

# A man of the Church



**VATICAN: March 13, 2023** marked the tenth anniversary of Pope Francis' election to the papacy. Signals that his papacy would be different started the moment he stepped out on the balcony of St Peter's Basilica ten years ago. He was not wearing a red, ermine-trimmed cape, and he bowed as he asked the crowd to pray that God would bless him.

Pope Francis also told us early in his papacy that he is "a man of the Church." His mission is to serve the Church, not to be served by it. Those who fear he will make changes that are untrue to the Church's authentic teachings and traditions should have no fear. Yes, Pope Francis knows how to rock the boat, and to scrape away the barnacles that are attached to the barque of St Peter, but he has promised not to interfere with the essential mission and identity of the Church he was chosen to serve

as its chief shepherd and teacher.

We also know that Pope Francis has deep compassion for the poor, the migrants, and those who have been relegated to the margins (the peripheries) of our society. We know that he grieves for families who are suffering from the horrors of war and injustice. And we know that this Holy Father can be intolerant of what he considers rigid or ideological positions that build walls instead of bridges among God's people.

For a decade, even when discussing the internal workings of the Vatican, Pope Francis has insisted the Church is not the Church of Christ if it does not reach out, sharing the "joy of the Gospel" and placing the poor at the centre of its attention.

His decision not to live in the Apostolic Palace, his invitations to Vatican trash collectors and gardeners and other employees to join him for his daily morning Mass, his insistence on going to the Italian island of Lampedusa to celebrate Mass and pray for migrants who had drowned in the Mediterranean, captivated the attention of the media.

But not everyone was pleased with the seeming ease with which he set aside pomp and protocol. And tensions within the Catholic community grew as he expressed openness to LGBTQ Catholics and to those living in what the Church considers irregular marriage situations.

In one of his first major documents, the apostolic exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel*, he laid out a programme for his papacy, looking inside the Church and outside at the world to see what needed to be done to "encourage and guide the whole Church in a new phase of evangelisation, one marked by enthusiasm and vitality."

Pope Francis has been laying the foundation for the new synod process since the beginning of his pontificate, said Cardinal Blase J. Cupich of Chicago. "There's an organic whole to all of this."

"I just wonder if, from the very beginning, he had in his mind that this would be the trajectory of his pontificate, and the synod on synodality I think is, in some way, the opportunity for him to pull everything together," he

said. "There are people who want him to go faster, but he wants things to be held together and the Church to be held together."

Asked what he thought was the most significant aspect of Pope Francis' pontificate, the cardinal cited his predecessor, the late Cardinal Francis E. George, who participated in the 2013 conclave, and said the best description of Pope Francis was "He's free."

"He's free in the sense of wanting to listen to different voices in the life of the Church," Cardinal Cupich said. "He's free in being imaginative, but also he has the kind of freedom that really allows him to be joyful in this ministry."

"John Paul II told us what we should do. Benedict told us why we should do it. And Francis is saying, 'Do it,'" the cardinal said. Pope Francis is leading by example in how he cares for the poor, sees God at work in people's real lives and reaches out to people often overlooked by the Church.

"I think history will look back on this pontificate as historic, as pivotal in the life of the Church," Cardinal Cupich said. —Agencies

For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), 10 and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Eph 5:8-9



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# HERALD

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## COMMENTARY

# Pope reflects on women's leadership

A new book on women's leadership begins with a preface by Pope Francis.

Entitled *More Women's Leadership for a Better World: Caring as the Engine for Our Common Home*, the book is a joint research project of the Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice Foundation and the Strategic Alliance of Catholic Research Universities (Sacru). Fifteen academics from 10 universities in eight countries offered their contributions in each of their field of study.

While the Pope's entire preface is worth reading, here are five particular comments he made that are worth pointing out:

*As I said in my speech at the conclusion of the Synod of Bishops of the Pan-Amazon Region in October 2019: "We have not yet understood what the woman signifies in the Church, and we limit ourselves only to the functional aspect [...] But the role of women in the Church goes well beyond functionality. And more work must continue on this."*

The Church has rich writings on women, such as Pope John Paul II's *Letter to Women* and his apostolic letter *Mulieres Dignitatem*. But as Pope Francis points out here, there is still much more to explore and develop about the theology of woman and the value we bring to the Church and to the world by virtue of our womanhood. It is not simply what we do, in terms of tasks and roles, but who we are as women and what the feminine represents in the Church and the world that matters. We can look forward, in time, to more theological and spiritual reflection in the Church about womanhood.

*Women's thinking is different from men's, they are more attentive to protecting the environment, their gaze is not turned to the past but to the future. Women know that they give birth in pain to achieve a great joy: to give life and open vast, new horizons. That is why women want peace, always.*

This comment speaks to the power of motherhood — whether biological or not — and the fact that women tend to be oriented towards peace-making. Women care about the future because that is where their children will dwell, and where others will flourish — or not. There is a reason mothers are particularly good at driving change — they are committed to making the world a more just and peaceful place for future generations to thrive.

*Women know how to express both strength and tenderness, they are good, qualified, prepared, they know how to inspire new generations (not only their children). It is right for them to be able to express these skills in every sphere, not just within the family, and to be remunerated equally with men for equal roles, commitments and responsibilities. The still existing gaps are a serious injustice.*

These gaps the Pope speaks of are truly an injustice because all spheres of life are made more human by women's strength, tenderness, care, and forward-thinking. Women bring specific qualities to all places where humans live and work — whether in the home, the office, the Church, or the public square.

*Women make the world more beautiful, they protect it and keep it alive. They bring the grace of renewal, the embrace of inclusion and the courage to give themselves to others. Peace, then, is born of women, it rises and is rekindled by the tenderness of mothers. Therefore, the dream of peace becomes reality when we look to women.*

Again, the Pope here emphasises the virtues that women and mothers possess that lead to a more loving society and more peaceful world. We look to women for peace, for harmony, for an example of what it is to make a gift of self to others.

*Unfortunately, even today, some 130 million girls in the world do not go to school. There is no freedom, justice, integral development, democracy and peace without education.*

This very pointed comment, given at the end of the Pope's preface, speaks to an ongoing injustice in the world which the Pope clearly believes is essential to highlight.

Educating women and girls is not simply for their own betterment — which is a worthy enough reason itself — but for entire generations. Women, whether they work inside or outside the home, are the primary teachers of their children, the partners of their husbands, the healers, teachers, coordinators, planners, facilitators, and leaders in communities of every kind. They pass on the faith, the traditions, and the values, forming hearts of minds of generations to come. When women and girls are refused an education, freedom, justice, development, democracy and peace around the world are indeed compromised and suppressed. — **By Zoe Romanowsky, Aleteia**

## The one who could see

*What do we see?*

People see, and yet they don't see. The first people to do this are the disciples (John 9:2). I imagine the disciples out for a walk with Jesus. A wonderful day to be alive. A great day to have an intellectually stimulating discussion with their rabbi. And then they happen to come upon a man who has been blind from the day he was born. The disciples seize the moment, pose a question: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" And this is the first instance of it: people seeing, and yet not seeing. The disciples look at the blind man, a beggar, because there is no commission for the visually handicapped, there is no Braille, there is no job-training. They look at the blind man and see a theological conundrum. They look at the man and they see a question of sin and punishment.

Now, Jesus looks at the man and He sees something else altogether. Jesus looks at the man, and He sees an opportunity to show the world just what God is up to. Jesus looks at the man, and He knows the goodness of God can be revealed through Him.

And then Jesus, casually, as if He does this sort of thing every day, spits on the ground, makes mud with His spit, and He rubs the mud on the man's eyes. He sends the man to a pool called "Sent," with in-

structions to wash. The man returns, and he is no longer blind.

Suddenly the man is able to see the world as it is: fluffy clouds. Green buds appearing on trees. Trees moving, just a bit, from the stiff breeze, but the sun still warm on his face. He is a man who can see.

But the problem continues, of seeing and not seeing.

*What do we see?*

First, the neighbours. They are all abuzz. They see the man, but they are convinced it cannot be him — because the man they know is blind, the man they know is a beggar, the man they know cannot see. This man can see. "Who are you again?" they ask. "It's me!" he replies. "Well, you look like him, but — no, no, really, who are you again?" They look at him and they see someone else. When they finally see that it is, really, truly, honest-to-Godly him, then they want to know the dirt. "Come on, how did it happen?"

"Jesus made mud with His spit and put it on me and sent me to Sent to wash." (I think that's something like saying, "He sent, sent, Sent me!")

*What do we see?*

The next ones are the Pharisees, the religious leaders. They're the upright ones. They see everything in terms of who is in and who is out, who is keeping the

Law, and who is breaking it. They see the man who can see, and they see: evidence. Evidence against Jesus, who is already on their radar for the signs He has been performing, signs of God's goodness. But they don't see them that way. They see someone who is a nonconformist, who performs miracles, and therefore is doing work, on the Sabbath. They see someone who doesn't obey the Law the way they want Him to. They barely acknowledge the formerly blind man...they immediately move on to what he means, what he signifies to them. He ceases to be a person. He becomes a tool, a device they will use. He becomes an issue.

The disciples look at the blind man and they see a question of sin.

Jesus looks at the blind man and He sees an opportunity for God's goodness to be revealed.

The Pharisees look at the blind man and they see an opportunity to make trouble for Jesus.

Even the blind man's parents don't seem to be able to see their own son. They look at him, and they see the loss of their place in the community, the threat of being kicked out of their synagogue.

*What do we see?*

The man who was born blind is given sight. He is also given faith, but it takes him a while to find it. By the end of our passage, after having navigated all these

## Reflecting on our Sunday Readings

with Fr Ravi Alexander OFM Cap

### 4th Sunday of Lent (A)

**Readings: 1 Samuel 16:1, 6-7, 10-13;**

**Ephesians 5:8-14;**

**Gospel: John 9:1-41**

people who see him as a metaphor, as a symbol, he knows one thing. He can literally see now, and he's glad. And so, he proclaims strongly, "Lord, I believe." And he recognises Jesus for who He is — the Light of the World.

*What do we see?*

Do we see people who look like sinners to us? Or do we see people whose struggles are unimaginably hard?

Do we see opportunities to trick and trap one another, prove ourselves right? Or do we see opportunities for God's goodness to be revealed?

Do we see the transformation that is possible when we let the Light of the World shine in our lives? Do we see the healing that is possible when we become bearers of that light to a world filled with darkness?

This is our call as members of the Church.

**Fr Ravi Alexander OFM Cap is currently serving in the Diocese of Sibu.**



## IMPORTANT DATE

March 25:

**Annunciation of the Lord, solemnity**

*The practice of covering crosses and images in the church may be observed, if the Bishops' Conference so decides. Crosses remain covered until the end of the celebration of the Lord's Passion on Good Friday, but images remain covered until the beginning of the Easter Vigil.*



### KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

#### Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

##### March

**24-25 PMPC Meeting with Working Committee**

**29 Bishops' Staff Meeting – College General, Penang**



### PENANG DIOCESE

#### Diary of Bishop Sebastian Francis

##### March

**19 Parish Feast Day Mass at 9.00am – Church of St Joseph, Batu Gajah**

**26 Installation of Parish Priest & Mass at 8.00am – Church of Our Lady of Good Health, Parit Buntar**

**28-29 Clergy Monthly Recollection**

**28 Chrism Mass & Priestly Ordination of Deacon Raymond Raj & Deacon Desmond Jansen at 7.00pm**

**29 Bishops' Staff Meeting at 9.00am – College General Major Seminary, Penang**



### MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

#### Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

##### March

**24 Outdoor Way of the Cross – MAJODI Centre Plentong followed by Mass**

**25 Diocesan Cultural and Arts Body Meeting – Church of St Louis, Kluang**

**29 Seminary Staff Meeting – College General Penang**

**31 Caritas IDCS – Good Shepherd Catholic Seminary, Melaka**

# Caritas Malaysia making inroads with local government

KUALA LUMPUR: Keenly aware that collaboration and mutual support are imperative in humanitarian-type works, the newly appointed Executive Secretary of Caritas Malaysia has lost no time in promoting Caritas and its works to our local government.

Eta Ting, who took on the role of executive secretary recently, made an official courtesy visit to the Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture, Yang Berhormat Dato Sri Tiong King Sing, at his office on March 6.

During the meeting, Eta explained to the minister that "Caritas Malaysia (CM) is a Catholic humanitarian organisation on a worldwide mission to assist the poor and disaster victims, like those afflicted by flood in our country."

Caritas Internationalis, based in Rome, has seven regional secretariat offices. CM is one of the 25 member organisations of Caritas Asia Regional Secretariat.

YB Dato Sri Tiong was impressed that Caritas is widely established in 162 coun-



Caritas Malaysia Executive Secretary Eta Ting with YB Dato Sri Tiong King Sing, Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture.

tries and also has a mission to be a peace builder all out to build a community of love far and near.

The minister has assured support and looks forward to assisting CM in any up-

coming conferences to be held in Malaysia with the ministry's resources and to welcome any international members of Caritas visiting our uniquely rich, hospitable, multi-ethnic country.



## Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #124

**F12**  
NEWS  
UPDATES

### Greetings, dear People of God

The floods have hit us again. Four states have been badly affected. Exams disrupted. More than 50,000 were displaced. Damages, loss of lives and livelihood were recorded. Lent reminds us to do more, to love more and to give more.

**Surviving Times.** People rise to the occasion. Kudos to the State Disaster Response Teams, the parish and diocese Caritas and the many groups and individuals. Strangely, sicknesses, calamities and disasters are colour blind. The best in us is seen at times like this. People walk the extra mile to help each other. A fellow patient watches out for his neighbour who is in the same ward. No colour, no race nor religion matters. Neighbourliness, solidarity in suffering and compassion make us caring people. Our hearts are made for love, and to love.

### A thought for the week: The Little or The Important?

In a classroom full of students, a professor asks: Let's suppose that you had RM86,400 and someone stole RM10 from you, would you throw away the remaining RM86,390 that you still have and try and get your RM10 back? Or would you just let it go?

All of the students said that they would let it go.

Then the professor told them this... everyone has 86,400 seconds to live every single day and this time is far more valuable than money. You can always work for more money, but once a second passes, you can never get it back. Every time someone upsets us, it probably took 10 seconds, so why do we throw away the other 86,390 worrying or being upset about it?

*The lesson from the professor:* This is our mistake. Learn to let the little things

go and focus on the important things in life. Focus on what is in hand, not on what is gone.

*Great food for thought!*

### Announcements for this Week

**1. The Pre-Synod Consultations** are over. The Synod reports were summarised from diocese level to the Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei conference level, and now, at continental level. It is not just another survey or exercise or meeting. It is towards being a synodal church-marked by listening, discerning and deciding together. *Spirituality, ecclesiology, structures and systems must change, to ready ourselves to become the Church that is led by the Holy Spirit.*

**2. Discover Your Vocation**, calling all single women, age 18-50. It is a special lay vocation called the Auxiliaries. Conducted by the Auxiliaries of KL Archdiocese at Majodi, on **April 29-30**, begins at 3.00pm on Saturday and ends at 4.00pm on Sunday. Contact Clara Paul (012-2509527) for more info.

**3. Life in the Spirit Seminar** will be held March 31 - April 2 at the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Johor Bahru. Scan the QR code to register.



### This week's Question and Query. The Q asks: I thought the Synod is over. What is the Synodal Church?

Cardinal Charles Bo of Myanmar called for a change of attitude to prepare for the way of being Church. He offered the word L.E.N.T for this attitudinal change:

**L = Letting Go.** If this journeying together is to be meaningful, we need to learn how to let go of all that prevents us

from being that synodal church as shedding is a pre-requisite for growth.

**E = Encounter.** Journeying on the path of discipleship has a specific goal – to encounter Christ and be reminded of Pope Francis' call to a 'culture of encounter'. An invitation to work in a simple way 'as Jesus did', not just seeing, but looking; not just hearing, but listening; not just passing people by, but stopping with them; not just saying "what a shame, poor people!" but allowing one's self to be moved with compassion.

**N = Neighbourliness.** The parable of the Good Samaritan was preceded by the question: 'Who is my neighbour?' (cf. Lk 10:29). In the end, it was the one who showed mercy. In Asia, we are a minority and we live amidst social, political, and religious tensions. Despite such tensions, we are called to help our brothers and sisters in need.

**T = Transformation.** Cardinal Bo recalled the words of the psalmist: "Send forth your Spirit, O Lord, and renew the face of the earth." In this synodal journey, he said, we are called to hear what the Holy Spirit is telling us. Therefore, if we are walking together to bring about a renewal in the life of the Church, we need the transforming power of the Holy Spirit as by ourselves we cannot achieve anything. We are always in need of God's transforming grace as we walk together in this synodal journey 'to serve Him alone'.

Keep on discovering how much we have walked away from the path of God and how much we have compromised. Let us return to the way of the Lord. He Awaits Us. Have a meaningful Way of the Cross. God Bless.

Bishop Bernard Paul



# CHARIS launched in Sandakan

By Evelyn Jock

SANDAKAN: The Diocese of Sandakan launched the Catholic Charismatic Renewal International Service (CHARIS) at St Mary's Cathedral on February 26.

It was carried out by the spiritual director of CHARIS, Fr Arthur John, in the presence of CHARIS leaders from St Mary's Cathedral, Holy Trinity Tawau, Our Lady of Fatima, Beluran, St Martin, Telupid, St Dominic, Lahad Datu, and Paitan Mission.

Fr Arthur thanked the various parishes for their presence and participation. He entrusted them to return to their respective districts and explain the meaning of CHARIS to their members.

He also thanked CHARIS Malaysia coordinator Anthony Lim, who witnessed the launching. Anthony was elected coordinator from a pool of Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) leaders from within the nine dioceses of Malaysia.



Groups doing their presentation after the workshop sessions, February 24 and 25, 2023.

The formation of CHARIS Malaysia was endorsed by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia on Aug 13, 2020. It was the first time a national body was able to serve the needs of the CCR in Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah, and Sarawak.

Before the launch of CHARIS Sandakan, the diocese's CCR, headed by coordinator Adaris Sintan, organised a day-and-a-half workshop titled *Explanation and*

*Launching of CHARIS* on Feb 24 and 25. Some 139 people attended the workshop, facilitated by Anthony.

The different language groups in Sandakan, the Star of Yahweh Covenant Community, and the Bahasa Malaysia and Chinese-speaking CCR groups, participated in Praise and Worship sessions to welcome CCR members from other parishes. The fruitful workshop comprised three briefing sessions by Anthony,

group discussions, presentations, and Praise and Worship segments.

Anthony briefed participants on the history of CCR, established 57 years ago, in 1967. Since Pope St Paul VI and the succeeding popes endorsed it, CCR spread far and wide across the globe. In Sabah, nine youths under the guidance of the late Fr Tobias Chi, started CCR 49 years ago, in 1974.

The facilitator explained the Holy Father's expectations when

he launched CHARIS on June 9, 2019. CHARIS is a service meant to assist CCR groups around the world. Pope Francis invited CHARIS members to share the graces they received in the Baptism of the Holy Spirit with everyone in the church, serve the unity of the body of Christ, the church, and the community of believers, and serve the poor and those in greatest need.

Anthony reiterated that the CHARIS groups must be in line with the framework of the Diocese of Sandakan. The CHARIS vision should not contradict the diocese's vision and must be a "Christ-centred community, serving one another with love". Leaders must be clear and passionate about the vision of the diocese and of CHARIS, and that the prayer groups and communities are maintained and are on track. He encouraged the CHARIS groups to commission at least two youths below the age of 30, so they can continue the mission of CHARIS Sandakan.

## Arise and shine this Lenten season

KUANTAN: "Arise and Shine" was the theme of the Lenten Retreat organised by the Church of St Thomas, for the English-speaking faithful from March 3 to 5.

The retreat master was Fr Michael Payyapilly VC, who captured the hearts of many through online Masses during the COVID-19 epidemic.

Some 340 participants registered for the retreat, of which 190 were parishioners, and the other 148 came from various parishes across Peninsular Malaysia and Singapore.

The Faith Formation Ministry, with support from parish priest Fr George Packiasamy, began planning and preparing the groundwork for the retreat in April 2022. The co-chairpersons Sheila Fernandez and Anna Thong, and the committee members worked tirelessly, especially during the final week, to ensure the event's success. It was heartening to see many young volunteers helping in various ways, including registra-

tion and serving at the food stations.

Those who attended had high praises for Fr Michael and his spiritual guidance. He was assisted by Fr Joseph Kannanpally VC, who inspired the participants with his life experiences. The daily programme included Praise and Worship sessions, talks, Eucharistic Celebration, Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, and healing services during which personal petitions were offered up.

During the closing session, Fr George thanked the two priests for conducting the retreat in Kuantan.

In appreciation, he presented them with a love offering. Fr George also thanked the organising committee and the volunteers for their hard work in ensuring everything went as planned. He wished the participants a safe journey home and that God bless them with a new heart, new spirit, new hope, and new enthusiasm as they arise and shine forth. — **By Dr Francis Leong**



The participants of the March 3 to 5, 2023 Arise and Shine retreat taking part in the Praise and Worship session at the Church of St Thomas, Kuantan.

## Commemorating the 250th birth anniversary of St Magdalen of Canossa



The Canossian Sisters of the Malaysian Province celebrating the birth anniversary of their founder on March 3, 2023.

KLUANG, Johor: The Canossian Sisters of the Malaysian Province gathered to celebrate the 250th birth anniversary of their foundress, St Magdalen of Canossa on March 3. Although St Magdalen was born on March 1, 1774, the Sisters organised the celebration to coincide with the completion of their Post-Chapter conference in Kluang.

The event aimed at uniting the Canossian Sisters and Fathers

together with the laity in the Canossian family. It is to experience a year of grace, with the motto *Light Up Your Life: Magdalen of Canossa 250 years, a gift of love and freedom*.

In line with this motto, the Sisters, with their candles lit, gathered at the foyer of the Oasis before proceeding to the conference hall where Mass was celebrated by the parish priest of the Church of St Louis', Msgr Peter

Ng. They placed their candles close to the statue of St Magdalen before the Eucharistic celebration began.

During Mass, the Sisters, as a gesture of respectful solidarity, placed their medals on the relic of St Magdalen. The celebration was a memorable occasion to thank the Lord for the gift of the Charism of Charity at the service of the Church and the world today. — **By Sr Esther Thomazios**

## Learning about the Exilic period

CHERAS: A biblical Lenten retreat was held at the Church of St Francis of Assisi by biblical scholar Fr David Reegon OFM Cap. from February 24 to 26. Some 160 participants attended, from various parishes within the Klang Valley.

Themed *Exilic period, Old Testament*, the retreat began with the Way of the Cross, followed by Mass celebrated by Fr David.

Besides focusing on the *Book of Esther*, Fr David touched on Job 29, Psalm 137, and Jeremiah 39 across seven sessions. During a session, the attendees watched movie clips about Queen Esther, followed by silent meditation and group sharing. Each group consisted of six participants, identified



Fr David Reegon OFM Cap conducting the biblical Lenten retreat.

with a Hebrew name and its meaning explained.

At the end of the retreat, Fr David addressed questions sub-

mitted by the participants before closing with prayers of healing and recitation of the Chaplet of Divine Mercy. — **By Vincent Liew**



# How to respond in the face of falsehood

By Stephanie Yeap

IPOH: In conjunction with Lenten, the Church of St Michael (SMC) organised a series of recollection sessions for the parish's English-speaking parishioners from February 28 to March 2.

Fr Fabian Dicom conducted the sessions over three evenings, to build and sustain a community of God's beloved to carry out His mission in the world.

The themes for the three evenings were *Embracing our Belovedness as our Identity*, *Embracing our Servanthood as our Spirituality*, and *Embracing our Mission as our Journey*, respectively.

Acknowledging and recognising our identity as God's beloved sons or daughters gives our life purpose and true worth. In the world today, many people erroneously measure their self-worth by what they do (jobs, positions), what people say about them (privately, publicly, or on social media), or what they possess (wealth or power).

Jesus' actions and replies to the tempter in the desert shows how we need to respond in the face of such falsehoods. Jesus responded decisively because He was unquestionably certain of His identity as the Son of God and conviction of scriptural truths. As Christians, we too, need to be rooted in this knowledge of our identity and the Scriptures. We must also be aware of and respect others as fellow Beloveds of God.

Knowing who we are and who we follow enables us to embrace Jesus' spirit of servanthood through the emptying of Himself. As His



Fr Fabian Dicom (inset) conducting the recollection sessions for SMC parishioners.

followers, we should be less self-focused and empty ourselves, to take on the heart and mind of Jesus.

The act of Jesus washing the disciples' feet on Maundy Thursday was not merely symbolic but an actual call to service. Likewise, our Eucharistic worship must lead us to place ourselves in the service of our fellow creatures. Fr Fabian further spoke about the concept of Servant Leadership as opposed to worldly leadership values. In Christianity, a leader must serve as Jesus who came to serve NOT to be served. True servant leadership must possess these six qualities: integrity, humility, flexibility, resilience, stewardship, and empathy.

On the final evening, Fr Fabian reminded us that everyone is called to a mission without exception. Our mission is to bring God to the world and to actualise the Kingdom of God. Practical actions include promoting and upholding human dignity, engaging in works of social

justice, loving our families, caring for the environment, and embracing the poor in our society.

Fr Fabian shared Pope Francis' call to transform our churches to become "field hospitals" by caring for those overlooked and marginalised in society. A Church that is only concerned about daily devotions, buildings, rites, and regulations is not truly fulfilling its mission. The challenge for all of us is to overcome this reluctance to move beyond superficial practices which delude us into thinking we are doing "God's work" within the comfortable confines of our church walls or homes.

It is hoped that the lessons gleaned from the recollection sessions will help us embrace our identity, perfect our spirituality, and live out our missionary call. We are very grateful to Fr Fabian for illuminating us through scriptural teachings and by sharing his personal experiences and stories.

## Lenten Recollection amidst nature

KUALA LUMPUR: The Archdiocesan Prayer Ministry in collaboration with the Archdiocesan Creation Justice Commission organised an outdoor Lenten Recollection at the Lake Gardens on March 4. The theme was *With Him on the Mountain; Journeying Together Towards a Synodal Church* keeping in mind the theme chosen by Pope Francis for Lent 2023 – *Lenten Penance and the Synodal Journey*.

Amidst the chirping of birds, Fr Andrew Manickam OFM Cap, the Ecclesiastical Assistant for the Archdiocesan Prayer Ministry and the Creation Justice Commission, welcomed the 320 participants and thanked the attendees that ranged from ages six to 89.

He encouraged everyone to experience the uniqueness of one another, to journey together and to listen to the voice of God and the voice of creation.

Archbishop Julian Leow led the group in the opening prayer, asking God to make us aware of His presence within us and to renew our relationship with Him. The archbishop highlighted how the event was an opportunity to spend time with nature, to walk together, to talk to God, talk to nature and to listen to God.

The participants were then put into smaller groups of 20 each and

sent to different locations at the park – the Sunken Garden, the herb garden, besides the lake, the gazebos, at the unusual species collection area, the canopy at the *Pokok Botoi*, under a tree, etc. True to the theme of journeying together, the facilitators of the guided reflection included members of the lay community, religious and the clergy.

Fr Edwin Peter in his group, took the discussion approach starting with the synodal logo. He highlighted how we rarely journey alone and being together helps in prayer, in bonding and in fellowship. God is present to us through others and we work towards an inclusive journey, incorporating the good and the not so good times. One of the participants pointed out that we are all heading towards our goal – a glimpse of our God and we nudge each other along the way to motivate and to guide each other.

The various groups also spent time either individually, in pairs or as a group reflecting on the take-away points.

Being inclusive in our journey, Lake Gardens was the perfect choice for the recollection as we walked together with people from different faiths, nationalities, communities and age groups. — **By Marilyn Menezes Simon**



Archbishop Julian Leow facilitating the guided reflection for one of the groups.

## Never destroy the faith of another by our actions

SEREMBAN: In preparation to embrace the risen Christ, a two-day Lenten retreat by Fr Philip Tay, OCD, was held at the Church of the Visitation, March 4 and 5.

Titled *The Catholic Family: The Light of the World and the Salt of the Earth*, the retreat, organised by the Visitation Prayer Group, welcomed 103 participants, mainly from the home parish. Some attendees came from Port Dickson and Sepang.

In the first session, the Carmelite friar talked about challenges currently faced by Catholic families and the degradation of several fundamental rules on how a family should function. Fr Philip said to help battle these challenges, families should pray, study the Bible together and communicate respectfully and lovingly. He added that couples should thank God for their spouses and surround themselves with like-minded couples who will strengthen and encourage them.

During the second session, Fr Philip spoke on how Catholic families must be the salt of the earth,



Friar Phillip Tay, OCD, and participants of the Lenten retreat at the Church of the Visitation, on March 4 and 5, 2023.

in that we need to pass on the faith to the next generation and those around us. As Catholics, we cannot only focus on ourselves and our relationship with God. He reminded the retreatants to build relationships with others and be the salt that helps them preserve their faith and nourish their souls. The friar said we should not destroy the faith of another by our actions.

"Our love of God cannot be separated from the love of neighbour. He who does not love his neighbour does not love God, so do not shut people out due to our differ-

ences," said Fr Philip.

The following session focused on family as the light of the world. The Carmelite friar shared his faith journey and how some people around him became the light for him through examples of their faith life.

"I had people around who encouraged me to say the Rosary, pray novenas, and attend youth rallies, among other things." The fact that he studied at a Catholic school meant he was probably around more people of the same faith, and he could pray at the

chapel in his free time. Sadly, chapels in schools are few and far between these days.

"Not only do we need to encourage children to be priests, we must also inspire them to be teachers so that some mission schools may still be run by Catholics, to help preserve the faith environment during school hours. There is also a large need for teachers who are counsellors in schools today."

The fourth session was on how the family and BECs have a mission to accomplish. Jesus' mission for us is to make disciples of all

nations. This mission is divided into an inward mission and an outward mission. The inward mission is to minister to our brothers and sisters and to help and support each other in times of need. The outward mission is to spread God's love to others.

In the final session, Fr Philip talked about raising hope. What threatens our hope is the soft and subtle despair we settle into when we live in ways that rob us of the higher good that God wants for us. The desert experience – where we encounter illusions, and evil temptations are part of life.

Lent can be a time we start a slow process of conversion into the perfect image and likeness of God. The desert of Lent purifies us and gives us knowledge and freedom. It is a time of renewal where we learn to unclutter our lives and live simply. We do not hope alone, we hope together with others who help us along the way. In this desert, we begin to experience the Shalom of Easter. — **By Girly Joseph**



# MJD laity benefit from de-stressing session

By Grace M. Beck

JOHOR BARU: After carrying out his trademark session called *The Art of De-Stressing and Letting Go* in the Diocese of Penang and Kuala Lumpur, it was time for the Malacca Johore Diocese (MJD) to welcome Fr Charles Chin to host the same session for the MJD lay faithful.

The Malacca Johore Diocesan Family Life Ministry and Counselling Ministry collaborated in organising the 20 hours' two-day event, one at Good Shepherd Catholic Seminary, Melaka and the other at MAJODI Centre, Johor, recently.

Fr. Chin designed the session to be experiential, promoting a hands-on approach for the participants. Bernard Wong, a participant, testified that although Fr Charles methods were different from his usual meditation practices, he was pleasantly surprised that he was able to sit still and stay focused throughout the entire two days.

Francis Khoo supported Bernard's take on how easy and practical the techniques taught were. For Francis, the crux of the teaching was to be self-aware – acknowledge what



Fr Charles Chin with the participants who attended 'The Art of De-Stressing and Letting Go' session at Majodi Centre.

comes to oneself, let it flow and let it go. Francis found it to be spiritually uplifting as it helped him to gently come to terms with "unhelpful baggages" and consequently felt lighter inside. They both attended the session in Malacca and intended to further grasp the techniques taught by enthusiastically joining the one in Johor, too.

Another participant, Angeline Thong, shared how at first during the practice session,

she thought to herself, why was she there to just "do nothing" as she was a typical "busy bee". Eventually, as the two days unfolded, she was gratified that she came. She learnt to "just be" and focus on the present. PY and Sharon (as the participants prefer to be called) said the techniques were physiologically beneficial in reducing stress and trauma that might have manifested itself in the form of bodily aches when left unattended.

Assertive yet humble and with a good sense of humour, Fr Charles' session was like a breath of fresh air. What he taught can be applied as a form of self-therapy and an adjunct to other therapeutic methods.

Participants who wish to practise these techniques for the next six months and are interested in diving deeper are welcome to contact either the MJD Family Life Ministry or Counselling Ministry.

## Cathedral seniors learn to meditate

KUALA LUMPUR: Sixty Golden Eagles from the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist were all ears during their parish priest Fr Gerard Theraviam's introductory talk on Christian meditation.

Fr Gerard said meditation is universal to all religions, though each may have its own approach. Christian meditation is not exclusive to Catholics; on the contrary, it is inclusive of all Christians.

The key to meditation is moving from the mind into the heart in complete silence, staying focused on one word, and repeating it throughout from the heart and not the mouth.

The preferred word to meditate upon is "Maranatha" (Come Lord Jesus). It is an Aramaic word, the language of Jesus. Other single words may be used but with an even number of syllables.

Fr Gerard reminded the Golden Eagles that "Maranatha" was on the banner hanging across the cathedral's altar at Advent.

During meditation, the challenge is to do nothing about the monkeys in the mind and other distractions but to stay focused. Any

effort to stop the monkeys or distractions will break one's focus.

Stressing on the importance of silence, stillness, and attention, Fr Gerard quipped: "So even if a mosquito lands on your arm, leave it alone." He was quick to add: "Don't worry, there are no mosquitoes in the parish house."

He was more relenting about falling asleep, saying it was something expected of beginners, and even veterans sometimes doze off.

Golden Eagles had their first meditation of 15 minutes. Many shared their experience, eager to know if it was done right.

According to Fr Gerard, peace is attained after, and not during meditation.

Responding to the enthusiasm, Fr Gerard offered to conduct classes. The Golden Eagles are indeed blessed to be taught by the national spiritual director of the World Community for Christian Meditation Malaysia.

Archbishop Emeritus Murphy Pakiam, who was instrumental in promoting Christian meditation in Malaysia, also attended. He blessed all after the talk.

## 46, 44 or 40 days of Lent?

PETALING JAYA: Lent is the season of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. It is a period of faith renewal and preparation to celebrate the Lord's Resurrection at Easter.

In the spirit of renewing our faith, the Church of the Assumption, is organising a series of Lent Formations. Each formation will be presented by the parish priest and liturgist, Fr Leonard Lexson (pic). The hybrid formation enables attendees to come in person to the Assumption Family House or to join online via Zoom application.

The first in this series was held on March 4, and titled; *46, 44 or 40 Days of Lent?* Lent commemorates the Paschal Mystery and the word 'lent' comes from an old English word meaning 'spring'. In Latin, it is known by the term *Quadragesima* which literally means 40.

Historically there is some dispute on the exact number of days in Lent. Hence the title of the first formation. Actually, it boils down to understanding the principal behind how the days are counted. Below are three common ways of measuring the season of Lent:

- Lent begins with Ash Wednesday and ends with Holy Saturday wherein Holy Week is part of the Lent Season. That makes 46 days.
- Lent begins with Ash Wednesday until Holy Thursday exclusive and includes all six Sundays. That makes 44 days; finally
- Lent begins with Ash Wednesday until Holy Saturday but excluding all six Sundays, which brings it to 40 days.

Despite the varying methods of counting the days of Lent, the number 40 stands as the most prominent answer for the total number of days. Why is that so? This is because the



number 40 in the Bible is a traditional number attributed to Discipline, Devotion and Preparation.

Within Scripture, we see the number 40 ascribed to numerous situations. In the Old Testament, Moses stayed on the mountain of God for 40 days before receiving the 10 commandments (Exodus 24:18, 34:28); Elijah travelling 40 days before reaching the cave where he had his vision (1 Kings 19:8) and the town of Nineveh given 40 days to repent (Jonah 3:4). In the New Testament, we see Jesus spending 40 days in the wilderness, praying and fasting in preparation for His ministry (Matthew 4:2). Each of these situations corresponds to the principals of Discipline, Devotion and Preparation.

Fr Leonard also shared about the significance of Ash Wednesday and the liturgical use of ashes and its biblical roots. Also preached were the various observances suggested during Lent, their significance and the importance to be sincere in our desire to draw closer to our Saviour. Fr Leonard encouraged all participants to especially remember and commemorate their Baptism day because that is the pivotal day they became part of the Church.

Finally, the session touched on the three pillars of Lent which are prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Fr Leonard quoted St Augustine who said, "Fasting and almsgiving are the two wings of prayer because they are signs of humility and charity."

We at the Church of the Assumption hope many more will join these formations either physically or via Zoom and that as a community, grow in knowledge and have a fruitful season of Lent. — **By Paul Devaraj**

### Schedule of upcoming sessions

**March 25** (9.00am – 12 noon) — *Holy Week 2 : Be Immersed in the Easter Triduum*

**April 1** — *Easter 1 : We as an Easter People*

**April 15** — *Easter 2 :Forty Days After Easter (Ascension), Fifty Days After Easter Sunday - the Great Commissioning (Pentecost)*

**April 22** — *Corpus Christi : Set Apart by the Body & Blood of Jesus*

**For enquiries and registration, email [Assumption@archkl.org](mailto:Assumption@archkl.org) or call 03-7497 6357**

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# CDM embark on litter-picking mission

By Halina Gooi

PENANG: Friends of Creation Ministry of the Church of the Divine Mercy – organised a hike near the parish to clear the hiking trail of unsightly litter on February 28. A group of 24 faithful gathered just after sunrise at the foot of a gently ascending trail.

Sportingly joining in was parish priest, Fr Michael Raymond OFM Cap, visiting priest Fr John Anandan OFM Cap, and two young Capuchin brothers.

After a prayer by Fr Michael, the group headed along the trail

for a satisfying, traditional Malaysian breakfast some 50 minutes away before diving into clearing as much litter they could reach, armed with litter-picking sticks, gloves, and trash bags.

It was extremely sad to see the beautiful natural surroundings, with tall, majestic trees and a gurgling river dotted with mini waterfalls marred by ugly litter. After a few hours, the group accumulated a substantial pile of trash bags, and it was left at the start of the trail for MBPP to pick up. Trash thrown down steep slopes leading to the river was almost impossible

to reach, and risky to try.

While the Friends of Creation Ministry takes caring for Mother Nature seriously, a lot more needs to be done to educate people on the importance of keeping the environment clean.

As Pope Francis once said, “Let us be protectors of creation, protectors of God’s plan inscribed in nature, protectors of one another and the environment.” St Francis of Assisi before him left the world with this famous quote: “Start by doing what is necessary, then what is possible, and suddenly you are doing the impossible”.



Fr John Anandan OFM Cap and the team working hard to clean up hikers' favourite picnic spot.

## Annual Back-2-School programme helps 70 students

RAWANG: The Parish Integral Human Development Ministry (PIHDM) members of the Church of St. Jude, took 40 students and their parents on a shopping spree to buy school items under their Back-2-School programme on March 4.

Before heading to Pusat Pakaian Hari-Hari to purchase two pairs of uniforms, two pairs of shoes, and socks for each child, they gathered at the church to receive school bags and angpows from the SP Care Clinic.

The founder of SP Care Clinic and philanthropist, Dr Sathia Prakash Nadarajan takes part in this programme annually.

“Don’t thank me, thank the good Lord for blessing me. In return, I



The children with school bags donated by the SP Care Clinic. With them are Dr. Sathia Prakash Nadarajan and Dr. Harry Dinesh Mahalingam from SP Care Clinic, Hulu Selangor’s councillors Nur Jahirah, Abwyn Chan and P. Puvanesvaran, PIHDM members and the parents of the children.

share this blessing with the less fortunate. Only by experiencing hardship can one empathise with poor

people and their needs,” said the Rawang-born Dr Sathia.

Also present were several Hulu

Selangor councillors who were happy to be with the children and agreed to assist the PIHDM in fu-

ture programmes organised for the less fortunate.

Donor and former teacher, Karen Khoo, accompanied the children on the shopping spree. She was pleasantly surprised to see how organised the children were and committed to joining the next Back-2-School programme.

Parish priest Fr Vincent Thomas had helped raise large donations for the programme.

The PIHDM also donated to Rumah Keluarga Kami, Kajang to assist some 30 students to buy school uniforms, shoes, and socks. PIHDM chairman Augustine Ratnasamy thanked donors for their generosity. — *By Mercy Almeida Stellus*

## SMC Evergreens launch clubhouse

IPOH: The Church of St. Michael (SMC) seniors’ ministry, dubbed SMC Evergreens, launched its clubhouse, The Oak, on March 2. SMC Evergreens caters to the faithful above the age of 50.

The wooden house, owned by the church, was formerly part of Regina Florists. It had been closed due to the pandemic and before reopening, the premises was repainted, its leaky roof repaired, and the electricity circuit re-wired.



Parish priest, Fr Anthony Liew, blessing the clubhouse.



The Oak, a clubhouse for the SMC Evergreens.

It is now ready to be occupied and the following activities resumed: Art classes, Mandarin classes for Beginners, Intermediate and Advanced levels, Sing-a-long sessions, Centring Prayer, qi gong, folk dancing and board games, recitation of the Rosary in Latin and line dancing (at Peter Pang Hall).

Parish priest, Fr Anthony Liew, blessed the clubhouse and prayed

that all using it would feel the touch of God in their lives. After the blessing, the persons-in-charge of the different activities came forward and gave a briefing on the individual activity to be initiated.

After brunch, the trio of Johnny, Magdalene, and Bobby Das led a Sing-a-long session. The fellowship and entertainment created great comradeship among all present. — *By Theresa Fernandes*

### Letters to Editor

## Mask wearing mandate during Mass and at church

Dear Editor,

I would like to ask the bishops when the mask wearing mandate at Mass and in churches will be lifted.

On September 7, 2022, the wearing of masks in indoor areas in Malaysia was no longer compulsory, so why are people attending Mass at Catholic churches still forced to wear face masks? I was literally told to leave when I went into a religious store in a church because I did not wear a face mask.

If we watch live Masses from the Vatican etc, mask wearing is no longer practised. I can understand that some people want to be extra cautious by continuing to wear a face mask, so by all means let these people do that. But for those who do not want to, is it right for the Church to force them to wear a face mask despite the government’s ruling?

If the Church hierarchy continues to do that, then I have decided to attend only online Masses. And I shall only return after the mask wearing mandate has ended in the Catholic Church in Malaysia.

John Wang  
Via email

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# More overtime but more flexibility

## Young Koreans approve of labour reform

SEOUL: Young workers in South Korea are in favour of a new labour reform presented by the government which aims to give companies and employees more flexibility in managing working hours and overtime.

According to the Organisation for Cooperation and Development (OECD), South Korea is the member country with the highest number of hours worked per capita. For this reason, when in 2018 the maximum number of hours per week was lowered from 68 to 52, it was a small economic revolution for the Asian nation, albeit not without controversy. At the time, there were progressives in government, but now that the conservatives have returned to power, labour market reform is high on President Yoon Suk-yeol's list of priorities.

On March 6, the government unveiled its plan to overhaul the working week legislation. According to the rules currently in force, a maximum of 12 hours of overtime per week is set for each worker. The reform, on the other hand, aims to

make the counting of these hours more flexible: instead of calculating the maximum overtime on a weekly basis, the Conservatives propose to introduce longer periods of time to better manage the hours worked in excess on the basis of necessity and workload distribution.

The government proposal introduces new maximum ceilings, which decrease as the time frame increases: in this way each worker will be granted alternatively 52 hours of overtime on a monthly basis, or 140 hours on a quarterly basis, 250 hours on a six-monthly basis, or 440 hours on an annual basis. Employers will have the obligation to guarantee a rest period of at least 11 hours between one shift and another, while workers will also be granted the possibility of converting overtime into holidays, forming a cumulative number of hours with the vacation days already guaranteed by law.

According to the *Yonhap* news agency, the new rules should allow companies to require each worker up to a maximum of 69 hours per



Employees will now also be able to turn overtime into more vacation time.

week, including overtime for a maximum of 52 hours per week per month.

Industrial associations were among the first to applaud the reform, with the Korean Business Federation declaring it a "starting point for revising old laws and systems". Due to its rigidity, the current legislation has always been highly criticised by employers, especially small-medium ones, who

in reality are asking the government for even more daring measures on the subject of labour market reform.

On the other hand, the two main unions in the country are of the opposite opinion, criticising the provision as favourable only to entrepreneurs, arguing that it will force employees to work even longer hours. Opposition parties have also aligned themselves against the reform.

However, the proposal seems to find consensus among young workers aged between 20 and 30. According to the results of a survey published by the *Korea JoongAng Daily*, 57 per cent of young people believe that the limit of 52 hours per week is inappropriate for a modern society where working hours should be more flexible.

— **By Guido Alberto Casanova, AsiaNews**

## Fifty thousand attend Marian feast in Odisha

PARTAMAHA: More than 50,000 people gathered on March 5 at a Marian pilgrimage centre in the eastern Indian state of Odisha, when it celebrated its feast after a gap of two years.

"We are here after the COVID pandemic to thank God Who loves unconditionally and Who is always willing to grant Mother Mary's intercession for all of us," said Archbishop John Barwa of Cuttack-Bhubaneswar, the main celebrant of the feast day Mass at the Marian shrine in Partamaha, a small village in Odisha's Kandhamal district.

The Divine Word prelate remembered Komoladevi, a local Hindu widow whose vision of the Blessed Virgin led to the setting up of the pilgrimage centre in 1994 in the village, some 250 km southwest of Bhubaneswar, the state capital. She died of COVID-19 in 2020.

Fr Mukund Dev, the parish priest of Our Lady of Holy Rosary Daringbadi and a member of the man-



A part of the crowd during the feast day celebration.

aging committee of the shrine, said more than 50,000 people attended this year's feast. The gathering included 55 priests and 25 nuns.

People gathering in such huge number is the sign of growing faith in God and accepting Mother Mary, the priest told *Matters India*.

Saraj Nayak, the secretary of

the development committee of the shrine, said the people prayed for Mother Mary's intervention to bring peace and harmony between warring Russia and Ukraine. "We also pray that the Vatican declare 36 Catholic victims of anti-Christian violence in 2008 as martyrs of the Church," he added.

The shrine was built after Komoladevi went to Partamaha Mountain to collect fire wood on March 5, 1994. She saw a bearded man in white dress and long hair coming closer to her. He disappeared after sometime.

A beautiful woman from a distance called her and told her to

request the local priest to build a church where people could pray the Rosary for the sinners to repent. The neighbours laughed at her when she first shared the experience.

On another day, a 12 year-boy came to Komoladevi and asked her to go to the same mountain. When she went there, the woman appeared and told her, "I am the Mother of Jesus, pray the Holy Rosary daily to come closer to Jesus and to establish the Kingdom of God where peace, joy, love, justice, truth and fraternity prevail."

With courage the woman shared her experience with the then parish priest of Daringbadi, Fr Alphonse Balliarsingh. The priest set up a parish committee and built a small grotto near a Banyan tree where Mother Mary had appeared. He also baptised the Hindu woman as Agnes.

People started flocking to the mountain to pray to "Mother Mary of Partamaha." — *Matters India*



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## The Lenten charity of Burmese Catholics

YANGON: During Lent, the local Catholic communities collect donations for displaced people, those living in poverty in the forests and victims of the ongoing civil war in Myanmar.

"During Lent, envelopes are placed in the churches with these words: You can practise fasting and donate the equivalent of your meal for the poor, for refugees who are struggling to survive," said Joseph Kung, a lay Catholic from Yangon.

"These days the churches are full and there are many people going to church to receive the sacrament of Confession. In returning to God is the hope of our people, even as violence continues in many parts of the



country," he said.

Donations to those in need are an integral part of the believer's journey at this time. The donations

go to Caritas Myanmar, known as 'Karuna Mission Social Services', the relief agency of the Burmese Bishops' Conference. "Karuna uses the money for the poor and marginalised, and also for other solidarity initiatives such as those for the earthquake victims in Turkey and Syria," says Kung.

"Karuna is organised in the diocesan offices and works in service to the people," without distinction of faith, culture or ethnicity. Today, the aid organisation tries "to enable the poor and weak to lead a decent life, concentrating above all on securing their livelihood and distributing essential goods to the displaced". — *Fides*



# Ecumenical prayer service pleads for peace in Ukraine

NEW YORK: More than a year after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Cardinal Wilton Gregory of Washington is reminding Catholics that regardless of the amount of news coverage the war does or doesn't receive, it's important to draw inspiration from the affected Ukrainian civilians and children "to intensify our prayers and commitment to peace."

Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022. In just over a year more than 14 million Ukrainians have been displaced from their homes. More than 7,000 civilians have been killed, and almost 12,000 more have been injured, according to the United Nations. However, the international organisation has stated that the true number is likely to be

substantially higher.

The cardinal was speaking at a March 7 ecumenical prayer for peace in Ukraine, where he reiterated that the US Catholic Church joins in prayer with Pope Francis "that everything possible be done to foster dialogue and pathway to co-operation and peace."

"May our Ukrainian brothers and sisters know our closeness to them and know that they are not alone," Gregory said. "May the people of Ukraine continue to find strength to face this difficult time with hope, and may they know our heartfelt prayers for peace."

Cardinal Wilton led the prayer service alongside Archbishop Borys Gudziak, head of the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadel-

phia. Gudziak highlighted a Ukrainian attitude of putting your head down and working hard that he encouraged all people to adopt in their prayers and giving.

"Ukraine has a basic attitude. Don't talk too much. Don't look around to see what other people are doing. Just do what you're supposed to do. Fulfill your vocation," Gudziak said. "And we appeal to all people of goodwill to do the same. Pray, and keep informed, and help in whatever way you can."

Gudziak noted how grateful the Ukrainian people are for the prayers and solidarity with Americans, especially American Catholics. The US Catholic Church has donated millions to support the people of Ukraine. Countless Americans have



Pope Francis greets Ukrainian refugees after his weekly general audience in St Peter's Square at the Vatican March 8, 2023. (Vatican Media)

also opened up their homes and communities to Ukrainian refugees.

"We are committed to helping our neighbour, especially when they are in crises, such as in the Ukraine," said Cardinal Wilton. "We remain committed to work for justice, on the well-being of all of God's people in every circumstance and in

every country."

"We pray this evening for comfort and wisdom, as well as the continued strength to endure," he continued. "Our prayers are for all war and conflict to cease in every part of the world, that we may experience God's healing and live in peace." —

By John Lavenburg, *Crux*

## Korean Catholics seek more counselling to curb suicides

SEOUL: Experts and Catholic groups in South Korea have called for more psychotherapy centres and counsellors and urged the Church to promote counselling as part of pastoral care amid a rise in suicide rates.

"[Pastoral] counselling should be added to sacramental pastoral care," said Fr Matthew Hong Sung-nam, director of the Catholic Psycho-Spiritual Counselling Centre of Seoul archdiocese.

He added that "the Church intervenes in people's lives from birth to death and takes care of them. Similarly, pastoral centres of the Church should try to solve the problem."

Pastoral counselling is a unique form of psychotherapy that uses spiritual resources as well as psychological understanding for healing and growth, according to the American Association of Pastoral Counselling. It is provided by certified pastoral counsellors, who are not only mental health professionals but have also had in-depth religious and/or theological training.

Fr Matthew ChoYoung-su, an official at the Good Neighbour Counselling Office of Chuncheon diocese pointed out that the positive image of the Church in Korea is a huge factor that contributes to the

trust of the public in its counselling services.

"Trust is important in counselling, and Korean churches are positively recognised in society. So they have strengths in providing counselling pastoral care," said Cho.

Cho said that the economic crisis caused by COVID-19, the Russia-Ukraine war, and social and political turmoil has created the need for a "neighbour who can help them [South Koreans] and stabilise their mind."

However, Church officials cite a shortage of counselling centres and trained personnel as drawbacks in providing timely counselling to potential victims.

Pastoral counselling experts suggest setting up counselling centres with trained personnel at local churches to tackle the ever-increasing demand for counselling.

In South Korea, many people consider seeking mental health support as a weakness and taboo, which makes them unwilling to speak about the issue in public.

Official data shows that only 20 per cent of South Koreans seek mental health care when they are depressed, and nearly 75 per cent of South Korean elderly individuals feel that depression and other



mental health problems are a sign of weakness.

In 2021, there were 10 mental healthcare facilities operating in South Korea's Chungnam province, according to *statista.com*.

There is a total of 59 such institutions nationwide, a number that has not changed for over a decade now. Gangwon is the only province that has no active mental health institutions.

Fr Mark Lee Geum-jae, director of the Pastoral Counselling Centre of Jeonju diocese said that the Church needs to follow the footsteps of Jesus to reach out to people who badly need mental health support.

"Jesus was the most exemplary counsellor who sympathised with, embraced, and accepted the people who always came to him, giving them healing and new opportunities," the priest said. — *ucanews.com*

## Vatican takes climate activists to trial

ROME: The Vatican held a hearing to try three climate activists for criminal damage to a famous statue in the Vatican Museums.

Guido Viero, 61, and Ester Goffi, 26, were ordered to appear before the Vatican City State's tribunal on March 9.

Viero and Goffi superglued their hands to the marble base holding Laocoön and His Sons, an ancient marble sculpture on display in the Vatican Museums, on the morning of Aug 18, 2022.

They are accused of damaging the

base of the statue through the use of "particularly tough and corrosive synthetic adhesive."

Laura, who video-recorded the demonstration in the Vatican Museums and whose last name is not public, has also been charged by the Vatican.

The three are part of *Ultima Generazione* ("Last Generation"), an Italian group that encourages non-violent civil disobedience to "raise the alarm on the climate emergency."

Charges of resisting a public official were dropped.

According to *Ultima Generazione*, Viero and Goffi face up to three years in prison and fines of up to 3,099 euros (RM14,836).

The climate activism group claims that after Viero and Goffi glued themselves to the statue base, that area of the Vatican Museums was cleared of museum guests by staff. It also said the cell phones of those recording the action were confiscated and video or photo footage of the stunt was deleted before the phones were returned to their owners. — *By Hannah Brockhaus, CNA*

## Boston prelate grateful for reappointment to Pope's 'kitchen cabinet'

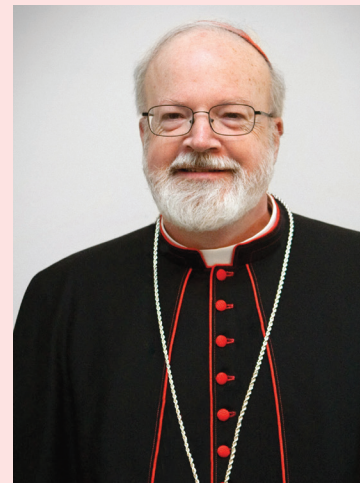
NEW YORK: After finding out that he would remain a member of Pope Francis' Council of Cardinal Advisors, Cardinal Seán O'Malley of Boston called the reappointment an honour, and commended the Holy Father for leading with a shepherd's heart for the past decade.

"The Pope leads with a shepherd's heart, seeking out those most in need and the forgotten and voiceless on the peripheries of our societies, inspiring us all to hear and respond to the Lord's call to service on behalf of all our brothers and sisters," said the cardinal in a March 7 statement.

The Vatican announced Pope Francis had renewed his Council of Cardinal Advisors on March 7. Informally dubbed his "kitchen cabinet," the council was created by Francis after his election on March 13, 2013 to advise him on matters concerning the life of the universal Church. It was founded with eight members, adding Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, in 2014 to make it nine. It will move forward with nine members again.

The council has at least one cardinal from nearly every continent. There currently isn't a cardinal on the council from Oceania, which includes Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands.

O'Malley, who has long been the president of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, is the lone United States cardinal on the council. Parolin, Cardinal Oswald Gracias of Bombay, India, the former head of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, and Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo Besungu of Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, will also retain their membership.



Cardinal Seán O'Malley

Newcomers to Pope Francis' Council of Cardinal Advisors are:

- Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich of Luxembourg, the president of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union, and relator general for the Synod of Bishops on Synodality.
- Cardinal Fernando Vérgez Alzaga, the president of the Pontifical Commission for the Vatican City State, and president of the Governorate of the Vatican City State,
- Cardinal Juan José Omella Omella of Barcelona, Spain, and president of the Spanish Bishops' Conference.
- Cardinal Gérald Lacroix of Quebec, Canada.
- Cardinal Sérgio da Rocha of São Salvador da Bahia, Brazil, and former president of the Brazilian Bishops' Conference.

In his statement, O'Malley said he is grateful for the Holy Father's "faith and confidence" in his assistance. He asked for continued blessings for Pope Francis in his service to the people of God. — *By John Lavenburg, Crux*



# How AI helped shape Asia's synod document

The Vatican's official media outlet raised eyebrows recently when it published a report noting that synod organisers in Asia had used artificial intelligence (AI) to help draft a final document.

*Vatican News* was referring to the Asian synodal continental assembly in Bangkok, Thailand, held February 24 to 26 as part of the continental stage of the global synodal process, leading to the synod on synodality in Rome this October.

The report said that Fr Dr Clarence Devadass (*pic*), a member of the discernment and drafting team, had presented an updated draft of the final document to the assembly's participants that was "compiled with the use of both AI and HI (Human Intelligence)."



*Vatican News* added that the Asia continental assembly was "the first of the continental assemblies to incorporate the use of digital technologies to gather the amendments and input from the participants."

The report provoked debate online about the scope of AI's role in

the final document.

But in online conversations, there have been some misconceptions about the process.

Most misunderstood? The entire draft was not actually written by an AI-powered chatbot, like ChatGPT.

Instead, an AI programme was used to help drafters to sift through proposals made by the assembly's 80 participants representing 29 countries.

Did it actually help? The Pillar asked synod organisers.

## Effective, but still needs monitoring by human resources

Fr Dr Clarence, a theologian from the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, who has previously served as a consultor to the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue, said that the process began with the small groups that met throughout the assembly to discuss their responses to questions posed in the working document for the continental stage issued by the Vatican.

At the end of each discussion session, the groups were asked to submit a summary of their responses using Google Forms.

"From the data received, the



(Unsplash/Brett Jordan)

responses were input into an AI software," Fr Clarence said, "and a command was given, like, 'From the response below, highlight the common themes' or 'Which are the responses that are specific only to one particular group?'"

Fr Nigel Barrett, a colleague of Fr Clarence, said that another command used was "Which are the top

priorities emerging from the data?" "Once the data was sifted through, we went through the data once more, as individuals, to see if the AI-generated information was accurate," Fr Nigel explained.

Reflecting on the process, Fr Clarence said: "We could safely say that it was effective in sorting the data and picking up on keywords, but it

needs to be monitored by human resources to ensure the data reflected accurately the mood of the house."

"What would have taken a couple of hours to do was done in a couple of minutes. But to ensure the integrity of the responses, it was checked again later by members of the drafting committee against the 'raw data.'"

## Robots in disguise

What Fr Clarence describes appears to be an example of natural language processing, an area of artificial intelligence using machine learning to process text which has been utilised increasingly in business and academic settings.

While the phrase *artificial intelligence* may summon up images redolent of science fiction, the term artificial intelligence is used by data scientists to describe systems in which a computer programme is designed to do tasks typically associated with humans, such as identifying what a picture depicts, correctly transcribing spoken communication, or discerning meaning in written text.

Machine learning describes the subset of artificial intelligence models in which humans build an analytical model and then train it by exposing it to a large selection of data to allow it to correctly identify certain patterns, rather than directly programming the model to interpret specific signs in a designated way. This training process is always human-assisted in one way or another.

One everyday example of machine learning is the handwriting recognition software used by organisations such as the Post Office to identify addresses handwritten on letters. To train such software, a computer programme is provided with millions of images depicting individual handwritten letters and numbers, and a correct identification of what character was intended in each case. Once provided with many thousands of examples of how each single character can be written, the



computer identifies commonalities which it then uses to identify new, unique examples of handwritten letters and numbers. Humans continue to train the model by identifying mistakes the computer has made.

While anthropomorphic terms such as "read" or "recognise" can be misleading for what the computer does in these circumstances, the process of machine learning is, in some ways modelled on human learning.

Machine learning is often driven by a type of programme called a "neural network," because it mimics human processes of recognition by storing a large number of characteristics which are taken together to identify some new piece of data.

Just as a human recognises a written letter or number by unconsciously comparing it to all the previous examples of that letter which he or she has seen before, so the machine learning model draws on a large set of past examples to identify new ones.

The difference is that, while the human has a concept of the shape itself, the computer model rapidly compares the position of individual pixels in millions of past examples to make a probabilistic estimate of how likely the new image is to belong to a particular category such as a handwritten "A".

In natural language processing — like the kind likely used in the Asian synod meeting — the task is taking ordinary prose written by a human, and categorising it in terms of content, and even tone.

Natural language models are trained on large sets of written prose and human trainers who identify both specific topics and examples of tone. For instance, natural language models used by companies to process customer service requests are trained to identify examples of prose which are angry or sarcastic and flag those requests for additional human attention.

## Super summarising and compelling compiling

In the kind of natural language processing used by the Asian assembly, the AI model is trained to identify common topics and flag outliers. That task is similar to the technology used by *The Pillar* in its own analysis of the conference and global synodal documents.

As Fr Clarence described, natural language processing is a very fast way to compile the focuses and sentiments of a large number of text submissions from different small groups.

Not only is a natural language processing model able to compile the themes and emphases of many documents much faster than a human, but the use of that kind of model removes the potential for human bias in assessing many documents.

Even without intending to, a human reader will often look for confirmation of certain hypotheses when reading a large number of documents, and the sections related to those existing focuses may stand out inordinately to the human reader, creating a bias in the summary.

It's worth noting that the kind of computer-assisted textual analysis used by synod organisers in Asia is different from the AI chatbots in the news lately, with the release of OpenAI's ChatGPT bot and the Bing artificial intelligence tool from Microsoft which has

been in widespread user testing.

AI writing tools like Bing or ChatGPT use a large training set of existing text to attempt to mimic human writing. In some sense, those models perform a summarising function, but they are fundamentally designed to mimic human writing, not to summarise it.

But the model used by the Asian assembly was of the type designed specifically to summarise a set of documents and highlight their most common themes. That process assists the humans studying the set of texts in knowing where to look to make their own assessment.

When the Asian assembly concluded on February 26, the text's final document — which was written by human beings who made use of AI-generated summaries — was still in draft form.

The most recent draft was presented symbolically at the end of the closing Mass to the youngest participant, Joshua Eka Pramudya, a 25-year-old from Indonesia.

After the writing team makes all the changes proposed at the assembly, the text will be reviewed by members of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) and sent to the Vatican, which has set a March 31 deadline for continental stage submissions. — **By Luke Coppen and Brendan Hodge, *The Pillar***



# The Church is on the move ... slowly, but surely

The Universal Church is bustling these days. Ever since Pope Francis announced the two-year Synodal Process beginning October 10, 2021 to October 2023 (later extended to Oct 2024), the Catholic Church throughout the world had been busy organising its Synodal Assemblies and dialogue sessions with all stakeholders in the Church; namely, clergy, religious and laity.

The 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, commonly referred to as the Synod on Synodality, which will conclude in October 2024, with its theme *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission* is truly creating a buzz in every corner of the Catholic world. This level of participation by so many people has probably never been seen since Vatican Council II in 1962-1965.

The recently concluded Asian Continental Assembly on Synodality held at Baan Phu Waan Pastoral Training Centre near Bangkok, Thailand, was attended by more than 80 participants and delegates representing 29 Asian countries. According to Vatican's estimates, as at Dec 31, 2019, the number of Catholics in Asia stands at 149.1 million, making up just 3.31 per cent of the total Catholic population worldwide. Evidently the 80 participants, representing these 149 million, carried a heavy responsibility in bringing forward the concerns of such a vast diverse array of Catholics in the continent.

Reading from the news reports and testimonies from participants at the Asian Assembly, I feel a great sense of awe. They are participants of a Church event that will go down in church history, and the responsibility of carrying forward their experiences to be collated into an Asian response itself is awesome. It brings to reality what we have been taught — that the Church is One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. That people of 29 nationalities, different cultures and backgrounds, can be united as fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, in 'mutual listening, in which each one has something to learn,' as how Cardinal Mario Grech, Secretary General of the Synod put it, when he addressed the Asian Continental Assembly.



## REMINISCING CHURCH

Richard Chia

Back home in Malaysia, the synodal process is not something new. In 1975, the Catholic Church in Peninsular Malaysia began our journey with *Aggiornamento*, called in Aug 1976, where 126 priests participated in a month-long process to map out the renewal process of the local Church in response to the Call of Vatican Council II. Every 10 years since, the Church in Peninsular Malaysia has had its Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Conventions (PMPC), where several representatives from the laity and religious, together with the clergy, gathered to discern, listen and sometimes engage in constructive deliberations. At PMPC I held in 1986, a total of 171 people participated. PMPC II in 1996 had 390 participants, PMPC III in 2006 had 530 participants, and PMPC IV was in 2016 with 610 participants. In total, counting the clergy, more than 1,700 Catholics took part in our local version of the synodal process, with hundreds more who had participated in preparatory sessions at parish and diocese levels.

For this Synod on Synodality process, according to The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei (CBCMSB)'s Synod Synthesis Report dated Aug 15, 2022, an estimated 66,329 people from the three archdioceses and six dioceses in Malaysia responded to the 10-point thematic questionnaire given out in 2021/2022. Counting the number of participants at the local level parish pastoral assemblies, the parish study days, at the various Pre-Synodal Assemblies, the number of Catholic laity involved in this Synod of Synodality process has indeed set a historic record of sorts in the journey of the Church in Malaysia.

Of course, like most things in life, so it is with the Church, there are plentiful remarks either spoken in whispers or sometimes voiced out loudly, that all these assemblies or dialogue are not effective. I beg to differ here, as I too

thought the same after being involved actively in PMPC III and Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Assembly III (in 2001). Compared with the fast paced corporate and commercial world, the changes in the Church are glacial, slow and, at times, cannot be felt. But for those of us in the know, there are certainly changes. For one, the participation and involvement of laity today is more prominent. The laity are now taking on more responsibilities in the life of the Church. The laity are now more knowledgeable and better formed in biblical, liturgical, pastoral and administrative matters of the Church.

If anyone were to analyse the 66,329 participants in this Synodal process, my guess is that more than 50 per cent (perhaps as many as 75 per cent) are people who are voicing out their concern for the Church for the first time. Surely anyone who has no interest in matters of the Church will not participate in the survey, and may not even be aware of these goings-on in the Church.

Returning to the Asian Continental Assembly on Synodality, I noted two disconnects in the process.

Firstly, as reported in *Vatican News*, February 23, there were more than 80 participants coming from 29 nationalities at the Asian Assembly, of which 57 (71 per cent) were clergy (cardinals, bishops and priests), four (five per cent) were religious and 19 (24 per cent) were laity. It would have been better if more laity were invited to experience and participate in such an important event of the Church's history.

Secondly, the laity representatives from Myanmar, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Laos, Cambodia, Philippines, Taiwan, Japan and Malaysia, each brought forward their country's experience. As highlighted in the Asian Continental Assembly, it was noted that "the assembly deliberated on key questions that had not been sufficiently discussed in lower-level gatherings". By this, I understand it means that at grassroot levels (at the various Parish Pastoral Assemblies and Parish Study Day), deliberations were mostly at localised level. Gauging from the type of issues reported in the *HERALD* in the past one year,

deliberations at parish assemblies were mostly concerning the sense of belonging, leadership in church, more formation, lack of resources, conflicts and misunderstandings among church leaders, etc. Are the grassroots Catholics expected to deliberate on issues like poverty, political and military oppression, social injustices, human rights violations, climate change, aging population, and more of the macro global concerns?

As I look at the journey of the Church in Malaysia, no doubt the local issues, concerns and challenges raised at the grassroots level remain the same, but the people involved and participating are not. More laity are now aware and adding to the thinking process. More laity are now contributing to the dialogue, listening and discernment processes. More laity are now stepping forward to take on many of these challenges. Changes are not visible, but it is surely there if we care to look.

In 2026, the Church in Malaysia will be having its first Pan Malaysian Pastoral Convention where all the three archdioceses and six dioceses in East and Peninsular Malaysia will be participating. No doubt there will be an abundance of issues, concerns and challenges to be deliberated. No doubt there will be many more hundreds or thousands getting involved for the first time. The feeling of empowerment and sense of ownership will surely be felt by those actively involved in the Church. Church is no longer the domain reserved for the clergy and religious. To be able to voice our concerns, offer our suggestions and deliberate on the issues are really what Pope Francis meant when he said, "Synodality indicates walking together and listening to one another but above all, to the Holy Spirit. It starts with, and involves all the faithful at local churches across the world, promising to listen to all, especially to laypeople".

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

## Digital Synod brings Catholic Church 'closer to digital natives'

The "Digital Synod" reached an estimated 20 million people and gleaned tens of thousands of responses from non-Catholics and non-believers, according to Fr Jeffrey Segovia, who points out that real people lie behind all the clicks and likes that fill social media.

Fr Jeffrey Segovia attended the Synod Continental Assembly for Asia held in Bangkok February 24-26. The Filipino priest brought the voice of all those who participated in the Digital Synod on Synodality, promoted by the Vatican's Dicastery for Communication.

In an interview with *Vatican News* on the sidelines of the Assembly, Fr Segovia explained the importance of holding synodal conversations in the digital realm, saying that he has learned much from the unique experience.

### Why a digital synod?

Fr Segovia explained that a "digital synod" was necessary for the Church, since it offered an opportunity to reach out online to people who have no formal contact with parishes or Church institutions.

"One of the realities that we have now in the Church is the existence of a new technology. And one of the things that we also have to admit is the presence of those in the digital media. Behind all the profiles, the clicks, the likes and the follows, are real persons."



The Digital Synod included an online prayer event live-streamed from St Peter's Basilica.

### What is a 'digital synod'?

Fr Segovia said the digital synod was, first of all, "an effort from the Dicastery for Communication, which also acknowledges the presence of the faithful in the digital culture, in the digital media, which also has its own digital language."

The Synod was "digital" not only because it was "held digitally," Fr Segovia noted, but because it tapped into "those who are already in the digital media, i.e. 'influencers' from all over the world."

They were able to "involve their followers" in the Church's effort of listening to as-wide-an audience as possible, Fr Segovia explained.

It also provided the Church the opportunity "to accompany them", since they are also members of the Church.

### What surprises were there?

One of the surprises Father noted was that "there's a lot of them actually!"

"Tapping digital influencers through TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, and the like," he reported that the digital synod was able to reach an estimated 20 million people.

Over 110,000 responses were received as a result.

"What is surprising is that 10 per cent of those responses came from non-believers and non-Catholics."

Fr Segovia said that giving them the "opportunity to be listened to" had a positive impact on many of those who participated.

### What issues were raised?

As in the traditional consultations that took place, Fr Segovia confirmed that one of the issues raised in the digital synod was that of not being listened to and the perception of clericalism.

But one issue specifically noted by digital synod participants is that "the Church does not know the language. Those in the digital world oftentimes find it difficult to communicate with the Church."

However, Fr Segovia said, those who participated acknowledged that pastoral ministers are seeking to "draw closer" to them.

"They also felt that they can speak to the people of the Church," more rapidly since many priests and men and women religious have social media accounts through which they can reach them more easily.

The hope which digital synod participants expressed, according to Fr Segovia, is that since their issues have been taken into consideration, and their voices have been heard, "that we can advance together and move forward to a better future for the Church." — **By Sr Bernadette M. Reis, fsp, Vatican News**



## Ruminations

## Faith is not a seasonal thing

The COVID-19 lockdown in 2020, which necessitated the shutdown of our churches, led me to search for Masses online. That was how I chanced upon Fr Michael Payyapilly V.C., who was then streaming Masses and Adoration services online from the Church of the Holy Family in Doveton, Melbourne, Australia. His homilies and his prayers after every homily had been soul-stirring for me and I found myself constantly searching for more of his inspiring sermons.

When the Church of St Francis Xavier, Petaling Jaya, announced late last year that Fr Michael had been invited to conduct a retreat in February 2023, I signed up without a second thought. It would turn out to be an immensely blessed three days for me. Coming out of that spirit-filled retreat, I feel compelled to share some of the blessings I experienced.

The retreat started on February 17 and ended two days before Ash Wednesday, which marks the beginning of Lent. While I was ecstatic over the thought of attending a 'Fr Michael Payyapilly Retreat' in person, I had wondered if it could not have been held during a more cheerful time of our Catholic liturgical year. It was 'A Lenten Retreat' and Lent, categorically, spells a time of repentance, a time of penance and sacrifice. Lent, to me, is a somewhat 'gloomy' season. The advent of the Lenten season for me has always been accompanied by a heaviness of heart and, subconsciously, a sense of dread. It is a time when we are entreated to give up specific pleasures, eat less, pray more, do penance and essentially, live holier, to prepare for Easter.

I also wondered if Fr Michael and Fr Joseph Kannampally, another Vincentian Order priest, who would co-conduct the retreat, would have anything new to tell me about Lent. Would they be echoing the oft repeated exhortations of the season and go over the same old same old about Lent? As it turned out, they did indeed draw focus to Lent. But in my case, the retreat did more than draw my mind into Lent, it immersed my heart and soul in it. The heart tugging homilies and soul nourishing Praise and Worship, the holy Adorations and the Benedictions that took place over the three days presented to me, Lent in its true profoundness and glory.

As the retreat progressed, I felt the weight and burden of Lent lift, and in its place came a sense of hope, assurance and joy. I was beginning to see the real value of Lent.

"The 40 days of purification and cleansing are not to prepare you so much for Easter but for eternal life," said Fr Michael.

That statement resonated within me. I found myself reflecting on Fr Michael's session on purification. But of course, I thought to myself! Lent is not merely a preparation for Easter! It does not, and should not, stop at Easter. Purification is intensified at Lent, but purification continues and prepares me for the beyond. It prepares me for the prize of Eternal Life! The immeasurable value of Lent became clear. Therein is the significance of Lent. Every Lent is another rung on my ladder of faith towards eternal life. That should be my focus and my ultimate goal. Lent surely cannot be limited to 40 days, finishing after Holy Thursday? My Lent cannot be seasonal. I cannot hang up my Lenten duties after Easter and pack them away till the next Lent. My purification cannot happen over one Lent. It will take many purifications to prepare me. My Christian discipleship, my faith, cannot be lived with an 'on/off' switch.

Lent leads us to the miracle of Good Friday. Lent leads us to the greatest gift we can receive – the gift of the Cross. On Calvary lies the greatest miracle of Love, the greatest gift of all.

Fr Michael talked to us about the Sacrifice of the Cross and he drew our hearts to the unfathomable love and the unreserved forgiveness of our crucified Saviour.

As I contemplated Jesus on the Cross, an enormous sense of gratitude swelled within my depths, even as my eyes welled up in tears of thankfulness. How awesome is my God! How much He must love me! How much He must have forgiven me. On the Cross, my God died in my place. How priceless the gift of the Cross.

On the final day of the retreat, Fr Michael and Fr Joseph sanctified all of us and carried Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament around the church that all of us might be able to gaze upon His Holy Presence up close. As Jesus passed by me, my only desire was to fall on my knees in reverence, to worship and adore.

My Lent is now a season of love and forgiveness. Not burdensome. Not dreaded.



Barbara Boey is a parishioner of the Church of St Francis Xavier, Petaling Jaya

# Many lessons learnt from Camino Walk

By Thomas Ong

I first walked the Camino de Compostela in 2018, at age 75. My youngest daughter and her husband were planning to walk the whole of the French way (route), 800 km in six weeks, from St Jean Pied de Port in France to Santiago in Spain, and they invited me to join them for part of the walk. My two companions and I flew into Madrid and took a bus to Burgos city from where we joined the young couple who had, by then, walked about 300 km.

Our group of five walked along the Mersata (with dry savanna-like terrain without any trees) for five days, found it boring and hot and the three of us then left the young couple to board a train for Sarria which is 100km from our destination, the city of Santiago (San Diego means St James in Spanish). After walking for seven days, we were elated to reach Santiago Cathedral where the remains of the Apostle, St James, are interred. I can say that all our aches and pains evaporated upon seeing the majestic Cathedral.

My second walk was in November 2022, with my three daughters who live in different parts of the world. It was a great opportunity for bonding. We spent a few days chilling in Porto (home of Port wine) in Portugal before we took the train to the town of Vigo for the walk along the Portuguese way, 105 km to Santiago.

I had read that the Camino (Camino means "walk" in Spanish) was a sort of "self-directed" pilgrimage, without spiritual director, hymns, Rosary or prayers. Of the 600,000-700,000 pilgrims who walked the Camino annually before the COVID-19 pandemic, the majority were non-Christian youth. These days, young people are searching for spirituality and meaning in life outside of any formal religion. Others who walk the Camino are searching for answers to their problems or seeking divine guidance in making important decisions in life.

In my first walk, I carried a backpack of seven kg (slightly more than 10 per cent of my body weight). It comprised of three sets of walking clothes, underwear, socks, two sets of pyjamas, warm and waterproof vests, basic toiletry items and some snacks. It is important to have good walking shoes and quality socks, as well as a hat and a light plastic poncho.

In the morning, we had our breakfast around 8.00am - 8.30am and allowed the early crowd to depart before us. We started walking around 9.30am, at a slow, steady pace and stopped to have coffee and snacks whenever we felt like it. It was free and easy, and some of the breaks were up to an hour, depending on the intensity of our chat among ourselves and with new friends we had found.

By 3.00-4.00pm, if we felt a little tired, we would look for accommodation for the night. In the first walk, we chose hostels with dormitory-type of beds called "Albergues" which in 2018 cost €6 (RM2870 to RM3830) for a bed



Thomas (second from left) with his daughters and son-in-law visited old churches and UNESCO Heritage sites along the French route of the Camino.

plus a simple breakfast with coffee. Dinner was extra, but always came with half a bottle of red wine per person, and dinner is usually the time pilgrims sit down together to share their experiences and insights from the day's walk.

The walk took us through the countryside and small villages which are approximately eight km apart. There are many old churches and UNESCO Heritage sites, farms and vineyards, majestic ocean views (the Portuguese way) and many streets of cobbled stones.

It was good to leave the noise, distractions and attachments of this world behind, even for a few days, to allow us to reflect on our real life's journey and to listen to our inner voice. No doubt, many pilgrims who are searching for answers, had their quest fulfilled. That is the attraction of the Camino — a quiet time and place to discover or re-discover oneself, free even from the chatter of prayers or the singing of hymns.

The quietness is only interrupted by the sound of birds or the occasional ringing of church bells. In our life's journey, we are too preoccupied to stop and smell the flowers. Life is an opportunity to leave a mark wherever we go, even if it is just a smile with a passing stranger. In the Camino, there is no ice to break and communication transcends language barriers. Lasting relations from brief encounters between pilgrims are not uncommon.

There are similarities between the Camino walk and our life's journey. We can make life simple, uncomplicated, by removing attachments and distractions. In both instances we are mere pilgrims, walking through a foreign land that we cannot call home. The journey is as important as the destination and is to be enjoyed (lived) to the full.

Life should be lived fully and consciously during each moment, like during the Camino walk. Somehow, many pilgrims shared that they stopped worrying about their work and problems, the past and the future, during the walk. Human beings tend to think too much of the past (usually with feelings of regret)

and worry about the future (which often brings anxiety and even fear).

During the walk (but not so much in life), I had a strong feeling that God was walking alongside me, guiding and protecting me. There may be the presence of angels who we cannot see along this sacred path but believe me, there are countless stories of angels in human form who appear out of nowhere to assist or counsel pilgrims in trouble or who have lost their way.

The Camino has changed me in some ways. It has taught me that my needs are small (all my worldly goods were carried on my back). Since my return from my first Camino, I have stopped hoarding things and am on my way to becoming a minimalist. I came home and gave away half my clothes and almost all my prized books. In the year following that, I did not purchase anything for my personal use, including new clothes and books.

The Camino has taught me that pain and suffering are only temporary and can be borne cheerfully. They usually end when we arrive at our destination. So too, in this life, our troubles and health issues will come to an end one day. Meanwhile, we should joyfully offer them up for God's noble intentions, like for the salvation of souls in purgatory.

I started the habit of praying for my sick friends to be healed. In the first walk, I carried a prayer stone for two young boys with health issues and God healed the first one and made a way for the other one. In the second walk, I carried 12 prayer stones for my friends' healing.

Another way the Camino has changed me is that I listen for God's voice as a way of daily meditation. I try to be more conscious of the presence of God's spirit in me. I know God wants to speak to me and prompt me to be a part of His plan for humankind. He will lead me to heal the sick, give a word of prophecy or perform all the other charisms if I am able to recognise His voice and obey His prompting.



# Lenten fast

## An opportunity at conversation

We are halfway through with Lent and Holy Week will soon be upon us. The 44 days of fasting, penance and almsgiving we do annually to remind us of the Jesus' time in the desert.

During this period, many Catholics experience the joy of re-connecting with the Lord and the Church, as we journey toward Easter, preparing ourselves spiritually, to celebrate the Resurrection.

Yet while we are focussed on self-conversion and inward reflection, Lent presents an opportunity for conversation and reaching out, as well.

Apart from the usual charities, it gives us, almost naturally, an opportunity to talk about our faith, and even the creative ways we sometimes express it, as well as the common points we have with our brothers and sisters belonging to other denominations and religions.

The Lenten fast, for example. Fasting is practised in almost every faith, using an ancient, time-honoured tradition to attain any number of different, but almost related goals.

At the crux of it, fasting is the most basic form of human self-denial, refusing to feed oneself, in the hope of attaining some form of higher realisation or reward. It affects us biologically, mentally, and of course, spiritually.

### Other Christians

While the Church prescribes abstinence as the general rule, applicable from ages 18-



### MAKING SENSE

Emmanuel Joseph

60, not consuming meat, and having either two half-meals or one full meal a day, many Malaysian Catholics tend to go full vegetarian. Others give up something in addition too, such as social media, their favourite TV show, their mobile screen time, their favourite foods or drinks and so on. This creative expression of sacrifice beyond the traditional scope makes for an interesting sharing of faith.

Other mainstream Churches too, such as Anglicans and Methodists observe Lent, too. Eastern churches, like the Eastern Orthodox, observe Lent for about one week more, complete with a Pre-Lent season. Eastern Churches dates for Easter and Lent tend to be a little later than Western churches, like ours. Orthodox Churches also prescribe specific fasts by week – pre-Lent, First Week of Lent, Second to Sixth Week and Pascha Week. At its longest, fasts can stretch for three days, and as its strictest, it even prohibits all forms of oil!

The traditions, liturgy and prayers in the Orthodox churches for both Lent and Pascha (Easter) are elaborate and beautiful (and even longer than ours!)

Even though Evangelical Churches are

not conventionally known for observing Lent, there is an observable increasing trend among millennials and younger members, especially in independent churches, to adopt aspects of Catholic practice, such as Lent and aspects of Holy Week as they seek a deeper, more spiritual meaning to being Church, and to Eastertide.

Catholics could share our rich history – many practices in the Protestant Churches have their roots in our own history, albeit usually in a more 'toned down' manner – such as the Roman collar, liturgical uniformity, simplified rituals and the use of other outward expressions of inward faith – as we do with Sacraments and sacramentals.

Thus, points like Lent opens up conversation as our brothers and sisters in Christ in these churches discover why Catholics do the things they do – changing some preconceived notions they may have about our faith, and opening up their mind on other aspects of it as well.

### Other Faiths

Not only are both similar – fixed period of fasting and prayer, in spiritual preparation of a celebration (*Eid ul-Fitr/Hari Raya*) of spiritual victory over the flesh, Muslims also observe the second *Eid*, as a remembrance of sacrifice – of Ishmael to God, by Abraham (while Christians and Jews believe Isaac was the sacrifice), while we observe the sacrifice of Jesus for mankind, at Easter.

Perhaps more interestingly, *Akedah* (as it is called in Judaism) also provides the root

term for *Aqidah* in Islam (or faith) and the Muslim term for it, *Qurban*, provides the word for Arab Christian term for Mass.

One of the earliest religions, Hinduism, practises various types of fasts – from food and drink, from conjugal activity, and some from speaking, sometimes for weeks and months. Some Catholic monastics too, observe this vow of silence as part of their religious discipline, such as the Carthusian Order, as do some monks from Buddhist and Taoist traditions. Both these religions of Indian origin also fast on certain auspicious days, and inauspicious ones as well – one as a means of temperance of festivities, and the latter as a means of penance to offset the negativity associated with such days.

Sikhs advocate moderation in all aspects of life, including worship, and as such, specifically encourage fasting among its adherents, generally considering it an extreme practice.

Interestingly, all religious fasts seem to be demarcated by prefixed calendar periods – indicative of a common wisdom by our founders to balance out the ever-present worldly excesses with spiritual exercises. And perhaps with that, a bit more understanding between us.

● Emmanuel Joseph oversees IT as his 9-5 job and from 5-9, he serves a few NGOs, think tanks and volunteer groups. He serves as an advisor for Projek Dialog and is a Fellow with the Institute of Research and Development of Policy.



### ...meanwhile

Joanne Lim

...Jesus summons every ounce of strength, rises up, and drags His Cross to the place where He will be killed.

Having run several marathons in my lifetime, the final 15km is no longer about physical strength. That is the intense stretch, almost humanly impossible, especially at a pace of 5:30min/km. All there is left to depend on is mental (and spiritual) strength. Yet, we run to the finish line, mustering every last ounce of strength, dragging ourselves to complete the race in order to try and conquer our own limitations and fears...of course, having come thus far, what a waste of blood, sweat and tears otherwise!

In the last 15km of the marathon, I often start to pray the Rosary...at every bead, I pray for my loved ones...each one of them, whether near and far...I pray for the sick and suffering, the homeless and hungry, the lost and lonely...I pray for our clergy, especially those who may be unable to resist the temptations of the world. 12km...I pray for the souls of those dearly departed...and those still wandering, longing for prayers...those who chose to abandon their crosses and to give up on one another, on themselves...eight kilometres...I pray for God's forgiveness and recount my sins...a sudden surge of remorse and sadness always overwhelms me: "Why did I hurt others when I could have chosen otherwise?"...at five kilometres, I am faced with visions of death: "what if I collapse now, so close to finish-

## As He falls the third time...

ing; who will I be leaving behind"...another surge of emotions – this time of desperation...I haven't done all that I need to do in this life...Lord, please spare me! And with that one last bead, that *final one kilometre*, I pray that God will lead me home to my family: "they are waiting for my *vindaloo!*"...no, this pain will not last, "and this too shall pass." – 2 Corinthians 4: 17-18

Often we are consumed by what is understood as 'crowd mentality' and like the 'crowd' in Jerusalem jeering at Christ, we hear "no you can't do this, you won't make it"; "you are too weak, just give up!"; "you've gone too far to ever turn back"; "there is no way you can stand back up"...and unlike Jesus who stood back up, we oftentimes believe these voices...we give in to them...like a voice in the dark, sometimes even from someone so close by, we believe this is truth and we instinctively fall a step back...10 steps back...only to realise that we made a mistake and the voice was unmistakably ungodly. We literally become limp and lame... "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me." Luke 22:42

For Jesus however, He dragged His Cross to the place where He would be killed. He heard the crowd...but He chose **not** to listen. And therein was His victory...the choice to stay fervent to the will of His Father...and to reign victorious forever, even in death.

If you started a race knowing it will end in death, you would not even start. However, life is a marathon, and we are all headed towards the finishing line...and Jesus showed us exactly how it is done as He fell the third (and final) time – that He would never fall again.

I lost two of my loved ones last year...

a dearest friend to the ravaging agony of cancer, and my loving grandma who held on until she no longer could. As death approached them, I felt my own life escape me...it was a helplessness...the same helplessness and hopelessness that I felt as I was lying in the hospital bed, waiting to be wheeled into the operating theatre for a major surgery five years ago...God's plan, not ours; in God's time, not mine... "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit." Luke 23:46. Grandma and Marie fought the good fight, right till the very end...they obeyed God and waited to be set free. Therein lies their victory.

And so, even with the third fall, even with nothing left in us to give or to live by, we are with Jesus at the ninth Station, not to give up, but to rise up and to drag our crosses – our burdens, our sorrows, our inequities, our pain, our suffering, our sins, our struggles, our anger, agony, misery, anguish, our griefs, and our disappointments, with us, to the finishing line. Yes, many of us know this Station all too well...it sounds all too familiar...it is what keeps us awake at night and even what keeps us away from our Faith...it is the same voice that prompts suicidal thoughts when we are near defeat or adds to the mental anguish lurking at many turns in our life. Yet we soldier on because we also know that this main story does not end with Jesus' death at Golgotha but, instead, unfolds into a beautiful truth of our salvation... everlasting life. Don't lose the plot – Get up! You can do it. Don't let 'you know who' win. Jesus got up, we must too.

...meanwhile, let's remember that Jesus



has been there...with His energy almost completely depleted and the weight of the Cross crushing His body, He conquered this Station. So, here's the good news...that because our strength is from Him, we too will eventually pull through...victoriously. So, let us laugh in the face of adversity, for as Matthew 12:21 tells us in no uncertain terms, "His name will be the Hope of all the world!" – hang on tightly to that Hope. Blessed Lent!

● Professor Joanne Lim shares the faith in Catechism and music in Church. She is Deputy Dean and lectures on media and society at the University of Nottingham Malaysia.





Fr Ron Rolheiser

# Waiting for the angel to come

The night before He died, Jesus struggled mightily to accept His Father's will. The Gospels describe Him in the Garden of Gethsemane, prostrate on the ground, "sweating blood", and begging His Father to save Him from the brutal death that awaited Him. Then, after He finally surrenders His will to His Father, an angel comes and strengthens Him.

This begs a question: where was the angel when, seemingly, He most needed it? Why didn't the angel come earlier to strengthen Him?

The first comes from Martin Luther King Jr. In the days leading up to his assassination, he met angry resistance and began to receive death threats. He was courageous, but he was also human. At a point, those threats got to him. Here is one of his diary entries.

"One night towards the end of January, I settled into bed late, after a strenuous day. Coretta had already fallen asleep and just as I was about to doze off, the telephone rang. An angry voice said, 'Listen, nig., we've taken all we want from you; before next week you'll be sorry you ever came to Montgomery.' I hung up, but I couldn't sleep. It seemed that all of my fears had come down on me at once. I had reached a saturation point.

I got out of bed and began to walk the floor. Finally, I went to the kitchen and heated a pot of coffee. I was ready to give up. With my cup of coffee sitting untouched before me, I tried to think of a way to move out of the picture without appearing a coward.

In this state of exhaustion, when my courage had all but gone, I decided to take my problem to God. With my head in my hands, I bowed over the kitchen table and prayed aloud. The words I spoke to God that midnight are still vivid in my memory.

'I am here taking a stand for what I believe is right. Now I am afraid. The people are looking to me for leadership, and if I stand before them without strength and courage, they too will falter. I am at the end of my powers. I have nothing left. I've come to the point where I can't face it alone.' *At that moment, I experienced the presence of the Divine as I had never experienced Him before.*" (Strive Toward Freedom)

Notice at what point in his struggle the angel appears.

In her autobiography, *The Long Loneliness*, Dorothy shares this story. As a young woman, along with the man she loved, she had been somewhat militant

in her unbelief. Indeed, their reluctance to enter the institution of marriage was meant as a statement of their non-acceptance of traditional Christian values. Then she conceived a child, and its birth was the beginning of a radical conversion for her. The joy she felt holding her baby convinced her that there was a God and that life had a loving purpose. She became a Roman Catholic, much to the chagrin of the man she loved, the father of her child: he gave her an ultimatum: if you have this child baptised, our relationship is ended. She had the child baptised and lost that relationship (though they continued as friends). However, she now found herself a single mother with no job and no real vision or plan as to where to go now in life.

At one point, she became desperate. She left the child in the care of others and took a train from New York City to the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C. In her autobiography, she describes how she prayed that day, how desperate her prayer was. Like Jesus in Gethsemane and Martin Luther King in Montgomery, her prayer was one of raw need and helplessness, of an admission that she no longer had the strength to go on. Essentially, she said this to God: *I have given up everything for You and now*

*I am alone and afraid. I don't know what to do and am lacking strength to carry on in this commitment.*

She prayed this prayer of helplessness, took the train back to New York, and not long after, found Peter Maurin sitting on her doorstep, telling her that he had heard about her and that he had a vision of what she should now do, namely, to start the *Catholic Worker*. That set the path for the rest of her life. The angel had come and strengthened her.

Notice at what point in these stories the angel makes its appearance — when human strength is fully exhausted. Why not earlier? Because, up to the point of exhaustion, we don't really let the angel in, relying instead on our own strength. But, as Trevor Herriot says, "Only after we have let the desert do its full work in us will angels finally come and minister to us".

● **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](http://www.ron-rolheiser.com)

## I'm an abuse survivor

### Pope Francis met with me and changed my life

When I try to describe what Pope Francis means to me, I immediately think that I should write something a theologian would say, smart and peppered with citations. I am no theologian, but my story with Francis does have an episode from the New Testament that serves as a lens for me and is probably familiar to all of you.

Jesus was called to Bethany by His friends Martha and Mary because their brother, Lazarus, had died. He had been dead for four days, and when Jesus went to the grave, He resurrected him, and Lazarus continued his life. So yes, I do feel like Lazarus. I am a regular person who has received way too much; therefore, I have a duty to return all I can.

I met Francis one day during a battle of years with so many Church leaders who — as some still do — had tried to silence me and so many survivors about the horrors of abuse. In 2018, I was given the opportunity to speak to Francis directly. At the time I was a man in pain and I didn't want anything left unsaid during that conversation.

I wanted to speak for so many survivors that deserve the privilege I was given and will never have it, to tell him about so many who have died waiting, those who have committed suicide, and those who are not believed and continue begging for justice. I wanted to tell him about the plight of the LGBTQ community and the cruel rejection of many in the Church.

After playing it beforehand for days and hours in my head, we met in the hallways of the Vatican's Santa Marta guesthouse,

where — to my surprise — I encountered a man who was humble and ready to listen to whatever I was going to say.

We sat for three-and-a-half hours in a room where I told him about what they had done to me and to many others, and the machinations of the leadership of the Church.

I also told him this was not unique and that it was a pattern for thousands of survivors all over the world. I told him how my faith and the figure of Mary had sustained me in the darkest times, even when I wanted to die.

I spoke about those Church leaders — many bishops and cardinals who seemed more like wolves instead of shepherds — who destroy the most sacred things a human being has: our belief, our faith and our dignity.

As we travelled through the pain, his face, his posture and his occasional words felt sincere, unlike others who through the years had just pretended to listen. We cried and laughed. I went in with a huge backpack of anger and pain and came out of the grave, like Lazarus, feeling that I had a second chance and more motivated than ever to help others. He changed my life.

Through the years, I have come to know and understand a Pope who has the weight of the world on his shoulders. A man who wants to change so much — and as he does, he realises how much there is still to do. From the outside, I feel the frustration when I see those who say yes to his face but, when they go back to their dioceses or offices, change nothing.



Pope Francis and Juan Carlos Cruz Chellew. (Pic courtesy of the writer)

I am amazed at this man who walks to where others want to run away, who exalts those who are poor and marginalised, and who is not afraid to speak his mind in the face of injustice. And when I am discouraged and I talk to him, his sense of humour can lift me up. He is the only person in the world who after every interaction I have with him, it feels like the first time we've met.

Francis' example makes me want to speak up against those loud and powerful minorities who try to monopolise religion through power, money and antique laws that turn people away. Those who cast so many of us to eternal damnation without even evaluating their own lives.

I do think he knows that there are millions around the world who have been touched by his love and love him back. I am not saying that he is perfect or that he has solved every-

thing that needs to be solved, but who is and who does? He sincerely tries. I see it when he invites, cares and loves everyone.

I know many don't share how I feel and that is OK. My change in these years has been unbelievable. I was very lost. I felt unworthy. I was in terrible pain. I didn't have much will to keep on living, let alone fight for others. Pope Francis pulled me out of the grave and I will be grateful forever. I have been given much and much will be demanded from me. I take that very seriously. — **Juan Carlos Cruz Chellew, NCR**

● **An executive with a multinational company, Juan Carlos Cruz Chellew was appointed by Pope Francis in 2021, as a member of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable People. He is also a global advocate for survivors of abuse.**



# Little Catholics' Corner

Hello children,

The readings for the Fourth Sunday of Lent are about sight and blindness. In the first reading, God chooses David to be king. David's brothers are presented to Samuel as the most likely candidates for greatness. However, God chooses David, the youngest brother, because

He sees beyond outward appearances and into the human heart.

The second reading is a reminder that we must live in the light, not in darkness.

The Gospel tells the story of the man born blind, whom Jesus cured.

Love, Auntie Gwen

Write a prayer to God giving thanks for the good things you can see, hear, smell, taste and touch by filling in the blanks with your own words.

God of all,

I thank you for \_\_\_\_\_ I see.

For the sound and the smell of \_\_\_\_\_.

I thank you for the feel of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ which I love to eat.

May my eyes be always open to see when others need my help, And may my heart be filled with Your love. Amen.

## My Lenten Journey

MY FAVOURITE BIBLE STORY ...

IN CHURCH, I LIKE

→ \_\_\_\_\_

→ \_\_\_\_\_

→ \_\_\_\_\_



WHAT EASTER MEANS TO ME?

Draw a picture



THIS LENT, I HAVE

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

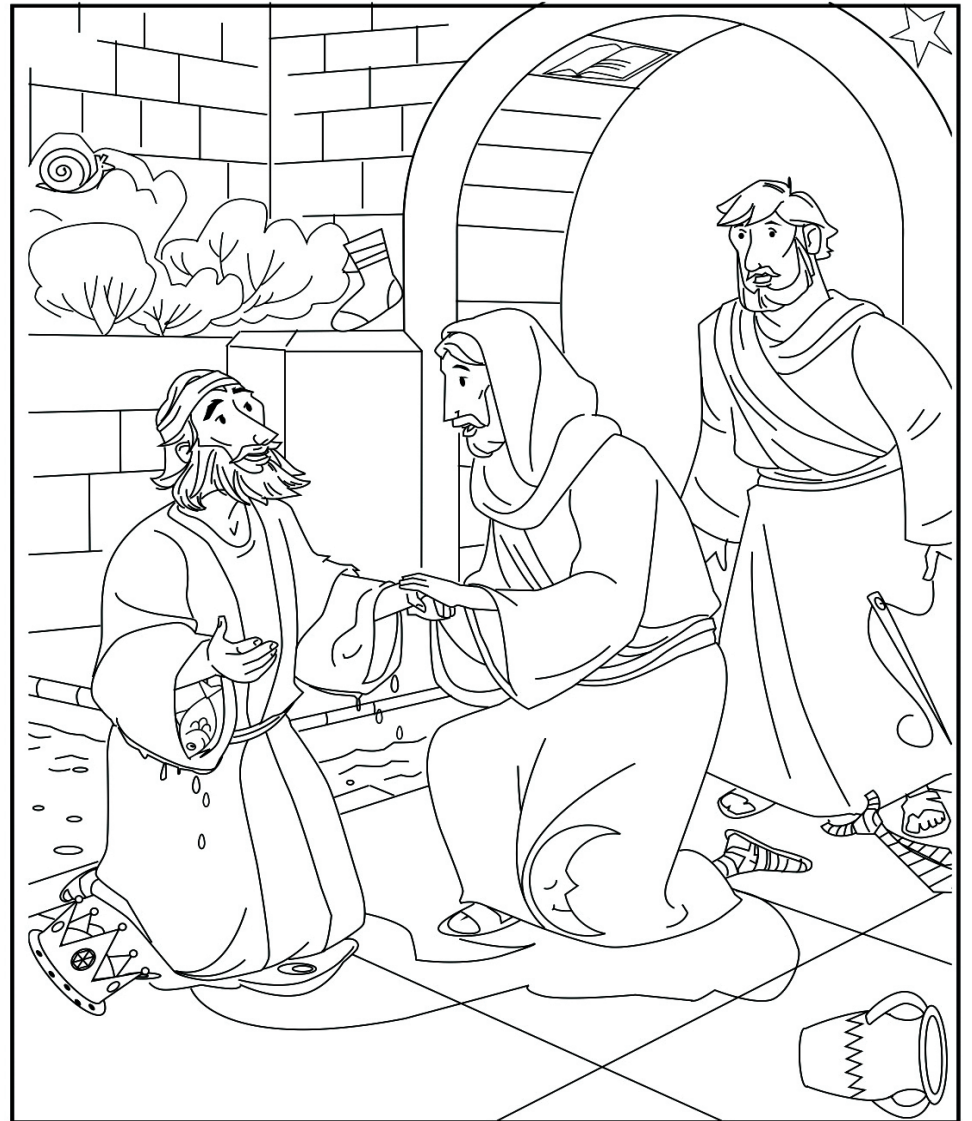


THE BIBLE SAYS



### Hidden Pictures: Jesus Healed a Blind Man

Find these objects hidden in the picture below: book, crown, fish, jug, moon, necktie, needle and thread, snail, sock, star.



### Bible Quiz

- What biblical event does the time of Lent represent?
  - The 40 days Moses spent on Mount Sinai with God (Exodus 24:18)
  - Jesus retreated into the wilderness, where He fasted for 40 days, and was tempted by the devil (Matthew 4:1-2, Mark 1:12-13, Luke 4:1-2)
  - The 40 days and nights Elijah spent walking to Mount Horeb (1 Kings 19:8)
- How is ash for Ash Wednesday made?
  - By burning the previous year's blessed palms
  - By burning logs
  - By burning books
  - By burning clothes
- What is the original meaning of Lent?
  - Autumn
  - Spring
  - Fast
  - Penance
- Which is the last Sunday of Lent?
  - Easter Sunday
  - Whit Sunday
  - Palm Sunday
  - Pentecost Sunday
- Lent is known to be 40 days long even though from Ash Wednesday to the last Saturday of the season it is 46 days. Why?
  - Sundays are not included
  - Mondays are not included
  - Counting error
  - Saturdays are not included
- Which feast day always comes during Lent?
  - Annunciation
  - Assumption
  - St. Joseph's Feast
  - Presentation

Answers: 1. B 2. A 3. B 4. C 5. A 6. A



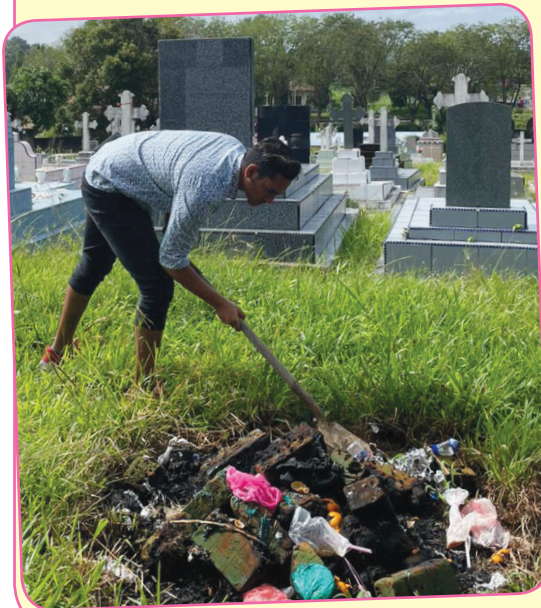
# YOUTH

MARCH 19, 2023

## MISSIONARY WORK

### PRAYING FOR THE LIVING AND THE DEAD

TAMPIN: Lent, as we know, is a period of penitential preparation for Easter. It begins on Ash Wednesday, six and a half weeks before Easter, and provides a 40-day period for fasting and abstinence (Sundays are excluded), in imitation of Jesus Christ's fasting in the wilderness before He began His public ministry.



Other than praying and fasting, missionary works are highly encouraged amongst Christians in the weeks leading up to Easter. This is what the Youth Ministry of the Church of St John Marie Vianney have engaged in.

The first week of Lent was all about visiting those who are sick. For the second week, (March 5), the Youth Ministry chose to visit the Catholic graveyard in Tampin to 'Pray for the Living and the Dead'.

The youth gathered in the Casa de Vianney hall after Sunday breakfast and were given a briefing by the youth leader on the tasks to be done and safety measures to observe. Around 12 youth joined the mission and the church van was used to get to the cemetery.

They arrived around 10.30am and began collecting litter around the graveyard — old candles, water bottles and wilted flowers, filling four garbage bags. After disposing the litter collected at the nearby dumpster, the youth gathered in the small hall at the cemetery for a brief sharing about the living and the dead by the youth leader.

A short prayer concluded the whole mission and the youth were given time to ponder on the sharing given. They then returned to church around 11.30am.

Praying for the living and the dead is one of the simplest but most forgotten works of mercy. Many of us choose to pray for our personal needs and the needs of others but in this millennial age, we often forget to pray for the departed souls. This missionary work not only builds our faith in the Lord but also strengthens our morals and virtues. — *By Arianne Abigail D'Costa*



## 'DARE TO TESTIFY TO CHRISTIAN IDEALS'

**L**ONDON: Tens of thousands of young Catholics from across England and Wales gathered at the OVO Arena Wembley, in London, for the Fifth CYMFed Flame Congress on March 4.

The event was held 150 days before the 37th World Youth Day — to be held in Lisbon, Portugal, Aug 1-6, 2023 — under the theme *Rise Up!*, an echo of the WYD Scripture passage: *Mary arose and went with haste.*

#### Set free by the Gospel

Pope Francis sent his greetings and encouragement to participants in the youth rally on Saturday.

In a message signed by Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin, the Pope assured the young Catholics of his "spiritual closeness" and prayed that "Almighty God will richly bless their time together".

He expressed his hopes that "through adoration, music, testimonies, and the sharing of friendship with Christ and with one another, all present will grow strong in faith and love and bear witness courageously to the Gospel message that sets us free."

#### Beauty of generosity

The Pope also urged them to hasten to respond to the Lord's call to follow Him, as did Mary, the Mother of God.

*"Dare to be different [and] point to ideals other*

*than those of this world, testifying to the beauty of generosity, service, purity, perseverance, forgiveness, fidelity to our personal vocation, prayer, the pursuit of justice and the common good, love for the poor, and social friendship."*

Pope Francis wrapped up his message by entrusting the young English and Welsh Catholics and their families "to the intercession of Our Lady of Walsingham" and offered them his "blessing as a pledge of wisdom, joy, and peace in Jesus the Lord."



#### Rising up as young Catholics

According to the event's website, Flame 2023 is an opportunity to "Rise up after the pandemic, Rise up as young Catholics, Rise up — as Mary did — for the surprising and beautiful adventure that is our Catholic faith."

Guest speakers include Filipino-born Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, Pro-Prefect of the Dicastery for Evangelisation, and Australian-born Archbishop Timothy Costelloe of Perth. — *By Devin Watkins, Vatican News*



# Sandakan youth festival logo competition has a winner!

SANDAKAN: Russel Richard Sebastian's logo has been chosen for the Second Sandakan Diocesan Youth Festival or TBK2 (Temasya Belia Keuskupan 2), to be held from August 28 to September 1.

In conjunction with TBK2, a logo drawing competition, coinciding with the theme, *Mary set out at that time and went as quickly as she could to a town in the hill country of Judah (Luke 1:39)* was organised by the TBK2 Multimedia and Publicity Team (MPT).

Some of the criteria in selecting the winning entry was the depiction of the theme, uniqueness, using not more than three col-

ours and text in the Bahasa Malaysia language.

The winning entry is the official logo for the TBK2. The competition, which ran from Feb 20 to 26, was open to Catholic youth throughout the Diocese of Sandakan. It aimed at inspiring the youth in heralding the upcoming festival.

The competition received several entries and a few were shortlisted and sent to the Main Organising Team (MOT) for further selection.

Russel, from Our Lady of Fatima Parish in Beluran, was notified by MPT's Roland Matthew of the winning logo before it was



LOGO RASMI  
TBK 2  
SANDAKAN  
2023



The winning logo designed by Russel Richard Sebastian (pic left).

announced on the official social media webpage of the Sandakan DYA, on Feb 28. MPT created a short video clip highlighting the winning entry and describing the illustration of the logo and colours used.

The MOT and MPT wish to express their heartfelt thanks and appreciation to the contestants of the TBK2 Logo Creation Competition for their support and enthusiasm in submitting their works. May

the spirit of the youths be elevated and strengthened.

The youth are called to 'hasten' and participate in the biggest celebration of the Diocese of Sandakan and to feel the love of Jesus. As Pope Francis exclaimed for the 37th World Youth Day, Aug 15, 2022, *Now is the time to rise! Let us arise and hurry! Like Mary, let us carry Jesus in our hearts and bring Him to be preached to everyone we meet.*

## Understanding St John Paul II's teachings on life and sexuality

KUALA LUMPUR: The Theology of the Body (TOB) is the profound teachings of St John Paul II on life, love, and sexuality. As Cardinal Karol Wojtyla of Krakow, he spent several years penning his thoughts on the Theology of the Body.

When he became pope, he took five years to deliver this message of love to the world from the Vatican. Theologians, writers, and others then invested many years unpacking St John Paul II's deep insights on creation and what it means to be human.

Andrew Kong from the Archdiocese of Singapore (as Defender of the Bond) delivered this TOB message of love to parishioners of the Church of the Good Shepherd (GSC) in two days, on February 25 and 26. Organised by the GSC Family Life Ministry, 90 participants signed up for this programme, last held at the parish several years ago.

The programme was to provide participants with a better understanding of the



Andrew Kong presenting TOB's message to the young people.

Church's teachings on marriage and human sexuality, covering a range of topics related to life, the nature of the human person, the purpose of human sexuality, the sacredness of marriage, and the importance of chastity and purity.

TOB not only expounded on the What but also on the Why and the How.

Participants, young and not so young, were both amazed and touched by these liberating teachings of St John Paul II on life and sexuality. The Family Life ministry feels

these profound teachings of TOB need to be further developed and fully understood through follow-up sessions, to be organised later in the year. — **By Christopher Cheong Kit Hoe, GSC Family Life Ministry Coordinator**

## CONFIRMANDS ATTEND THEOLOGY OF THE BODY CAMP

KUALA LUMPUR: A Theology of the Body (TOB) session for confirmands was held on February 18 and 19.

It was organised by the Catechetical Ministry of the chapels of Christ the King and Christ the Light, under the guidance and prayers of Fr Peter Anthony.

The session was conducted in a fun and youthful manner, much to the participants' delight, by the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur TOB team.

Under the leadership of Sr Retta Savarianan FDCC, the TOB team knew the young learners' desires and requirements and tailored the camp well. The energetic and engaging session covered current is-

ssues while referencing the teachings of the Catholic Church and the TOB. The sessions also covered topics like *Created for Love, Love Defined, Free-Total-Faithful-Fruitful (FTFF), Discovering your Vocation, Dating with Purpose & Purity, and Living the TOB.*

Participant Jericho Ross Peter said, "I learnt that love is an important element to bond your relationship with the specific other. I also learnt a lot about myself and how to be a better person."

Janice Patricia said, "I enjoyed the sessions. We had activities, group work, games, and a lot of fun. Thank you, teachers, Sr Retta, and speakers, for the effort in making this a memorable camp. Despite



Sr Retta Savarianan FDCC facilitating the TOB session.

your family commitments, you came in full force to make this happen for us."

The sessions ended with Adoration and Mass, so the learners could surrender and meditate on what they had learnt and experienced throughout the sessions.

While the students attended sessions by the TOB formators, Sr Retta also had a session for their parents to help them understand things from the children's perspective. Sr Retta touched on parenting styles and how we can work together as a family

unit in building God's kingdom.

Special thanks go out to the catechists, Albert Anthony, Jennifer Deravasoo, Joshua Raphael Raj, and Julia Michael for helping with the administrative work so the children had a flawless and perfect camp.

If your parish wishes to organise a fun and reflective camp for teens on the Theology of the Body, please contact Sr Retta at the KL Archdiocesan Catechetical Centre. — **By Joanne Adriana David, Chapel of Christ the King, Selayang**





# Amber VanVickle Requiescat in Pace

Amber and I met decades ago. She was a teenager, in a new town at a new high school and I was a graduate student at Franciscan University. I knew she was terribly homesick for her old life in Grand Rapids, so we started having regular dinners out. Despite the gap in our age, we became close friends, a friendship which continued after I left Steubenville.

The first thing everyone noticed about Amber was her beauty. I don't think Amber ever knew just how beautiful she was, in body and soul, which of course, made her even more attractive. It was a grace given to her by her parents, who understood humility, but also perhaps because of the move they made with her to Steubenville, plucking her from comfort and cliques. She never took herself too seriously.

With her megawatt smile, she always had a story to tell. Her dramatic retelling of tales, mostly funny things that happened to her, included lots of gesticulation and vivid descriptions. I remember her crush on Ricky Martin and the night the "limousine" arrived for prom, but it wasn't the cool black stretch she thought she had ordered, but a bulky, boxy bus.

When I moved to Washington, DC, she came for a visit. I'll never forget walking the National Mall with her and overhearing the tourists behind talking about finding the "are-chives" instead of using the correct pronunciation of archives. Words were important, and funny, and a friend to her.

As time wore on, Amber met dear Dave and our relationship continued in small drips through phone calls, emails, and snapshots of weddings and children on social media. I prayed with them when Dave took their son Max on a trip in hopes that he could someday walk. I prayed with them again when their daughter Josephine had a stroke. And I prayed even more when Louisa was born with spina bifida. Amber's mother, Sharon, told me that nurses who helped with Louisa didn't even know how to handle her body because they had never seen a baby with that disease. Most are aborted. But Dave and Amber, Amber's parents, and the whole family, loved her with all they had in those early days of her life.

Eventually, I started the blog that would become *TheologyofHome.com*. I asked Amber to write something for it. Theology of Home was just getting started and I didn't have money to pay our writers. She wrote a few pieces for us for free, but there were some that I knew needed a bigger audience. I also knew she should be paid for her fine work, so we sent them over to our friend Kevin Knight at the *National Catholic Register* and he published



them. They feel so poignant now, her hard-earned wisdom shining through.

I recall one afternoon, both of us puttering around our homes and children, talking about writing. "Writing feels like flying to me," she confided. It offered her a tiny break from some of her daily duties that she didn't resent, but that were often challenging.

And then she got sick.

It is a story, a Job-like story, that one can scarcely wrap one's mind around. How could this happen? How could a family who is so in need of a mother, not have a mother? How could a family who has suffered so much endure this new round of suffering?

Amber fought valiantly, but lost her battle with cancer February 23. The void she leaves is unfillable, for Dave, the children, her parents, and all their family. But we trust, like Job of old, that God has a plan and will do something beautiful with this suffering.

Amber's words, written years ago, offer us some consolation today. Of the challenges in her life, she wrote:

*"I have learned to stop asking why, and to start asking what. As Fr Jacques Phillipe says, to have 'courage' to leave some questions unanswered and ask, 'What does God want from me?' Freedom. Broken chains. Freedom in knowing that it's not my picture, but God's. Freedom in knowing that God's ways are beyond us, beyond our understanding. Freedom to know that God will do anything to bring us to Him, even break our hearts, because the reward is so much greater."*

Thank you, Amber, for your hard-won wisdom, your heroic witness, and your fierce love of Jesus, family, life, the cross. Your death breaks our hearts, but we will join you in your quest for true freedom. How you will be missed. May you rest in peace. — **By Carrie Gress, NCR Register**

## MEMORIAM

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*In Loving Memory  
Forever in our Hearts*

"I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die" (John 11:25)

From God 07.12.1941 To God 20.03.2020

*Anthony Gnanapiragasam*

*Papa,  
You are forever in our Hearts  
We miss you so much*

Patricia Michelle Michael Melissa Morrin

**4th Anniversary  
In Ever Loving Memory of**

**Yvonne Yeoh Siew Lay**  
**Departed: 22-03-2019**

*Our lives have changed since you left us,  
but your presence is always felt. Missing you dearly.*  
From Joseph, Michael and Marie Ong.

**In Ever Loving Memory of  
JOSEPHINE NICHOLSON**  
(Called to the Lord: 18th March 2016)

*The days are long  
but the years  
are short  
So much time  
has passed  
But your memory  
lingers on*

*The day you left us  
Still etched  
in our hearts  
Until we meet again  
Our angel  
you'll always be.*

**30th Anniversary  
In Loving Memory of**

**Sankar Dass**  
**21st March 1993**

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the passing of Sankar Dass - an ever-loving husband, devoted father, dedicated brother, caring uncle, and a wonderful friend. It's hard to believe that so much time has passed since we lost him, and the pain of his absence still lingers in our hearts.

He was a remarkable person who touched the lives of many with his kindness and compassion. His love for his family knew no bounds, and he worked tirelessly to provide for them and make their lives better. His loss has left a gaping hole in our lives that can never be filled.

As we remember him on this solemn occasion, we can't help but feel a deep sense of sadness and longing. We miss his warmth, his humour, and his unwavering love for his family. It's hard to imagine a world without him in it.

Though he may be gone, his memory remains alive in our hearts. We will always cherish the time we shared with him and hold onto the love and wisdom he imparted to us.

Rest in peace, dear Sankar Dass - my Mama and our appa. You are deeply missed and forever loved.

**4th Anniversary  
In Loving Memory of**

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

*Listen to me, my people;  
hear me, my nation:  
Instruction will go out  
from me; my justice  
will become a light  
to the nations.*  
Isaiah 51:4-5

*"Blessed are  
you who are  
hungry now,  
for you shall  
be satisfied.  
"Blessed are  
you who weep  
now, for you  
shall laugh.*

Luke 6:21

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

*REST IN PEACE*



# Priests key to fostering vocations



A new report from Vocations Ministry “looks at the vocations crisis under the microscope” to understand the “severe lack of priests most dioceses experience, and how to fix the problem,” says Rhonda Gruenewald, founder of the Texas-based ministry focused on creating a culture of vocations in Catholic parishes and education.

TEXAS: A new study cites trusted relationships with parish priests as a deciding factor in cultivating vocations and reducing the priest-to-parishioner ratio as essential for making such encounters possible.

The 2023 “State of Priestly Vocations in the United States” by Texas-based Vocation Ministry concludes that “the overall role of priests in fostering vocations is significant,” with “around 70 per cent of those ordained” reporting that they were invited by a priest to consider the calling.

“We know the priest is the number one factor for a young man saying ‘yes’ to the priesthood,” Vocation Ministry founder, Rhonda Gruenewald, told *OSV News*.

But as ordination numbers decline while many parishes close or merge, priests are becoming responsible for a greater number of parishioners, Gruenewald said. With increased administrative and pastoral responsibilities, clergy often have little time and energy to mentor teens and young men who might be interested in religious life.

“If that (priest-to-parishioner) number is lower, then priests can create relationships that foster vocations,” said Gruenewald,

whose report draws on data from the Official Catholic Directory, along with input from vocation directors and seminarians from around the country.

According to the Centre for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University (CARA), in 2022 there were 34,344 priests (24,110 diocesan, 10,234 religious) and 452 priestly ordinations in the US, serving 16,429 parishes and 66.5 million “parish-connected” Catholics. Just 66 per cent of the diocesan priests were in active ministry, with an average of one active diocesan priest per parish.

Gruenewald stressed that Catholics have plenty of options for countering the declines in priestly vocations – such as regular prayer, education about vocations and how to foster them, affirmation of current priests and seminarians, and youth ministry.

“Priests and parishioners need to find those pockets where young people are and bring the vocations message to them,” she told *OSV News*. “Instead of throwing our hands up and saying, ‘Oh well,’ we need to be intentional and strategic. Vocations can happen if you believe. Let’s get to work.” — *ucanews.com*

## Economic sanctions preventing post-war recovery in Syria

SYRIA: Fr Hugo Alaniz, an Argentine missionary of the Institute of the Incarnate Word in Aleppo, Syria, called for an end to the economic sanctions against the nation which he says have prevented the country from recovering from the ravages of war and earthquakes.

Alaniz was one of the presenters at the *Night of the Witnesses*, an event held in Mexico, organised by the Pontifical Foundation Aid to the Church in Need (ACN).

In a recent interview in Mexico City with *ACI Prensa*, CNA’s Spanish-language news partner, the missionary stressed that Syria is going through a “very sad economic situation.”

“The economic blockade is causing great suffering today,” said the priest, who also

lamented that “people don’t have jobs and those who work have very low salaries.”

“Families at this time need to be helped by other institutions outside the country and by the Church,” he said.

Alaniz noted that Christians in Syria “appreciate this help, but what we want is for the country to recover on its own.”

Since 2011, the United States and the European Union, among others, have imposed various economic sanctions on Syria in an effort to weaken the current regime of President Bashar al-Assad, who has been accused of human rights violations.

The sanctions have affected Syria’s ability to rebuild after suffering from more than a decade of civil war, and have hampered humanitarian work in the aftermath of the

earthquake that struck the region on Feb 6 along with its multiple aftershocks.

In early February, Syrian Christian leaders called on the international community to lift economic sanctions, in order to facilitate jobs and humanitarian aid.

Alaniz lamented the situation in Syria “first with the war, then postwar. What comes after the war are difficult situations.”

These “situations,” he continued, “unfortunately often lead to actions far from Christian morality because people are immersed in many needs.”

“The consequences were very sad, especially in Turkey, but it also greatly affected northern Syria, where the city of Aleppo is also located,” the missionary said.

“On Feb 20 there was another earthquake

and now the aftershocks continue. After the first earthquake, there were at least 50 aftershocks a day.”

Alaniz noted that “our mission is the mission of the Church, it’s to give a vision of faith, it’s life with hope. What’s curious is that many times it is they, it is these families, that are conveying this message to us.”

The missionary priest stressed that “the Church these days is on a mission to be welcoming, to be close to families, especially Christians, but also Muslim families.”

“All the churches, all the parish centres, opened to receive the people in this time of fear, due to the issue of earthquakes and tremors,” he said. — **By Ana Paula Morales, CNA**

## St Peter’s Basilica to hold monthly Eucharistic adoration on portico

VATICAN: St Peter’s Basilica will now host an hour of Eucharistic adoration on its front portico once a month.

The adoration, which commenced on March 14 will take place every second Tuesday from 8.00pm to 9.00pm on the parvis in front of the Vatican Basilica leading to St Peter’s Square.

The holy hour, according to a press release, is part of the pastoral initiatives of the Basilica.

The March 14 adoration was led by Cardinal Mauro Gambetti, OFM Conv, who is the archpriest of St Peter’s Basilica. The prayer was offered for Pope Francis in light of his 10th anniversary as pope.

St Peter’s Basilica is typically open every day from 7.00am to 6.30pm in the winter, or 7.00pm in the summer.

The Eucharist is also exposed in St Peter’s Basilica for adoration in the Chapel of

the Most Blessed Sacrament from approximately 9.00am to 4.45pm, Monday through Saturday.

A monthly Eucharistic holy hour in front of St Peter’s Basilica is added to other initiatives started by Cardinal Gambetti after he was appointed archpriest in February 2021.

In October 2022, the facade of St Peter’s Basilica was illuminated with a 3-D projection mapping of art from the Vatican Museums. The eight-minute light show, called *Follow Me: The Life of St Peter*, played every night for two weeks.

Last year the Vatican also held the Stations of the Cross in the Basilica every Friday during Lent. The prayer was accompanied by paintings of the *Passion of Christ* by the Italian artist Gaetano Previati (1852-1920).

During his tenure, Gambetti also enacted a ban on the celebration of private Masses at the altars in the upper part of St Peter’s

Basilica.

Though early morning Masses by groups “with particular and legitimate needs” may be allowed, in general, private Masses can now only be celebrated in the chapels in the Vatican crypt. Visitors to the Basilica may also participate in regularly scheduled Italian language Masses in the Basilica and priests may concelebrate.

The change was criticised by Cardinals Joseph Zen, Robert Sarah, Raymond Burke, Gerhard Müller, and Walter Brandmüller.

Pope Francis also led Eucharistic adoration and gave an extraordinary *Urbi et Orbi* blessing on the portico of St Peter’s Basilica on March 27, 2020, to pray for an end to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The televised prayer took place before an empty square since Italy’s lockdown prevented attendance. — **By Hannah Brockhaus, CNA**



Cardinal Gambetti blesses the faithful with the Blessed Sacrament. (Vatican Media)