and turn back to God. It amounted to a radical change of attitude and lifestyle — from indifference to God or unbelief in Him to taking Him seriously in life.

Vis-à-vis Jesus' call to repentance to enter the kingdom of heaven, "the learned and the clever" refer to those who choose to disregard God. They think that their knowledge is self-acquired and makes them self-sufficient. For they are convinced that it empowers them to lead a successful life.

On the contrary, "mere children" and those "to whom Jesus chooses to reveal the Father", are those who are willing to accept the kingdom of heaven Jesus proclaimed and demonstrated with signs. The kingdom of heaven belongs to the divine realm and God the Father sent Jesus into our world to offer it to all humankind.

Jesus' invitation in the second part of the Gospel offers a way to harmonise Science and Faith: "Shoulder My yoke and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart." Jesus is God, the source of all creation and knowledge. In His humility and for our salvation, He became Man and subjected Himself totally to human conditions and limitations as well as to the laws of nature, and thus, to Science. He had to learn and He did learn both religious and secular sciences. But at the same time, He was always open to His Father, daily discerning and doing His Will so that He could reveal Him and His Will to people.

In Jesus, revelation and Science coin-

### Reflecting on our Sunday Readings

with Archbishop  
Emeritus John Ha

**14th Sunday of  
Ordinary Time (A)**

**Readings: Zechariah 9:9-10**

**Romans 8:9, 11-13;**

**Gospel: Matthew 11:25-30**

cided and worked in harmony, because His Father was the source of both. One evidence of this is found in Jesus' parables. There, Jesus used knowledge from natural science to convey realities about the kingdom of heaven. Those who accept Jesus' offer of the kingdom will "find rest for their souls". That is because in the kingdom they will be with God. The great St Augustine understands Jesus' offer very well when he affirms, "My soul will be restless until it rests in God."

The "learned" in today's Gospel can become "mere children" by learning from Jesus. Their repentance consists in becoming "humble in heart" and making room for divine revelation amidst their scientific pursuits for knowledge. Faith and Science are not opposed to each other. Faith keeps Science on course as its focus on God serves as a constant reminder that He is the source and goal of all knowledge.



# Gaining a deep appreciation for the new SYPG hymnal

SIBU: The Liturgy Commission for Sibu Diocese organised a three-hour introductory session on the new *Sing Your Praise to God* (SYPG) hymnal at the Church of St Mary's of Divine Mercy recently.

Forty choir members, made up of singers and musicians, from various parishes in the Sibu diocese attended the session by Neil Mah, a member of the Liturgical Music Committee (LMC) of the Episcopal Regional Commission for Liturgy (ERLC) for the Catholic Bishops' Conference for Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei (CBCMSB).

Neil, who was one of the members who worked on the hymnal for seven years, began by sharing about the history of the hymnal which dates back to 1970 when it was first published by the CBCMSB. The hymnal was published to provide a collection of hymns, devotions, and prayers that would cater to the needs of the faithful during Mass, allowing them to come together to worship God in spirit and in truth.

In the years following its initial publication, the hymnal underwent several updates and more hymns, devotions, and prayers were included. However, after the release of the second edition in 1985, no further updates were made for a significant period. Recognising the need for a revision and improvement of the hymnal, the CBCMSB mandated the ERCL to undertake this im-

portant task in 2014. The ERLC, comprising dedicated individuals with expertise in liturgy and music, was entrusted with the responsibility of revising and enhancing the existing hymnal.

Neil further informed the participants that the LMC was formed to revise and improve the hymnal. The LMC consisted of dedicated individuals who were knowledgeable in liturgical music and had a deep understanding of the principles and guidelines set forth by the Second Vatican Council.

The Second Vatican Council's documents provided important guidance on the liturgy, including the role of music in the worship of the Catholic Church. By studying and understanding these documents, the LMC ensured that the revised hymnal would align with the teachings and spirit of the Council.

In addition, the LMC was in constant consultations with the CBCMSB. The bishops' valuable insights and guidance helped shape the content and direction of the revised edition.

During the revision process, LMC also acknowledged all copyright owners of the selected hymns. The committee recognised the importance of respecting intellectual property rights and sought permission from the copyright owners for the inclusion of



Neil Mah explaining about the new SYPG hymnal to the participants of the Sibu diocese.

their hymns in the hymnal. This process ensured that the hymnal complied with copyright laws and that the rightful owners were duly acknowledged for their contributions.

As the hymnal is designed to be a comprehensive resource for worship, it also includes the Order of Mass, Antiphons and a wide range of hymns in English to enhance the Mass experience. To assist users in finding specific hymns, Neil explained the index listings available in the Hymnal which allows users to search for hymns by title, first liner, and also according to the various liturgical seasons.

Neil also presented examples of both suitable and unsuitable hymn choices, so

the attendees could understand the importance of aligning the lyrical content and musical style with the specific moments and themes of the Mass.

He explained the significance of including Antiphons in the hymnal and their role in enhancing liturgical music. Neil said, Antiphons, with their scriptural basis and rich historical tradition, provide a deep connection to the liturgical season or feast celebrated.

He also briefly demonstrated the proper technique of chanting the Ordinaries of the Mass and proposed conducting a separate workshop at a later date to provide more in-depth training on chanting techniques.



## KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

### Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

#### July

- 9-14 **Catholic Bishops' Conference Malaysia-Singapore- Brunei Plenary Meeting**
- 15 **Confirmation Mass – Church of St Aloysius, Mantin**
- 15 **Confirmation Mass – Church of St Theresa, Nilai**
- 16 **Confirmation Mass – Church of St John Vianney, Tampin**
- 16 **Confirmation Mass – Church of the Visitation, Seremban**



## MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

### Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

#### July

- 10-14 **CBCMSB – MAJODI Centre**
- 17 **3rd Caritas Malaysia - Diocesan Directors & EA Meeting**
- 22 **Catholic Teachers – Johor AGM at the Church of the Immaculate of Conception, JB**
- 31 **Memorial Mass for Bishop Emeritus James Chan – MAJODI Centre at 6pm**



## Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #137



### Greetings again dear people of God.

Our Muslim friends just celebrated Hari Raya Haji and we all enjoyed a long weekend break. COVID hit a number of us after recent gatherings. A woman was fined for wearing shorts in Kelantan. The Minister of Manpower says four million will lose jobs for lacking skills by 2030. The Ringgit is still on the down slide. Medicine prices will go up 5 per cent because of the weakening Ringgit. The Church prepares for the October Synod in Rome. Pray for the outcome of the Synod.

**The 5 vs 750 Times:** Two events showed up the world's hypocrisy, double standards and prejudice.

**The first:** Five people died when the Titan submersible imploded when descending to view the sunken Titanic in the depths of the Atlantic.

**The second:** A fishing boat with 750 refugees capsized off the coast of Greece. Six hundred and forty-six perished, mostly children. The rescue efforts, the use of resources and manpower, the media reporting and the deep analysis of the two incidents contrasted sharply. There was a multi-million \$ rescue operation in the first incident. In the second, the response is 'tighten the borders'. What is glaringly obvious is the different value placed on different lives. Wealth, education, social standing and social connections in the first incident, poor refugees fleeing intolerable conditions in their homeland in the second. Only Pope Francis lamented from his hospital bed about so little being done to save lives. When will we ever see that "he is my brother! She is my sister!"? 1 Cor.12:26 reminds us: "If one part of the body suffers, then all the other parts suffer

with it". No one is more important or more privileged than the other.

### A THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: RESPECT THE INVISIBLE

The car ahead was moving like a turtle, not giving way in spite of his continuous honking! When he was at the brink of losing his cool, he noticed the small sticker on the car's rear.

It read: "Physically challenged; Please be patient."

And that changed everything!! He immediately calmed down and slowed down!

**The lesson from the sticker:** Do we need stickers to be patient with people?

Would we be more patient and kind with others if people had labels pasted on their foreheads? Labels like: Lost my job; Fighting cancer; Going through a bad divorce; Suffering Emotional abuse; Lost a loved one; Feeling worthless; Financially messed etc., etc. Everyone is fighting a battle we know nothing about. The least we can do is be patient and kind.

### Announcements for this Week

1. The **MJ Mission Schools Gathering** is over. They met at GSS Melaka on June 17. Mission Authorities from MJD, the IJs, the Canossians, the La Sallians, the BOGs and Head Teachers from 23 schools attended sessions on 1) Serving Mission Schools, 2) What Makes a Mission School Different? and 3). How is ethos practised in schools? It was a bonding and networking time.

2. The **Episcopal Regional Commission Family, Laity & Life** met at Sibu from June 11-13. The concerns raised include: LGBT-QIA+, The Three Addictions of Gaming, Pornography and Drugs; elderly care, aging

church & parish day-care centres, and the setting up of Parish Family Life Ministry.

3. **Katolikos 2023** happened. Youth Leaders gathered at Bakhta Hall, Kluang to be informed, formed and transformed. The present and future movers of parish youth ministries see a different church. They seek to awake and live the call to become 4E Catholics and build 4E ministries.

4. A **Zoom Training Session on Safeguarding of Minors** for Clergy, Religious, Catechists, Ministry/Committee Members and Church Personnel, volunteers and staff, will be conducted by the PSO of MJD on July 22. We have been reminded by the Pope to be PSO Compliant.

### This Week's Question and Query

**The question asks: Pilgrimages? What drives them?**

There are two types of pilgrims. One is like a tourist, keen on sightseeing, wandering from place to place, flitting from one experience to another for the fun of it. There is sorrow on this path. The real home is yet to be found.

The other treads the path that is consistent with man's true being and which leads to his real home, to self-knowledge. Pilgrimages are meaningful when the pilgrims find themselves in their pursuit of the end.

**"The secret to living well and longer is: eat half, walk double, laugh triple, and love without measure."** ~ Tibetan Proverb

God bless you all. Be safe. Keep safe.

Bishop Bernard Paul



# Renewing our commitment for the environment

By Marilyn Menezes Simon

KUALA LUMPUR: To thank God for the gift of our planet Earth and to mark the 50th anniversary of World Environment Day, the Creation Justice Ministry (CJM) of the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur organised a series of activities in the month of June.

On June 3, 90 enthusiasts gathered for a forest walk at the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM) and to experience the Canopy Skywalk at the Kepong Botanical Gardens. Witnessing different flora, insects, ant hills, colourful mushrooms, lily pads, herbs, etc., was a fun and exciting way to think about how we are a part of nature and how intimately we all depend on it. Viewing 'The Crown Shyness/Canopy Shyness', where the crowns of *Dyobalanops aromatica* (Cam-



Volunteers visiting the Kloth Cares factory in Port Klang on June 17.

phor Tree) do not touch each other to aid the growth of all the trees, was a special moment for all.

A beach cleaning session was organised at Tanjung Sepat, Kuala Langat, on June 10. The dark skies did not deter the 90 environmentalists from different faiths, determined to do their bit for the environment. The group collected bits of plas-

tic, cloth, car tyres, tins etc., before freshening up and bonding over lunch.

An awareness visit to the Kloth Cares factory, Port Klang, was arranged on June 17, to learn how fabrics are kept out of landfills by responsible disposal and recycling of clothes. Kloth Cares has around 350 to 400 fabric bins in the country. Do

look out for the one at your parish or in your surroundings.

On June 24, Solemnity of St John the Baptist, a Eucharistic celebration was held at the Church of the Holy Family, Kajang, concelebrated by Frs Andrew Manickam OFM Cap, and Fr Bonaventure Rayappan.

Fr Andrew, during his homily, mentioned that the birth of the saint

was 'no ordinary birth'. Everything was done according to God's plan and He kept His promise of mercy to Sts. Elizabeth and Zachariah. The responsorial psalm for the day "I thank you for the wonder of my being," was uplifting.

While the congregation sang 'Be Praised Most High Almighty God', gifts from nature were offered as our commitment to adopting green practices, knowing that everything in nature is interconnected and we are responsible for our actions.

World Environment Day, established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1973 and celebrated on June 5, had the theme 'Beat Plastic Pollution' this year. It is a reminder that our actions regarding the usage of plastic matter. Parishioners were encouraged to bring in their recyclable plastic during this month.

## Clergy, laity attend Marital First Responder course

KOTA KINABALU: The Archdiocesan Family Life Commission of Kota Kinabalu (AFLC) held a two-day training course on Marital First Responder (MFR), from June 9-10, at the Sacred Heart Cathedral Parish Centre.

Fr Dr Charles Sim, SJ, a Jesuit from Singapore, facilitated the training programme. Fr Charles, currently attached to the Singapore University of Social Science (SUSS), is a qualified master trainer for the MFR and "Person-of-the-Therapist" (POTT) training courses, an associate member cum consultant at SUSS, a clinical member of the Association of Marital and Family Therapy (Singapore), and a fellow at the Asian Academy of Family Therapy (Hong Kong).

The MFR Training Course aimed to train people involved in couples and marital pastoral works and those inspired to provide better

personal help to friends and family members facing emotional distress in their marriage.

A total of 40 people including priests, lay leaders and representatives from a few parishes in the Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu attended the training programme.

AFLC spiritual advisor, Fr Michael Modoit, opened the session by welcoming the participants and expressing his gratitude to Fr Charles for his time and sharing his experience with all. "Family is the most important institution; every little aspect begins from home; having the privilege to participate in this training course prepares each of us to be sure of our role as 'someone to talk to' when we are approached at an unexpected moment. Being a good listener means to listen more and talk less," he said.

Often, when we are suddenly approached by friends or relatives

regarding their family crisis, the first thing that comes to mind is "How am I going to respond to her or him?" What words can I offer to ease their emotion at that particular moment? Am I doing the right thing or should I decline even before she or he expresses the anxiety, or perhaps be the decision and solution maker?

Besides the input from Fr Charles, ample time was given for practical sessions on developing the seven skills of LEAP (Listen, Empathise, Affirm and offer Perspective) and CAR (Challenge, Advice and suggest Resources for an advanced skill).

In this workshop, participants were not trained to be counsellors but rather to be good listeners, and good friends who can respond immediately to someone in need of instant comfort or consolation about their marital issues.



Fr Michael Modoit welcoming the participants.

Participants had the opportunity to share their experiences throughout the course. Some feedback was that the course was an affirmation. It strengthened their confidence when encountering and handling such situations. Some said it was an eye-opener that a good listener could be

a good friend who empathises and guides them to discover the cause of the crisis, and directs them to seek professional counselling.

Participants were each awarded a Certificate of Completion and an E-learning certificate (online course). — *Catholic Sabah*

## The fruits of Alpha – Becoming missionary disciples

KUALA LUMPUR: 'The primary impact of my participation in the Alpha sessions was transformative. I used to be a sceptic and have now come to understand Alpha's immense evangelisation value for even cradle Catholics, potentially igniting sparks in many lukewarm souls.' These exact words are from a fervent Catholic on how Alpha impacted him during the testimony session on the final night of Alpha, June 25.

Sixty Catholics from all over Malaysia, two Canadians as well as a free thinker from Singapore, a Buddhist from Petaling Jaya and a Taoist from Ipoh embarked on the *Alpha in the Catholic Context* which started on Divine Mercy Sunday, April 16. Running over 11 weeks, this is the fifth Alpha online course conducted by lay Catholics from East and West Malaysia since its inception in April

2021, when the country was still in the grip of the pandemic. Since then, the Alpha online course has been running twice a year.

In line with the theme *Fan into Flame the Gift of Divine Mercy*, the Chaplet of Divine Mercy was recited before the start of the weekly session.

Going back to basics, Alpha helps the participants explore life and their Christian faith. Whatever we do in life has some connection to our faith. The subjects presented each week were different, with diverse topics such as 'Is there more to life than this?', 'Who is Jesus?', 'Why did Jesus die?' and many more thought-provoking themes.

The seventh week of the course was the Holy Spirit Weekend, which providentially coincided with Pentecost this year. It was the highlight of the course and the two-nightly

sessions during the Pentecost weekend helped everyone appreciate the third Person of the Trinity.

Fr Martin Arlando, a priest of the Diocese of Penang who journeys with the team, led the infilling of the Holy Spirit where he asked each person to open his or her heart to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The participants then prayed for one another in their breakout groups. There were testimonies on how the Holy Spirit touched them and how they felt at peace when another participant prayed for them in their small groups.

Each week, for two hours, participants watch the Alpha Film Series (AFS) video, a resource designed to help the audience begin life's greatest adventure – encountering Jesus through Alpha. The AFS features inspiring interviews from around the world and stories including that

of Jackie Pullinger, a British missionary based in Hong Kong; Jose Henriquez Gonzalez, one of the 33 miners trapped for 69 days at the San Jose mine in Chile; Corrie Ten Boom who sheltered Jews during the German occupation of the Netherlands, papal preacher Cardinal Raniero Cantalamessa, and Cardinal Christoph Schonborn, Archbishop of Vienna and globally well-known for editing the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

Following the video, participants are split into small groups and share their stories based on the week's topic. The rule that participants' sharing remains within the group provides a safe environment for all, as conversations about faith, life and God are not always easy. Alpha creates a space for participants to challenge their thoughts and share their opinions. A trained small group host

sees that no one is left out and at the same time, there is no coercion that everyone must share.

The weekly small group dynamics built, strengthened and deepened the friendship among participants in each group, strengthening the Christian community. The fruits of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, forbearance and self-control – can be experienced throughout the journey with the participants.

The Alpha course caters to the needs of everyone, from pre-believers, young believers, nominal believers, and lapsed believers to mature believers and the tagline of *Come and See to Go and Tell* and is the collaboration of the lay Catholics from East and West is a sign of God's providence, where Christian communities are built and strengthened. — *By Cynthia Baring-Gould*





# Focusing on spiritual well-being of ministry members

SERIAN, Sarawak: Kuching played host to 21 members of the Episcopal Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Persons (ECMI) for their 16th annual commission gathering from June 18-22, 2023 at the Gethsemane Pilgrimage Centre (GPC), Bunan, Serian.

The Ministry to the Migrants, headed by Fr Alvin Ng, SJ and team, welcomed representatives, all of whom work directly with migrants and refugees from the nine Malaysian arch/dioceses, as well as the Archdiocese of Singapore and the apostolic vicariate of Brunei Darussalam.

This was the first physical gathering since the onset of the pandemic, replacing the online con-

ferences of the past three years. Amidst familiar faces were also new ones, giving a jovial vibe to the gathering from the moment all participants met at Kuching International Airport to be bussed to GPC, an hour and a half drive away.

Unlike previous gatherings which tended to focus on the physical work and challenges of ministering to migrants, refugees and itinerant persons, this meeting in Kuching shifted the focus to the spiritual well-being of ministry members themselves. Accordingly, Fr Paul Dass, SJ, a Jesuit with years of experience tending to migrants in Malaysia and overseas, was invited to be the resource person and spiritual guide.



*The members of the Episcopal Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Persons.*

## A contemplative Biblical journey

Over the course of two days, Fr Paul invited participants to take a contemplative biblical journey featuring the ancient Israelites as migrants, their ancestor being “a wandering Aramean”. From slavery in Egypt, through the Exodus event and the Babylonian exile, the Israelites were never far from the reality of migration and being forced to live amongst strangers. Thus, the divine refrain was for them to be kind to the foreigner and sojourner in their midst because they were once foreigners and sojourners themselves.

Using the structure of an Ignatian contemplation, Fr Paul presented the following prayer exercise:

**Point 1:** Using my imagination, I will join the Holy Family who, fleeing Herod's persecution, make their escape to Egypt. I will listen to what they say to each other as they hurriedly prepare to leave, feel their panic and anxiety, and be with them all the way. I will accompany them on their journey. I will be present to them like I am present to my own soul.

**Point 2:** In my imagination, I will seek to serve them in all their needs. I will do everything I can to help Joseph care for his family in this hour of need; carry things,

look out for shelter on their way, secure food, etc. I will assist Mary in caring for her baby. I will look out for ways and means to make their journey and stay in a foreign land easy and safe. I will serve them in their day-to-day practical needs.

**Point 3:** I will reflect more broadly on the circumstances that arose around this situation for the Holy Family. All male children two years and under in Bethlehem and its surrounding districts had been killed. I will think about the families of these children, their mothers refusing to be consoled. I will think about how a king and his system of rule can enforce this and make this happen. In modern terms, would this be a crime? A crime against humanity? A genocide or policy of infanticide of sorts? In modern terms, what international law, particularly those protecting children, have been contravened? Who will raise their voices against it? Who will speak up and make it known that such a thing has happened or will no one speak up and the whole thing be forgotten? Who will speak up for the rights of those so seriously affected? Who will work to make those necessary changes to such a system of rule and government to

make sure that such a thing never happens again? In other words, who will advocate for this? And, what would that advocacy look like? What other dimensions of the situation arise in my mind as I pray over this?

After praying over the three points, I will summarise them in my mind.

1. Accompany/be with the Holy Family.
2. Serve them in their needs through this entire ordeal.
3. Speak up or advocate for them and those affected like them. Then, I will ask the question of myself: can I use these three points to help me in my ministry to migrants, refugees, and stateless persons? Collectively speaking, can these three points – accompaniment, service, and advocacy – serve as a frame of reference for the work of ECMI? I will meditate on this matter for a while?

I will conclude my prayer by looking at the Holy Family. What are they saying to me? What is the baby Jesus saying to me? What is Mary, His mother, saying to me? What is St Joseph saying to me? I will ponder over this and ask of them, grace and strength for me and my ECMI companions.



*Fr Paul Dass, SJ taking the delegates on a Biblical journey.*

## Conversations and discernment

Participants also had a chance to update each other on what had taken place in their own respective diocese and ministry in the past two years. Clearly the pandemic challenged pre-pandemic ways of doing things, surfacing new needs among ministry members themselves if they are to remain relevant and effective. These needs include skills and capacity-building for all involved, no less spiritual rejuvenation as this gathering testifies to. Collaboration, networking, and resource-sharing remain key ingredients for facing the

post-pandemic present and future that is unpredictable and fluid.

A synthesis session featuring spiritual conversations among the participants elicited feedback for the way forward for ECMI. Based on “3 Ds”, the conversations included a discernment on where participants felt God was moving the commission. They also decided on the key graces received after praying with the pointers of Fr Paul. Finally, participants designed some suggestions for the Executive committee of ECMI to follow up post-gathering.

## Bonding and camaraderie-building



*ECMI delegates dropped by the Migrant Children Learning Centre run by the Ministry to Migrants of the Archdiocese of Kuching.*

A full day of the programme was set aside for bonding and camaraderie-building. Participants spent a day out in the city and dropped by the Migrant Children Learning Centre run by the Ministry to Migrants of the Archdiocese of Kuching for children aged 5 to 12 years old. All were treated to a welcome dance by the children as they shared in their newly acquired English – their names and what they learn at the centre. Funded by generous benefaction, the centre provides half-day classes from

Monday to Thursday offering an Indonesian syllabus covering English, Bahasa, science, mathematics, and craft work. Both paid and volunteer teachers help at the centre.

The rest of the day was spent on foot exploring the sights, sounds and of course, Kuching's culinary delights. A visit to the Borneo Cultures Museum was arranged before all gathered for Holy Eucharist at St. Joseph's Cathedral. A farewell dinner concluded the programme. — *By Fr Alvin Ng, SJ, Ministry to Migrants*



# Mantin parish celebrates 123rd anniversary

By Selva Manogary  
Arikrishnan

MANTIN: Tintinnabulations rang for four days as the Church of St Aloysius celebrated its 123rd parish feast day with other religious leaders and the faithful from far and near.

Beginning on its actual Feast Day, June 21 with the theme "St Aloysius Pray for Us", the main preacher for the celebration was Fr Michel Dass, with parish priest Fr. Christopher Soosaipillai, Fr Xavier Andrew, Fr Albet Arockiasamy, Fr. Adrian Francis, and several Carmelite Friars concelebrating.

Mass on June 23 was celebrated by Fr George Ho, OCD, with Fr Christopher and Fr Nicholas Hoh, OCD concelebrating. The priests



Fr Lawrence Ng, CDD leading the Blessed Sacrament procession.

anointed the sick, the elderly, and those in attendance.

Parishioners believe St Aloysius Gonzaga's intercession played a significant role in bringing peace,

mercy, and healing to those present. Fr Christopher reminded the congregation of the spiritual significance of the church, adding that if we pray and believe, even

touching the church walls can bring about healing. The following day saw Fr. Lawrence Ng, CDD, from the Church of St Ignatius, Petaling Jaya, celebrating Mass and leading the procession with the Blessed Sacrament. The presence of a stunning sunset added to the serene atmosphere as the Blessed Sacrament was carried in procession within the courtyard. Flower girls delicately tossed petals as the faithful venerated the Holy Eucharist at seven stations around the churchyard.

Prayers were offered for all the priests who served at the Church of St. Aloysius Mantin, and the Carmelite sisters whose presence and prayers continue to be felt. The souls of those resting at the cemetery behind the church were remembered. The catechism

teachers and children, the Christian community and the people of other faiths in Mantin, were also held in prayer. Lastly, there was a special mention of the cherished, elderly parishioners of Mantin.

The final day Mass was presided over by Archbishop Julian Leow with Fr Christopher Loh, OCD and Fr. Chin Sin Wee, OCD concelebrating. Also joining in the festivities were members from the interfaith group.

The efforts of the Stella Maris choir in lending their melodious voices to the feast day hymns reminded us we must persevere, pray and reach out to one another with love and respect, even if we are of different faiths. For God is the one who binds us together in peace and harmony.

## Learning about St Thomas More

SUBANG JAYA: The Church of St Thomas More (STM) celebrated the 12th anniversary of its establishment and the feast of its patron saint on June 22.

Parish priest, Msgr Patrick Boudville celebrated the feast day with Mass at 8pm followed by refreshments for all present.

The following day, STM's Music Ministry hosted a hybrid musical on the life and story of St Thomas More. The musical was a combination of digitally enhanced video footage of an actual 'live' stage performance in 2011 with a cast of parishioners from STM. The music

and songs were, however presented 'live' in the church itself. Almost all the choir members who sang in the musical 12 years ago reprised their roles, especially the lead voices portraying Thomas More, his daughter Meg and King Henry.

"Msgr Patrick mooted the idea to restage the musical in conjunction with the feast day celebrations. The purpose was to make known our patron saint, who is not well known among Malaysians," remarked Patrick Archibald, who led the restaging of the musical.

"I was present at the live musical 12 years ago. It brought back good

memories. Since then, we have lost many involved in the original production, including Fr O.C. Lim," said parishioner Joseph Tan. Connie Lee said, "I am new to this parish. I now have a better understanding of St Thomas More and the cause he died for."

As part of the celebration, a full-length video of the live musical in 2011 was circulated among STM parishioners and friends to give a better understanding of who St Thomas More was and what he stood for.

St Thomas More was beheaded at the Tower of London in 1535



The team behind the restaging of the musical, after the show.

for treason when he refused to acknowledge King Henry VIII as the head of the church, his divorce of Catherine of Aragon and his marriage to Anne Boleyn. At his execution, he proclaimed, "I die the

King's servant and God's first". His stand for justice makes him the patron saint for lawyers, the legal profession and politicians, adopted children, widowers and large families. — *By Angeline Lesslar*

## Family, the light of the world

TELUK INTAN: The Church of St. Anthony celebrated its patron, St. Anthony of Padua, with a Triduum from June 15 to 17, 2023. The festivities began on June 13, the actual feast day, with a novena and Mass centred around the theme "Family, the Light of the World."

The parish priest, Fr David Lourdes, preached on the first day of the Triduum, focusing on "Family and Reconciliation." He emphasised the importance of love and reconciliation among family members to foster communion with one another.

On the second and third day of the Triduum, the main celebrant was Fr. Peter Anthoney, parish administrator of the Church of Christ the Light, Kepong. As the Ecclesiastical Assistant for the Kuala Lumpur Archdiocesan Family Life Ministry, Fr. Peter preached on the themes "Family and Communion" and "Family and Participation," respectively. He highlighted the significance of families coming together, praying together, and seeking reconciliation to strengthen their communion with one another.

The preacher said, "This year, the parish celebrates its 129th anniversary, imitating a great saint, St An-



The statue of St Anthony being taken around the town.

thony of Padua." He reiterated the importance of family participation and highlighted the significance of the Eucharist. He encouraged the congregation to offer themselves as a united community comparing it to the coming together of grains of wheat to form flour and individual grapes pressed together to create wine.

Throughout the triduum, Fr David and Fr. Peter encouraged the congregation to pray for their families by invoking the intercession of St. Anthony and the Immaculate Heart of Mary for the well-being of families, including those experiencing fragmentation.

Fr. Peter also stressed the need for active participation in the church and the importance of the family

Rosary. He shared personal experiences of his family members attending Mass together and lamented the disunion prevalent in many families today. He reminded the assembly that as brothers and sisters in Christ, they are part of the parish family, with St. Anthony being an integral part of their parish.

The celebration culminated on June 17 with a 35-minute candlelight procession after Mass, attended by approximately 1,200 faithful. A statue of St. Anthony was carried through part of the town area before returning to the church for Benediction.

On Sunday, June 18, a morning Mass was celebrated with the theme "Family and Mission" by Fr David. — *By Bernard Anthony*

## Be witnesses to your community

SERDANG: The faithful who gathered at the Chapel of St Anthony for the feast of their patron saint have been urged to be witnesses to the community they live in. This was the exhortation by Archbishop Julian Leow during their recent Triduum and feast day celebration.

The prelate, who celebrated the feast day Mass, also blessed the recently renovated sanctuary of the chapel and the newly erected altar containing a sacred relic.

The first and second day of the Triduum was presided over by Msgr Stanislaus Soosaimariam, parish priest of the Church of the Sacred Heart.

Reflecting on the central theme

of "Christ in the family," Msgr Stan shared his journey that began 33 years ago in a modest family residing on an estate in Pulau Carey, Selangor. He emphasised the pivotal role his parents played in nurturing his faith and shaping his spiritual life. His sermons touched the heart of the people present.

As the chapel operates under the supervision of the Church of the Holy Family (HFC), Kajang, her assistant priest Fr Bonaventure Rayappan, led the organising team in preparing for the feast. He, along with the HFC's other assistant priest, Fr Philip Chua, concelebrated at all the Triduum Masses.



Archbishop Julian Leow with the co-celebrants.



# Montfort's 'Batch 21' overcomes adversities to graduate

MELAKA: The Montfort Youth Centre (MYC) witnessed the graduation of 24 gentlemen from Batch 21 on June 25. It was a proud moment for the graduates, most of whom were between the ages of 18 to 21 years old. The ceremony was held in their new hall, which can accommodate about 1,000 people. It was a joyous occasion not only for the graduates and their proud family members but also for each staff who journeyed with them throughout their stay at Montfort.

The ceremony was graced by YB. Datuk Hajah Kalsom binti Noordin from the Women, Family and Community Development Ministry. YB Datuk Hajah Kalsom's warm personality made the occasion relaxed and pleasant. During her speech, she pledged to support MYC in any way she can. She also expressed her delight at being invited to the graduation ceremony, as she had wished to visit MYC for some time.

Centre director, Bro Peter Kolandai Samy, SG, in his speech, said, "This batch was dubbed 'The Covid Batch'. They were interviewed online and did their orientation and lessons online for almost the whole of their first semester. They had their nasals and throats swabbed each time they returned after their holidays and were quarantined for a few days before classes resumed. Therefore, it is with much fulfilment that we watch these young men develop in their skills and self-worth. That is the reason why each graduation ceremony deeply touches our hearts."

MYC's chairman, Datuk Christopher Wan, expressed his heartiest congratulations to the graduates for their endurance, which enabled them to obtain a certificate. He also recorded his thanks to all donors, foundations and the



Montfort Youth Centre Graduation 2023 - Batch 21.

press for their continuous support of the educative mission of Montfort and expressed his extreme gratitude for their charitable efforts towards this noble cause.

The students' representative thanked Bro Peter and deputy director Joseph Philip, for treating them like family. He narrated how these gentlemen used to wait with them in the hospital if they were sick, even till late at night or early in the morning. It was very touching to hear how these students have learned to be appreciative.

Another graduate, who spoke in English, thanked his teachers because, before he studied in Montfort, he couldn't complete a single sentence in English and was afraid to speak. The heartfelt expressions of love and gratitude resonated deeply with the staff, providing them with renewed strength, particularly during difficult times.

The students received their Malaysian Skills Certificate for Light Vehicle Repair Service Level Two, Computer System Operation Certificate Level Three and Industrial Training Institute Certificate for Single Phase Elec-

trical Installation for their respective skills training and the Montfort Certificate.

Several students who took the International Computer Digital Literacy (ICDL) as their elective subject received the ICDL certificates. Earlier, during their in-house Leavers' Evening, the students shared how they have improved in both their skills and behaviour and thanked the staff for their patience in guiding them. It was an inspiring evening and it ended with staff and Batch 22 students wishing them well. They also received certificates of appreciation for the various special duties they held and for the social work they did at a few homes in Melaka.

This year, there were many award recipients, such as the St Louis Award, Good Discipline Award, Outstanding Prefect Award, Leadership Award, Best Motor Mechanics Student Award and the highest award, the Student of the Year Award. Not every year do graduates receive such awards. These awards are only given to those who qualify within the criteria.

With the graduation of Batch 21, the current



Billy Lerry S. Pelawi – Recipient of the following awards: Good Discipline, Outstanding Prefect, Leadership, Best Motor Mechanics student and Student of the Year. He also received appreciation award for being a Prefect for the Homeside and Librarian for the class.

students have been trained to take up various leadership roles to help run the Home and the Skills programme smoothly. They will also be trained to be "Big Brothers" now as they await the new students' intake on July 23.

Interviews are ongoing for four courses in Light Vehicle Repair Service, Computer System Operation, General Maintenance, and Agriculture.

## Learning to step out of our comfort zone

KUALA LUMPUR: The Parish Assembly at the Church of the Risen Christ (RCC) identified faith and spirituality, a sense of belonging, ongoing formations, evangelisation, and social outreach as areas of focus for 2023. To address these areas, they invited Sydney Centre for Evangelisation director Daniel Ang to present *Leading Change in The Mission of Christ*. The talk also marked the parish's revival of the charismatic movement after a five-year hiatus.

RCC parish priest, Fr Edwin Peter said, "Incidentally, in our Catholic settings, most people involved in evangelisation are generally charismatically inclined people."

Francis Pereira led an immersive Praise and Worship session before introducing Daniel, whose parents were from Malaysia.

Daniel dove right into 'What it means to be a disciple?'

Quoting Matthew 28:19, Daniel emphasised the importance of discipleship and encountering Jesus. He described discipleship as a constant learning process, following the teachings and way of life of Jesus. Encountering Jesus through hearing the Word and participating in the Eucharist is crucial in deepening one's relationship with Him and being able to share His love and message with others.

Daniel, who embraced the Catholic faith at age 19, reminded the attendees that the Kingdom of God is the abundance of God's love and that love is made present in Jesus, who brings the Kingdom near. As the Kingdom is near, we must repent and believe in the Good News.

Daniel connected various biblical stories that may sound far-fetched, like the Parable of the Lost Coin, the Prodigal Son, Je-

sus feeding 5,000, the Parable of the Lost Sheep, giving sight to the blind, and raising the dead to demonstrate God's excessive love for humanity. He highlighted that wherever there is hope and love, the Kingdom of God is present, and embracing those qualities helps individuals become disciples of Jesus.

Regarding leadership, the 44-year-old highlighted the importance of forming, correcting, and inspiring leaders without exerting authority over them.

Daniel asked the congregation if we were using the gifts we had been given. Also, when it comes to serving in the Lord's vineyard, are we using people with the necessary gifts or using available people?

"You need to identify your gifts to help you work better with others. If you use your gifts correctly to serve the Kingdom of God, it will ripple to those around you," said Daniel.

He also underlined the need for change and adaptation in evangelisation methods while maintaining the unchanging message of the Gospel.

The session concluded with Daniel urging participants to step out of their comfort zones and reach out to people from all walks of life, fostering a missionary spirit within the Church.

Overall, the presentation focused on the significance of discipleship, encountering Jesus, using personal gifts for service, embracing change in evangelisation, and reaching out to diverse communities as a missionary Church. — By Gwen Manickam

## Exhibition on Mary an eye-opener for many



The exhibition displaying the many titles of Mary.

SITIAWAN: The Tamil Apostolate of the Church of St Francis de Sales organised an exhibition on 'Mary our Mother' recently.

The five-day exhibition was open to all, but one of the days was set aside especially for the Catechism students. Some of the students shared that the exhibition revealed much about Our Lady, and gave them a vast understanding on apparitions and why there are many names for Mother Mary. The many miracles attributed to Our Lady produced deeper understanding of devotion to her, as well as the importance of reciting the Rosary.

The parishioners also shared how Our Lady had touched them through the exhibition. They started reciting the Rosary as a family. For some, family or personal problems were solved or diffused. By making it a point to pray every day, which was never done before, they feel the strength gained through prayer. Others said that after reading articles on Our Lady through the exhibition, they have resolved to change in their lives. — By Christi Nathan



Daniel Ang (front) joins the congregation in the Praise and Worship session.



# A bishop who understands the struggles of the people

NAY PYI TAW: Monsignor Celso Ba Shwe was canonically installed as Bishop of Loikaw by Cardinal Charles Maung Bo on June 29, Feast of Sts Peter and Paul.

The new bishop is currently the administrator of the Diocese of Loikaw following the death of Bishop Stephen Tjephe more than two years ago.

In his homily during the episcopal ordination, Cardinal Bo emphasised the importance of having a bishop who understands the struggles of the people.

"He is already the shepherd who lives among the sheep and has come here with the smell of the sheep, knowing their tears, their brokenness, their shattered ness," said Cardinal Bo.

Cardinal Bo praised Ba Shwe for the leadership that he has provided as administrator, which "has won the admiration of all." The prelate said, "You have reached out to thousands of faithful in their need of sacramental and physical needs."

"You have kept the church united, you have been inspired all by your courageous and calm presence. You were the healer, consolator, committed priest, energetic preacher of hope," said Cardinal Bo.



Bishop Celso Ba Shwe of Loikaw, Myanmar

Cardinal Bo urged the clergy "to join hands to support" the new bishop. He also commended the church workers, especially the religious men and women, who are "wounded healers, reaching out even when you were affected".

In May 2021, Msgr. Ba Shwe played the role of mediator between the unarmed protesters, among whom were many Christians, and the security forces to prevent violence to erupt.



Fr Celso Ba Shwe, then apostolic administrator of the Diocese of Loikaw in Myanmar's eastern Kayah State, tries to stop security personnel but he was pushed away. (LiCas News photo/RVA)

The Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) called for prayers for Bishop Ba Shwe and for the city of Loikaw, the capital of Kayah state, where 90 percent of the population are Catholics.

The group said Loikaw is one of the areas "most affected by the violent conflicts" since the military coup of February 1, 2021, started.

"Let us pray for Myanmar, for its people,

for the Christian community, priests and religious of the state of Kayah, and for bishop Celso, shepherd of the Diocese of Loikaw," the group said in a statement.

"Let us invoke, from different parts of the world, the gifts of the Holy Spirit — counsel, wisdom, understanding, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord — to sustain Bishop Celso in his difficult task," it added.

— LiCAS News

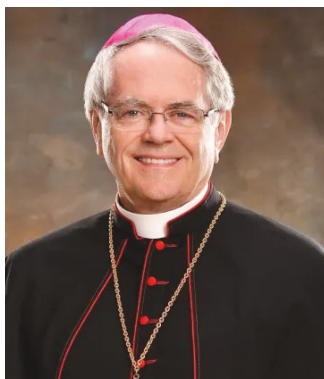
## Newest American archbishop receives pallium in special Mass at Vatican

VATICAN: Archbishop George Leo Thomas of the newly created Archdiocese of Las Vegas formally received his pallium, a vestment symbolising his authority in the Church, from Pope Francis in a solemn Mass at St Peter's Basilica on June 29.

Thomas, 73, received the pallium alongside 29 other new metropolitan archbishops on the solemnity of Sts Peter and Paul.

During the Mass, the Pope blessed the pallia that will soon be placed on the shoulders of the 32 archbishops appointed this year across the world.

In his homily, Francis called on the new archbishops to "be apostles like Peter and Paul" and to "be disciples in following and apostles in preaching."



Archbishop George Leo Thomas

"Brothers and sisters, we are celebrating Peter and Paul," the Pope said. "They answered that essential question in life — 'Who is Jesus for me?' — by following him as his disciples and by proclaiming the Gospel."

"It is good for us to grow as a Church in the same way, by following the Lord, constantly and humbly seeking him out. It is good for us to become a Church that is also outgoing, finding joy not in the things of the world but in preaching the Gospel before the world and opening people's hearts to the presence of God," Francis added.

In concluding his homily, Francis instructed the archbishops to "bring the beauty of the Gospel everywhere, together with all the People of God." — By Peter Pinedo, CNA

## More than half a million Germans left the Catholic Church in 2022



GERMANY: More than half a million Germans left the Catholic Church last year, a record for an institution destabilised by an unprecedented crisis of confidence linked to sexual abuse scandals and struggling to reform itself. A total of 522,821 Catholics turned their backs on their Church, according to annual statistics released on June 28 by the German Bishops' Conference (DBK). Some 359,338 Catholics dropped out the previous year.

The figures are "alarming", admitted Bishop Georg Bätzing, the DBK president. He urged his fellow Catholics "not to be discouraged" and to continue working towards reform. Despite the haemorrhage, Catholicism remains the leading denomination in Germany. Its 20.9 million members slightly outnumber Protestants, who at 19.1 million are down by some 380,000 members since a year ago.

Since the clergy sex abuse crisis exploded in Germany in 2010, the number of Catholics has shrunk by some 3.7 million.

"It's sad, but not very surprising," said Irme Stetter-Karp, president of the influential Central Committee of German Catholics (Zdk), which brings together lay people. "The Church has lost the trust (of its members) above all because of the sex abuse scandal," she said in a statement.

But today, it "is also not showing sufficient determination to implement visions for the fu-

A woman prays in a pew at a nearly empty cathedral in Cologne, Germany, March 16, 2020. (CNS/KNA/Theodor Barth)

ture of Christian life in the Church", said Stetter-Karp. She complained that the Church's process for reform has stalled.

A university survey in 2018 revealed that 3,677 children had been sexually abused by members of the Catholic clergy between 1946 and 2014. But the actual number of victims is believed to be higher, as the authors of the report did not have access to all the institution's archives.

Having officially apologised, Church leaders have since worked on a system of compensation for victims, which is still deemed insufficient by the latter. During its Synodal Path, which lasted over three years, the Church also attempted to propose ways of reforming itself in order to regain the trust of believers and make up for the shortage of priests. There were calls to reconsider mandatory priestly celibacy and to give greater leadership and ministerial roles to women.

The Vatican has rejected these calls, as have Germany's conservative bishops. Among them is the controversial Cardinal Rainer Maria Woelki of Cologne who is suspected of covering up for a priest accused of sexual abuse in his diocese. The 66-year-old cardinal is currently under investigation for perjury. — LCI

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# Accountability, key to Church's safeguarding efforts

VATICAN: The Catholic Church has made great strides in drafting norms to protect children and other people at risk of abuse, but "we don't have a culture of accountability when it comes to the implementation of those norms," said Jesuit Fr. Hans Zollner (pic), a leading expert in the field.



Some norms exist even to hold accountable bishops who failed to properly handle abuse allegations, but at the end of the review process some bishops are asked to resign while others are not, said Zollner, director of the Institute of Anthropology: Interdisciplinary Studies on Human Dignity and Care at Rome's Pontifical Gregorian University.

"How seriously does the legislator take his own law?" Zollner asked, referring to Pope Francis who has promulgated the norms and determines which bishops are allowed to remain in office.

The Jesuit spoke to reporters June 22 at the conclusion of the 2023 International Safeguarding Conference at the Gregorian University. The conference brought together more

than 200 bishops, safeguarding officers and specialists from some 50 nations to discuss "sustaining organisational accountability."

Beatrice Mumbi, safeguarding coordinator for the Jesuit Conference of Africa and Madagascar, told reporters that ensuring the men she works with and for embrace accountability and follow her directions "is quite difficult" because "patriarchy is real in my context," so "it really takes the goodwill of the bishop or the priest that I have to deal with to move a situation forward or resolve a situation."

But in many African cultures, she said, there also persists a "culture of silence" when it comes to sexual abuse. "We don't talk about those things because we do not want to shame people in leadership, we do not want to harm their standing in society."

However, she said, "it's changing. But very, very slowly."

Archbishop Paul-André Durocher of Gatineau, Quebec, and Archbishop Simon Poh of Kuching, Malaysia, addressed the conference June 21 about "the challenges faced by church authorities" when it came to accountability.

Poh told reporters the next day that in most of Asia safeguarding programmes are in their infancy, but a growing number of bishops are

committed to implementing steps to screen candidates for the priesthood and parish volunteers.

"Maybe seven, eight years ago, the thinking was that this is a Western problem. That was the mentality," the archbishop said. But now people realise "it is not a Western problem; it is a human problem."

Durocher said that in Canada there has been a "sea change" over the past 30 years with the bishops moving from an emphasis on setting up structures to accept and investigate allegations to focusing on the victim and learning "how to listen to a victim speak about their allegation in a way that will be compassionate, understanding and that will respond to their needs."

In his presentation to the conference, the archbishop said he found it helpful to make an "examination of conscience" about his own accountability using traits described in the book, "The Oz Principle: Getting Results through Individual and Organizational Accountability."

"Accountability," he said, is "an attitude, a virtue even," that goes beyond responsibility. "It implies taking true ownership for a situation and personally engaging with it in order to move it forward."

It also requires continual monitoring, measuring and adjustment, he said.

For a bishop, true accountability requires "communicating openly and candidly," the archbishop said, although "this is not a habit in our church."

A bishop must ask for and accept feedback, he said.

"I must continually ask myself: 'What more can I do? What are the best practices arising and how can I integrate them in my ministry and in my diocese?'" Durocher said. "I'm afraid too many bishops — and too many of our faithful — think that this crisis is behind us."

"I believe this crisis will always be with us, because, just like the poor, abusers will always be with us," he said. "We cannot let down our vigilance, we must constantly be seeking to improve."

"The sexual abuse crisis has deeply hurt that bond of trust between bishops and priests, between laity and clergy, between believers and non-believers," the archbishop said. "It will take a long time to rebuild that trust, probably a few generations. And it will only happen if we continually to make it a priority — if I, as a bishop, make it my priority." — *Today's Catholic*

## Pope looks at need to reform diocesan chanceries

VATICAN: With the help of an expert canon lawyer, Pope Francis and members of his international Council of Cardinals discussed ways that the principles behind his reform of the Roman Curia also can be reflected in the structuring and functioning of diocesan chanceries.

At the end of the council's meeting June 26-27, the Vatican press office said one of the items on the agenda had been the beginning of a "reflection on how to implement the spirit, principles and criteria of the apostolic constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* (Preach the Gospel) in the diocesan curias."

Cardinal Gianfranco Ghirlanda, a longtime professor of canon law at Rome's Pontifical Gregorian University and a top canonical adviser to the Pope and various Vatican offices, joined the members of the Council of Cardinals for the discussion, the Vatican said.

The apostolic constitution, published in 2022, called for the "missionary conversion"



Pope Francis meets with the members of his renewed Council of Cardinals at the Vatican April 24, 2023. (Vatican Media)

of the Church and of its structures to better serve the Church's mission of preaching the Gospel. An important part of that effort, it said, was strengthening the Church's "synodal" nature so that all the baptised listen to one another and share responsibility for the Church's mission.

The constitution also emphasised the need for church offices to promote the spirituality of employees, as well as their "personal integrity and professionalism" and cooperation across offices and areas of expertise.

The council members also were joined by Cardinal Mario Grech, secretary-general of the

Synod of Bishops, for a discussion on synodality "with an update on the steps taken in recent months" in preparation for the synod's first general assembly in October, the press office said.

Cardinal Seán P. O'Malley of Boston, a member of the Council of Cardinals and president of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, informed the group about the commission's plenary meeting in May "and the work of the commission to update regulations and practices throughout the Church to ensure that child protection mechanisms are effective in every diocese," the press statement said.

The Council of Cardinals also dedicated time for reflection on the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

Looking ahead, the Council of Cardinals scheduled their next session for December of this year. — *ucanews.com*

## Procession in Rome honours Our Lady of Perpetual Help

VATICAN: Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle led a procession through the streets of Rome on Sunday to honour Our Lady of Perpetual Help, whose feast is celebrated on June 27.

The rosary procession began with Mass in the church in Rome that holds the original icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, the Church of St. Alphonsus Liguori.

More than 70 priests and religious sisters processed two by two ahead of a large image of the Marian icon down the Via Merulana, the street that leads from the Archbasilica of St. John Lateran to the Basilica of St. Mary Major.

The modern road follows the historic route Pope Gregory XIII created for religious processions between the two basilicas during the Jubilee of 1575.

Our Lady of Perpetual Help, also known as Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, is a Byzantine icon painted on wood believed to date back to the 13th century.

The icon was brought from Greece to Rome near the end of the 15th century and



Procession for the feast of Our Lady of Perpetual Help passes down Rome's Via Merulana. (CNA photo/Courtney Mares)

was enshrined in 1499 in the Church of St. Matthew, which was located on what is now the Via Merulana, where pilgrims venerated the image for centuries.

The icon shows the Virgin Mary holding the child Jesus, who is being shown the cross,

nails, and other instruments of his Passion by the Archangels St. Michael and St. Gabriel. In the image, the child Jesus has lost his sandal, which has led some to interpret that the depicted child ran with haste to the arms of Our Lady.

The Church of St. Matthew was destroyed when Rome was occupied by Napoleon's French troops and the icon was lost for decades until it was rediscovered in an oratory of the Augustinian Fathers in the 1860s.

Pope Pius IX, who had memories of praying before the icon as a boy when it hung in the Church of St. Matthew, asked for the icon to be returned to its original location on the pilgrimage route between the Basilicas of St. Mary Major and St. John Lateran. At the time, the Redemptorist order had built a church on the site of the former Church of St. Matthew.

In 1866, the icon was carried in a great procession through the streets of Rome to the Redemptorists' Church of St. Alphonsus of Liguori, where it was enthroned above the

high altar. The report of miraculous healings spread rapidly throughout the city of Rome and people came by the hundreds to visit the shrine.

Pope Pius IX himself came to the church to pray before the icon two weeks later. His successor, Pope Leo XIII, kept a copy of the icon on his desk so that he might see it constantly during his working day.

St. Pius X sent a copy of the icon to the Empress of Ethiopia and granted an indulgence of 100 days to anyone who repeated the phrase "Mother of Perpetual Help, pray for us."

Pope Benedict XV had the picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Help placed immediately over his chair of state in the throne room. Here it could be seen by all just over his head, as if to say: "Here is your true Queen!"

The Redemptorists also built a church dedicated to Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Boston, which was later raised to the honour of a papal basilica by Pope Pius XII. — *By Courtney Mares, CNA*



# Synodal working document is deeply rooted in Vatican II

The first two things that jump out when reading the working document, or *instrumentum laboris*, for the forthcoming synod, which was released June 20, are how much the document charts a new approach to a working document for an ecclesial synod and how deeply the document is in continuity with the teachings of the Second Vatican Council.

Whoever came up with the idea of framing the document in terms of questions, rather than a draft text, deserves a bonus. For starters, it puts to rest one of the most common complaints about the synodal process coming from the anti-Francis bleachers, namely, that this synodal process is a smokescreen for a predetermined agenda to radically change the moral teachings of the Church. After Cardinal Robert McElroy called for the synod to achieve a “radically inclusive” Church earlier this year, conservative theologian Larry Chapp opined, “What it all amounts to is code for the ascendancy in the Church of the moral ethic of secular modernity and its imposition on everyone in the Church via the pathway of deceptively pre-engineered, faux democratic processes designed to produce predetermined results.”

Predetermined results? For the first time, the *instrumentum laboris* does not present a draft of a final document for the synodal assembly to amend, but a series of questions. These questions reflect the ones raised in the worldwide consultations. The planning



Bishops pray at the start of a session of the Synod of Bishops on Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment at the Vatican Oct. 9, 2018. The Vatican released its working document, or “*instrumentum laboris*,” for the upcoming world Synod of Bishops on June 20. (CNS/Paul Haring)

committee did not draft a set of plausible responses. It did not lean into the neuralgic issues one way or the other. It acknowledges them and, in so doing, also acknowledges that the effort to declare some topics closed failed to stop the questioning.

The working document does, however,

frame the issues, neuralgic and pedestrian, raised in the consultation process, and the frames it uses are all drawn from the ecclesiology of Vatican II. And so, the first set of questions is grouped under this category and question: “A communion that radiates: How can we be more fully a sign and instru-

ment of union with God and of the unity of all humanity?”

This is almost word for word from the opening paragraph of Vatican II’s Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, which reads: “Since the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race, it desires now to unfold more fully to the faithful of the Church and to the whole world its own inner nature and universal mission.”

I see also in this awareness that the Church’s self-understanding is achieved in part by its mission to the world an echo of the brief remarks then-Cardinal Jorge Maria Bergoglio made to his fellow cardinals shortly before they elected him Pope. “The evils that, over time, happen in ecclesial institutions have their root in self-referentiality and a kind of theological narcissism,” Bergoglio told them. “In Revelation, Jesus says that He is at the door and knocks. Obviously, the text refers to His knocking from the outside in order to enter but I think about the times in which Jesus knocks from within so that we will let Him come out. The self-referential Church keeps Jesus Christ within herself and does not let Him out.”

This pastoral intuition grew out of Bergoglio’s experience of the reception of Vatican II in Latin America. It is neither a left or right insight. It brings the seeds planted at Vatican II to maturity.

## Fulfilling a common mission

The second group of questions also flows from a key conciliar insight: “Co-responsibility in Mission: How can we better share gifts and tasks in the service of the Gospel?” The fathers of the Second Vatican Council would not have put the question this way. But without the recovery of the central role of baptismal dignity in the life of the Church evidenced in *Lumen Gentium* such a question would not be possible. As the *instrumentum laboris* states earlier in the document, “a synodal Church is founded on the recognition of a common dignity deriving from Baptism, which makes all who receive it sons and daughters of God, members of the family of God, and therefore brothers and sisters in Christ, inhabited by the one Spirit and sent to fulfill a common mission.”

That focus on the common dignity of the baptised also revolutionised the Church’s ecumenical efforts at Vatican II and since, just as the council’s consideration of the common dignity of the human person made dialogue with non-Christian religions possible in a way they had not been before. The image of Popes John Paul II, a Pole, and Benedict XVI, a German, visiting the death camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau, was unthinkable before Vatican II. Obviously, non-Christians are not “co-responsible” for Catholic mission, but those entrusted with Catholic mission must, after Vatican II, be mindful that God is already at work in the world before we come to evangelise.

It is only after the subject of mission has been addressed that one can turn to issues of participation, governance and authority, which form the third category of items the synod will consider. In this section, most questions are essentially practical. For example, “How can seminaries and houses

of formation be reformed so that they form candidates for ordained Ministry who will develop a manner of exercising authority that is appropriate to a synodal Church?” and “To what extent does the shortage of priests in some regions provide an incentive to question the relationship between ordained Ministry, governance and the assumption of responsibilities in the Christian community?”

Practical or not, this is the section in which we can foresee the most difficulties.

Some conservative critics have been frantically worried that the working document would lead the Catholic Church astray. Last November, after the release of the working document for the continental stage of the synod preparation, George Weigel complained, “This has nothing to do with Vatican II.”

The joke is on the critics. The working document contains precisely the combination of elements of continuity and discon-

tinuity that constitute the “hermeneutic of reform” with which Pope Benedict XVI said the council should be interpreted in his famous 2005 *Address to the Roman Curia*. The citations from Scripture throughout the document are not cherry-picked. They are ecclesologically foundational. The vision is deeply rooted in the teaching of Vatican II.

The vision of a synodal church that emerges from this document is also something else. It is a sign of that “abundant ‘more’ that signals God is at work” of which Pope Paul VI spoke and which I highlighted in my review of a new book by Cardinal Michael Czerny and Fr. Christian Barone. Discussing the reports from those who participated in the synodal process, the working document states: “One common trait unites the narratives of the stages of the first phase: it is the surprise expressed by participants who were able to share the synodal journey in a way that exceeded their expectations.”

We can note that many Catholics have low

expectations at this moment in church history, but that sentence, like the rest of the text, is brimming with hope. People’s expectations were “exceeded.” Surely, this is a mark of the church, no matter what Cardinal Burke says. When we surrender to God, and become docile to the Holy Spirit, then, and only then, do we experience the joy the first apostles experienced when their expectations were dashed by Jesus of Nazareth’s ignominious death. We, like they, and like Christians in every epoch, are called to trust in the Lord in the circumstances of our times.

This document, collecting the insights from what is likely the widest consultative process in the history of the world, helps all of us to trust that the Holy Spirit is calling us to this synodal process and the ecclesial vision that is emerging, a vision rooted in the teachings of Vatican II and looking confidently forward. — **By Michael Sean Winters, NCR**



... at the presentation of the *Instrumentum Laboris* paper. (Synod facebook)



# Catholics in the Workplace

Being a Catholic usually conjures an image of a person going to church for Mass every weekend, makes the sign of the cross, prays the Rosary and wears a crucifix on a necklace around his/her neck. In Pope John Paul II's Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, titled *Christifideles Laici* (The Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and the World), he encapsulates in a single sentence how Catholics ought to live their vocation as workers. "The lay faithful must accomplish their work with professional competence, with human honesty, and with a Christian spirit, and especially as a way of their own sanctification." (CL43)

In the society we live in today and in the place where we work, how often do we recognise or acknowledge a fellow colleague, a customer, a superior or a supplier as someone who shares the same faith and religion as you?

A priest once asked the audience in a talk, "Are you a teacher who is a Catholic, or are you a Catholic teacher?" We can just as easily replace the profession with any other profession and repeat the same question. Are you a marketing executive who is a Catholic, or a Catholic marketing executive? Are you a lawyer, or a doctor, or an engineer who is a Catholic, or a Catholic lawyer, doctor or engineer? At first read, it sounds the same. In reality, it is not.

The difference between Catholic workers and others comes not from the work itself, but from HOW we perceive and execute the tasks in which we specialise. When we do



## REMINISCING CHURCH

Richard Chia

our job well, we bring glory to God in whose providence the task has a role, however tiny. Trust God to see to it that we will not starve or go hungry. For Catholics, the added satisfaction of knowing that the work pleases the Creator should suffice.

Back in 1997, a small group of Catholics working in Kuala Lumpur City Centre embarked on launching the Catholic equivalent of cell groups in the workplace, adapting the idea from our other Christian groups. The idea was to emulate our Christian brothers in setting up fellowship groups within the workplaces, where they could gather regularly during lunch time to pray together and have fellowship. These gatherings were meant as a platform where Catholics working in the same vicinity (e.g. same building, same company, neighbouring building) could meet, pray and support each other spiritually, and praise God as a small Christian community at their workplace.

The first challenge was to find a venue. It had to be somewhere convenient, walking distance from most offices, accessible during lunch time and could accommodate a small gathering. Ideally, it had to be free and with full consent from the business owner.

The first gathering was attended by four

people in the office of a Catholic business owner at his office in the Concorde Hotel office block. Due to the limited time and lack of agenda, they decided to recite the Rosary together, read and discern on the Gospel message for the day, and end with sharing and of course a quick simple lunch. Then, back to work.

As they continued to meet weekly, word went around, more people were invited, and the size of the gathering grew. Not long after, another Catholic business owner offered his conference room at the Promet building nearby, where they could accommodate more people, with some variations. In addition to prayer, they began with praise and worship, followed by Gospel reading for the day and group sharing.

By 1998, as the size of the group grew to over 40 people, a new venue was needed, especially when they invited priests to celebrate Holy Eucharist during the lunch hour. The third location was Menara TA's auditorium, courtesy of a Catholic director of the company. His generosity was indeed a blessing as this venue could accommodate up to 150 people, and came complete with air-conditioning, sound system and audio-visual systems.

Guest speakers could now be invited, and Yahoo groups (this was long before WhatsApp or Facebook groups existed) were created to disseminate the information to a larger audience of Catholics. At its peak, there were up to 120+ people connected via Yahoo groups to this *Catholics In the Work Place*

(CIWP), as they called themselves then.

Local and visiting priests, prominent speakers from various Church ministries and organisations, became a regular item for the CIWP lunch time gatherings. Lunch time Mass was also one of the hits that attracted more attendees. Facilitators, coordinators and speakers all helped to manage and plan each weekly session, as the expectations rose. The variety of speakers was really a blessing and impressive, as it is never easy to impart a spiritual message, inspire and deliver God's Word within 45-60 minutes, inclusive of praise and worship, prayers and some announcement time. At Menara TA, the gatherings also had other Christian attendees, invited by their Catholic colleagues.

At its peak, the CIWP groups had eight locations meeting weekly, each conducting their gatherings differently from the other. In YTL Plaza, they used the Workplace Alpha format. In other locations, in the absence of invited speakers or priest, the group would do simple prayer sessions, Gospel reading and sharing. Over time, as people changed jobs and offices moved locations, it became increasingly difficult to continue. By 2019, only Menara TA remained open, until it too was closed just before the COVID-19 pandemic arrived.

● **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.

## HUMAN RIGHTS

# Religious freedom declines further in Asia

Religious freedom continues to decline across the world, with Asia remaining a region for particular concerns, says a report from papal charity, Aid to the Church in Need (ACN). The ACN's latest religious freedom report found that 61 out of 196 countries surveyed completely or severely limit religious freedom.

The report, published biannually since 1999, is the only non-government document on global religious freedom that covers all faiths. During the publication of the report on June 22, Regina Lynch, executive president of ACN International, stated that it intends to provide information and analysis "about the abuse of this fundamental human right worldwide."

The report pointed out that since January 2021, persecution has increased while "impunity continues to be the rule when it comes to attackers, including oppressive governments." Among the regions analysed in the report, Asia was highlighted as the "home to nations that host some of the world's worst religious freedom violations." China, India, Nepal, North Korea, Vietnam, Myanmar, Malaysia, Indonesia, Iraq, Iran, and Pakistan are among the nations where religious persecution in one form or the other exists.

It found the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) 'sinicisation' of religion hampered the freedom of religion among almost all communities in the nation. The government "requiring all religions to adhere to the Chinese Communist Party's ideology, doctrine, and teachings – resumed its intense crackdown on religious communities," the report said. The Chinese authorities reportedly use leading-edge surveillance technologies, which include the approximately 540 million CCTV cameras countrywide with facial recognition capability to persecute minorities. The report pointed out that the Muslim Uyghur popula-

tion continues to suffer intense persecution, which includes the closure and the destruction of mosques.

India, ruled by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has also engaged in victimising, and terrorising religious minorities, especially Christians and Muslims. The socio-political situation of millions of these minorities is severely undermined by the practice of religious conversion and cow slaughter, which "invite severe repercussions." The BJP "also supports restrictions on religious freedom through the Freedom of Religion Acts (or anti-conversion laws)," the report said. At present, 12 Indian states have enacted or are considering passing anti-conversion laws that curtail the freedom of religion and its propagation in the country.

Reportedly, India's neighbour and Hindu-majority Nepal has copied the law and "adopted a constitution and a penal code that forbids proselytism and marginalises non-Hindu communities and organisations" in the nation. The report highlighted the rise of the Hindu nationalist Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), which seeks to re-establish Nepal as a Hindu state.

"The data from India, Nepal, and other countries in this region suggests that ethno-religious nationalism continues to be a dangerous pattern in Mainland Asia," the report said.

According to the report, North Korea has the world's worst human rights records where faith groups also suffer "extreme persecution." North Korea's discriminatory Songbun system categorises citizens according to their loyalty to the state. Religious believers are automatically classed as "hostile" and "subjected to severe repression," the report said.

Vietnam's Hmong and Montagnard Chris-



(Agenzia Fidez photo)

tians continue to suffer systemic discrimination as well as persecution, while Christians in Laos, "faced attacks by mobs and demands by the authorities to denounce their faith, with severe repercussions if met with refusal."

Buddhist-majority nations Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Thailand were reported to have various levels of religious persecution in their territories. Myanmar's Military Junta has engaged in religious persecution fuelled by an ethno-religious nationalist ideology that resulted in the destruction of at least 132 churches and religious buildings since the start of the coup in February 2021.

Meanwhile, the Buddhist nationalist movement in Sri Lanka has marked Muslims, Hindus, and Christians as existential threats to Buddhism. The groups have engaged in provoking extremist responses among Muslim and Hindu minority communities.

The southern border provinces of Thailand continue to face conflict driven by the Islamic separatist movement, the Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN), with numerous failed

truce attempts and ongoing negotiations for a cease-fire agreement.

Ethnic minorities and Christians in majority Islamic nations such as Malaysia and Indonesia continue to face oppression, threats, xenophobia, and blasphemy laws, the report said. Pakistan continued the systemic persecution of Christian and Hindu communities, it said.

The report also highlighted some regions in Asia and the Middle East that showed improvement. The Iraqi government, for example, made important gestures toward its Christian and Yazidi citizens. In December 2020, the Iraqi parliament unanimously recognised Christmas as a national public holiday; in 2021, it passed the Yazidi Survivor Law, acknowledged as an important step to overcoming the injustice inflicted upon minorities by Islamic State extremists.

In the United Arab Emirates, encouraging signs such as the opening of a Hindu temple or the establishment of the Dubai-based Association of Gulf Jewish Communities are of note, the report said. — [ucanews.com](http://ucanews.com)



# Sixty years of FMDM presence in Malaysia

By Sr Clara Lee, FMDM

The Franciscan Missionaries of the Divine Motherhood (FMDM) sisters celebrated 60 years of presence in Malaysia recently. In conjunction with our diamond jubilee, let me take you on a whistle-stop journey through the past six decades.

The FMDM were already in Singapore since 1949, and it was with a deep desire to serve the poor that the missionary work was extended to Malaya.

In January 1964, the *Malaysian Catholic News* reported that 'The Franciscan Missionaries of the Divine Motherhood, who run Mt Alvernia Hospital in Singapore, have just opened a new hospital in Ipoh'.

Our Lady's Hospital in Ipoh started operating in 1963, though the sisters were already busy preparing in 1962. The palatial mansion, gifted to the sisters by millionaire philanthropist, the late Mr Foo Yet Kai in

1960 was initially converted into a 32-bed general hospital, the main focus was for poor children.

In less than two and a half years, 21,000 children had been treated either free or for a nominal fee. The out-patient department was always crowded and it was common even in the 70s to see children with TB and malnutrition. We would be naive to think that malnutrition existed only in Africa!

Several years later, our missionary activities expanded. The year 1976 saw the opening of Mt Miriam Cancer Hospital in Penang. In 1987 some sisters moved out of institutions and accepted Bishop James Chan's invitation to work in the Malacca-Johore diocese. With daring spirit, commitment and openness to God's guidance, our sisters immersed themselves into the needs of the diocese.

We continued to be guided by the Spirit, when, in 1990, our sisters in response to the



Church's call for 'preferential option for the poor', accepted the invitation from the late Cardinal Soter Fernandez, (who was then the Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur Archdiocese) to serve in Port Klang and the surrounding areas. We tried to provide the means for better education for the children and ministered to deprived families. As the need for counselling grew, a community was opened in Melaka in 2005 at the request of Bishop Paul Tan SJ (then bishop of Malacca-Johore diocese). A qualified sister was able to provide counselling services and train para-counsellors.

The community subsequently left Johor in 2006 and the last of the remaining sisters in Melaka, left in 2020.

Towards the end of 2022, our mission in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur came to a completion. The remaining three religious sisters who were residing in Port Klang were commissioned to Ipoh and Taiping. This marked an end to the presence of the FMDM sisters in the archdiocese after 32 years.

Today all our sisters are in the diocese of Penang, serving in various areas according to the gifts and capacities of the individual sister. Some are in pastoral care, counselling, spiritual direction/spiritual accompaniment, family ministry, a listener, or simply being a friend/companion to the elderly, lonely or sick. However, life is not all about 'doing', it is also about the quality of our 'being'. It is with this sentiment that we are proud to celebrate, to rejoice and to give thanks for God's unfailing faithfulness for our 60 years' presence in Malaysia.



Early community in Our Lady's Hospital, Ipoh



## A celebration of thanksgiving and gratitude



Archbishop Julian Leow greets Sr Felicity Tan.

On May 23, we had a wonderful celebration at the Church of Our Mother of Perpetual Help, Ipoh to mark our 60th anniversary in this country. It was great to see our benefactors, friends, family members, doctors, staff and women who had once been part of our FMDM family. Our sisters from Singapore and two from the Central Leadership Team (CLT) in England were also present to commemorate the significant occasion.

From across the Causeway, we were happy to welcome Srs Geraldine Ee, Inez Koh, Elisabeth Lim and Angeline Lim. From the CLT, we were pleased to have Srs Helena Mc Evilly and Helen Doyle, bringing with them

prayers and blessings from the rest of the Congregation.

We appreciated our friends, benefactors and clergy who had travelled from the KL Archdiocese to join us on this occasion. We were also grateful for the presence of Archbishop Julian Leow who came despite his busy schedule.

The thanksgiving liturgy was beautifully celebrated with an excellent choir, put together by Terezinha, who was once with us. Fr Joseph Stephen CSsR, vicar for religious of the Penang Diocese was the main celebrant. He gave an inspiring homily.

We are truly grateful to God for our pio-

neers and early sisters who had such determined spirits that when we look back, we are in awe! We recall in gratitude our many sisters for their untiring efforts in serving the People of God, and for those who have gone before us, may they receive their eternal reward.

This reminds me of the lyrics from the song by Joyce Johnson Rouse, 'Standing on the Shoulders'.

*'I am standing on the shoulders of the ones who came before me/us ... I am honoured by their passion... I imagine our world if they hadn't tried. We wouldn't be here celebrating today.'*

Sr Helena in her speech, described the sisters as true pilgrims. All had been missioned to foreign lands and lived among diverse cultures. The gift of memories helped us treasure such experiences and enhanced our living in the here and now. She also stated, 'As true missionaries, allowing themselves to be changed by their many encounters, they hold rich experiences, and their intercultural living remains a great witness for the world today to finding harmony in difference'.

I like to share the lyrics from one of our favourite songs 'The presence you are' by Jan Novotka.

*It's not what you do but how you do it  
It's not what you see but how you see it  
It's not what you say,  
what you know or achieve  
But it's the presence, the presence you are.*



The sisters with the clergy who were present at the celebration on May 23.



# The gift of acceptance

At a cashier counter the other day, the young woman at the register asked me, out of the blue, “Aren’t you the singer who used to come to the Home and teach us English with Disney songs? I recognised your voice right away!” Seeing that it has been over 20 years since I used to spend Saturdays with the girls of Home of Peace, then located in Taman Seputeh, it was quite a wonder that I was recognised, and more so by my voice alone. Obviously I had not been singing my way to the till (who does in these expensive times?), but to be recognised while masked, and only by voice, was uncanny.

What was even more uncanny was the fact that I had been struggling with my voice of late. I have always had a good voice. Not *American Idol* stunning, but coupled with confidence, it made me a standout in church choirs and at the cantor’s lectern. I had sung my way through high school, college and well into my late 30s. Singing gave me a mode of expression, a way to worship, and was a source of venting and comfort.

However, in my 40s, my clear, true voice became unsteady. I began missing higher notes. My voice broke when trying to sustain a note. I would sometimes start in one register and struggle to keep the note, thus having to come down an octave. Pandemic and its corresponding ban on Masses took away the weekly vocal workout. I became more conscious about singing in public, and even in the car with friends. I felt like I was losing a bit of myself. My voice was so



## WORD IN PROGRESS

Karen-Michaela Tan

much a part of me that I felt abandoned by my inability to feel good when I sang. It got to such a stage that even my shower stall ceased to resonate with music.

I initially refused to be part of last year’s Christmas musical performance before Mass, but my dear organist friend Ann - who herself is battling crippling rheumatoid arthritis which is misshaping her talented, dexterous fingers – sagely said to me, “Fear of failure comes from ego. When our voices and abilities fail, we need to take stock on why we do the things we do. If it is for fame and compliments, then once we consistently fail, we should consider it time to hang up the hat. But if you sing because it brings you happiness, because you believe you are serving in a way no one else can, will, or does, then you must believe God will bless your endeavours.” And so, without any practice whatsoever, I got up and sang on Christmas morning. Like the little drummer boy, I brought what I had, and believed that God would know it was the best I could bring. And my voice held.

But it has not been consistent. It made me wonder what God wanted of me. I certainly did not want to continue being in the choir

if my voice was going to give up on me mid-hymn! Over the course of the year, I delved more deeply into the meaning of acceptance, and how a Catholic perspective of it helps in the challenges of daily life.

I learnt that ‘letting go, and letting God’ was easier said than done. As a journalist and dogged pedant, I have always sought for definitive answers. However, a big part of the process of acceptance is acknowledging that we may never have the answers, and that perhaps something we think is so major, because we are so self-centred, is negligible to God. Because, face it, missing the sustained A in an *Alleluia* is hardly apostasy.

I could see myself in conversation with Jesus ala Martha, and hear Him tell me that I worried and fretted over too many things, and that in fact, it was not the question of the quality of my voice, but the quality of my service. God did not desire a perfect *Gloria* from me, as much as He wished someone, anyone, to lead an ageing choir which has seen more member deaths than new recruits. I wasn’t in the choir pew singing for a Golden Buzzer. I was singing to rally a congregation in worship, and to perhaps demonstrate that God truly does choose from the less capable. As long as I accepted the fact that I was less capable, God would give me what I needed to do what was needed capably.

The Bible is full of assurances of God’s acceptance of us, flawed and broken as we are. This heavenly acceptance should flow

into our daily lives and allow us to accept our own limitations and situations. In order to reap the richness of this, there is a need for discernment. Most parishes will not ‘kick out’ a person whose abilities in their field of service has diminished. Sit through the quavering of an elderly chorister at some Masses and you will know what I mean.

Yet, for the person serving, the question is this: do I truly believe that God requires my continued service? Am I still capable of performing my function in the ministry I am in? In filling this seat, am I obstructing a new person with fresh perspectives or stronger abilities from serving? Acceptance is gracefully relinquishing posts which we are no longer capable of holding, either by reason of diminished capacity or life changes. Acceptance is knowing that there are times and seasons to all things, and believing that when God closes a door, He sometimes opens new windows. Above all, acceptance is not the petulant, grudging “Okay, fine” ungracious ceding to popular opinion or leadership, but a generous acquiescence that our knowledge is finite, and that we are realistically unable to control most of what happens in our lives. Acceptance is about not knowing, and yet, still being secure in the infinite wisdom of God; that He knows best, and will do right by us.

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



## FAITHFULLY SPEAKING

Julie Lim Seet Yin

I once heard a priest saying in his sermon that ‘the elderly are in the twilight of their lives’. It seemed presumptuous to label the elderly as such because there are many elderly folks who are active and living life to the fullest. We remember them especially in the month of July when we celebrate World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly on July 23.

### Rise of the elderly

After the COVID-19 pandemic tapered off and life began returning to normalcy, there was an increase in church activities. After participating in these activities at parish and archdiocesan level, I noticed that the number of elderly folks participating in these activities sometimes outnumber the younger participants. Be it an outdoor or indoor event, a physical activity or an intellectual pursuit like Bible study sessions, the elderly were participating enthusiastically in these activities.

In parishes, we see many elderly folks serving in ministries and volunteering for various causes compared to the younger ones. A good reason is because the elderly, being retirees, have a lot of time on their hands.

The large number of elderly folks wanting to do more than merely staying home is an indication that the dioceses in Malaysia could do more for this group of people, especially since Malaysia is set on becoming an aging nation.

### Aging nation

According to the United Nations, an aging country is where seven per cent of its total population is made up of people aged 65

## The elderly – living life to the fullest



Youths and catechists of City Parish, Penang spend time with the elderly at the Little Sisters of the Poor (LSP), Ayer Itam. (City Parish facebook)

years and above. Japan, Italy and Finland are examples of aging nations.

The Department of Statistics Malaysia estimates that 7.3 per cent of Malaysia’s population will reach 65 years of age by 2022. In a 2020 World Bank study, Malaysia is expected to become an aged nation in 2044 (with 14 per cent of its population aged 65 and above), and a super-aged nation in 2056 (with 20 per cent of its population aged 65 and above).

Acknowledging the signs of the times, various organisations in Malaysia have started preparing for the transition into an aged nation.

### Preparing for an aging nation

As an aging nation, a country will experience an increase in life expectancy due to better healthcare services and living standards. This has spurred a demand for integrated resorts and community living specially designed for the elderly such as Eden on the Park (in Kuching, Sarawak) and Sunway Sanctuary (in Petaling Jaya, Selangor).

Examples of Catholic-based homes for the elderly in Malaysia are Graceville Home (in Johor Bahru, Johor) and Sri Seronok Retirement Village (in Cheras, Kuala Lumpur). And there’s the endearing Little Sisters of the Poor religious order who are actively serving the elderly poor in Cheras and Penang.

With the increase in number of elderly persons, perhaps it is time to expand those homes or build new ones.

### World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly

In January 2021, Pope Francis established World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly. The observance is celebrated annually on the fourth Sunday of July to coincide with the memorial of Sts Anne & Joachim (July 26), the parents of the Virgin Mary, and grandparents of Jesus.

During the Mass, Pope Francis noted that in the scene of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, the elderly Simeon and Anna had recognised Jesus as the Messiah. He said, “The Holy Spirit even today, stirs up

thoughts and words of wisdom in the elderly. The voice of the elderly is precious because it sings the praises of God and preserves the roots of the peoples.”

Pope Francis added, “The elderly reminds us that old age is a gift and that grandparents are the link between the different generations, to pass on to the young the experience of life.”

### Living life to the fullest as an elderly person

Elderly folk can contribute to society in their own way, especially with their vast life experiences.

Grandparents may impart their knowledge and experience to their grandchildren. Certain grandparents even look after their grandchildren whilst the parents are out working the whole day.

Even elderly persons who are immobile could become prayer warriors, praying and interceding for one another. And we all need prayers which we often take for granted.

At a soup kitchen where I serve weekly, there are a few homeless elderly guys who sit quietly in the corner. Because they cannot move around quickly, they are given simple tasks that can be done whilst seated such as wiping the plates and cutting vegetables. In spite of their age, these individuals make themselves useful by serving their fellow homeless brothers from the streets.

All of us will eventually become an elderly person one day. It is a state of life that nobody can escape from. And when I reach that milestone with a head full of greying hair and a wrinkled face, I don’t want to be labelled as being in the twilight of my life. Instead, I want to live life to the fullest.

● **Julie Lim Seet Yin** believes that a satisfied life measured by one’s heart, mind and soul is better than a successful life measured by worldly yardsticks. She can be reached at: [limseetyin@gmail.com](mailto:limseetyin@gmail.com)





Fr Ron Rolheiser

# The therapy of public life

More than 50 years ago, Philip Rieff wrote a book entitled *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*. In it, he argued that widespread reliance upon private therapy today arose in the secularised world largely because community has broken down.

In societies where there are strong families and strong communities, he contends, there is less need for private therapy. People can more easily work out their problems through and within the community.

If Rieff is right, and I suggest he is, then it follows that the solution to many of the things that drive us to the therapeutic couch today lie as much, and perhaps more, in a fuller and healthier participation within public life, including ecclesial life, than in private therapy. We need, as Parker Palmer suggests, the therapy of a public life.

What is meant by this? How can public life help heal us?

In caption: public life (life within community, beyond our private intimacies) becomes therapeutic by immersing our fragility into a social network which can help carry our sanity, give us a certain rhythm within which to walk, and link us to resources beyond the poverty of our private helplessness.

To participate healthily in other people's lives links our lives to something bigger than ourselves and this is its own therapy because most public life has a

certain rhythm and regularity to it that helps calm the chaotic whirl of our private lives which are often racked with disorientation, depression, psychological fragility, paranoia, and a variety of obsessions.

Participation in public life gives us clearly defined things to do: regular stopping places, regular events of structure, a steadiness, a rhythm. These are commodities the psychiatric couch does not provide. Public life links us to resources that can empower us beyond our own helplessness. What we dream alone, remains a dream. What we dream with others can become a reality.

But all this is rather abstract. Let me try to illustrate with an example. While doing doctoral studies in Belgium, I was privileged to attend the lectures of Antoine Vergote, a renowned doctor of both psychology and the soul. I asked him one day how one should handle emotional obsessions, both within oneself and when trying to help others. His answer surprised me. He said something to this effect:

"The temptation you might have as a priest is to simplistically follow the religious edict: 'Take your troubles to the chapel! Pray it all through. God will help you.' It's not that this is wrong. God and prayer can and do help. But most paralyzing obsessional problems are ultimately problems of over-concentration . . . and over-concentration is broken mainly by

getting outside of yourself, outside of your own mind and heart, life, and room. Have the emotionally paralyzed person get involved in public things — social gatherings, entertainment, politics, work, church. Get the person outside of his or her closed world and into public life!"

He went on, of course, to qualify this so that it differs considerably from any simplistic temptation to simply bury oneself in distractions and work. His advice here is not that one should run away from doing painful inner work, but rather that doing one's inner work is sometimes very dependent upon outside relationships. Sometimes only a community can stabilise your sanity.

As a corollary to this, I offer this example: I have been teaching theology in a number of colleges for over 40 years. Many is the emotionally unstable student, fraught with every kind of inner pain and unsteadiness, who shows up at these colleges, hangs around its classrooms, cafeteria, chapel, and social areas, and slowly gets steadier and stronger emotionally. And that strength and steadiness come not so much from the theology courses, but from the rhythm and health of the community life. These students get better not so much by what they learn in the classrooms as they do by participating in the life outside of them. The therapy of a public life helps heal them.

Further, for us as Christians, the therapy of public life also means the therapy of an ecclesial life. We become emotionally healthier, steadier, less obsessed, less a slave of our own restlessness, and more able to become who and what we want to be by participating healthily within the public life of the church.

Monks, with their monastic rhythm, have long understood this and have secrets worth knowing: Program, rhythm, public participation, the demand to show up, and the discipline of the monastic bell have kept many a man or woman sane—and relatively happy besides.

Regular Eucharist, regular prayer with others, regular meetings with others to share faith, and regular duties and responsibilities within ministry not only deeply nurture our spiritual lives, they also help keep us sane and steady.

Robert Lax, who greatly influenced Thomas Merton, suggests that *our task in life is not so much finding a path in the woods as of finding a rhythm to walk in*. Public life can help us find that rhythm.

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

There is a point when what you are doing with your life satisfies you, but you begin to wonder if there is something more.

Head-on: go for it. Go for living. Not just getting through each day. I was once advised, don't let life come to you — go for it. I decided it was somebody playing with words, and ignored it. Wrong choice, I found: a group calling itself GFI set itself up, and that was both its name and its motto.

If you who are reading this are young, then it means that you really look at what you want your life to be like, write it down, and follow the plan. Example: you want to be a famous and successful XYZ.

Plan,

1: tell some close associate your intention.

2: Map out the approach (you know, the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step — that sort of planning).

3: Take step one — and tell your associate you did it. The idea of telling an associate is, it helps you to be true to your aim without skipping the steps. If it's a physical thing like football or dancing, join a group. If it's a mental thing like mastering outer space, identify a source like the nearest up-to-date library, or Google. Keep informing your associate. And join a group.

4. Let it be known that this is your territory. Others will contact you. Now you are really on your road, all you need is perseverance. Go to related meetings. Your associate and your group will help here.

Important: there will be rough patches. I remember when I was approaching a prestigious examination in piano, I was refused permission to attempt it, on the grounds that it wasn't the aim of the

## Go for it - Go for living



organisation I was a member of. Crash. I still played, but I needed the recognised qualification to advertise myself. Somehow, I came into ownership of a clarinet. Practise, practise, practise, but came the exam problem again. Someone told me, I'll pay the fee — do the exam, I'll deal with your authorities. I did, and then informed the 'authorities' that I had a recognised qualification in music. In fairness to them, they promptly wrote me a letter of congratulations (these were the days before email) on the cover of which appeared my name and the new qualification — in capitals!

### Listening to your inner voice

There is something else, however, in the

matter of GFI — Go For It. This is tougher, and will probably make deeper sense when you are a bit older.

It has to do with listening to your inner voice. There is a point when what you are doing with your life satisfies you, but you begin to wonder if there is something more. An inner disquiet, somehow not related to your current interest. For me, it was a simple accident — I broke my arm, and while the doctors did a great job in giving my arm back to me, the nerves controlling my fingers were muddled, and so I had to quit playing music.

I found I had two choices. One was moan. One was, do something else. As it happened, I had moved past the moaning stage — one realises that a thousand people

have been through similar upsets and had moved on. And so I turned to my inner self. I was already deeply involved in working with poor kids in Kolkata, and then with helping senior youngsters and teaching staffs elsewhere make better sense of their own life processes — I labelled it Value Education — when came the inspiration to make my God the focus of all my life choices. I'll skip the interpretation I have of that strange concept 'God', and just say that I experienced God as a presence of powerful love in every sector of my life.

In practice it means listening to every nudge that your inner self inclines you to. So if you are continuing your music or your space studies, great: but listen also to things to do with your relationships. That's the real core of it all. Relationships.

Maybe you will feel the urge to return to some of your Scripture readings, your listening to your religious leaders, time for prayer — things like that, if you still, even partly believe in it. This takes a lot of courage, dear reader: but — GFI. It will nudge you to cease hostilities towards someone you don't much like — GFI. That's hard work — harder than practising scales! But this is where the fullness of life kicks in.

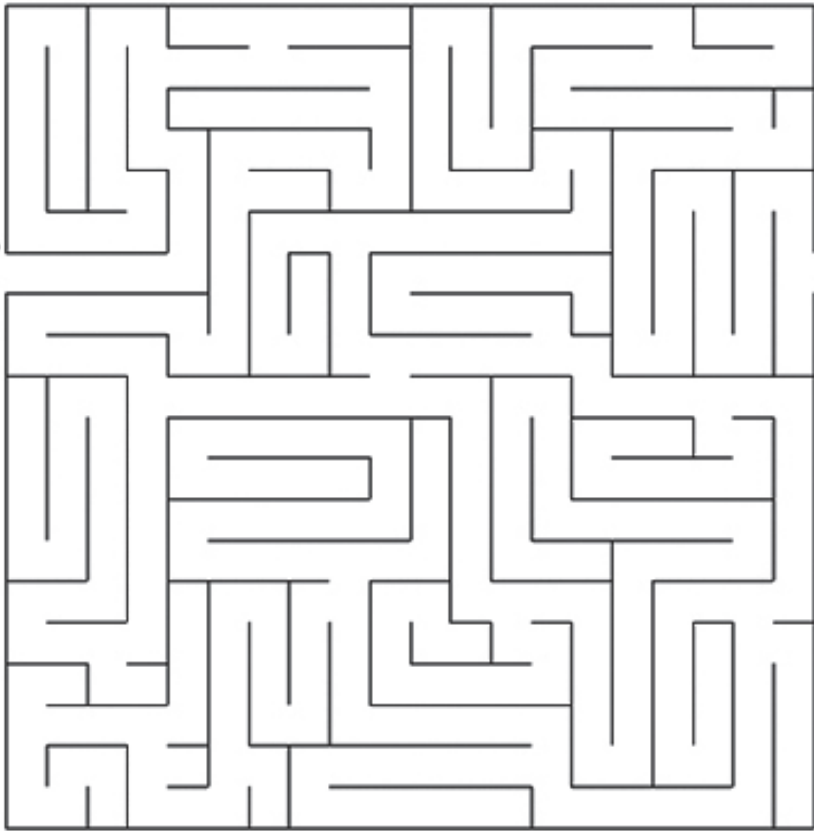
Lots of people do it. Parents especially are very often heroines and heroes in this respect, so as to give their kids courage to be the best they can be. Yes, it is unattractive but utterly fulfilling work. So — GFI! — **By Brendan MacCarthaigh, LCI**

● **Brendan MacCarthaigh**, an Irish Christian Brother who worked in India for over 60 years, mostly in Value Education with senior classes and teachers, now resides in Dublin.



# Little Catholics' Corner

COME TO ME AND I WILL GIVE YOU REST



Hello children of God,

Today Jesus tells us, "Come to Me, all you who labour and are burdened and I will give you rest."

Sometimes, the heavy things we carry are sins. When we've done something wrong, it makes us feel guilty, and when we feel guilty, it makes our souls feel heavy and sad.

Sometimes, the heavy things we carry are worries. We worry about things, and that makes our souls feel heavy, too.

But Jesus says He will take our heavy things and give us something lighter. We can give Him our sins and our guilt, and He will forgive us. We can give Him our worries and then, not worry about them anymore.

Then, when we give Jesus our sins and our worries, He gives us His rules to follow. But following Jesus' rules is much easier than making our souls heavy by carrying around all those sins and worries. We can give Jesus our sins and the things we're worried about, and all we have to do is follow His rules.

Love, Auntie Gwen

Choose the word that best matches the definition.

- The opposite of go  
A. come B. learn C. wait D. rest
- Very tired, especially after working hard for a long time  
A. gentle B. weary C. light D. humble
- A heavy load that you carry  
A. light B. rest C. humble D. burden
- Stop and relax to regain your strength  
A. weary B. rest C. burden D. come
- To get knowledge or skill about a subject  
A. humble B. rest C. gentle D. learn
- Calm, kind or soft; not violent  
A. tired B. gentle C. weary D. rest
- Not proud or not believing you are important  
A. angry B. light C. humble D. gentle
- The place within a person where their feelings or emotions are  
A. brain B. heart C. feet D. stomach
- Not difficult  
A. gentle B. humble C. weary D. easy
- Not heavy  
A. light B. humble C. gentle D. heart

## Rest for the Weary

F	Q	N	E	Y	M	Y	V	K	K	D	I	G	X	E
Q	Q	K	O	Q	R	G	H	U	M	B	L	E	M	S
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Y	M	O	E	V	B	N	Y	Q	Q	K	C	T	B	V
F	N	W	L	S	W	T	H	V	A	D	C	M	U	W
P	H	K	G	R	O	L	E	T	R	W	T	F	R	D
E	M	G	I	B	U	E	A	G	E	W	W	R	D	A
Z	A	A	V	G	P	S	R	R	W	C	H	V	E	Y
M	S	S	E	Z	J	Z	T	F	E	C	W	L	N	T
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R	E	S	E	M	X	E	N	U	E	L	Y	N	R	W
X	C	C	O	I	I	Y	X	M	J	F	I	A	A	K
E	I	Z	A	U	S	S	L	Y	J	K	E	G	Y	D
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HUMBLE  
SOULS  
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Jesus m  
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# YOUTH

JULY 9, 2023

## PILGRIMS FROM ARCHKL, PREPPED AND READY!

By Jacinta Fernandez, ASAYO KL

KUALA LUMPUR: The on-site formation for pilgrims from the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur was held June 17 and 18, at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre (APC), Jalan Pudu. The preparatory sessions were facilitated by ASAYO KL.

The formation began with a pilgrim walk from APC to the Church of the Holy Rosary, where the pilgrims were welcomed by Fr Dominic Tan, who went on to explain the parish's history and the significance of particular architectural elements in the church's design.

After some time in prayer, the pilgrims continued their walk to the Church of Our Lady of Fatima (OLF), Brickfields while reciting the Rosary.

Their formation continued at OLF with a brief sharing on the Apparition of Our Lady of Fatima. The pilgrims were treated to light refreshments graciously arranged by Frs William Michael and Andrew Manickam, OFM Cap, who later came to meet them. The journey continued with small groups finding space to share their reflections.

In the evening, the pilgrims participated in the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament fol-

lowed by Holy Mass celebrated by Fr Michel Dass in the APC chapel. The night continued with supper and programme briefing which covered the details of the WYD proper and *Days in the Diocese* programme. In addition, the pilgrims were briefed on the cultural exchange and aspects of sharing the faith they would encounter during their trip.

The following day's agenda covered more spiritual aspects, including helping one to recognise and identify the meaning in everything experienced, be it art, culture, events, etc. The pilgrims were invited to ask questions, interact with other pilgrims and form bonds with

### SEND OFF MASS FOR WYD2023 PILGRIMS

Eucharistic Celebration by Archbishop Julian Leow



19 JULY 2023 (WED), 5.30PM  
CHURCH OF ST ANTHONY, KL  
All are welcome to join and celebrate with pilgrims.

their fellow travellers.

All pilgrims are invited to a send-off Mass, to be presided over by Archbishop Julian Leow on July 19, at 5.30pm (with Rosary beginning at 5.00pm). Kindly keep our pilgrims in prayer as they make their way to Lisbon.

## We're on our way, just like Mary!

KUALA LUMPUR: I am so blessed to be part of the 148 pilgrims from all over Malaysia who will be attending the World Youth Day (WYD) in Lisbon. Just thinking about it makes me excited but also a bit nervous as it will be my first WYD (or maybe last) experience as a young Catholic adult.

I registered as a pilgrim under my home parish, Holy Family Church Telipok in Sabah, under the Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu but I'm currently working in Kuala Lumpur. Since I am still a "church-hopping" parishioner here, I couldn't register under any particular parish. I realised not belonging to a local parish could be an issue for my pre-pilgrim faith formation when the WYD coordinator segregates us by the diocese.

Little did I know the ASAYO youth office took the initiative to organise a formation in preparation for WYD, not only for pilgrims from the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur but for pilgrims from all dioceses.

We began our formation journey online, meeting once a month in April and May, and then we met physically for a weekend WYD preparation on June 17 and 18.

As my job requires

that I work on shifts, which include weekends, I applied for annual leave to attend the onsite formation and it was well worth it. It is a blessing to be a part of this programme.

The day started with us meeting fellow pilgrims at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre (APC).

My good friend and buddy on this pilgrimage, Ginna, flew in from Sabah, to join the physical formation too. I am inspired by her commitment to this trip. After a briefing, we began our pilgrim walk from the APC to the Church of the Holy Rosary, then to the Church of Our Lady of Fatima, both located in Brickfields. Though it was only a three to four-km walk, compared to the actual event later in Lisbon, I gained new experience in this activity.

The highlight for me was when we recited the Rosary along the busy Indian Street (Jalan

Tun Sambanthan); I felt like I was on a mission to proclaim God's glory. I dedicated each Hail Mary we prayed to the passers-by. It was

a beautiful experience. Another inspiring session during this pilgrim walk was when we shared our life story within our assigned group by reflecting on this year's WYD's theme, "Mary arose and went with haste" (Luke 1:39). Listening to each other's reflection and struggles made me feel closer to them, although we'd just met.

During Mass that evening, Fr Michel Dass shared a beautiful homily about sheep without the shepherd. He mentioned the importance of every priest, as a shepherd, to open up and listen to the voice of young people and embrace those who have distanced themselves from the Church.

At Mass, I offered intentions for young people like us to develop the courage to become shepherds and God's labourers by serving others, for His glory.

After Mass, we spent the evening hanging out, eating pizza, singing together, getting to know each other, and listening to WYD experiences by ASAYO's Josephine and Jacinta. Their tips and tricks on things to prepare and what to expect on the actual pilgrim days helped us get a little picture of what would be happening throughout our journey especially during the vigil and missioning Mass with Pope Francis. To help us familiarise ourselves with the experience during the WYD Vigil, our accommodations during this weekend were WYD-sleeping-bag-style.

On the second day of the formation weekend, we said morning prayers together and



Pilgrim Walk

then continued with a short group sharing, after giving input and reflecting on a painting by Carravaggio titled "The Calling of St Matthew." I loved Jacinta's interpretation of each character in the painting. It helped me appreciate and understand more about spiritual art and realise that God also uses art as a medium of communication to speak to us. We ended our two-day-one-night onsite formation by noon.

It was joyful to meet lots of brothers and sisters in Christ in person, after almost two years of socialising and interacting virtually because of the pandemic. I've also collected tonnes of beautiful memories over the two days, and it has made me anticipate the sort of journey God will lead me into as a WYD pilgrim this year. Please continue to pray for us! — *By Cynthiana Santos*



With my pilgrim walk group members  
From left Lovie, Thia, Rachel and Roveeth

## Pope Francis sends heartfelt message to 17-year-old girl suffering from serious illness

DENVER: Pope Francis on June 23 sent a heartfelt video message to a 17-year-old Portuguese girl suffering from a serious illness.

Edna sent the Holy Father a letter expressing her sadness at not being able to attend World Youth Day this year in Lisbon. Although she registered for the event, she told the Pope she will not be able to attend physically. The young girl deeply desired to meet Pope Francis.

She wrote in her letter: "When I heard that the [World Youth] Day would be held in Por-

tugal, I was very happy, because every time I see the Pope speak on television, I feel well, as if I had no illness that would prevent me from participating in the WYD."

Edna added that she wanted to meet the Pope so that she could tell him "how important he is for her and her family."

However, the teenager doesn't know how much longer she has to live. She has been suffering from a serious illness for the past eight years.

"The doctor said that he does not know

when I will meet Jesus, but that it will happen soon," she wrote.

Moved by her words, Pope Francis sent Edna a personal message to thank her.

"Edna, I received your letter; thank you! Thank you for your tenderness and thank you for the peace in your heart," the Holy Father said.

He added: "This peace is like a seed planted in the hearts of all of us who see you and all those who talk to you. Thank you! I accompany you on this journey that you are making.

I accompany you and I know that you will be well received. I accompany you by praying for you, praying with you, and looking at Jesus, who is always waiting for us. Thank you!"

In her letter, Edna asked for the Pope's prayers. In his video message, he asks her to keep him in her prayers.

"And now I give you my blessing so that it may also give you strength on this journey," he concluded. By Francesca Pollio Fenton — *By Francesca Pollio Fenton, CNA*



# I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS

By Rickson Wong

**GENTING HIGHLANDS:** The Form Five catechism class students from the Churches of Jesus Caritas, Kepong, Risen Christ, Kuala Lumpur and St Joseph, Sentul attended a Confirmation camp on June 24 and 25, at the Archdiocesan Retreat House - Villa Dominic.

Alvin Fernandez and his team took charge of the camp, where a total of 34 students, two catechists, and eight facilitators participated. The main focus of the camp was to explore and understand the Bible verse Matthew 28:20, *I am with you always*.

The retreat gave the students the opportunity to interact with peers from different parishes and broaden their horizons. At first, it was slightly worrying about the students' ability to connect and communicate with peers from other parishes. But after engaging in ice-breaking activities and some gameplay sessions, the students quickly learnt teamwork, initiating a bond with their counterparts. These games tested their creativity,



*The students learning teamwork as they solve a puzzle together. alertness, awareness, strategy, and planning skills. The different dynamics played an important role in helping them nurture and foster better relationships.*

Throughout the camp, the attendees not only learnt about God's love, but also had the opportunity to experienced it. They also gained a deeper understanding of His mercy and forgiveness. Many students were amazed by how the Word of God spoke Truth to them, further fuelling their blossoming faith.

The Inner Healing sessions helped the students break free from their emotional burdens of past harmful experiences. It moved many of them to tears, as they recognised their deep unhappiness, emotional bondage, grief, and their need for forgiveness to find peace and healing.

A question box was set up for the campers to anonymously drop-in any burning questions and the facilitators answered them on the second day. Lastly, the students experienced the joy that comes from being led by God as they placed their trust in Him. The camp culminated with Mass at the Church of Jesus Caritas, presided over by parish priest Fr Simon Lau and the Risen Christ parish priest Fr Edwin Peter concelebrating.



## CONFIRMAND LEARNS TO SHARE THE GOOD NEWS THROUGH ACTIONS

**PETALING JAYA:** The journey of receiving Confirmation never stops. Confirmation is when God says "Do not be afraid. I am with you, I have called you each by name. Come and follow me, I will bring you home, I love you and you are mine."

I wouldn't have made it without the help of my dedicated Catechism school teachers, from the Church of the Assumption. They were truly the backbone of my faith journey and I can't thank them enough.



*Confirmation students stand for the presentation of candidates.*

The word 'Confirmation' is something that earned meaning in my life as it goes; the older I grew, the more frequently I heard the word Confirmation and the more I understood what it meant. Now that I have been Confirmed, I ask myself, is this the end? What can I do to continue my faith journey? Many told me to volunteer at the church or in other Catholic organisations proclaiming the Good News of the Lord. Those are good ways that I'll look into but what can I do as a mere 17-year-old?

The answer came from my English teacher. I go to a government secondary school, where religion is a sensitive topic that many people my age avoid but Mr Jacob, showed me that ver-

bal proclamation is not the only way to spread the Good News. You can show people the Good News through your actions.

While being respectful towards all denominations and religions, every morning, without fail, he hosts prayers at the back of the hall. I was mesmerised by this effective measure and I vowed to do the same.

Proclaim the Good News through your actions. You don't have to go up to people and preach the Gospel. I believe I can show people what it means to be a Christian through my actions. Thus far, this is my Confirmation journey. — *By Ashira Clifford*

## Proud moment for St Joseph's Private Secondary School

**KUCHING:** June 8 was a good day at St Joseph's Private Secondary School (SJPS) as 27 of its students scored straight As and another 11 earned all As and 1B in their Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) 2022 examination. One student scored 10A+ and 1A and another 9A+ and 1A, and 62 students achieved B or better in all subjects.

The school saw 159 students taking the SPM examination in February and March this year and their performance is heartening for everyone at SJPS.

SJPS is a part of the St Joseph's Family of Schools' and its chief executive officer, Christopher Chua, was on hand to meet the graduates as they came to collect their results. He was accompanied by the school's senior assistants.

SJPS acting principal Fr Stanley Goh, SJ, who was unable to be there, extended his congratulations to the graduates on their commendable performance in the SPM examina-



*The top scorers proudly displaying their certificates.*

tions, despite enduring disruptions due to the pandemic.

"I'm very proud of how our students have risen above the challenges they faced to do well. The Josephian spirit of courage and wisdom came shining through all of them, as they

managed to meet adversities head-on while learning and growing in the process."

Fr Stanley added, "I join our students in thanking our dedicated teachers who ably accompanied the students during their years in the school. Teachers do so much more than

teach and impart knowledge. They were a constant source of strength and encouragement for our students, especially during the difficult times of the pandemic. As we congratulate our students, we also extend much gratitude to the teachers for all that they are doing."



# Inspired by Sr Wilhelmina

I went to see the body of Sr Wilhelmina, the founder of a Benedictine congregation of religious sisters in Gower, Missouri.

"I was really shocked, more than I thought I would be," I wrote on Facebook. "But I've been thinking of her — and praying — ever since."

"What do you mean, 'shocked'?" someone asked.

So I confessed the truth: What I wanted to write was that I was weirded out by seeing Sr Wilhelmina — but that my attitude is improving.

Sister Wilhelmina's story has become a minor sensation, worldwide.

Sr Wilhelmina was born Mary Elizabeth Lancaster in 1924 St. Louis. She heard God's voice when she received her First Communion at age 9. Jesus asked her to be his. She answered "Yes" with her life. She took vows with the Oblate Sisters of Providence in 1944. In 1995, in her 70s, she left the Oblates to found her own Benedictine order that settled in Gower, Missouri — 45 minutes from my home in Kansas. She died there in 2019 at age 94 after crying out, "I saw Jesus! ... I want to go to heaven!"

Her body was discovered unexpectedly because her convent is so successful that it has had to expand its facilities, requiring her gravesite to be moved.

This puts the Church in a tight spot.

One of the great blessings of being a member of the Catholic Church is that we belong to a careful, deliberative institution that does not rush to conclusions and so avoids embarrassing mistakes when it comes to miraculous phenomenon.

Sr Wilhelmina Lancaster is no exception. I refer to her body as "uncorrupted" instead of "incorruptible" because of what the bishop of Kansas City-St. Joseph said:



*Sister Mary Wilhelmina Lancaster*

"It is understandable that many would be driven by faith and devotion to see the mortal remains of Sr Wilhelmina given the remarkable condition of her body, but visitors should not touch or venerate her body, or treat them as relics," said Bishop James Johnston. "Incorruptibility has been verified in the past, but it is very rare. There is a well-established process to pursue the cause for sainthood, but that has not been initiated in this case yet."

So, for now, I'm left to evaluate my experience on shaky ground: Personal feelings rather than established facts.

To me, the whole experience was strange but powerful. Everything about it was very outside our experience in secularised American culture. But ever since I visited, I can't get Sr Wilhelmina out of my mind.

First, going to see the dead body of someone you never met is unusual, and seeing lines of people waiting to do so felt bizarre.

But the more I thought of it afterwards, the more natural it felt. People lined up to see Queen Elizabeth's body. They didn't do so because they wanted to see a corpse; they did so because we all know somewhere deep inside that we are our bodies and vice versa; that even though spirit and body were separated, the body of the queen still had a meaning.

One of the fundamental insights that Christianity has given to the world is this understanding of our humanity.

The feast of the Assumption — when we celebrate Mary being brought body and soul to heaven — reminds us of it every summer.

That mystery "shows us that God wills to save the whole man, namely, save his soul and body," Pope Francis explains.

Human persons are a body-soul unity, incarnated souls as much as ensouled bodies. It's not that "I" have a body or "I" have a soul, but rather that we are our body and soul, together.

A holy person's body has an even greater significance than a queen's.

Elizabeth was thrust into her position by lineage and carried it out with dignity; Sister Wilhelmina fought for her position day after day through faith, hope, and love.

To visit Queen Elizabeth's body was to participate in world history, where great men and women shape our times; to visit a holy person's body is to participate in salvation history, where ordinary men and women are shaped by eternity.

Seeing the devotionism of so many people there was also very odd to me — at first.

At the body, people were taking part in the experience with gusto, touching things to the body and praying, apparently unaware of the bishop's caution.

Afterwards, I joked that they had a more Catholic soul than mine. But the more I think of it, the truer that seems to be.

Every Catholic Church has a crucifix in the centre, the depiction of our own dead founder, precisely so that we will have exactly this kind of experience. Catholics should be used to looking at a dead body and thinking not of the end of life so much as the future life we all have.

To see Sr Wilhelmina's body separated from her soul is to see how horrifying and unnatural death is, but to see her body undecayed is to remember that Jesus has overcome the horror of death and will restore us all one day.

I don't know if Sr Wilhelmina is a saint or not, but she is inspiring me to be one, if I can. — **By Tom Hoopes, Aleteia**



*The exhumed body of Sister Mary Wilhelmina Lancaster, foundress of the Benedictines of Mary, Queen of Apostles, lies in repose in the church at the Abbey of Our Lady of Ephesus in Gower, Mo., May 21, 2023. (OSV News photo/Megan Marley)*

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## Feast of St. Anne 2023

### THEME: SALT OF THE EARTH LIGHT OF THE WORLD NOVENA & MASSES SCHEDULE

E - English, BM - Bahasa Malaysia, M - Mandarin, T - Tamil, K - Kadazan



Date	Time			Sub-Theme
<b>DAY 1</b> 21 JULY 2023 FRIDAY	10.00am (E)*	3.00pm (BM) 5.00pm (T)	7.00pm (E) 9.00pm (M)	<b>UNITY</b>
<b>DAY 2</b> 22 JULY 2023 SATURDAY	10.00am (E)*	3.00pm (BM) 5.00pm (T)	7.00pm (E) 9.00pm (M)	<b>PRAYER</b> <i>Adoration and Healing at 12 noon</i>
<b>DAY 3</b> 23 JULY 2023 SUNDAY	10.00am (E)	3.00pm (BM) 5.00pm (T)	7.00pm (E) 9.00pm (M)	<b>GRANDPARENTS AND THE ELDERLY</b>
<b>DAY 4</b> 24 JULY 2023 MONDAY	10.00am (E)*	3.00pm (BM) 5.00pm (T)	7.00pm (E) 9.00pm (M)	<b>FAMILY LIFE</b>
<b>DAY 5</b> 25 JULY 2023 TUESDAY	10.00am (E)*	3.00pm (BM) 5.00pm (T)	7.00pm (E) 9.00pm (M)	<b>LOVING NEIGHBOUR AND SELF</b>
<b>DAY 6</b> 26 JULY 2023 WEDNESDAY	10.00am (E)* 12 noon (K)	3.00pm (BM) 5.00pm (T)	7.00pm (E) 9.00pm (M)	<b>NEWNESS OF LIFE</b>
<b>DAY 7</b> 27 JULY 2023 THURSDAY	10.00am (E)*	3.00pm (BM) 5.00pm (T)	7.00pm (E) 9.00pm (M)	<b>THE YOUNG PEOPLE</b>
<b>DAY 8</b> 28 JULY 2023 FRIDAY	10.00am (E)*	3.00pm (BM) 5.00pm (T)	7.00pm (E) 9.00pm (M)	<b>PEOPLE LIVING IN THE MARGIN</b>
<b>DAY 9</b> 29 JULY 2023 SATURDAY	7:00am (E)* 9:00am (M) 11:00am (T) 1:00pm (BM)	7.00pm MULTI-LINGUAL (OPEN AIR)	8.30pm PROCESSION	<b>SALT OF THE EARTH AND LIGHT OF THE WORLD</b> <i>Adoration and Healing at 3pm</i>
<b>DAY 10</b> 30 JULY 2023 SUNDAY	7:00am (T)* 9:00am (E) 11:00am (M)	1:00pm (BM) 3:00pm (T) 5:00pm (E)		<b>SENT ON MISSION</b>

\* This mass will not be live-streamed

- Personal Prayer request available outside shrine.
- Confessions will be available throughout all 10 days.
- No plastic bottles will be provided for St. Anne's Water. Please bring your own water containers.



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