

HERALD

The Catholic Weekly

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.

TERHAD

PP 8460/11/2012 (030939) ISSN: 1394-3294 | Vol: 30 No. 09 | MARCH 12, 2023

www.heraldmalaysia.com

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. *Rom 5:1-2*



New Executive Secretary for Caritas Malaysia

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Rite of Election

■ P5 & P6



Ten years, a look at some of Pope Francis' top soundbites

■ P10 & 11



You can never outgive the Lord

■ P5 & P6



By Fr Vimal Tirimanna, CSSR

BANGKOK: The Second Vatican Council's document *Lumen Gentium* (light of the nations) clearly taught that the Church consists of all the baptised, not just the clergy.

The return to this conciliar concept surely is a powerful antidote to the recent discoveries of clerical domination and abuse in almost all spheres of ecclesial life.

In fact, the unprecedented opposition to this papal initiative, even from within the Church — mostly from a powerful lobby of a vociferous clerical minority — is a clear sign that they are set to lose all the undue and excessive power and authority they had been used to wielding unjustly over the laity within the Church.

One characteristic of the current worldwide synodal process is to get all the baptised — the bishops, priests, religious and laity — involved in the ecclesial decision-making processes.

The unprecedented consultation of the baptised at grassroots levels on crucially important ecclesial issues was modelled for the harnessing of the *sensus fidei fidelium* (the sense of the faith of the believers) as it was done in the early Christian communities as we find in

the New Testament, especially in the *Acts of the Apostles*.

This consultation — in the form of a questionnaire — thus, was uniquely novel in the sense that it was a process that began from the lowest rungs of the Church hierarchy — from the parish or ecclesial communities spread all over the world.

Those responses of the ecclesial grassroots were collected and sent to Rome by the bishops' conferences in each country by August 2022.

In September-October 2022, they were read, word-for-word, by the theological commission (consisting of members from all five continents) of the Secretariat for Synodality based at Frascati, and they were collated as they were (without any editing or interpretation as such), thus, formulating what was called "the Continental Stage Document" (CSD) which was approved by the special commission of cardinals and bishops drawn from all over the world.

It was this CSD that was sent to the seven zones of the world known as "continents", namely, North America, South America, Asia, the Middle East, Europe, Africa and Oceania, for further discussion and discernment.

The three-day Asian continental stage of the synodal process concluded on February 26 at Samphran, Thailand with an ecclesial assembly consisting of delegates from all the episcopal conferences of Asia.

Although the Churches in Asia are used to episcopal assemblies, this is the first time (since the early centuries) that an ecclesial assembly of all the People of God was held in Asia.

There were some 80 Asian participants from the 29 countries that constitute the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC). Their task was to read the draft entitled *The Asian Continental Final Document* prepared by a drafting team of nine persons (six priests, one layman and two lay women) after having read and discerned prayerfully the responses of the Asian bishops' conferences to the CSD.

The draft served as an open-ended framework for reflection and discernment during the Assembly.

What was most inspiring during the whole assembly was how, after each input and discussion, the delegates were asked to spend time in the chapel to reflect prayerfully on what they had heard.

Moreover, the delegates were divided into 12 small groups in which everyone had the opportunity to share his/her views, which were reported to the plenary by the secretary of each group.

At the end of a few interventions within these small groups, a two-minute silence was maintained in order to allow the Holy Spirit to speak and also to discern His voice. It was not only an experience of listening to what the

Holy Spirit was telling the Churches in Asia, but also of discerning what His will for Asia really was.

What was discerned prayerfully at the assembly, with the involvement of all the participants, was collated and put together into the final Asian document by the same drafting and discerning group (who were unanimously endorsed by the assembly to do so), which will later be approved by the Central Committee of the FABC.

It is this particular document that will serve the drafters of the *instrumentum laboris* for the Synod of Bishops in Rome in October 2023.

True to the authentic synodal spirit, there was no vote taking to decide on various issues in a modern democratic sense, but everything was approved through consensus. It would have been ideal if the lay representation in the entire dynamics, especially at the Asian continental stage, were much higher because almost 99 per cent of the Church membership consists of the laity.

However, we should not forget that this is a period of transition in enhancing the lay participation in the Church, and in that sense, the Asian Ecclesial Assembly surely demonstrated great promise for the future of Churches in Asia. — ucanews.com

Source photo: Bangkok.synod2023.org
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HERALD

ESTABLISHED 1994

Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre

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Tel / Whatsapp: 03-20268291

Website : www.heraldmalaysia.com

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heraldmalaysia

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

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COMMENTARY

The enduring moments of Pope Francis' first 10 years

Moment by moment, sign by sign, and word by word, Pope Francis has defined his papacy in the 10 years since his election to the See of Peter. Through iconic gestures and memorable quotes, the Holy Father has used his service in the Petrine ministry to call Catholics throughout the world to be animated, living bearers of the Gospel. As the Church marks the 10th anniversary of Pope Francis' election as Bishop of Rome, now is an appropriate time to ask: What is the charism of Pope Francis? What is his special contribution to the Church?

On this occasion, we have the opportunity to revisit the quintessential Pope Francis moments. If viewed as moments of the past and points of an agenda to be untangled or interpreted, they remain constrained by the unreflective habits of thought we use to evaluate our celebrities and political figures. But if we view them as insights into Christian living, they become more powerful — timeless invitations to better conform our lives to the Gospel.

Initially, some thought Pope Francis might have chosen his name in honour of the saintly Navarrese missionary, Francis Xavier, who was a co-founder of the Society of Jesus. The Vatican clarified early on that the Pope's namesake was, in fact, Francis of Assisi. During the election in the Sistine Chapel, Cardinal Claudio Hummes, archbishop emeritus of São Paulo, Brazil, and prefect emeritus of the Vatican's Congregation for the Clergy, congratulated the newly elected Pope, Jorge Bergoglio, and urged him, "Don't forget the poor!" Those words struck Cardinal Bergoglio, who immediately thought of Francis, known to be a patron of peace-making and of the care of creation.

The day after his election, Pope Francis, in his first act as Pope, visited Santa Maria Maggiore, where he paused to pray at the tomb of Pope St Pius V. Commentators took special delight in the image of the Jesuit Pope named Francis praying before a Dominican saint. But the visit had deeper symbolism still. Pope Pius V was a renowned reformer of the Roman Curia. He was famous for walking the cold, marble floors of the apostolic palace barefoot and for his special affection and care for the poor of Rome. St Pius V even forewent the customary festival thrown for a newly elected pope and gave the money instead to the poor, personally washing their feet and caring for the sick.

The Pope's daily homilies during the Masses he offered and preached from Casa Santa Marta provided insight into the spiritual life widely appreciated throughout the Church. His regular references to Satan, denouncing the prince of lies, and offering clear, practical advice on how to better hear the voice of Jesus were appreciated by many. For years, around 50 people a day joined him for those Masses, with 25 of those 50 seats reserved for Romans, so that local pastors could bring groups of parishioners to pray with the Pope.

On Easter Sunday 2013, a photo of Pope Francis took the world by storm. While touring St Peter's Square after Mass, the Pope embraced eight-year-old Dominic Gondreau. The young boy with cerebral palsy was lifted up

by the crowd to the Pope in the popemobile, and he gently embraced him and blessed him. Dominic, who suffers from extremely limited physical mobility, raised his arm and put it around the Pope. The image became iconic, reprinted in newspapers and carried on websites across the globe, showcasing the Pope's special love for the sick and disabled.

Pope Francis' special love for the poor was given greater attention with his concrete actions.

He has regularly dined with those experiencing poverty, including on the World Day of the Poor, which he established during the Jubilee Year of Mercy in 2016. Pope Francis has supported mobile health clinics in St Peter's Square and renovated a public restroom to make showers available to the homeless.

In his writings, Pope Francis has drawn the attention of the global Church to themes dear to his patron. In his first encyclical, *Lumen Fidei*, he concluded Pope Benedict XVI's trilogy of encyclicals on the theological virtues, calling for special attention to be given to recovering the light of faith in our day. In *Laudato Si'*, which begins with a canticle of praise authored by Francis of Assisi, Pope Francis urges the Church to make increasingly greater efforts for the care of creation. In *Fratelli Tutti*, he called for members of the Church to work for the common good of the social order, fostering interreligious dialogue and peace.

At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns, Pope Francis arranged for a special *urbi et orbi* address to be made from St Peter's Square. In an unforgettable scene, with blue police lights eerily flashing and fires flickering, Pope Francis called the Church to place our confidence in Christ, who would care for His beloved boat, the Church, just as He once tended to the Apostles tossed about the stormy seas. The Eucharistic Benediction, with Pope Francis standing alone, holding a monstrance, braced against all the suffering of the world, was a sight that will not be erased swiftly from the annals of Church history.

In his apostolic journeys, the Pope has diligently worked to foster relationships with the Islamic world. Pope Francis was the first Pope to visit Iraq, travelling to the war-torn nation to offer healing. Several years before, Pope Francis made history by becoming the first ever Pontiff to visit the Arabian Peninsula, travelling to the United Arab Emirates in 2019. The Abrahamic Family House, a new interfaith centre which includes a church, a synagogue and a mosque, came about as a fruit of that pilgrimage.

And what will the future icons be? Some continue to see great symbolism in his visit to the tomb of St Celestine V last summer. Celestine V was the last pope to voluntarily resign before Benedict XVI did so in 2013. As rumours about the Pope's health rise and fall, he offers little indication that a resignation is anywhere on the horizon. Perhaps the best indication, like so much of his papacy, is to be found in the example of his namesake, Francis, who followed Christ in zealous service to the last of his days. — *OSV*

● See also pages 10 & 11

We are all entitled to speak to Jesus

When was the last time you had to go and speak to someone that you didn't want to? Perhaps asking for help in a store? Perhaps asking someone to move their car which was blocking your gate? Asking for something, asking perhaps for a favour? How did it make you feel? Nervous? Needing a dose of courage? Awkward?

Or perhaps even worse, what is your reaction when someone you don't know approaches you and asks you for something? Someone you've never met before asks you to go out of your way to help them despite your having no acquaintance with this person before. How does that make you feel? Threatened? Nervous? Unsure of what will happen next?

Our Gospel reading begins with an encounter at a well between two strangers, which leads to a conversation. And both parties leave the conversation changed by it, despite uncertainties between the two. Two people who wouldn't normally meet or interact, question each other and will not be the same following this exchange. They both started the encounter needing something sustaining for life — water and food but leave the encounter having received something different.

At first sight it appears that this is a conversation between Jesus and an unnamed woman at Jacob's Well in Sychar. However, by social convention, this isn't a conversation that should happen. This is a single male talking to a female, alone, in a traditionally female space — the well. Then there's the fact that

the woman is a Samaritan — not an expected meeting of people — there's a reason the Good Samaritan is a surprise to the original hearers in *Luke's Gospel*. Years of antipathy between Samaritans and Jews, over cultural practices, over religious practices.

Then there is the fact that the woman has been divorced multiple times. However, this says more about what has been done to the woman rather than what she has done. In this time, a woman could be divorced for a younger woman, someone perceived to be more beautiful, for any reason and in a society where a woman's worth and safety are defined by her marriage and childbearing status.

This woman is set up as an outcast, not only by her gender, her ethnic status and her personal history. Definitely not the kind of person Jesus should be talking to by convention or by the type His disciples think He should be speaking with yet, Jesus does speak to her. Actually, it's more than a conversation they have; she questions Him and recognises Jesus for who He is.

Jesus, in speaking to the woman at the well, has overcome social conditions and the busyness of the day — what does Jesus have to overcome so we can hear Him to speak to us? Is it busyness, is it challenging the way we think things should be, is it that we're not listening, looking, observing and discerning Jesus speaking to us? Lenten disciplines are often about clearing space — not doing something to create space — whether it be living with less, creating time, creating absence all

in order to try and hear God more, consider our relationship with God more. We should not be the same after our Lenten encounters with God in the same way that neither Jesus nor the woman at the well are the same after their encounter.

The woman, because she is a human made in God's image and beloved, recognises who Jesus is — a Prophet, then the Messiah. The woman recognises this because she is human, despite what social conditions at the time may have classified her as. Jesus tells her He is the living water — living water necessary for life, as with the water that began this conversation, but living water has an impact way beyond that of water. Consuming living water, through an encounter with God — Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer leaves us changed, nourished and formed — there are opportunities to encounter God through Scripture and prayer, whether alone or in community.

Despite her status in society and the difference in status and social convention around gender, nationality, ethnicity and social standing, the Samaritan woman still had a conversation with Jesus. Jesus asked for water to drink, invited the woman into an encounter with God incarnate and the woman had the courage, the self-assurance and the need to respond to Jesus, not with an immediate yes, no, handing Him the water requested.

The Woman at the Well had a conversation with Jesus, sharing her questions, her life, including the things she was less comfortable about. Jesus can be confrontational, and He

Reflecting on our Sunday Readings with Fr Dr Joseph Lubula

3rd Sunday of Lent (A)

Readings: Exodus 17:3-7;

Roman 5:1-2, 5-8;

Gospel: John 4:5-42

can be compassionate, He can be generous. Jesus here, through conversation, helps the woman grow in faith, she leaves the encounter changed, assured of her place as a beloved child of God, assured that she has something to say, assured that she can have courage to share what has happened to her with others.

The Good News for us here today is that we don't need to be collecting water at a well to speak to Jesus, we don't need to be alone in the midday sun, we can speak to the Triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit any time we want — through prayer.

No matter who we are, no matter who we think we are, no matter what we are afraid of or think of ourselves for our reactions to things around us, we can have a conversation with Jesus through prayer. No matter where we are, whether at home or in a car or in a place of worship, we don't have to wait to speak to Jesus — the invitation is open at all times. How will we respond to that invitation?

Fr Dr Joseph Lubula is from the Diocese of Lugazi in Uganda.



KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

March

- 12** 10th anniversary of Pope Francis' pontificate Mass – Church of Our Lady of Fatima, KL
- 13** Christian Federation of Malaysia EXCO Meeting
- 14** Chrism Mass – Church of Holy Redeemer, Klang
- 14&15** Clergy Monthly Recollection
- 19** Parish Pastoral Assembly – Chapel of Kristus Aman, TTDI



PENANG DIOCESE

Diary of Bishop Sebastian Francis

March

- 13** Meeting — Penang Diocesan Education Council (PDEC), Penang Diocesan Centre at 10.00am
- 14** Visit of Father Founder and Mother General of Putri Karmel Congregation, Balik Pulau at 10.30am
- 16** Rite of Lector & Acolyte for candidates to Permanent Diaconate, Minor Basilica of St Anne, BM at 8.00pm
- 18** Blessing of the National Cancer Society Malaysia-Caritas Homes of Hope, Simee Ipoh at 10.00am
- 18** Confirmation – Church of St Joseph, Batu Gajah & Parish Feast Day Mass at 6.00pm
- 19** Feast Day Mass — Church of St Joseph, Batu Gajah at 9.00am



MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

March

- 10** Outdoor Way of the Cross – MAJODI Centre Plentong followed by Mass
- 14-15** Clergy Monthly Recollection – Good Shepherd Catholic Seminary, Melaka
- 16** MJDPN (MJD Young People Network) Staff Meeting
- 16** MJ Diocesan Animating Team – Mission Pastoral Institute
- 17** Outdoor Way of the Cross – MAJODI Centre Plentong followed by Mass
- 18** MJ Pastoral Team Meeting – Church of St Louis, Kluang

New Executive Secretary for Caritas Malaysia

KUALA LUMPUR: Diocesan Director of Caritas Sib, Eta Ting Ming Na, has been appointed Executive Secretary for Caritas Malaysia, effective February 26.

She takes over from Charles Bertille who served for three years and was instrumental in helping establish Caritas Malaysia, the over-arching body for all organisations involved in charity and development work.

“When I was offered this position, I realised it would be different from what we do in our respective dioceses. After much prayer and reflection, and with my bishop’s blessings, I accepted the role,” said



Eta.

She hopes the three regions of the Catholic Church in Malaysia: Peninsular, Sarawak and Sabah will grow and journey together in synodality “that we may be one” (John 17:18) in Caritas, or love and compassion. (Caritas in Latin means love and compassion)

“We need to get together as one, as God wants us to journey together. Our time on earth should be spent continuing the mission of Jesus. God loved us first and we must love Him in return. That is my vision, to listen to Him.”

Eta said, “We are asked to be in the boat

with Him and to follow Him to the destination He wants us to go. We are bound to experience stormy weather but we must focus on God. He is the prime mover and He will help us withstand the storm.

“I like to follow the examples of the three siblings, Mary, Martha and Lazarus. We too can imitate their attitudes. Mary would listen and was contemplative. Martha was called to serve, God first and then the people, and Lazarus was raised from the dead. We too need to die to our sinful ways and rise to new life,” she said.

“We are bound to face challenges and sometimes feel discouraged, but we need to realise that God strengthens us and we will be able to face all difficulties.

“That is what Caritas needs to do. We need to be on the ground as we are the hands, feet and mouth of Jesus. If we cannot see God in the poor, then we have failed in our mission.”



Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #123

F12
MJD NEWS
UPDATES

Greetings, dear People of God

A look at self. Performance must be rated. The cabinet went through it. A list of the 10 outstanding ministers and their ministries made the news. Two students who criticised the 2023 History papers were detained. Is it a crime to comment? Are authorities above criticism? Educate our young to be critical, to discern, and to question. See, judge act, is a good tool for a thinking nation, Church or Catholic.

Reviewing Times. The Unity Government’s performance over these 100 days were reviewed by the people. Strange signs appeared from the survey conducted. From an appreciative majority that appeared to see some stability and recovery, to an unappreciative section. Likewise, when we review our own life, be honest. Lent 2023 asks: Do we hear the cry of the poor and the earth? Are we listening, discerning and walking together? The Church has to regularly review herself; listen to the *sensus fidei* and the voice of the Spirit. Genuine fast, prayer and giving invites us to change, to repent.

A thought for the week:

A 200-year old Watch

There was once a father who became very ill and just before he died he took out an old watch and said to his son, “This is a watch that your grandfather gave me, and it is more than 200 years old. But before I give it to you, go to the watch shop on the first street and tell him that you want to sell it, and see how much he offers you.”

The son left and when he came back, he told his father: “The watchmaker offered five dollars because, he said, it was too old.”

The father then said to his son, “Go to the coffee shop and see what they say.”

Again, the boy went out and soon returned. He said to his dad, “They of-

fered me five dollars for the watch as well.”

Finally, the father said, “Go to the museum and show them the watch.”

A short while later, the boy excitedly reported to his father, “They offered me a million dollars for this piece!”

A lesson from the dying patriarch: Son, I wanted to let you know that the right place values you in the right way.”

“Don’t find yourself in the wrong place and get angry if you are not valued.

Those that know your value are those who appreciate you. Don’t stay in a place where nobody sees your value.” Know your worth.

Announcements for this Week

1. Discover Your Vocation, calling all single women, age 18-50. It is a special lay vocation called the Auxiliaries. Conducted by the Auxiliaries of the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur at Majodi, on April 29 - 30 (begins on Saturday at 3.00pm and ends on Sunday at 4.00pm). Contact Clara Paul (012-250 9527) for more info.

2. The Asian Continental Synod ended on February 26. It is evident that the Spirit is calling us to go beyond Synod to Synodality, which is living Vatican Council II, becoming a Church that listens, walks together and acts together, and continues to be inclusive, bridge-building and creative.

3. The Rite of Election 2023 was conducted at CIC, JB & STC, Melaka. The Elect numbered 195.

This week’s Question and Query. The Q asks: What is listening?

Thich Nhat Hanh says *Deep Compassionate Listening and Loving Speech Heals Conflict*.

1. You listen with only one purpose, to help someone empty their heart. And if you remember that you are helping this

individual to suffer less, and then even if what this person says is full of wrong perceptions, full of bitterness, you are still capable of listening with compassion. Because you know that listening like that, with compassion, you give him/her a chance to suffer less.

2. If you want to help someone correct his/her perception, then you wait for another time. But for the time being, you just listen with compassion and help the person to suffer less. One hour like that can bring transformation and healing.

3. The fear, the anger and the despair are born on the grounds of wrong perception. We have wrong perceptions concerning ourselves and the other person, and that is the foundation for conflict, war and violence.

4. Deep compassionate listening is to listen with your ears, eyes and heart. To pay attention to body language, to tone of voice, to the hidden emotions behind what is being said. To be fully present.

Deep compassionate listening says I’m here for you, I’m in it with you, I’m not here to fix you or to judge you, I’m here to feel with you and to let you know that you are not alone.

5. Deep listening, compassionate listening is not listening with the purpose of analysing or even uncovering what has happened in the past. You listen first of all in order to give the other person relief, a chance to speak out, to feel that someone finally understands him or her.

A blessed Lent preparation to all of you. Return to Jesus, to the cross and to the call to be a 4-E Catholic — Encountered, Enlightened, Empowered and Evangelising. Be safe. Be charitable.

Bishop Bernard Paul



Asian leaders end synod preparations discussing 'gaps'

BANGKOK: Asian Church leaders concluded their continental-level preparations for making the Church more participatory by discussing key questions that have not been sufficiently discussed during lower-level gatherings.

The continental-level gathering that ended on February 26 in Bangkok was the highest preparation level ahead of the Synod of Bishops, more commonly called the Synod on Synodality, which is scheduled to conclude at the Vatican in 2024.

More than 80 delegates from across Asia gathered for the continental-level preparations. They included representatives from 17 national conferences of bishops and two Synods of Bishops, representing 29 countries covered by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences.

The delegates split into groups and discussed the five most crucial priorities for the continent of Asia, which urgently need to be brought to the first session of the Synod of Bishops at the Vatican in October, said a press statement.

The assembly deliberated on key questions

that have not been "sufficiently discussed" in lower-level gatherings — parish, diocesan and national — and on "gaps" in the draft paper. They also discussed any Asian realities, experiences, or concerns that can be included or improved upon, the press statement said.

The delegates used a three-step method of giving their opinions, ideas, and suggestions on the draft document.

The Synod of Bishops at the Vatican will finalise ways of making the Church more participatory, an initiative led by Pope Francis. The Vatican event will have two sessions and is set to conclude next year.

Cardinal Joseph Coutts, former archbishop of Karachi in Pakistan, during the Mass on Feb 25, asked participants to see the "great parallel" between the synodal journey and the Lenten journey of the Church.

Both synodal and Lenten journeys "include a communitarian as well as personal dimension," Coutts said.

The synod like the Lenten journey "is a call

Cardinal, Arch/Bishops with other delegates at the Asian Synodal Assembly, Thailand on February 24, 2023. (photo/bangkok.synod2023.org)

to walk the path of God, to listen to His voice, and to recognise the God of love and tenderness, mercy and compassion," he explained.

Coutts said Francis, who initiated the worldwide synod, is "a prophet of our times."

"The synodal path we are called to take is an invitation not to reject or exclude anybody, but to take everyone along. We also need the humility to know that Jesus Himself is leading us," Coutts said.

Other Asian Church leaders such as Cardinal Charles Bo of Yangon, president of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, also spoke about the challenges offered by the synodal Church.

The synodal journey of the Church is like Jesus' journey in the wilderness and is "challenging and necessary" for the Church to move forward, the leading Asian cardinal said.

Bo, in his homily gave the example of Lent as an acronym for "Letting go, Encounter,

Neighbour and Transformation."

He urged the bishops and other delegates to learn how to "let go" of all that prevents them from moving toward a synodal Church — a more participatory Church, where the needs and opinions of all members will be respected.

Jesuit Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich, Archbishop of Luxembourg and relator-general of the Synod of Bishops at the Vatican, officially called the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, also addressed the conference.

Citing the example of musical instruments, Hollerich urged each delegate to play their role to "function in unison, to produce a symphony," stressing the need for constant unity in actions.

Cardinal Mario Grech, secretary-general of the Synod of Bishops, assured the delegates that their "journey at this synod will be fruitful and their contributions will not be forgotten by the Universal Church." — ucanews.com

Malaysian delegates share their experiences

Allow the 'Tent' to be lowered and widened for all

Being a delegate at the Asian Continental Assembly on Synodality held in Bangkok recently, was indeed a grace-filled experience for me personally. It was a time of sincere sharing and listening to one another as we walked together through memory lane, looking at one another's experiences of joy and sadness, opportunities and challenges and the call to embrace new pathways.

"The assembly was a time of engaging in dialogue, weaving relationships together and bringing about awareness of the importance of walking together. The Spirit of the Lord was present amongst us and the Spirit was guiding and leading us through the process, in the interventions, the group sharing and reporting and the peaceful and orderly dynamics of the entire assembly.

"As the focus was on the Asian resonances, tensions, realities and divergences, gaps and priorities that came from the responses from the different countries in Asia, I believe and envision that the dreams, hopes, aspirations and the pains that echo within the Church in Asia, only makes the Church beautiful and stronger.

"I was truly touched with the 'prayerful intervals' which we had at the assembly. We were invited to journey through the Synodal process using a three-step method called, 'Spiritual Conversation'.

"The first step, *Taking the floor* is a time when each participant of the group speaks for two minutes about their experience of the Synodal process, with no discussion or intervention, followed by two minutes of silence to consume the sharing.

"The second step, *Making room for others* is a time when each member of the group speaks



for two minutes on what most resonated from what the other has said; with no discussion or intervention and followed by two minutes of silence to internalise the sharing.

"The third step, *Building together* is a time of interaction to identify the fruit of the conversation, recognising convergences, common questions, disagreements, and prophetic voices. This method allows space for moments of grace and helps the group ask the one fundamental question: what is the Holy Spirit telling us and where is the Holy Spirit leading us?

"At the assembly, we were always reminded that the purpose of the Synod is not to produce documents, but 'to plant dreams, draw forth prophecies and visions, allow hope to flourish, inspire trust, bind up wounds, weave together relationships, awaken a dawn of hope, learn from one another and create a bright resourcefulness that will enlighten minds, warm hearts, give strength to our hands.

"I guess we can begin being synodal by allowing the 'Tent' to be lowered and widened so all people may feel at home, a place where they can call their very own — the Church welcomes and listens." — **Msr Jude Miranda, VG, Diocese of Penang**

Called to embrace new pathways

My synodal journey was fruitful and enriched with spiritual experience, information, and friendship. When I arrived, I felt so "small" among these intellectual and religious people. However, the meeting began by "taking off our shoes". The orientation was a good starting point for all of us to accept one another despite our different backgrounds and levels.

Three essential things struck me:

Spiritual Conversation

I first encountered this term when I attended the Malaysia pre-synodal Assembly in Penang last year. All delegates were divided into small groups. Everyone in the group was heard. No discussion, no advice, no debate, no judging. Just listening to one another based on the reflective question shared by the facilitators. In between the sharing, we were invited to be silent to allow whatever we had heard from each other to sink into our hearts as we prayed and discerned. The quiet and prayerful moment was the core of the whole assembly as we allowed the Holy Spirit to move us in the sharing.

Draft Document

I am amazed at the drafting team's dedication and effort in putting all the reports from the Bishops' Conferences and Synods of Bishops representing 29 countries of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC). The document captured the essential resonances, tensions, and priorities. The team also filled the gap by adding last October's FABC 50 General Assembly outcomes which do not appear in the synod report. The findings were crucial; going through it as the Asian Church has made eve-



ryone feel heard and important. One particular finding is on family and marriage. Family is a 'small' Church that attends to the life of children and the life of society because that is where value and character are formed. This is important since we live in a vast and fast world of modern technologies and culture. There is a need to promote the spirituality of family life so that the value will not be taken and

drowned by contemporary culture. We hope the team can share the final document with the delegates as a resource and reference.

"Enlarge the space of your tent" (Is 54:2)

After the assembly, I asked myself, "how can I enlarge the space of the tent?" We are called to embrace new pathways to be a Synodal Church. We must have the spirit of inclusion, and no one must be excluded from coming into the tent. Cardinal Hollerich remarks on synod as a symphony. "Synodal conversion is the way we have to tune our instruments." There will only be synodality if we are humble.

"Conversion is always conversion to Christ." The conversion needs a massive effort of humility to let go of our ego, fix our eyes on Jesus and allow the conversion to take place.

It will be a challenging mission, but we must start and continue to walk and talk about the spirit of synodality and the importance of journeying together as one Church. With this in hand, I hope to share this experience, journey and information with my home diocese. May we, in solidarity with the whole Church in Malaysia, Asia and the world, be "tents" to all humanity. — **Anna Teresa Peter Amandus, Diocese of Sandakan**

More than 800 to join the Church at Easter

This year, the Peninsular Malaysia Church will welcome 852 new Catholics during the Easter Vigil on April 8, 2023.

Over the weekend of the First Sunday of Lent, their names were enrolled in the Book of Elect marking their entry into the final phase of their preparation to receive the Sacraments of Initiation.

Let us continue to keep the Elect in prayer as they prepare to answer the call of Baptism.

DIOCESE OF MALACCA JOHORE

JOHOR BAHRU: The Rite of Election in the Diocese of Malacca Johore saw almost 200 catechumens affirming their desire to enter into full communion with the Catholic Church. The Rite took place at the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Johor Bahru, on February 25, and again at the Church of St Teresa, Melaka, on Feb 26, to cater for catechumens from both states.

The celebrant of the Rite in Johor Bahru was Bishop Emeritus Paul Tan, whereas

the one in Melaka was presided over by Msgr Peter Ng, both celebrants being delegated by Bishop Bernard Paul, who was in Thailand attending the Asian Continental Assembly on Synodality.

Assisting at the Rite at both locations was Director of the Malacca Johore Diocesan Catechetical Ministry, Deacon Sherman Kuek, who preached a brief homily on the call of the Gospel to abdicate our thrones and allow God to be the Lord of

our lives.

He said, the temptations faced by our Lord in the Judean wilderness reminded us of what truly mattered, God's will or our self-determined life programme, God's timing or ours. He stressed the importance of trusting in God's way and timing in all matters of life, assuring the new Elect of the prayers of the Church, together with those of our Blessed Mother and the entire host of heaven.



Msgr Peter Ng signing the Book of Rite as Deacon Sherman Kuek looks on at the Church of St Teresa, Malacca, on February 26, 2023.



Bishop Emeritus Paul Tan with catechumens and the congregation after the Rite of Election at the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Johor Bahru, on February 25, 2023.

DIOCESE OF PENANG

PENANG: The Cathedral of the Holy Spirit (CHS) was filled on February 25 as Bishop Sebastian Francis celebrated a multilingual Mass for 128 catechumens from 12 parishes of Penang Island and the Northern Deaneries of the Diocese of Penang.

This assembled multitude truly reflected the Diocesan Lenten theme: *Renew our hearts to care*, with its focus on *Kempen Kasih*.

Bishop Sebastian welcomed the soon-to-be Elect of God, and all present, to the joyous event that marked the final threshold-crossing into a period of intense spiritual preparation to receive the Sacraments of Initiation.

In his homily, Bishop Sebastian expressed his delight to be with the catechumens because "You are central to the Church and the heart of Christ." He explained how this Lenten journey also doubled up as a Synodal journey. In reiterating the three-part traditional syllabus of Lent: Pray-Fast-Give (alms), he added a fourth: Receive. He emphasised its participatory nature, "It is a two-way process." He both preached and taught from the cathedra:

1. What is the call? Baptism. It is crystal clear.
 2. What is the identity that comes through Baptism? I am a disciple of Jesus Christ.
 3. What is the gift? None other than the Holy Spirit who comes with the fire of communion and mission.
 4. What is the destiny? Abba, Our Father. It is the destiny of all creation to end in the embrace of Our Father.
- He solemnly reminded and clarified to all present to hark and mark the two key points of



The Elect facing their godparents/sponsors during the intercessory prayers.

Pope Francis' 2023 Lenten message:

1. Listen to my Son – Jesus Christ.
2. Rise up and do not be afraid.

"The Synodal journey of Lent will climax on Easter night in the glorious baptism of 194 adults throughout the Diocese of Penang," he noted. He invited all to join in the Diocesan Caritas Lenten Campaign: *Renew our hearts to care*. He closed with a call for all to pray with him in a personalised way: Lord, how are you inviting ME to pray, fast, give, and receive, this Lent? He cautioned, "The Lord may surprise you with the answer!" He assured the catechumens, "As your bishop, I will be interceding and praying for you at every Mass until Easter." He then translated his homily into Bahasa Malaysia, after which Bernadette Teh and P.R. Selvarajan translated it into Mandarin and Tamil accordingly.

Proceeding with the scripted Rite of Elec-

tion (ROE) that began with the "Calling" of their names, the bishop explained that this calling out aloud of each name was precious in God's hearing. Having sought affirmation from godparents/sponsors and facilitators re their spiritual readiness to be admitted to the Election stage, and the assurance of congregational support, the catechumens were called upon to openly declare their own intentions for admission.

Satisfied, the bishop beckoned "Then offer your names for enrolment." On behalf of their parish priests, RCIA coordinators took turns to submit to the prelate the Book of Elect containing the names and signatures of the catechumens. Bishop Sebastian signed each Book on the spot. He then pronounced the Act of Admission/Election, "Catechumens, I now declare you to be members of the Elect, to be initiated into the sacred mysteries at the forthcoming Easter Vigil."

During the intercessory prayers, the Elect faced their godparents/sponsors who placed their right hands on their shoulders as a gesture of receiving and caring for them. The prelate prayed over the Elect in concluding the ROE, inviting them to stay for the Liturgy of the Eucharist. He utilised every experiential learning opportunity to teach them: why do Catholics kneel during the Eucharistic Prayer? "Because Jesus Himself 'turun padang' to be one with us!" He encouraged the Elect to be in Spiritual Communion with the rest who received Holy Communion. — **By Lucille Dass**

IPOH: As Catholics go through Lent to prepare for Easter, 66 non-Catholics from the Perak Deanery have been preparing themselves for a year to receive the Sacraments of Initiation.

On February 26, the Rite of Election for the Perak Deanery was held at the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, presided over by Bishop Sebastian Francis.

The names of the 66 Catechumens were inscribed in the Book of Elect and were presented to Bishop Sebastian Francis. The Rite of Election provides an opportunity for these names to be formally enrolled among God's chosen people.

Addressing the catechumens during the homily before the Rite of Election, Bishop Sebastian said, "It is with delight that I speak to you as we begin the Lenten Penance and the Synodal Journey, in this Year of the Lord 2023. Traditionally, the Church tells us to Pray, Fast and Give. And I would like to add, "And Receive". Pray, Fast, Give and Receive. He also added that the Synodal Journey of Lent will climax on Easter night, the night of glorious baptism throughout the Diocese of Penang and Baptisms in Kelantan, Kedah, Perlis, Perak, Penang and beyond.

Towards the end of the homily, Bishop Sebastian assured the Catechumens that he would pray for each of them personally till Easter. — **By Pauline Sundram**



Bishop Sebastian Francis praying over the Elect at the Perak Deanery Rite of Election.



The Elect from Penang Island and Northern Deaneries.

KK sees a decline in RCIA candidates

KOTA KINABALU: The Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu welcomed 789 catechumens during the Rite of Election, the final stage of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) at the Sacred Heart Cathedral on February 26,

The catechumens, their sponsors/godparents, facilitators, and parish pastors gathered at the cathedral for the Rite, officiated by Archbishop John Wong.

The catechumens publicly expressed their desire for baptism during the trilingual Rite of Election. Their names were recorded in their respective parish books, which the coordinators duly presented to the prelate for his signature. The catechumens are now called the elect.

During the homily, the prelate asked the candidates to reflect on the day's first reading and Gospel.

In the first reading, taken from the *Book of Genesis*, Adam and Eve were tempted by the evil spirit. In the Gospel, Jesus too was tempted

by the evil spirit. However, Adam and Eve fell into sin because they gave in to their desire and rejected God, whereas Jesus fully trusted the voice of God.

Archbishop John reminded the catechumens to emulate Jesus in adhering to the voice of the Holy Spirit to overcome temptation in their daily lives.

At the end of the ceremony, the prelate asked for a few minutes to share his concern. He said, a few years ago, the archdiocese had more than 1,000 elect to be baptised during the Easter Vigil, but the numbers are decreasing.

He also said for many years, although there were thousands of newly baptised, only a few came back to serve in the church ministries. The prelate emphasised that all baptised people, including bishops, priests, religious, and laity should do their duty to strengthen their faith and spread the Word of God. — *By Liza Magnus*



The congregation at the Rite of Election.

463 to be baptised

ARCHDIOCESE OF KUALA LUMPUR

KAJANG: Four hundred and sixty-three catechumens and their godparents, RCIA facilitators, and parish priests from 34 parishes gathered at the Church of the Holy Family on February 26 to celebrate the Rite of Election, presided over by Archbishop Julian Leow.

The Rite signifies the progress made by the catechumens in the RCIA process and their readiness to give their names to receive the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Eucharist. It also marks the beginning of the catechumens' journey as the "elect" during the Period of Purification and Enlightenment when they will undergo intense spiritual and catechetical preparations to receive the Sacraments of Initiation at the Easter Vigil.

Unlike the past two years when the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown prevented the Rite of Election from being held onsite at the Archdiocesan level, this year the celebration was held at one location. Despite the lockdown, the majority of RCIA ministries in the parishes continued, unabated to promote the RCIA process and hold the sessions online. In 2021, the Rite was held at the Church of the Good Shepherd, Setapak, with a small number of representatives and it was live-streamed. In 2022, after the implementation of a partial lockdown, it was celebrated at the parish or district levels.

In his homily, Archbishop Julian thanked the RCIA facilitators and their collaborators for their unflinching work in ensuring that



Archbishop Julian Leow signing the Book of Elect of the Church of the Holy Rosary.

those who sought entrance into the Catholic Church were not left in limbo because of the lockdown. He also thanked the catechumens for their zeal in wanting to know more about the faith despite the inconvenience and hardship caused by the lockdown. He also reminded the congregation that the Rite of Election has its basis in the Bible: "I will be your God and you will be my people" (Jeremiah 7:23). The archbishop also extolled the elect to be part of the larger Church community to ensure they travel far in their faith journey.

After listening to the testimonies of the godparents, RCIA facilitators, and the community at large, and receiving the expressed consent of the catechumens, Archbishop Julian asked that the names of the elect be presented to him for ratification. Parish representatives, accompanied by their respective parish priests, presented the Book of the Elect to the arch-

bishop. Having ratified the names in the Book of Elect, the archbishop declared the catechumens as the "elect".

The Rite continued with intercessory prayers for the elect. Archbishop Julian then prayed over the elect and gave a general blessing to the congregation, after which the assembly was dismissed. Light refreshment was served on the church grounds after the celebration.

The RCIA core team, together with Archbishop Julian, recorded their gratitude to the Church of Holy Family's parish priest, Fr Michael Chua, for consenting to host the celebration and to the parish community for their support and assistance.

This year, besides the 463 catechumens who will receive the Sacraments of Initiation, there are also 171 persons seeking the Sacrament of Confirmation, and 81 seeking Reception into the Church. — *By Alan Lukose*



DIOCESE OF PENANG
PKK/BDN/2023/02/153

Notifications and Updates

1. Annual Collection for Holy Land

The annual collection for Holy Land is on Maundy Thursday.

Parishes can make their contributions by cheque or online transfer. Payable to: DIOCESE OF PENANG | RHB Account No: 2-07082-0005132-4 | Kindly notify payment to: trefin@gmail.com

2. Solidarity Fund for Penang Diocese

The parish monthly collection for the solidarity fund of all parishes in the Diocese of Penang can also be made following the same banking details and method as above.

3. RCIA Elect for Baptism at Easter

I am delighted to inform you that 196 Adult RCIA candidates will be baptised, together with several other adults at Easter in our diocese. Please join me as I invite you to pray for them, every day until their Baptism.

4. Collaboration between National Cancer Society of Malaysia (NCSM) and the Diocese of Penang

The Diocese of Penang will be offering NCSM the use of Simee Old Folks Home, Ipoh (Block B) to provide accommodation for the underprivileged B40 cancer patients and their caregiver while undergoing treatment at the Ipoh General Hospital. The

blessing of this NCSM – CARITAS Homes of Hope at Simee Ipoh, will be on March 18 at 10.00am. Free cancer screening will be available.

5. Priestly Ordination of Deacons Raymond Raj and Desmond Jansen

Deacon Raymond Raj Jeremiah from the Church of Divine Mercy, Sg Ara and Deacon Desmond Jansen David Anthony from the Minor Basilica of St Anne, will be called to the Order of the Presbyterate and ordained diocesan priests on March 28 at the Chrism Mass celebrated at the Minor Basilica of St Anne, BM. Kindly keep them and all the clergy in your prayers.

6. Parish priest of the Church of Our Lady of Good Health, Parit Buntar

Fr Martin Arlando has been appointed parish priest of the Church of Our Lady of Good Health, Parit Buntar, with effect from March 1, 2023. We congratulate him for having completed his studies in Canon Law and continue to pray for him as he embarks on his new mission in the parish at Parit Buntar.

My heartfelt thanks to Fr Anthony Pillai for having served tirelessly in his priestly ministry and is now released from his responsibilities due to health reasons.

Special thanks to Msgr Henry Rajoo who assisted as administrator of the parish in the interim. My prayers and blessings for the parish community at Parit Buntar.

7. 100th Birthday of Fr Peter Wang

Fr Peter Wang, a priest from the Diocese of Penang who is currently residing in Canada, celebrated his 100th birthday on March 5. We remember him in our prayers as he remains close to our hearts here in the diocese.

8. Head of Chinese Language Apostolate Sr Theresa Chew

Sr Theresa Chew FdCC will be released from her responsibilities as the Head of Chinese Language Apostolate with effect from March 1. We thank Sr Theresa for her dedicated and committed services in this ministry. The new head who will be replacing Sr Theresa for this apostolate will be announced soon.

9. CHARIS Penang Team

I am pleased to share with you the team of CHARIS PENANG, a service of communion with all the expressions of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal of the Church in the Diocese of Penang. (bit.ly/3SLrRUs)



10. Mission of the Sisters of the Infant Jesus in the Diocese of Penang

A new community of IJ sisters will be reopened at Light Street Convent in Penang. Along with this information, I am pleased to share with you the IJ communities in our diocese.

Also for your information, the Convent Light Street (CLS) will be fully closed in 2024, while the CLS Secondary will be fully closed in March 2023 after the SPM examinations. As for the secondary school of Convent Pulau Tikus (CPT), it will be returned to the IJ Sisters in March 2023 after the SPM examinations.

11. Appointment as Chairman of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference-Office of Social Communications (FABC-OSC)

I ask for your prayers as I take on this new role and responsibility as Chairman of the FABC-OSC for a period of three years with effect from January 1, 2023. One of the important responsibilities which the FABC has entrusted to the FABC-OSC is the management and governance of Radio Veritas Asia (RVA).

A weekend of holy moments

CDM ministry leaders' retreat

By Sharon Chandra

PENANG: The first weekend in Lent was filled with "holy moments" for some 50 ministry leaders and potential leaders, from the Church of the Divine Mercy as they came together for the *Stand United; Ignite our Faith* retreat.

Held at the Stella Maris Retreat Centre on February 25 and 26, retreatants gained spiritual insights into fulfilment in service and leadership as they bonded through discussions and sharing, games, Praise and Worship sessions, and simply spending quiet moments looking at ways to bring new energy to their ministries.

Fr Michael Raymond, OFM Cap, the main retreat facilitator, presented astute sessions that guided ministry leaders and members to look introspectively at where they stood in their journey of service. He coaxed them to ask hard questions while revisiting some leadership methods and led them into meaningful discussions on finding fulfilment in their ministries and teams.

Fr Michael began by introducing the participants, who ranged from baby boomers to Gen Z youth, to the concept of Holy Moments, based on the book *Holy Moments: A*



Ministry leaders and potential leaders of the Church of the Divine Mercy.

Handbook for the Rest of Your Life by Matthew Kelly. "A Holy Moment is a moment when you open yourself to God. You make yourself available to Him ... you simply do what you prayerfully believe God is calling you to do at that moment." Fr Michael also touched on the various "storms" of life that besiege each leader and what it teaches us in our faith journey.

On the second day, they explored the topic of mission and identity. "You cannot speak of a mission if you are not clear of your identity", stressed Fr Michael. "Ministry is not about achievement but fulfilment" he reminded. In-

stead of just looking for happiness, he encouraged all present to find the "joy in serving".

Leading an interactive discussion on ministry leadership, Roland Victor, who heads the Parish Animating Team, delved into what makes an effective leader within the realm of the Church as opposed to the secular world, quoting examples of servant leaders like St Teresa of Calcutta as exemplary role models.

Noting the diversity of different generations, Roland pointed out that even within the retreat, there were members from the baby boomers, Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z eras. This made it important to constantly be

aware of the generational gaps among members from the various groups. He also asked to focus on making ministry work relevant, to engage and have the element of the mission, so everyone feels "energetic, passionate and committed" to giving their "hearts, spirits, minds and hands" to the best of their abilities.

At the end of the two-day session, participants, grouped by ministries, moving forward, took time to deliberate on action plans while sharing their aspirations and hopes for their respective ministries.

The interspersing of lively action songs and Praise and Worship sessions with games, many led by the Genesis Youth Ministry (GYM) of CDM, was a bonus. Fun, laughter, open discussions, and fellowship made the weekend a much-needed break away.

For most present, the opportunity to bond and spend time together in a relaxed atmosphere made an impact.

Amy Wong from RCIA said the retreat was "a balance of spiritual, secular, relevant input and lots of fun and laughter. The participants from various ages gave important feedback to all."

Andrea Gonzales from GYM said she liked "the reflection times, sharing, and the leadership talks" best.



The group making their way to Perdana Botanical Gardens.

Pilgrims begin Lent with *Compostela Walk* in Kuala Lumpur

KUALA LUMPUR: In conjunction with the season of Lent, the Archdiocesan Pastoral Institute (API) organised a *Compostela Walk* in the heart of Kuala Lumpur on February 25.

The walk was in the spirit of Camino de Santiago ("Camino" as it is popularly known) or the Way of St James, a network of walking routes that leads to the tomb of St James in Santiago de Compostela, a city in Spain. The Camino is one of the oldest pilgrimage routes in Europe, and millions of pilgrims have walked it over the centuries.

The *Compostela Walk* began at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre in Pudu and ended at the Perdana Botanical Gardens (Lake Gardens). More than 20 pilgrims from different parishes in the Archdiocese participated in the 2.5km walk.

Director of API, Fr Eugene Benedict said, "The *Compostela Walk* in Kuala Lumpur is in the spirit of our Synodal Journey. Significantly, we are doing the walk at the beginning of Lent, which is a walk of 40 days in the Lord."

"By faith, every day is a journey by the Lord and in the Lord. Our journey through life is a pilgrimage because we are a people of faith who want to live by faith and walk by faith," he added.

A pilgrim of the *Compostela Walk*, Thomas Ong, had walked the original Camino de Santiago twice. He said, "There are similarities between the Camino walk and our life's journey. We can make life simple and uncomplicated by removing attachments and distractions. In both instances, we are mere pilgrims, walking through a foreign land we cannot call home. The journey is

as important as the destination and is to be enjoyed (lived) to the full."

Thomas, who hails from Chapel Kristus Aman, said that the Camino walk changed him in some ways too. The walk taught him that his needs are small, and upon completing the walk, he gave away half his clothing, and all his prized books and began leading a minimalist lifestyle.

During the *Compostela Walk* in Kuala Lumpur, pilgrims made pitstops at different landmarks in the city to learn about its historical significance. These pitstops included Tung Shin Hospital on Jalan Pudu, Oriental Building on Jalan Tun Perak, and St Mary's Anglican Church at Dataran Merdeka. Apart from learning about each landmark, pilgrims also enjoyed the fellowship and sharing of life experiences as they walked with the other pilgrims. — **By Julie Lim**

Ageing with a raging desire for God

PORT DICKSON: The Golden Eagles of the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist were delighted to learn the significance of wine to the disciples of Christ.

Pope John XXIII's reflection that "Humans are like wine – some turn to vinegar, but the best improve with age" resonated deeply with this group of seniors who journeyed to Port Dickson on February 16.

They are ageing but with a raging desire for a closer relationship with God and to grow their faith together.

Parish priest Fr Gerard Theraviam blessed the 41 Golden Eagles before they boarded the bus for the 90-minute trip to the Church of the Immaculate Conception.

Parish priest Fr Jestus Pereira and Friar George Ho, OCD, met them on arrival. It was a touching reunion for those who have known Fr Jestus for years.

Fr Jestus celebrated Mass, with Friar George

as concelebrant. In his homily, Fr Jestus talked about his hospitalisation, including his time in the Intensive Care Unit. He praised God for letting him continue celebrating Mass.

After the Liturgy of the Word, Fr Jestus and Friar George conferred the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick on the pilgrims, followed by the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

Golden Eagles coordinator Christine Suan, said: "I shed tears of joy as I felt my hands warming up during the anointing. The same night, my years of trigeminal nerve pain disappeared. Washing my face is no longer a torment."

"Praise and glory to God the Highest and thank you, Mother Mary, for interceding for my healing," gushed Christine.

The pilgrims had lunch at the Champagnat Youth Centre before attending a talk on *Humans are like wine* by Friar George.

While there is vintage differentiation for



The seniors with presenter, Fr Jestus Pereira and Friar George Ho OCD.

wine, they learned that "we humans are all God's best vintage. Each of us is unique!" Fr George said: "Let's not compare with others but store our hearts in the right place so that our vintage remains fresh and ages like fine wine".

Like Fr Gerard in his blessings, Friar George also touched on the need to go beyond and fol-

low Christ in our old age.

It was a great day spent with the Holy Spirit and each other. As Retna put it, "we spent our retreat like a family," with blessed smiles and a loving friendship.

Fr Gerard, unable to join them, was on hand to welcome the happy seniors upon their return. — **By Bob Ho**

Manuben's street Catechism in Manila

MANILA: For 13 years, a lay Catholic missionary in the Philippines has been teaching Catechism to the poor on the street, reaching them in the peripheries.

Artemio B. Manuben Jr, a member of the Secular Franciscan Order, began on August 31, 2009, together with other Franciscan catechists from the parish of Nuestra Señora Dela Soledad, in Binondo, Manila.

"Our group is composed of Third Order Franciscans, full-time catechists of the Archdiocese of Manila, and volunteer catechists," said Manuben.

Inspired by Pope Francis' call to "go to the peripheries," the group promotes street catechesis in Manila's Tondo, Binondo and Port Area Delpan areas, using a *kariton* (cart) and a method designed specifically to reach families living on the streets.

"We formed a Franciscan Catechists Band and composed our songs, which we sang during Musikatekesis in jail and to street dwellers," Manuben explained.

The initiative began in 2009 with 23 children and adults, on the streets of Tondo, one of the largest slums in the country's capital.

The main work involves teaching the faith in the streets through various outreach activities, prayers, storytelling, puppetry, games, readings ...

The catechesis uses audio-visual tools, but also colouring materials, Bibles, images of Our Lady of Fatima, the Cross of St Damian and St Francis of Assisi and small gifts for



Inspired by Pope Francis' call to "go to the peripheries," the catechists promote street catechesis in Manila's Tondo, Binondo and Port Area Delpan areas, using a *kariton* (cart) and a method designed specifically to reach families living on the streets. (AsiaNews photo)

participants.

Manuben, 47, teaches religion at the Benigno Aquino Elementary School, in Port Area Baseco, Manila. The reason that led him to reach out to the marginalised is that he saw a rotten cart at the school where he works that was no longer usable for teaching.

"I was inspired to make it a catechetical cart. From that inspiration, I aimed to build a new one. On the feast day of St Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Sept 5, 2012, I was able to bless the cart," he said.

Since then, every Wednesday, after catechesis at the Almario Elementary School, he pushes the cart with food, audio-visual aid,

the Bible, the St Damian cross and the image of Our Lady of Fatima to the place where many street kids come to listen to him.

"What drives me to love catechising at the peripheries is to bring Jesus to the hopeless. When I was a child, I was like them, coming from a broken family, and being a drug addict, but God changed me through the help of a catechist," he explained.

"Since then, I have also helped people who are experienced being lost to find their way back to God. And now I want to repay God's salvation to me by bringing the lost and those who are on the streets who have different vices, to Him. Being a witness to them has

a big impact on them; if God changed me, so can they change, by the grace of God," said Manuben.

Speaking of the impact of his ministry, he noted that after several years of street catechesis, his work has started to bear some fruits.

Some families have struggled to get jobs and rent a house; some gave up their vices and went back to school; others are no longer in prison and are trying to start a new life.

He and his team face multiple challenges though: health, poverty, poor weather.

"We are planning to upgrade our *kariton*, or catechetical cart. From a *kariton* to a catechetical tricycle, we could easily move and carry more materials for the catechesis" he said.

Eventually, the team would like to open a house to train young catechists to be involved in this ministry.

"Every time we do the street catechesis, we bring the image of Mama Mary, so we adopted the name 'Our Lady of the Peripheries' as a response to the call of Pope Francis to go to the peripheries. We made a painting of her presence," Manuben said.

The painting accompanying the catechists depicts them in their mission to the most marginalised people. As Mary is always present in evangelisation, she is a sign of Christ's presence.

"His mission was not to end poverty but to save sinners," which is what the catechetical cart does. —By Santosh Diga, AsiaNews

Lent, "a journey through trials and suffering, towards full joy"

COLOMBO: "What we are living this year is a Lent somewhat different from previous years, because Sri Lanka is going through a situation of great economic, political, social, and even moral suffering," said Fr Basil Rohan Fernando, a priest of the Archdiocese of Colombo.

"We see a decline of moral values, especially in political life and in those who should act for the common good: it is a very unpleasant situation and one that makes us reflect," said the priest who is also the National Director of the Pontifical Mission Societies on the island of the Indian subcontinent.

"Many citizens, many families, including Catholics find themselves in a real situation of poverty and have no food to feed themselves. Many are in a state of deprivation and precariousness. This is why Lent is a time of return to God and a time to experience the works of mercy: we try to spend time with God in prayer and Adoration, we celebrate the Stations of the Cross every Friday, and we offer acts of charity toward the needy, of whom there are many."



Children participating in Mass. (Fides photo)

Fr Fernando notes, "As priests and religious, we are called to comfort those who suffer and to give not only material but also spiritual nourishment. In this sense, we have activated the national network of the Pontifical Mission Societies in the dioceses, asking them to celebrate a special daily Mass, every day for 40 days, to support the people of the nation who are tried by the crisis, so that the Lord can instill in everyone a light of hope." — Fides

Pakistani Christians oppose polling on Easter Sunday

ISLAMABAD: Christian leaders in Pakistan have joined opposition leaders in demanding the rescheduling of elections in two provincial assemblies slated for April 9, citing Easter festivities.

Fr Inayat Barnard, the chaplain of Caritas Pakistan, criticised the unilateral decision to hold the polls of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab provincial assemblies on Easter Sunday and said the people should be made aware of "this unwanted announcement."

The announcement was made by President Arif Alvi, a senior leader of former Prime Minister Imran Khan's party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) though according to Pakistan's constitution, it is the provincial governors who announce new elections in case an interim government is not formed within 90 days of the dissolution of an assembly.

The provincial legislatures in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab were dissolved last

month as the PTI is pushing for early national elections.

"The Christian members of national and provincial assemblies should bring this 'presidential negligence' to the notice of speakers and change the date," Fr Barnard said.

Fr Barnard said that "the president is for all citizens of the country and not only of Muslims" while reminding how politicians proclaim Christians as their brothers and sisters during election campaigns and then pretend as if they do not exist in Pakistan.

Aspiring Christian candidates stood a slim chance to contest the elections as Punjab has eight reserved seats for non-Muslims while Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has three seats.

The Election Commission had rescheduled local elections in Pakistan's capital, Islamabad, as Christian members of federal statutory bodies rejected the decision to hold them on Christmas Eve last year. — ucanews.com



The Justice and Peace Commission of the Pakistani Church: A denial of the right to vote. (AsiaNews photo)

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Nicaraguan president bans Easter processions

MANAGUA: In the latest move against the Catholic Church and government opponents in Nicaragua, the government of President Daniel Ortega has reportedly banned the traditional public processions of the Way of the Cross in all parishes in the country.

During Lent, and also on Good Friday, the ritual will take place inside churches and not in public venues.

The move comes in the context of President Ortega's escalating crackdown against the Nicaraguan Church, and follows the widespread outcry over the recent sentencing of Bishop Rolando Álvarez of Matagalpa to 26 years' imprisonment and the deportation of 222 political opponents to the United States.

They have all been stripped off citizenship along with 94 Nicaraguan citizens, including the exiled Auxiliary Bishop Silvo José Baez, of Managua, and a priest from Matagalpa.

Tensions between the Sandinista regime and the Catholic Church reached its peak recently when, in a speech for the 89th anniversary of the killing of Nicaraguan national hero Augusto Sandino, President Ortega launched an unprecedented attack against

the Church, accusing the Catholic hierarchy of "grave crimes and horrors" and of supporting dictator Somoza, who was ousted by the Sandinista Revolution in 1979.

In his address to the nation, Ortega also accused the papacy of having supported Italian dictator Mussolini, and the Vatican of being a "mafia organisation".

"I don't believe in popes or kings: who chooses the Pope?" he said. "If we want to talk about democracy, the people should first elect priests and the bishops", and "even the Pope" should be "elected by direct vote and not by the organised mafia in the Vatican."

Ortega's ranting came in the wake of Pope Francis' appeal for Nicaragua on February 12. During the *Angelus* prayer, the Pope said he was praying for Bishop Álvarez, "for those who have been deported to the United States, and for all those who suffer in the beloved nation of Nicaragua", adding his voice to the many expressions of solidarity with the Church in Nicaragua from across the world.

In his speech, Ortega made no mention of the 222 exiles, nor of Bishop Álvarez's recent sentencing to 26 years of prison for treason.

Following Pope Francis' appeal, the US bishops too have expressed their solidarity with the Church in Nicaragua.

In a statement last week, the president of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio, thanked the Catholic community in the United States for the warm welcome given to the Nicaraguan exiles.

"At this dark hour, courageous hope, charity, and solidarity are bearing witness to the enduring vitality of the faith of the people of Nicaragua and among Catholics worldwide supporting the Nicaraguan faithful", Archbishop Broglio said, urging the US government and other partners "to continue to pursue the release of Bishop Álvarez and the restoration of human rights in Nicaragua."

Relations between the Ortega administration and the Nicaraguan Church deteriorated again after the wave of anti-regime protests that were brutally suppressed by the government in 2018.

Despite attempts to mediate in the crisis, bishops were ultimately banned from mediating, and accused by Ortega of being "putschists" for giving refuge to wounded



President Daniel Ortega

demonstrators during protests that, according to human rights groups, left at least 328 people dead.

Relations further worsened after the controversial 2021 elections which confirmed the Sandinista leader for another mandate.

Since the outbreak of the crisis the Church has been the target of several attacks and desecrations, as well as harassment and intimidations of bishops and priests.

Between April 2018 and October 2022, the Nicaraguan regime has allegedly carried out 396 attacks against the Catholic Church of Nicaragua, ranging from offensive paintings in churches to physical attacks, exiles, and arrests. — **By Lisa Zengarini, Vatican News**

Sisters in Ukraine: Choosing life in the midst of war

KYIV: "The spiritual component of every person is very sensitive. Obviously, in a war there are numerous and varied interior experiences, many conflicting emotions and feelings, in a way that at times, especially at the beginning of the war, made it difficult to pray", admits Sr Teodora Shulak, a Ukrainian religious sister who was elected Superior General of the Missionary Sisters of the Most Holy Redeemer in October 2022.

Her women's congregation has been active in Ukraine since 1998, and the Ukrainian province has five communities with 26 religious. They help the Redemptorist priests in the parishes, working with young people and children, giving catechesis, and organising summer camps, pilgrimages, and retreats.

The war has sorely tried the lives of these women religious, who are all under 50 years old. "It seemed to us", continues Sr Teodora, "that we had been abandoned to ourselves, with our feelings of fear, anger, and pain. At times we were frightened by the feeling that hatred had managed to worm itself into our hearts. Sometimes I experienced almost a sort of split: on the one hand, during community prayer, I would thank and praise God, and then, back in my room, I would experience the most conflicting emotions that I could not manage. One day I realised that this separation was not Christian and had nothing to do with our God: Jesus rose with His wounds; He knows what it means to bear these wounds and experience pain until death. I understood that I could survive this tragedy only in Him and with Him".

The war requires constant discernment, not only for the interior but also for the pastoral life. Sr Teodora, who was Provincial Superior of the Redemptorist Sisters in Ukraine from 2013 until October 2022, recounts that after the Russian invasion, they found themselves rethinking their work so as to better serve the Church and the people in the new situation. Already in March,



Redemptorist sisters with a woman of Chernihiv in front of her destroyed home. (Vatican News)

some 10 religious who spoke German and/or English went abroad (Germany, Austria, Ireland) to help out in the Catholic facilities that had welcomed Ukrainian refugees. For more than six months, they helped their compatriots compile documents, visited the sick and wounded in hospitals, and helped the children of refugees in local schools.

Another aspect of their work is psychological assistance to victims of war. Various sisters who had obtained specialisations in psychology and psychotherapy decided to take additional specialised courses so as to be able to help people overcome their grief and trauma. "In some of our convents", explains the missionary, "we also welcomed refugees, and among these was also a Tatar Muslim family. Their baby was born while they were staying with the sisters. And then they published a very touching post on Facebook about the fact that they never would have thought that they would be able to experience this relationship between Christians and Muslims so closely".

The Missionary Sisters of the Most Holy Redeemer also have a community in Chernihiv, the capital of the region of the same name, in northern Ukraine.

In the first months of war, the sisters were unable to continue their mission in Cherni-

hiv. They were forced to leave the city which had been surrounded and bombed by Russian soldiers. When they returned in April, they found devastation. Sr Teodora, who was specialised in psychotherapy, also went. "We went to visit the people in the places that had been most heavily hit", she shares. "People had lost their loved ones, their homes, everything. By dialoguing and listening, we were able to help them overcome some of the depression and panic attacks. These people are truly in need of knowing that someone is close to them, someone who can offer hope and faith when they waver".

The missionary adds that although anger is a natural response to the injustice and suffering experienced, it is important not to allow anger to become the predominant emotion and that the people know how to choose life even in small gestures, the way one woman she met in Chernihiv did. This woman planted a wonderful garden around her house, which had been completely destroyed by bombs. The woman said to the young religious sisters, "I focus on the smallest things in life. Look at this small plant that just sprouted from the earth. It will grow and it will live". Sr Teodora says that for her, this was a witness of what it means to choose life. — **By Svitlana Dukhovych, Vatican News**

Pope to visit Hungary in April

VATICAN: In a statement on February 27, Director of the Holy See Press Office, Matteo Bruni, announced: "Accepting the invitation of the civil and ecclesial Authorities, His Holiness Pope Francis will make an Apostolic Journey to Hungary from April 28 to 30, visiting the city of Budapest."

The papal visit will mark Pope Francis' 41st Apostolic Journey abroad.

During his three-day journey, the Pope will visit with refugees and poor people, as well as with children of the Blessed László Batthyány-Strattmann Institute.

As is customary, the Holy Father will address authorities, civil society and the diplomatic corps; young people, bishops, priests, deacons, consecrated persons, seminarians and pastoral workers; and representatives of the academic and cultural world.

More than half of Hungarians are Christian, and at least 37 per cent of the population identify as Catholic.

Since the start of the war in Ukraine, nearly one million Ukrainian nationals have travelled through Hungary as refugees, according to local sources.

The Holy Father had made a brief stop in the country's capital of Budapest to celebrate Mass for the closure of the 52nd International Eucharistic Congress on Sept 12, 2021, on his way to Slovakia.

Pope Francis had also shown his closeness to the Hungarian faithful during his visit to Romania, when he celebrated Mass at the popular Hungarian pilgrimage site of Csíksomlyó (Șumuleu Ciuc) in Romania's Transylvania region.

Transylvania had once been part of Hungary, but became Romanian territory in 1920. Ethnic Hungarians in Romania total more than one million people. — **By Deborah Castellano Lubov, Vatican Media**

Ten years in, a look at some of



ROME: When Jorge Mario Bergoglio was elected Pope Francis almost ten years ago, the world was immediately captivated by his vibrant personality, his simplicity, his love of the poor, and the fresh, and frankly, unusual papal vocabulary he has often adopted.

From his first *buona sera* to his occasional mother-in-law jokes, to his use of symbolic imagery and his shoot-from-the-hip quips, some of which have gotten him into trouble, Pope Francis has been a soundbite machine.

While he has become more scripted the longer his papacy has gone on, his frank and easy style of conversation, and his simple language and warm engagement with both members of the public and political leaders, were, initially, among the most appealing aspects of Francis after his election.

He was elected pope March 13, 2013, ushering in a string of 'firsts' for the Catholic Church.

Not only had the Church experienced

the first papal resignation in 600 years, with Benedict XVI's historic decision to step down from the papacy, but the Church also got her first Jesuit and first Latin American Pope.

Thanks to the growth of social media platforms over the past decade, Francis is also the first real 'digital' Pope, in the sense that he has accounts on most major social networks and thus has a higher global visibility than most of his predecessors likely did, meaning he quickly gained a reputation for the colourful soundbites he has often let fly.

Some of his remarks seemed odd or humorous, such as his declaration to believers during a general audience address in May 2013 that Christians should be joyful, rather than having a face like a "pickled pepper."

Many of his comments have been appreciated, such as his description of God's love as a "caress" and his focus on forgiveness, and others less so, such as his flap on a handful of occasions that women are "the cherry on top of the cake," and thus need to be more fully included in the Church.

Yet of all the quotes Pope Francis has given the Church over the years, some stand out either because of the publicity they gained, or the relevance they hold to the overall tone of his papacy.

Here is a rundown of some of the top papal soundbites since 2013:

Don't forget to pray for me

By now, it's become characteristic for Pope Francis to ask for prayers at the end of pretty much any public speech or event and is his classic tagline at the end of his weekly Sunday *Angelus* address, telling the faithful gathered "don't forget to pray for me. Have a good lunch, and goodbye!" before stepping out of view.

It is probably his most frequently repeated request, and, in fact, this was nearly the very first request Francis made as pope after stepping onto St Peter's central loggia following his election.

"I ask that you would pray to the Lord to bless me — the prayer of the people for their bishop. Let us say this prayer, your prayer for me, in silence."

After asking those gathered to pray for Benedict XVI and making an appeal for global brotherhood, he asked the faithful to pray for him, saying, "I would like to give the blessing, but first I want to ask you a favour. Before the bishop blesses the people, I ask that you would pray to the Lord to bless me — the prayer of the people for their bishop. Let us say this prayer, your prayer for me, in silence."



Don't forget the poor



"often speaking out on behalf of the most marginalised and those on the 'existential peripheries' of life, and prioritising them in his travels."

This phrase is technically not from Pope Francis but, is rather, that of the late Brazilian Cardinal Claudio Hummes, who was sitting next to the new pope when the final votes were counted and it was obvious he'd been elected.

On that occasion, as Francis himself has recounted it, as the applause began to echo through the Sistine Chapel, Hummes whispered into his ear, 'Don't forget the poor' — a remark which inspired the new pope to choose the papal name "Francis," after St Francis of Assisi, who was known as "the poor man of Assisi" and who was famed for his life of poverty and service to the needy.

While it was Hummes that uttered this phrase to him, Pope Francis has taken it to heart to such an extent, that it has become emblematic of much of his style as Pope, often speaking out on behalf of the most marginalised and those on the "existential peripheries" of life, and prioritising them in his travels.

Hacer Lio

During his first international trip to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in July 2013 — an appointment Pope Francis assumed after his predecessor's resignation — the new pope from the new world held a special meeting with Argentine youth, telling them to *hacer lio*, which is Argentine slang that translates roughly as "make a mess" or "wreak havoc."

"I want the Church to go out to the streets," he said, lamenting high youth unemployment and warning young people to guard themselves against "all worldliness, opposition to progress, from that which is comfortable, from that which is clericalism, from all that which means being closed up in ourselves."



"Make a mess"

Over the years, many critics have argued, with a sense of irony, that Pope Francis, throughout much of his papacy, has followed his own advice, making a "mess" of things with his ambiguity on matters such as Communion for the divorced and remarried or any number of things, while admirers have defended this 'go out to the streets' style as a necessary opening bringing the Church into the 21st century.

Either way, this bite made waves at the time, and has been emblematic of much of Pope Francis' own style, at least in the early years of his papacy.

Who am I to judge?

On his return flight from that Rio trip in 2013, Pope Francis raised eyebrows when, in response to a question on homosexual clergy, he said, "If someone is gay and he searches for the Lord and has good will, who am I to judge?"

For many, it was a shocking statement from the leader of a global institution still largely considered as homophobic by significant portions of society, and where many homosexual individuals have struggled to find welcome and acceptance.



"Need to be more welcoming and inclusive toward homosexual Catholics"

This one line is perhaps the most famous of all Pope Francis' soundbites over the years, and it has come to represent his broader outreach to the LGBTQ community throughout his 10 years as pope.

Though he has not changed official Church teaching or even publicly green-lighted blessings for same-sex couples, he has repeatedly stressed the need to be more welcoming and inclusive toward homosexual Catholics and has repeatedly met with Catholic LGBTQ groups and activists, including his fellow Jesuit, Fr James Martin.

Pope Francis' top soundbites

The smell of the sheep

Yet another famous papal soundbite that Francis has continually recycled throughout his time in office is for priests to take on “the smell of the sheep,” being pastors close to their people, rather than administrators governing from a stale, cold office.

He first uttered the phrase in a Chrism Mass barely two weeks after his election in March 2013, telling priests in an off-the-cuff remark during his homily that, “This is what I am asking you, be shepherds with the smell of sheep.”

This one soundbite neatly sums up Pope Francis' entire approach to pastoral care and practice, and it quickly set the tone for his expectations of the clergy under his guidance.

“Be pastors close to their people, rather than administrators governing from a stale, cold office.”



Breeding like 'rabbits'

Pope Francis raised eyebrows again, and created a significant amount of backlash, when on a return flight from the Philippines in 2015 he told reporters that good Catholics should practise “responsible” parenting, and did not need to breed like “rabbits.”

He had been asked about the Church's stance against artificial birth control, given that during the trip, he had met with a group of children who'd been abandoned because their parents could not take care of them.

Francis, in his response, remained firm against artificial birth control, saying new life was part of the sacrament of marriage, but cautioned that, “Some people think that ... in order to be good Catholics we have to be like rabbits. No. Parenthood is about being responsible. This is clear.”

To this end, he referred to the case of a woman he'd met who had seven children by Caesarean section and was expecting her eighth, saying the pregnancy was irresponsible because it put the mother's health and that of her unborn child at risk, while she already had so many who needed her, and noted that population experts had advised three children per family.

This papal remark, while eliciting a few grins, caused enormous backlash amongst the pro-life community, especially the American Catholic pro-life movement, who viewed the Pope's comment as critical and offensive. It arguably marked the undeniable beginning of the end of the honeymoon phase for Francis, particularly with conservative American Catholics.



“Parenthood is about being responsible”

Church as a Field Hospital

Perhaps one of the most poignant images of the Church that Pope Francis has conjured was his description early on of the Church as “a field hospital” during an interview with Jesuit Fr Antonio Spadaro, editor of the Jesuit-run magazine *La Civiltà Cattolica*, in August 2013.

During that conversation, which took place in three different meetings, Francis said, “The thing the Church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the Church as a field hospital after battle.”

“It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else,” he said.

In this one soundbite, Pope Francis painted out his entire vision for the Church's role, and that of its pastors in the world, which has underpinned much of his own pastoral decisions, including, among other things, those



“the Church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity.”

coming out of the 2014 and 2015 Synods of Bishops on the Family (Communion for the divorced and remarried), the Synod on the Amazon (protecting indigenous populations), and even his outreach to the LGBTQ community.

Throwaway Culture

Pretty much from the beginning of his reign until now, the “throwaway culture,” or the “culture of waste,” has been a constant refrain for Pope Francis, who early on defined the term as when, “Human life, the person, are no longer seen as a primary value to be respected and safeguarded.”

The “throwaway culture” is a topic the Pope returns to often in his public speeches and homilies, and it was also a major underlining theme of his 2015 eco-encyclical *Laudato Si'*, in which he used the term to condemn not only wasteful consumerism, but naked capital interests and the pursuit of profit at the expense of people, values, and communities when they appear to lack immediate or quantifiable value.

He has used this term in reference to vast categories of people, saying that among the throwaway culture's many victims are unborn children lost to abortion, which he has also likened to hiring “a hitman” to solve a problem; the elderly, who are often abandoned by family and who were a special priority during COVID lockdowns due to the isolation they experienced; youth who face unemployment and a lack of opportunities; the environment, and the poor.

“the person, are no longer seen as a primary value to be respected and safeguarded.”



Incisive feminine presence

Early on in his papacy, Pope Francis scored points with women by saying there was an “urgent” need for what he said was “a more widespread and incisive female presence” in the Church.

Though he had mentioned the phrase before, in a speech to participants in an assembly organised by the Pontifical Council for Culture in 2015, he repeated this desire, saying the Church needs women who are “involved in pastoral responsibilities, in the accompaniment of persons, families and groups, as well as in theological reflection.”



“the Church needs women who are ‘involved in pastoral responsibilities, in the accompaniment of persons, families and groups, as well as in theological reflection.’”

Women, he said on that occasion, must no longer feel “as guests, but as full participants in the various areas of social and ecclesial life.”

Francis has often repeated this plea for a more “incisive feminine presence,” and has followed through by appointing several women over the years, both laywomen and religious, to high-ranking positions in curial offices and to Vatican commissions.

While some of his other language insisting that “the Church is a mother” and that “the Church is a woman” have perhaps fallen a tad flatter, this line sparked hope for Catholic women everywhere that they would finally get to have a say, no longer lingering in the background, but making a real contribution that would be taken seriously and valued.

Please, thank you and I'm sorry

Donning his pastoral hat, Pope Francis offered the world another classic soundbite during a general audience in 2015, giving faithful on that occasion what he said were three key words to any healthy marriage: “please,” “thank you,” and “I'm sorry.”

These words “open up the road to a good family life,” he said, but cautioned that while simple, they are “not so easy to put into practice,” requiring a keen ability for self-reflection and an ability to swallow one's pride.

This has become one of Pope Francis' most repeated counsels for marriage and

“For couples to always reconcile before going to bed, saying often that ‘plates can fly,’ but couples must never go to bed angry or without making peace.”

family life, along with his frequent exhortation for couples to always reconcile before going to bed, saying often that “plates can fly,” but couples must never go to bed angry or without making peace.

While there are countless other phrases Pope Francis has used over the years — likening gossip to “terrorism” and condemning “rigidity” among clergy, which some have interpreted as a critique of traditionalist-leaning conservative Catholics, or his insistence on forgiveness — these are among the most memorable, and tone-setting for his papacy. — By Elise Ann Allen, *Crux*

You can never outgive the Lord

By Gwen Manickam

Cradle Catholic lawyer Joachim Xavier felt the Lord calling him to serve in His vineyard six months after attending a *Life in the Spirit Seminar* (LSS).

Raised in a strict and conservative Catholic family, the 47-year-old remembers spending his childhood in church and serving in parish-related activities. His parents, Francis Xavier, a teacher, and Regina Antoinette, a homemaker, served the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit in many different capacities, as did their children.

Francis was an active member of the Justice and Peace Commission and the Office for Human Development (OHD), and as a primary school student, Joachim used to accompany his father to meetings, camps, and retreats.

Completing his secondary education, Joachim's father was not in a financial position to send him overseas for tertiary education, dashing his dreams of studying aeronautical engineering in Ireland. Upon finishing his fifth form, Joachim spent the next six years selling insurance. He continued to serve in church but on an on and off basis.

In his mid-20s, Penang-born Joachim attended a youth LSS, which changed the course of his life.

"Something happened at that camp, which till today I find hard to explain. I was moved by the existence of God. Before that, God was a concept. He was a taskmaster to whom we had to comply and be obedient.

"At the LSS, I felt a personal connection, that He was a God who cared about us in a personal way — far from the taskmaster image I had of Him. It was an inner connection."

After the three-day camp at Balik Pulau, his view of the world changed drastically.

"I began to question 'Who am I?' 'What am I doing?' and 'Why am I doing what I do and its purpose?'"

"I was in a state of limbo. I had lost all motivation and couldn't find any good reason to continue down the path I was on — be it selling insurance or pursuing wealth."

The Call

Six months later, as Joachim was driving around, metaphorically looking for an answer, he had an overwhelming feeling, deep within, to work full-time for the Church. He immediately contacted Fr Fabian Dicom, the LSS's spiritual director, to discuss his newfound conviction.

"I told him I don't know how or where I fit in, all I know is I want to work for the church."

Financially, Joachim had a five-figure debt,

and he couldn't make his loan payments. Yet he knew he just wanted to serve the Lord regardless of the salary package.

Fr Fabian informed him that he had just received approval from the Bishop of Penang to open the Penang Office for Human Development (POHD). Joachim jumped at the possibility since he was familiar with the ministry, having followed his father around for many years as child. The apple didn't fall far from the tree.

To Joachim, money was the last thing on his mind, he was elated to accept the role at RM1,500 per month, even though it was a far cry from what he used to earn.

Due to certain circumstances at that point, his parents were not supportive of his decision to work for the church full-time. Joachim moved out of the family home. Fortunately, his best friend offered rent-free accommodation and Joachim stayed there for three years after which, he reconciled with his parents and returned home.

With Fr Fabian, the then-director of POHD, Joachim's journey with the Church began on a full-time scale. Fr Fabian was also instrumental in turning Joachim from a hot tempered, arrogant and angry young man to a more humble, forgiving, and gracious person.

"Fr Fabian also taught me the principles of serving — to serve the community in a way that preserves the dignity of the people receiving it instead of robbing them of it."

Over the decade that Joachim served in POHD, the staff and committed volunteers grew from one to 10. Bishop Antony Selvanayagam instructed him to identify the social needs of the community in the Penang Diocese and help the Church set up systems and structures to satisfy those needs, to the extent that was possible.

Of the many ventures formulated and executed under the ministry, the Lighthouse Drop-In Centre project to provide free-meals and services to the street people in the heart of Georgetown city, the first Joachim spearheaded, is still ongoing.

"In serving the poor, I discovered so much about myself. It was a humbling and transforming experience. Many of them became my friends. I also learned that some of the people were in such a position due to circumstances and to no fault of their own.

"I also learnt that many migrant workers and refugees were in a state of poverty, mainly because they were hoodwinked by their agents or employers. So, we eventually set up the Migrant Workers and Refugees Ministry under POHD and I organised a bunch of *pro bono* lawyers through the Catholics Lawyers Soci-

ety and human rights groups to provide legal support services to these foreigners."

Soon the ministry was assisting them with their numerous legal troubles, and this was Joachim's first exposure to legal work. Flyers were placed in churches and the information spread like wildfire as these foreigners had nobody to fight their cases for them. The ministry eventually took up 60 to 100 cases a year with the help of the *pro bono* lawyers.

Joachim would process a complaint received from a foreigner and assign the file to a *pro bono* lawyer, and he'd work with the lawyer as the cases went through the courts. Along the way, Joachim realised that Law came to him easily.

"Over time, I learnt how to draft some of the routine documents for the busy lawyers, so they just had to look it over, tidy it up before formally submitting it through their law firms. I also started reading the Employment Act and the Immigration Act and found it easy to understand."

The programme was going well enough that we began training people in other dioceses and Protestant churches on how to provide migrant and refugee services, particularly in case handling.

Joachim was later appointed by the Bishop's Conference as the Chairperson of the Episcopal Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants & Itinerants, covering migrant and refugees' services in the 11 dioceses in Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei.

In his fifth year of serving the Lord, an elderly lady who had observed his work, suggested he take up Law to be better equipped to help. When Joachim said he couldn't afford the tuition fees as his salary had only increased to some RM1,600, she offered him a full scholarship of about RM60,000 to do his A-levels, read Law and sit for the bar exam over a period of five years.

"I humbly declined her generous offer as it was a lot of money, but I did mention it to Fr Fabian, who was also my spiritual counsellor. He said, 'You give graciously, you must learn how to receive graciously'. If the Lord wants to bless you, He can, through any means or persons."

Joachim accepted the scholarship and completed his studies while working in the diocese.

After 10 years of serving in the diocese, Joachim and his wife Helena Michael moved to Kuala Lumpur so he could begin practising Law. Fast forward to today, with 10 years of legal practice under his belt, last month, Joachim started his law firm in Kuala Lumpur, Messrs Xavier & Koh Partnership.



“The dashing advocate gives God all the glory for everything in his life.”

"If man was unjust in his salary, God was never unjust. He has, over the years, more than made up for the small salary I earned as a church worker. You can never outgive the Lord".

"Again, money was not of the essence. Today, He has blessed me abundantly in many ways including making me debt-free, but the years I served the church full-time were the best and most fulfilling years of my life."

Through the years, Joachim has often wondered and questioned God's plan for his life but Fr Fabian would always guide him to put his whole trust in God's faithfulness and generosity. Joachim is now a witness and holds firm to God's promise in Jeremiah 29:11 as he continues to see it come to pass.

"It doesn't mean I am a saint. I have dropped the ball many times. I am a rascal and have no defence for my failings, which are many. I only seek His limitless mercy every day."

From the days of his pupillage with Messrs Chooi & Company to a partnership with Nadzar, Kuok, Puthuchery & Tan, and then to his law firm, doing *pro bono* cases is a must for himself and all lawyers working with him. "I don't want my career to be all about money and enriching myself".

"At any time, I have at least four *pro bono* cases on my desk. My employee lawyers are encouraged to have at least one open *pro bono* case on their portfolio at any one time. For now, I have bills and staff salaries to pay so I take up regular commercial cases that provide a good income to the firm. But I hope there comes a time when I can just work *pro bono* cases for the community.

Apart from his regular legal cases, Joachim also conducts monthly awareness sessions for young lawyers to be of service to the community through the KL Legal Aid Centre, an effort he strongly believes in and enjoys being involved with.



Joachim Xavier training young lawyers to be of service to the community through legal aid.

The WE is as important as the ME

I confess the hardest part of being a Catholic, for me, was the mandate that marriage meant procreation. As a kid, while other girls my age were marrying their Barbies to Ken, (polygamous fella that he was, he had multiple wives, being the only male doll), I was too busy lining up my stuffed animal menagerie by zoological classification.

While teenage girls antagonised about being asked out, or not, I was too busy learning the guitar chords to *Stairway To Heaven*, and trying to pitch my voice to Nancy Wilson of the rock band, *Heart*. I was not overly fussed to have had my first kiss only when I was in Form 4, nor was I bothered about pairing off with any of the boys in my co-ed school. In my opinion, boys made better friends because they didn't go on and on about having to lose weight!

It therefore came as a bit of a surprise (both to me and my friends) that I got married at the age of 31. I had hoped my weight and age would have made it harder for me to get pregnant, but without much effort, one year into marriage, I had conceived. And let me tell you, the best part of that was feeling it was my right to have a burger at 2.00am because hey, I was *pregnant*.

Apart from the medical aspect of it – was the foetus growing on track, was a heartbeat present – I had minimal maternal urges. In fact, it was my mother-in-law who was the excited one. I came back one day from work



WORD IN PROGRESS

Karen Michaela Tan

to be presented with a completely assembled nursery for the expected baby! I wasn't bothered about a nursery colour, or matching crib bumpers. I just wanted a healthy baby, gender notwithstanding.

Pregnancy-induced diabetes and pre-eclampsia necessitated a caesarean. For me, I was relieved I didn't pay for Lamaze classes only to have to be sliced open. The post-epidural experience was possibly one of the worst things I have ever experienced in my life. A reaction to the numbing drug left me shaking and teeth-chattering for hours, while my surgical incision burned with the wrath of a fallen angel.

I wanted to attribute my lack of maternal instinct to the fact I was forced to deliver two weeks early. Unstimulated by contractions and a natural delivery, my body refused to lactate, necessitating the use of a breast pump to try to extract the few drips of precious colostrum for the baby who just would not latch on to my grudging breasts.

I did not know it then, but I probably suffered from terrible but undiagnosed post-

partum depression. I would wake in the night, believing the baby was crying, only to find her asleep. But anticipating her waking and crying made it impossible for me to sleep peacefully, so I would spend the nights in dry-eyed wakefulness, just waiting for the time a wail would send me scurrying to make a bottle of formula.

Everything about motherhood was a chore for me. There were very few moments of that beatific peace one sees in the Madonnas painted with the child Jesus. I came to realise then that having a child does not make one a mother. Carrying a child in one's womb for nine months does not assure a smooth transition to motherhood.

Motherhood to me was aggravating, perplexing and a downright inconvenience. I remember ringing my late granduncle, Fr Ignatius Huan, one night, sobbing in frustration, and demanding answers to why God gave me a child but not the ability to cope with, and delight in, her. His answer was, "Sometimes God tests us to show us what we lack."

The baby turns 15 this year. I still struggle with patience, tenacity, gentleness and motherliness. I make a better business owner than I do a mother, and my executive decisions come more astutely than my motherly ones. Yet, at an age where teens shy away from contact with their parents, mine still wants to come on holiday with

me, and looks forward to little café dates together. Some nights, the teen comes into my room to cuddle and she tells me she wants to live with me until she is 'old'. When I tease her that I will probably be dead when she is old, she chastises me, and tells me she will always need me.

We have existential conversations about God, faith, outward signs of piety, inner conversions, and the struggle to find truth in a polarised world. I have told her of my continuing struggles with motherhood, and the new responsibilities of parenting a teenager, being very careful not to blame her for any of it. My inability to be a goo-goo-gaga mummy has given way to my ability to be the cool mother, who allows, nay, insists her friends come to our house to hang out, instead of loitering in malls and spending their allowances on inordinately expensive coffee.

What happened? I don't know. Maybe my relationship with my progeny is illustrative of the times and seasons all lives need to go through. Perhaps it's because I continued to hang on to the belief that "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Corinthians 12:9) because there was nothing else that I could do.

● **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

On February 10, parts of the ceiling of the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist in Kuala Lumpur collapsed. The incident happened around 2.30pm, just after the 1.00pm Friday Mass. Thankfully, nobody was injured in the incident. However, the altar area was damaged and a few pews destroyed. Archbishop Julian Leow's chair and the tombs of Anthony Soter Cardinal Fernandez and Archbishop Dominic Vendargon were not damaged.

I cringe to think that the incident could have caused fatalities. But at the same time, my heart praised the Almighty for protecting the people of God who had attended Mass at the Cathedral that afternoon. The incident also gave insights on crisis communication and human behaviour.

Chronology of events

At around 4.30pm, I received (via WhatsApp) a screenshot of a Facebook group called PINOY LAH which claimed that the ceiling of the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist had collapsed. The screenshot had photos of the incident. The sender asked me whether the news was true, considering that I am a parishioner there. When I saw the screenshot, I thought it must be fake news because there were no alerts in the chat groups of the Parish Pastoral Council, BECCOT and *Laudato Si'* Ministry that I am in. Since it was already time to knock off work, I decided to walk to the Cathedral to check it out myself.

As I was walking there, two friends from neighbouring parishes rang me to ask whether the ceiling had indeed collapsed. They too had received the news via WhatsApp. Both of them had attended the 1.00pm Mass at the Cathedral. Therefore, they were in a daze thinking that they had escaped death.

When I arrived at the Cathedral around 5.20pm, all its doors were closed. I flipped open one of the windows and peered in. There

was a gaping hole in the ceiling above the Divine Mercy wing. Debris had fallen all over the sanctuary. So, the news was true – the ceiling had indeed collapsed.

When I entered the Cathedral through the sacristy, I saw parish priest Fr Gerard Thera-viam inspecting the damages with a few other guys. After about 10 minutes, they told me to leave because they were going to inspect the ceiling and it would be dangerous for me to be there. As I left the Cathedral, I mentioned to seminarian Bro Selva who was based at the Cathedral, on the need for a communications plan to inform people quickly and accurately of what had happened. Otherwise, there would be speculation, rumours and untruths.

Muddled communication

At 6.18pm, a message dropped into the Parish Pastoral Council chat group urging parishioners to quickly gather at the Cathedral to clean the debris. The message read, "Everyone, we need manpower to help clean the debris. Appreciate if you can reach out to friends or anyone to go over to church to help." I thought that was strange because to begin with, there was no official statement from the parish to confirm that the ceiling had collapsed. Why suddenly were they asking parishioners to clean the debris? And how did the person who sent the message verify that the ceiling had indeed collapsed? Was she present when the incident happened? So many questions that nobody had answers to.

It was only at 6:58pm that Fr Gerard began posting in the chat groups and social media to inform that the ceiling had collapsed. His message confirmed that "the affected area was infested by termites." This was probably to quell speculation that the ceiling had collapsed due to the weight of the High Volume Low Speed (HVLS) fans that had been installed on the ceiling about a year ago. The message also informed that, upon advice from an engineer who had inspected the roof together with several others, the Divine Mercy wing would

be closed. Later on, I learned from Fr Gerard that he was out running an errand when the incident happened, and had rushed back to the Cathedral to inspect the damages before making an official statement.

Quick and accurate communication

Quick and accurate communication is vital in a crisis. In the case of the ceiling collapse, there was no need to wait for the engineer to inspect the roof and provide advice. Instead, a holding statement to confirm that the incident happened should have been quickly prepared. The statement should have been short but contained essential information. Here is an example: "At around 2.30pm today, a part of the ceiling at the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist collapsed. Thankfully, no one was injured in the incident. However, the altar area was damaged and a few pews destroyed. We are currently investigating the incident and will provide more updates soon."

The objective of the holding statement is to confirm that the incident had happened and to buy time whilst a thorough inspection is conducted. Therefore, it should have been sent out as soon as possible. Let's take a look at Malaysia Airlines' infamous flight MH370 that went missing on March 8, 2014 whilst on route between Kuala Lumpur and Beijing. When the plane didn't land in Beijing at 6.30am, in less than an hour, at 7.24am, Malaysian Airlines had already announced on its Facebook page that the plane was missing. That is how fast communication needs to work in a crisis.

In a crisis, it is important to quell speculation and rumours immediately. Otherwise, it could lead to untruths and finger pointing. This leads to my second point about human behaviour.

Outside information

When I exchanged notes with my fellow parishioners, many of them said that they first heard about the collapsed ceiling from people

in other parishes. Some of these 'informers' even came from other states and countries. The irony of it was that St John's parishioners had to hear about the incident from outsiders (once again, the importance of quickly issuing a holding statement is highlighted). This goes to show that many people want to be the first to break the news, regardless whether it is authentic or not. Perhaps they feel thrilled that they are the first to do so.

The act of sending unverified messages may have been happening since the emergence of instant messaging. I remember similar incidents where people had jumped the gun and sent or forwarded messages that certain members of the clergy (who were unwell and near death), had passed away, when actually, they were still very much alive! People who send such messages don't realise the consequences of their action.

Conclusion

The collapse of the ceiling has highlighted the importance of communication in a crisis. The March 5 issue of *HERALD* has an article, "Dear Father, are you prepared for a crisis?" Read it for pointers on how parishes may prepare for a crisis.

Now that a month has passed since the incident, Fr Gerard has provided regular updates about repairs and funding in the bulletin and social media. I hope this flow of communication and transparency continues. Once the ceiling is repaired and we move back into the Cathedral for Masses, I suppose we won't be taking our beloved Cathedral for granted anymore.

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



Fr Ron Rolheiser

A requiem for an older brother

Several weeks ago, my older brother George died. His death was somewhat of a shock, since he had been in relatively good health until a week before he died. His story is worth telling. No community, Mircea Eliade once said, should botch its deaths.

Although highly intelligent and motivated, George never got the chance for higher education. Our family was large and living on a small farm that could not support us. He, like other older members of our family, ended his schooling early to enter the work force to help support the family. In this, he was not unique. In the second-generation immigrant community where we grew up, a lot of his generation, both men and women, had to do the same. His story, like many others like him, was one within which he had to renounce his own dreams for the good of others.

His story is a story of dedication to faith, to family, to church, and to community. For the most part, he was conscripted by circumstance. Although he was very bright, perhaps the brightest in our family, circumstances dictated that he leave school after the eighth grade to help support the family. Consequently, he never really had a chance to do what he wanted in life, both in terms of a career and in terms of getting married

and having a family; and for him the great sacrifice wasn't career, but marriage.

George was never meant to be a life-long bachelor, but his life and commitments never quite allowed for marriage and led, instead, to a life of celibacy (in much the same way as this plays out for a priest or a vowed religious). Nevertheless, as for a vowed celibate, in the end, it served him well. He ended up with a very large family, that is, with people from all over the world considering him their brother, their mentor, their trusted friend. Since his death, there has been a flood of letters, emails, texts, phone calls, and messages from people everywhere, expressing what George meant to them. He died celibate, but he died a loved man.

However, all of this came at a price. Those of us who were privy to his private frustrations, know the price his soul paid for his dedication. He needed, at times, simply to vent at a safe place vis-à-vis the frustrations and tensions he was carrying, times when he couldn't fully emulate the patience and selflessness of Jesus. However, he always expressed his frustrations at a safe place, where his venting couldn't hurt anybody. He was always bigger than his frustrations. The deepest part of him was always gracious and laced with hu-

mour. He brought laughter into every room he entered.

Moreover, he was a man of faith and of the Church. The Church was an integral part of what he thought of as family and he gave himself over fully, both to the little rural faith community within which he lived and to the larger Church. For more than 20 years he helped lead a Lay Formation programme and assisted in the youth ministry in his home diocese. The dedication and talent he brought to those programmes were recognised by many. Indeed, at one point the local bishop came up to him and said, "George, I have only one question for you, do I ordain you now or do you want to go to the seminary for a few years first?" Ministry as a priest would have been a dream come true for him, but those of us who knew him also know why he turned down that invitation. He still had some commitments inside of family and community that he felt he could not abandon. That choice might be questioned; but again, it was made out of dedication and selflessness, putting the needs of others before his own.

In the *Gospel of John*, the author describes how, after Jesus was already dead, soldiers came and pierced His side with a lance and "immediately blood and water

flowed" out of His dead body. An interesting image! Life flowing out of a dead body! After Jesus died, His followers felt themselves nourished by Him in an even deeper way than during His life. From the spirit He left behind, they sensed a rich outpouring of life and cleansing.

George also left behind that kind of a spirit. Everyone who knew him will continue to drink from his spirit — his selflessness, his sacrificing his dreams for family and Church, and his willingness to carry frustration and tension for the sake of others. Not least, we will be nourished by his humour and the lightness he brought into a room, a quality that manifested both his intelligence and his zest for life.

He lived a good life. He died a loved man. He will be remembered fondly by a large family — for whom he sacrificed his own chance for marriage and having a family of his own.

● **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.ron-rolheiser.com.

Are your children away from the Church?

My favourite story in the whole Bible is Jesus' instruction, "Ask and you shall receive."

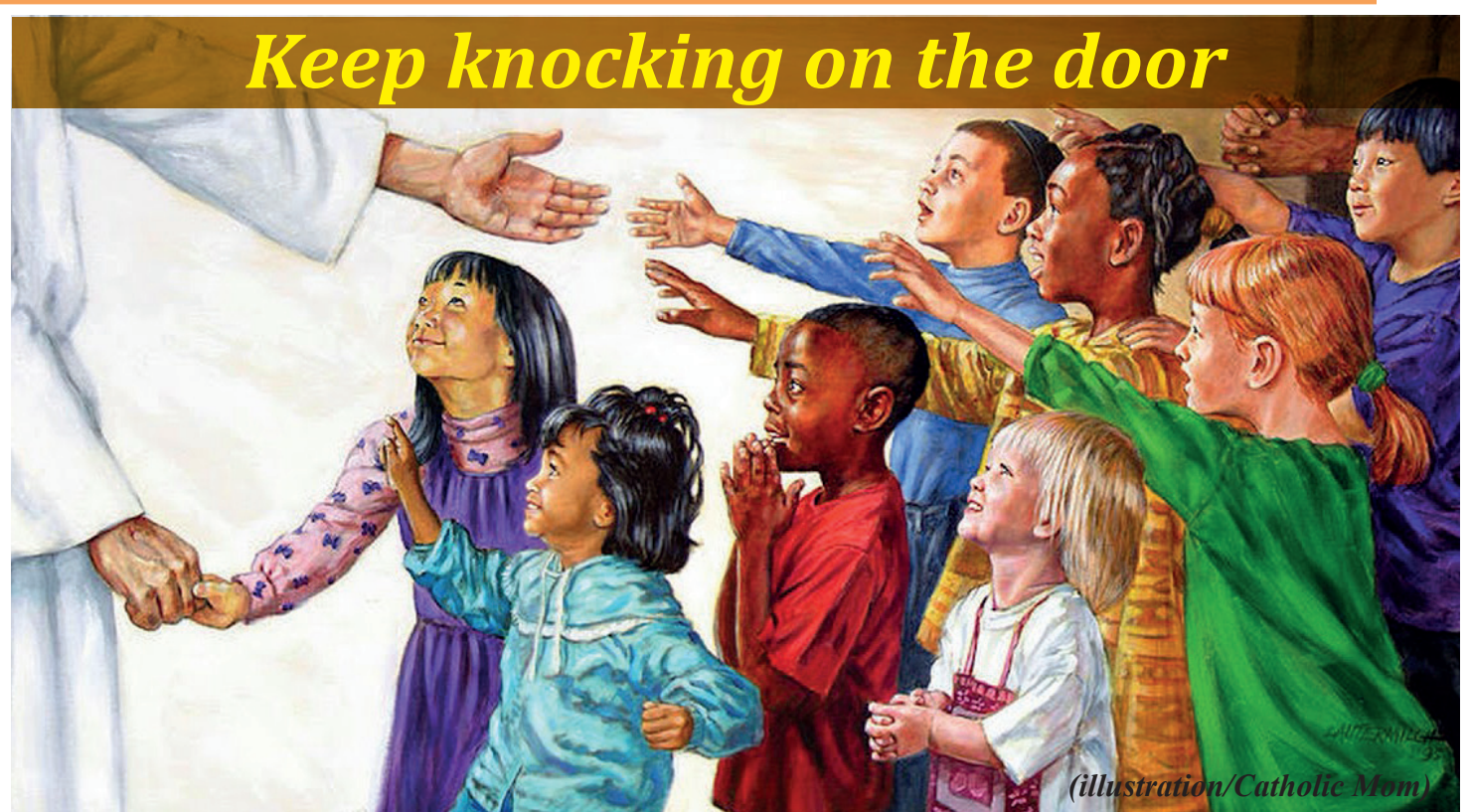
I know it to be true, and I've had the gift on many an occasion of praying and knowing when a prayer has been answered. It is a great comfort to me that God never tires of our prayers or our asking, even as I know He knows that I am a selfish creature of near-infinite needs and conflicting and constant wants. I knock often.

In my own life, I long for the faith of the woman who compared herself to the dogs and asked Jesus to let her eat the scraps from the floor, or the woman who haemorrhaged for years, and knew if she could just touch the tassel of His cloak, she would be healed. I want the absolute trust the soldier had at Christ's death, or that of the thief who stole heaven, or of Martha, who professed the resurrection of the dead before Christ raised her brother.

I want to be like the centurion who told Jesus He need not come to his home, but to only say the word so that all would be healed. I loved that phrase before Holy Communion. I took it into my heart, knowing it was true then and remains true now.

Each of these saints, named and otherwise, revealed a total trust in the person of Jesus and in His divinity. They petitioned in total humility for their needs, be it for a child, or for their health, or to relieve a long-time suffering or a recent affliction to a servant.

I wish my faith were the size of half a mustard seed. I don't need a mountain to move — just lots of molehills. Yet I know that mountains have moved in my life — whole mountain ranges of miracles to keep me alive for more than 50 years. Still, I come every day, hungry for more, asking for more, and wondering whether I'm coming only to be satisfied, or whether I'm



dissatisfied because I've tasted the infinite and thus cannot want less. I'd like to think it is a lifetime of knowing that God exists, that God is love, and that God hears and answers all our prayers always to our good.

I know sometimes it's that I need, I need more, and I want, whether or not it is ordered to my good. But I knock anyway because I'm stubborn, and if the answer is No, I want to know I asked.

I have children wandering, and I want them back. My heart aches each day, as I know they willingly seek to be elsewhere. And I wonder: What did we do? How could we have shown them more?

Such ruminations can lead either to

despair or to deeper prayer. I'm not sure if I'm tilling the earth of my soul, or just digging a grave, because I don't know how to take all this hurt and make a gift of it. I only know it hurts.

There isn't a formula for offering suffering or a ritual. It's an act of the will, and it's hard, because I can't see how my will (that they return to the Church) is not God's will too. As such, the impatient part of my soul says, "Well, Lord, if we're in agreement, why isn't their conversion happening already?"

Free will. God blessed us with free will. Part of me wishes otherwise.

I want God to take the pieces of my heart, which has broken each time one of them has

broken from the faith, and give a portion to them so they could have some of my mine.

You told us to knock. I am banging on the door. I also know that prayer, fasting and time will be required. In the meantime, I'm asking God to give them my scraps. Let them feast on it daily. Let them be filled and secure in that fullness, knowing it is always there for them. Let them feast until they begin to consider whether they'd like to try the food before it is dropped from the table. Please, God. Give them something to eat. —

By Maggie Green, NCRegister

<https://www.ncregister.com/blog/keep-knocking-on-the-door-for-fallen-away>

Little Catholics' Corner

Dear children,

The readings for the third Sunday of Lent help us think about our true desires. The first reading tells of how God satisfied the thirst of the Chosen People in the desert by telling Moses to strike a stone to get water. We can learn a lot from Moses. When you and I face an impossible situation, we can go to God and ask for His help. God can do impossible things.

The Psalm reminds us to let God open our hearts and flow through it. The second reading tells us again that God pours Himself into our hearts.

The Gospel is the story of the Woman at the Well (also known as the Samaritan woman), whom Jesus brings to new life through His mercy and compassion. It is worth noting Jesus chose to interact with a Samaritan (an outsider) and a woman. So this is also a good time to discuss how we treat outsiders.

Love
Aunty Gwen



**COMPLAIN
ELDERS
WALK
ROCK
GRUMBLE
WATER
DRINK
LIVESTOCK
STAFF
POUR
CHILDREN
NILE
DESERT
THIRST
MOSES**

Water from the Rock Word Search

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

The Woman at the Well Spot the Differences

Compare the picture on the top with the picture on bottom. Circle the 11 things that are different.



Seremban students on KL excursion



The children learning how to decorate their candles.

KUALA LUMPUR: The Ministry of the Poor from the Church of the Visitation, Seremban, organised an educational day trip to the city for 85 students on February 28.

The students gathered at church at 6.30am, had breakfast and departed for Kuala Lumpur. For many of them, it was their maiden trip outside Seremban. Their first activity for the day was a visit to Petrosains, the Malaysian science and technology museum at Suria KLCC. The children spent a few hours exploring various themed areas at the interactive discovery centre.

The students and their teachers then headed to the Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre where they were treated to lunch by the Archdiocesan Office for Human Development (AOHD). The AOHD director and volunteers were on hand to extend a warm greeting and have fellowship with the group.

Also present was Archbishop Julian Leow, who welcomed the group and shared how we are called to brighten the lives of others and to be a light to all we meet. The children, who came from different faiths and an economically weaker section of society, were excited to learn that the prelate was a native of Seremban and

cheered him on.

After lunch, the children dabbled in a candle-decorating activity and then took the candles they had decorated home.

As it was student Jessica's birthday, everyone born in February was invited to cut a cake.

The Archdiocesan Pastoral Institute director and Church of St Anthony assistant priest, Fr Eugene Benedict, shared a brief history of the parish – one of the oldest in the city, established in 1913. He also described the beautiful stained-glass windows in the church.

Fr Eugene talked about being kind to the environment and how we are all called to refuse, reduce and recycle. After a short prayer for everyone present and our planet, the group boarded their colourful buses and headed to the Aquaria and the gardens at KLCC for the rest of the evening.

The students, their teachers, and the organiser thanked the AOHD team and volunteers from the Churches of St Francis Xavier, Our Lady of Fatima, Sacred Heart Women's ministry, and the youngest volunteer Joshua, from the Jesus Caritas Youth Ministry, for their day well-spent in the city. — *By Marilyn Menezes Simon*

YOUTH

MARCH 12, 2023

Young people of Hope **REIGNITE** their Faith in Charity

KEPONG: Young people from the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur embarked on different acts of service and mission early February 18 morning for REIGNITE - A Pilgrimage of Charity and Faith for young people of Hope.

Members of the Malaysian Catholic Youth Ministers' Committee (MCYMC) took on the role of pilgrim guides to accompany each group. The KL Archdiocesan Single Adults and Youth Office (ASAYO) Pastoral team assisted the young pilgrims, who formed 27 groups targeting various clusters of those in need, in their preparation.

On the first leg of their journey, *Part One, Charity*: the young people took their respective pilgrim guides on their planned and prepared acts of service. It included time helping at the local soup kitchen, working at an animal shelter, visiting families in need, encountering people on the streets or the local market, and visiting the elderly and children in homes.

For *Part Two, Faith*: the pilgrim guides, in turn, took the young pilgrims on an excursion of faith to further delve into the topic of service, mission, and sacrifice. The young pilgrims were challenged to carry out acts of service for others while visiting various public spaces to encounter people beyond our typical churchgoers. Later, they reflected as a group on the sacrifice of others for them.

The pilgrims and guides made their way to the Church of Jesus Caritas for *Part Three, Hope*: where the groups unpacked and processed their experiences of the day, discovering the Hope we have in Christ together.

Archbishop Julian Leow presided over the Eucharistic celebration, with ASAYO Director and parish priest of Jesus Caritas, Fr. Simon Lau, and ASAYO Assistant Director, Fr. Michel Dass, concelebrating.

The bilingual Mass was animated by the young people of Jesus Caritas. In his homily, the prelate shared, "God is present in the world, not just in the tabernacle, we encounter God in the people we meet.... You (young people) went out today to be of service to the people we encounter — the lost, the last, the least, and the little. Perhaps, you received from those you wanted to serve. You were, in turn, given the opportunity to be generous, present, patient, courageous to speak..."

After Mass, the young pilgrims and friends, and the pilgrim guides, were invited to a time of fellowship and celebration. The young people

were asked to share their talents and testimonies about their experiences throughout the day.

The night concluded with those in attendance receiving a candle from the Archdiocesan Office for Human Development Lenten Campaign to send them on their Lenten journey. Everyone received the Light of Life from Archbishop Julian and were led to pray for their spirit of mission and service to continue, especially during this time of Lent.

REIGNITE is part of MCYMC's initiatives under the leadership of Archbishop Simon Poh. These MCYMC initiatives are aimed at reviewing and rediscovering the needs of young people and ways to grow in accompaniment to our young faithful. REIGNITE included Youth ministers from the nine arch/dioceses as pilgrim guides. The process undertaken by the MCYMC will continue for two years, 2023-2024, culminating with the Malaysian Young People Assembly in 2025, followed by the Pan Malaysia Pastoral Convention (PMPC) in 2026. — *By Jacinta Fernandez, ASAYO KL*



TAMPIN YOUTH VISIT THE INFIRM



TAMPIN: The youth ministry of the Church of St John Marie Vianney embarked on an external Lenten initiative this year.

On every Sunday of Lent, the young people will engage in missionary work in their community.

This incorporates the corporal works of mercy, which focuses on other people's material and physical necessities. Eighteen young people signed up for this Lenten mission project.

On February 26, the youth began their first missionary work of "Visiting the Sick" by visiting those in hospitals and the homebound because the touch of a hand, eye contact, and a hug are great healers of the human spirit.

Before the youth carpooled to visit their homebound parishioners, the youth leader hosted a briefing session at the Casa De Vianney Hall to highlight the significance of their missionary work.

Upon arrival, they were greeted with warm welcomes and huge grins. The youngsters recited a decade of the Rosary at each home and concluded with a Prayer for the Sick. They also stayed on to chat with the families for a while. The mission took about two hours to complete.

The first Lenten missionary work taught the youths the value of visiting the sick and spending time conversing with them, encouraging them to combat their ailments and recover quickly. — **By Jeyshiella Benchman Amos**

Pope impressed with new interactive youth Bible

PETALING JAYA: The Bible Society of Malaysia General Secretary, Rev Mathew K. Punnoose, represented Malaysia in a six-person delegation invited to a private audience with Pope Francis at the Vatican on February 16.

The audience was Pope Francis' way of lending his support for the efforts of the global fellowship, United Bible Society (USB).

An interdenominational organisation, USB was founded in 1946 and operates in over 240 countries and territories. It comprises over 300 Bible societies from around the world, and their core function is to translate the Word of God into the local and indigenous languages throughout the world.

Rev Mathew, a member of the Fellowship Council of USB and coordinator of Asia Pacific Catholic Affinity of Bible Societies in Asia Pacific, said the meeting was to strengthen ties between the Catholic Church and further enhance the existing relationship and agreements for translation and look at agreements that need to be reviewed.

Vatican News reported that during the meeting with a UBS delegation at the Vatican, the Pope reflected on the spread of the Word of God as recounted in the Acts of the Apostles.

An ordained priest of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church for over 29 years, Rev Mathew had two weeks from the date the invitation arrived from the Dicastery for Promoting

Christian Unity, to pack his bags and be at the papal palace for the meeting.

With him in the audience were Chairperson of Fellowship Council of USB, Elaine Duncan, Emeritus President of USB, Rev Dr Robert Cunville, and Secretary General of United Bible Societies, Rev Dirk Givers, Director of Church Relations at United Bible Societies, Dr Rosalee Velloso Ewell, and Executive Director of Bible Ministry and Translation at United Bible Societies, Dr Alexander Schweizer.

During the meeting, Rev Mathew presented the Holy Father with the latest Youth Bible titled *Identity Identified*, first launched in Malaysia during the solemn declaration of the Church of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam as a Minor Basilica on Jan 9.

In collaboration with Bible Societies in Asia Pacific and the Catholic Bishops Conference of Asia, the interactive and futuristic Bible was in the works for five years. The process to compile this Bible was dubbed "Come Follow Me" and aimed at helping youth facing identity challenges and guiding them in finding who are they in God and their purpose for being in this world.

The Bible has 24 inserts (issues) and highlights key passages in the New Testament. It is designed to help youths navigate life's challenges while understanding and securing their unique identity in Jesus. The Bible also comes with QR codes that when scanned, lead to a series of videos created by others struggling with similar



Rev Mathew K. Punnoose presents Pope Francis with a copy of the new Youth Bible, *Identity Identified*, during a private audience at the Vatican on February 16, 2023.

issues and how they found ways to cope. Bishops, priests, and laity have also penned several articles addressing young people's concerns.

This Youth Bible is produced based on the Pope's desire enshrined in Pope Paul VI's *Dei Verbum*, and Pope Francis' *Evangelii Gaudium* and *Christus Vivit*, which relates to Bible engagement with youths.

On how he felt meeting the Pope for the first time, Rev Mathew said it was an awesome and blessed experience.

"The Pope was so gentle, so pastoral, so caring and so understanding. He endorsed the work of the Bible societies around the world, collaborating with the Catholic Church.

"When I presented the Bible, the Holy Father asked, in English, for clarification, if the Bible was designed in collaboration with the Catholic Bishops Conference of Asia and the Catholic Biblical Federation. To which I answered 'Yes'.

"The Holy Father was impressed when I showed and explained how interactive the Youth Bible is."

The English edition of *Identity Identified* is currently available around the world and will be promoted at the upcoming World Youth Day in Lisbon, Portugal. The respective countries are working on translating it to their native languages. On the home front, the Bahasa Malaysia version is in the works, following which, an Iban edition.

Within the three-day trip, Rev Mathew met with the Ambassador of Malaysia to the Holy See, Westmoreland Edward Palon, and Fr George Harrison. He also had a meeting with members of said Dicastery.

—**By Gwen Manickam**



Members of the United Bible Societies during a private audience with the Pope.

India's Catholic hermit nun dies

JUNAGADH: Sister Prasanna Devi, a Catholic hermit nun who was an inspiration for many, especially Hindus, died February 27 in the western Indian state of Gujarat. She would have turned 89 on March 13.

Sr Devi had been suffering from age-related illnesses for the past few years.

The death occurred at 2.33pm at the parish presbytery of St Ann's Catholic Church in Junagadh, a town in Gujarat where she had been staying for nearly a decade.

Carmelite Fr Vinod Kanatt, the parish priest who looked after the nun, said that she was discharged from Christ hospital, Rajkot, two days earlier. She was taken to the hospital on Feb 3 after her health deteriorated.

The funeral took place on March 1 in Junagadh. Sr Devi had lived four decades among lions, panthers and other wild animals deep inside the Girnar mountain range, the only home for Asiatic lions in India.

The nun does not belong to a particular religious order. She had chosen the contemplative life of an ascetic, devoting her life to God and sharing Christian blessings with thousands. She was the only female member of the Syro-Malabar Church to choose such a life.

She had spent time with two religious congregations initially. When she was 22, she joined the Little Sisters of the Sacred Heart, a contemplative order founded by French hermit and martyr, Fr Charles de Foucauld. Sr Devi left without taking vows because the congregation wound up its operations in India in 1961 when she was still in the novitiate.

Later, she spent two years with the Benedictine Sisters in Bangalore to observe the congregation and explore the possibility of joining them. She left because she felt the urge to become an ascetic.

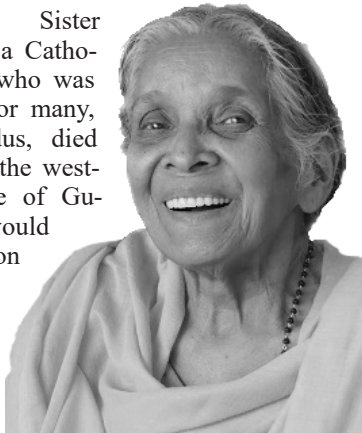
In September 1974, she began living deep inside the Girnar mountain range.

Many mistook the Catholic nun for a Hindu sanyasi because of her dress and lifestyle.

In an earlier interview, she explained that even though she looked like a Hindu ascetic, she shared about her Catholic identity and the love of Jesus Christ with everyone who visited her.

As she developed health problems, Bishop Jose Chittooparambil of Rajkot asked her to move to the Junagadh parish house in September 2014.

The prelate said Sr Devi had shown "an ideal way" to introduce Christ's message to people in India. — *Matters India*



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In Ever Loving Memory of Our Dear Amma



A. Agnes Rajaratnam
08-08-1929 ~
17-03-2009

*You left me beautiful memories,
Your love is still my guide,
And though I cannot see you I feel you by my side...*

Fondly remembered by
Children / Spouse
Sylvester / Mary @ Queenie
Isabel/Andrew
Elias/Roseline
Jude/Arasu

Grandchildren
Priscilla, Naomi, Aaron,
Arnold & Trice, In-Laws
& loved ones.

6th Anniversary In Precious Memory of Our Beloved



SYLVESTER RAJARATNAM
26/10/1948 ~ 03/03/2017

*Our Darling Athan & Anyah
It has been six years
And we miss you so much.
You were the most important
Part of our life.
And we treasure the memories
Of everything we shared together.*

Deeply loved and forever cherished by:
Wife: Fatimah Mary
@ Queenie Arokiasamy
Children: Priscilla Ann Raj &
Aaron Jeevan Raj,
In-Laws, Grandchildren & Loved Ones.

In Loving Memory of 14th Anniversary 18th Anniversary



P A Francis

Departed: 09-12-2009

*I am the resurrection and the Life,
he who believes in Me will live,
even though he dies — Jn. 11:25.*

Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May their souls rest in peace. Amen.

Fondly missed by sons and loved ones.



Maria Letitia Emmanuel

Departed: 13-03-2005

24th Anniversary In Loving Memory of John Toh Bah Bah



Departed: 15 March 1999

*24 years have gone by in a blink of an eye.
We love and miss you.*

Deeply missed and fondly remembered by family, loved ones and friends.

16th Anniversary In Loving Memory of



Josephine Agnes Harding (nee Nonis)
Departed: 18-03-2007

*In our hearts you will always live
your Love, your Laughter,
And your Smile
are forever imprinted on our minds.*

Fondly remembered by husband John and all her family.
*Eternal rest grant unto her, O Lord,
and may your perpetual light shine upon her.*

Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Matthew 11:28-30

43rd Anniversary In Ever Loving Memory of



Mr. S. Anthony Samy
From the Lord: 8th August 1931

Returned to the Lord: 10th March 1980

*We treasure your sacrifices and wisdom.
Highly appreciate your invaluable guidance.
We greatly miss your presence.
Forgetting you never.
Appa, you will remain in our hearts forever.*

Eternal Rest Grant Unto Him,
O Lord And Let Perpetual Light Shine Upon Him. May his soul rest in peace. Amen.
Always remembered and not forgotten by Loved Ones.

4th Year Anniversary of a Loving Wife, Mother and Grandmother



Susan D. E Sundram
19th July 1949 –
10th March 2019

*"In Life
We Loved You Dearly,
In Death We Love You Still,
In Our Hearts,
You Hold A Place
No One Else Will Ever Fill"
"Strength and dignity
are her clothing,
she opens her mouth with wisdom,
and the teaching of kindness
is on her tongue.
"Many women
have done excellently,
but you surpass them all."
Proverbs 31:25-29*

Deeply missed and lovingly remembered by her Husband, Children, Sons & Daughters-in-law and Grandchildren.

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Catechesis must also evangelise

NEW YORK: At the same time the US bishops look to revitalise the nation's faith through different initiatives related to encounter and evangelisation, Fr Daniel Mahan wants to utilise the same concept to enhance the catechetical processes for young people, what he calls "evangelising catechesis."

As more and more young people in the US leave the Church, Mahan said there's a need to supplement the catechetical texts with effective presentations of the faith that win their hearts, and memorable experiences that create an encounter with the Lord.

"We want to make sure we're aware of the fact that we can't simply teach the faith out of a book," Mahan said. "Our books have to be top notch for sure, but we have to be teaching the faith in an authentic manner. We have to do that in ways that spark the imagination."

Some of those ways, he added, could be taking young people on pilgrimages to holy places, visiting churches that have historical importance and architectural history, and participating in events that bring together people of different cultures and walks of life for the same purpose.

"These are all things that could be done now that we could be doing more of," Mahan said.

Mahan was appointed February 27 to become the first director of the Institute on the Catechism launched by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) in November 2022. In the role, he will look to assist the bishops and local catechetical leaders implement an "evangelising catechesis." He begins on July 1.



There's a need to supplement the catechetical texts with effective presentations of the faith.

The institute is couched within the USCCB Secretariat for Evangelisation and Catechesis, and within that the Subcommittee on the Catechism. It was created to re-implement and re-invigorate the subcommittee's mandate to respond to the nation's catechetical landscape by bringing together bishops, diocesan staff, Catholic publishing houses and catechetical consultants, according to the USCCB.

Mahan put the onus for the rise in young people leaving the Church on an ever-secular culture, saying it "wraps its tentacles around young people and pulls them in an opposite direction" from the faith. He noted that the way to address that is through creating the aforementioned experiences of encounter, but also through the way the faith is taught

in the classroom.

In addition to the text, Mahan highlighted the need to utilise digital media for religious instruction that connects the material to current events. Beyond that, he said, catechists need to teach with a passion that touches the hearts of the students, which traditionally "has defined the best of catechesis."

"That personal encounter with the Lord is the desired outcome of our catechesis and we want to pay attention to that and make sure we're doing the best we can to make sure we learn from the best practices, and we really do see it as our goal in catechetics not simply to get to the end of the lesson, but to win hearts over to the Lord," Mahan said.

Mahan brings to the Institute on the Cat-

echism more than 20 years of experience reviewing catechetical texts. In recent years, he has been a part of the core group that laid the groundwork for bishops to envision the institute and helped put together its inaugural event in November.

He has been a parish priest in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, where he was ordained, since 1988. Of the appointment, Bishop Frank Caggiano of Bridgeport, chair of the Subcommittee on the Catechism, said Mahan brings a "deep understanding of the Catechism, along with the invaluable, long-time expertise of teaching it to the faithful in a meaningful way."

Mahan said his pastoral experience is key to how he views catechesis, having heard for years from parents concerned that their children have slipped away from the faith, and that their grandchildren won't be raised in the faith, as well as seeing first-hand what does and doesn't work.

"Whenever we try to express the faith in ways that are experiential, ways that are tactile, ways that involve the whole person, we see very positive results," Mahan explained. "We see that the parents and their children get it," noting the power of things like Corpus Christi and Rosary Processions.

"I have seen that expression of awe and wonder in the eyes of children, and I see how that has an impact upon their parents," he continued. "Their parents suddenly want to be more interested in the faith. They want to learn more. They want to make sure that they're supportive." — **By John Lavenburg, Crux**

Human fraternity for world peace and living together

KANGAR, Perlis: Rt Rev Sebastian Francis, Bishop of Penang, met the Perlis State government officials for lunch and a meeting at the Menteri Besar's office on February 28.

This cordial meeting was to foster better understanding and fraternity in line with the Abu Dhabi Declaration on Human Fraternity dated Feb 4, 2019, where Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmad al-Tayyeb, invited all persons who have faith in God and faith in human fraternity to unite and work together. Accompanying the bishop for the meeting was the vicar general Msgr Henry Rajoo.

The Speaker of DUN Perlis, YB Tuan Russele Eizan, in his opening address spoke on the need to instil in the rakyat a solat or prayerful attitude, where prayers are part of daily activities that will guide individuals to lead good and decent lives. This would remove the need for many laws to govern human conduct as a prayerful community will practise goodwill, harmony, and good works.

Bishop Sebastian congratulated the new government and is fully confident they will rule with the welfare and well-being of the people in mind. The prelate added that he hopes and prays the Malaysian political scenario will be clean, fair, free from corruption, and all working toward a full economic recovery.

Bishop Sebastian is also optimistic that this friendship silaturrahim will continue and grow closer because we are all brothers and sisters in humanity.

The PAS Ulama Syura Council Tuan Guru, Ustaz Hj Ahmad Ali, also spoke on the need for



From left: Msgr Henry Rajoo, Bishop Sebastian Francis, Ustaz Hj Ahmad Ali and YB Fakhru Anwar.

different faiths to meet one another so we will understand and identify with each other instead of getting misleading and incorrect information from other sources. We must binalah kawan bukan bina lawan i.e. make friends, not opponents.

Bishop Sebastian shared that the Catholic Community of Perlis is centred around Kangar and Arau. There are also many Catholics from Sabah and Sarawak studying at various educational universities in the northern state.

On education, the Church first started an English language class in 1950. It later evolved into the Stella Maris primary and secondary school in Kangar.

The Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together was also presented to the Perlis State officials — **By Christopher Kushi**

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