



## Attending Mass, Sunday and Holy Days of Obligation

### Lifting of Dispensation with effect from April 2, 2023

March 17, 2023

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:3).

Since the middle of March 2020, our freedom to physically attend Mass had been disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Celebrating the Eucharist as a community in churches was no longer accessible for reasons beyond our control. Yet we found ways to listen to God's Word at home and through the digital world. We united ourselves through personal and family prayers.

Due to the dangers to our health, in accordance with the *Code of Canon Law* (CIC) 87 §1 which allows the diocesan Bishop to dispense the faithful from disciplinary laws, we had granted a dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation.

The dispensation was always meant to be a temporary exemption for the sake of the health, safety, and common good of all. After having consulted and discerned, seeing that most of the pandemic restrictions have been lifted, the general dispensation from Sunday and holy days of obligations

will be lifted with effect from Palm Sunday 2023.

We remind ourselves once again, "the Lord's Day, on which the paschal mystery is celebrated, is by apostolic tradition to be observed in the universal Church as a primary holy day of obligation" (CIC 1246 §1).

As provided for in the Church's Canon Law, for those who are unable to fulfil the Sunday and holy days of obligations due to grave reasons which include serious medical conditions (for example, heart disease, chronic pulmonary diseases, kid-

ney disease, being immuno-compromised, and other dangers to life that may be brought about by the coronavirus), you are still held to keep holy the Lord's day in other ways. You should "spend an appropriate time in prayer, whether personally or as a family" (CIC 1248 §2), which could include participating in an online Mass.

We would like to welcome the faithful to return to full in-person Masses remembering that "on Sundays and other holy days of obligation, the faithful are bound to participate in the Mass." (Catechism of the Catholic Church 2180; CIC 1247.)

*Your shepherds,*

+ Most Rev Julian Leow Beng Kim D.D.  
President, CBCM  
Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur

+ Rt Rev Sebastian Francis  
Bishop of Penang

+ Rt Rev Bernard Paul  
Bishop of Malacca Johore

+ Most Rev John Wong  
Archbishop of Kota Kinabalu

+ Rt Rev Julius Gitom  
Bishop of Sandakan

+ Rt Rev Cornelius Piong  
Bishop of Keningau

+ Most Rev Simon Poh  
Archbishop of Kuching

+ Rt Rev Richard Ng  
Bishop of Miri

+ Rt Rev Joseph Hii  
Bishop of Sibiu

# A *kairos* moment for Church in Asia

**B**ANGKOK: In its "final document" following its general conference in Thailand in October, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) urged Churches and Church leaders to go "off the beaten track" and to "face new pastoral priorities."

The document was presented online on Wednesday, March 15, 2023, five months after the general conference in October to mark FABC's 50th year.

Bishop Allwyn D'Silva, auxiliary bishop of Bombay and FABC 50 General Conference Adjunct Secretary who hosted the event said, "This document is going to make a difference to the Church in Asia. It reflects the voices of all 140 cardinals and bishops, 60 priests, religious and lay faithful who attended the Oct 12 – 30, 2022 General Conference.

FABC President, Cardinal Charles Bo, welcomed those participating online. "Today, my heart is filled with joy. The FABC 50 General conference held in October

2022 was a historic event and a watershed moment for the Church in Asia."

Speaking of the first-ever General Conference of Bishops in Asia, he characterised it as a "kairos moment...as we dialogued in a spirit of solidarity and collegiality." He recalled that all facets of the Church participated in it. The final "visionary" document, he says, "responding to the call of synodality," and "envisioning new pathways for the future," contains the fruit of that fraternal and mutual dialogue and discernment.

The document, which was drafted by a committee led by Bishop Pablo Virgilio David, president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, invites the Church in Asia to return to the people "by another road" like the Wise Men who came from the East did after meeting with Jesus in Bethlehem.

The sustained reflection on Matthew's account of the Magi is a unique feature of the document which also provides "thematic unity" and the framework for its arrangement according to its five narrative aspects – Journeying together; looking, discerning, offering our gifts and, taking new pathways.

"Journeying together" discusses issues

on how to respond to the "call of synodality." It talks about the "three essential elements" of a synodal Church, that is, Communion, Participation, and Mission.

The second part of the document takes a serious phenomenological look at the emerging realities confronting the Churches in Asia. It focuses particularly on nine aspects which include the emigration and refugee phenomenon; family; the role of women; youth; new technologies; the environment and interreligious dialogue.

These realities are then developed in the third chapter which expresses how the Church can pastorally address the emerging realities. Among the latter is the call "to be bridge-builders, instruments of dialogue and reconciliation in Asia," and "to adapt the formation of our clergy to the Asian context and culture."

The fourth section is "a reflection on what Asia can contribute to the Universal Church...focusing on Asian culture and spirituality." The Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelium in Asia* provided inspiration for this section.

Finally, 'Following New Pathways' aims to articulate the new directions the FABC feels called to undertake. The five pathways

identified are: "From dominative to inculturated evangelisation; From basic Christian communities to ecclesial communities that promote basic human communities; From dialogue to synodality; From proclamation to storytelling; From beaten tracks to new pastoral priorities." All this in order to reach the goal "To be all things to Asian peoples."

Bombay Archbishop Cardinal Oswald Gracias, who concluded the online event said he believes the document will be important for "the pastoral work in Asia," and called the FABC 50 General Conference an "unforgettable experience."

Rather than the document being a "finished product," he explained, "it's the beginning of the journey." He sees it as a spiritual document meant to be prayed over and reflected on, to provide food for spiritual conversation. His hope is that it will have an impact on pastoral ministry throughout all the countries of Asia.

Drawing inspiration from it, he sees the Church working "in Asia for a better Asia, a Church in Asia for a better people, a Church in Asia that works in Asia for a better world. This is the mission the Lord has given us." — *Vatican News/LiCAS*



# HERALD

ESTABLISHED 1994

Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre

5, Jalan Robertson, 50150, KL

Tel / Whatsapp: 03-20268291

Website : www.heraldmalaysia.com

Facebook : www.facebook.com/

heraldmalaysia

Jointly published by the

Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur,

Diocese of Malacca Johore, Diocese of

Penang and Diocese of Keningau

**EDITOR**

Patricia Pereira

editor1@herald.com.my

**ASSISTANT EDITOR****Social Media Coordinator**

Sandra Ann Inbaraj

sandra@herald.com.my

**WRITER****Children's Section**

Gwen Manickam

gwen@herald.com.my

**GRAPHIC DESIGNER****Youth Section**

Amanda Mah

amanda@herald.com.my

**BAHASA MALAYSIA**

Melania Liza Magnus

liza@herald.com.my

**MANDARIN**

Adelina Wong

yin4482@gmail.com

**TAMIL**

RK Samy

rksamy3@hotmail.com

**ADMINISTRATOR****Advertisements/Memorial**

advertisement@herald.com.my

**LETTERS**

letterseditor@herald.com.my

## OPINION

## The synod is not an event – It's a new way of being Church

What is the way out of polarisation?

This is a question that a group of theologians, bishops and other Church leaders wrestled with at a recent colloquium at Boston College called *The Way Forward: Pope Francis, Vatican II and Synodality*.

And I admit, I did wonder at what I would discover when I arrived at the hotel where we all stayed for the gathering. Who would be there, and what would they talk about?

Over the next two days, we listened to a series of keynote reflections from various speakers. The lectures were edifying, to be sure, but perhaps not as rewarding as the informal interactions that took place between meetings and during meals. There is no substitute for meeting your fellow Catholics face to face.

You will not be surprised to learn that the word “synodality” was mentioned many times and was held up as a possibly groundbreaking way to combat the polarisation that plagues the Church. I confess that I was not as enthusiastic about the synod process as some of the participants when I first arrived. Don't get me wrong: I think it's a very good thing that the Church is asking to hear more from Catholics about the issues that matter most to them. But the concept of synodality is a bit confusing, even to seasoned Catholics, and the global synod process has struck me as unwieldy and ultimately not as representative of Catholic opinion as it is sometimes argued. One fact: Only one per cent of Catholics in the United States took part in the process.

But here are some equally important observations and takeaways from our gathering. “Our communion is unsure of itself.” We must “recover a sense of what holds us together.” We have to find a way to “walk and work together.” “In listening, I make myself accountable to real communities.” In short, the stakes are very high for our Church, and listening to one another is the first step on a much longer journey.

Once I began to see the synod as less of a discrete event, but rather, a new way of being Church, the more I felt open to it. I also realised that I am the product of a Church that has not placed a high value on listening and conversation, so it's a muscle I need to exercise. One criticism made about Catholics today is that they



don't see themselves as part of the Church they criticise. But as one participant noted, can you really blame them? Have we done the hard work necessary to make everyone feel co-responsible for this Church we love?

The only way to be a listening Church is to learn by doing — and by doing again and again. This, several participants argued, is part of Pope Francis' “long game.” He is trying to teach us a new way of relating to one another, one that is embraced in much of Latin America but is foreign to the Church in most of the world.

Does the global synod process represent the best way out of polarisation? That very much remains to be seen. The synod process itself has become another thing to argue over. It will take many more gatherings, at all levels of the Church, for the process to start to work. And that will mean including people with whom we disagree and who may have serious questions about the course set by Pope Francis.

But at a time when polarisation runs deep in all levels of society, the Church is one of the few places where people of all backgrounds gather under one roof. That represents a rich opportunity. And in the end, we don't all have to agree with one another. As one panellist noted, Jesus prayed “that they all may be one” — not that they all may be the same. — **By Maurice Timothy Reidy, America**

● **Maurice Timothy Reidy is the deputy editor in chief of America.**

## What prevents us from experiencing resurrection?

It seems death permeates our lives and world. It hangs like a cloud and blows through places stricken by natural disasters and countless other places filled with war and violence. It wafts into our lives taking those we love and cherish.

Every day we smell death and every day we have the opportunity, by the grace of God, to change and be changed, to unbind and be unbound, to let go and be let go.

Death stinks. There's no getting around it.

But here's the thing: we can't experience resurrection until we experience death. We can't accept new life in Christ until we allow our old, sinful lives to end. What do you need to let die, so that you can come out of your tomb? What binds you to death, and prevents you from living abundantly, fully, as a new creation?

Whatever keeps you wrapped up in a dark cave of pride, hatred, lust, greed, or deceit, or whatever stinks in your life, hear the voice of Jesus calling to you, “Come out of there!”

And then you must decide. Do you fall back into the tomb, or do you step out into the unknown? Because what lies ahead is completely new territory. But you don't have to go there alone. When Lazarus stepped out of that tomb, there were friends at hand to help him get out of his grave clothes, to support him and love him. That's what this community of faith is for: to help each of us get unbound.

And what about our BECs and parish communities? What do we need to let die, so that our community can experience new life in Christ? What binds us so tightly we



can't move forward? What shroud keeps us from seeing the neighbours around us? What prevents us from experiencing resurrection?

Maybe we all are a little like Martha sometimes. How many times have we asked God to do something and then tried to take back control because there might be something unpleasant we don't want to have to deal with in the process? How often do we feel the panic that comes with realising that the fulfilment of our prayers may mean having to face what just plain stinks? People complain about how the environment is being ruined but don't want to deal with the smell, the discomfort, or the inconvenience of doing some cleaning up. We declare that something should be done for the homeless, but we pretend we don't see them when we pass them on the way into our places of work

each day. Similarly, we want Jesus to work miracles as long as there's nothing to offend our senses or sensibilities.

Maybe like Martha, we've asked Jesus to help us, and we're sure He hasn't heard. Remember, Jesus won't always answer when or how we expect, but that doesn't mean our requests are unheard. Jesus will find a way to use even the most painful of situations to bring glory to God.

Or maybe, like Martha, where we feel confused by something Jesus said; perhaps we're struggling with the Word of God. Remember that though there are some lessons we may not fully understand, we may still trust in Jesus because we know who He is and we know who sent Him; and sometimes if we just keep faith and continue to walk with Jesus, He will take us to a place where

Reflecting on our  
**Sunday Readings**  
with the **HERALD** team

**5th Sunday of Lent (A)**

**Readings: Ezekiel 37:12-14;**

**Romans 8:8-11;**

**Gospel: John 11:1-45**

all becomes clear.

Or maybe, like Martha, we have turned to Christ for help but fear that the answer will be messy in some way. Jesus knows our doubt but wants us to keep faith so that we, too, will see the glory of God.

Or maybe, like Lazarus, we feel as though life has gone out of us or perhaps that life has passed us by. Maybe we're feeling soulless and wrapped up in things that won't let us go.

Jesus offers us new life. He will call us by name and loose that which binds us. And then, as others witness the change that Jesus makes in us, they, too, will come to believe and will find new life in Christ.

Jesus shows us that He is truly the redeemer who can restore our value, even bringing new life to rotting flesh and calling us into a new life so that we can experience the resurrection today. That is the fullness of the Good News that eternal life begins today by opening our heart.

As we stumble forward, that voice we love says, “Come out of there! Get unbound!” We are stepping into new territory. But Jesus is right there, waiting for us.



## IMPORTANT DATE

### April 2: Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord

*Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord, a day on which the Church enters upon the mystery of the Death, Burial and Resurrection of her Lord, brings together the triumphal procession of Christ as King and the proclamation of his Passion. Both aspects of the paschal mystery should be explained in the catechesis of the day.*



### KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

#### Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

##### March & April

- 24-25/3** *PMPC Meeting with Working Committee*
- 29/3** *Bishops' Staff Meeting – College General, Penang*
- 9/4** *Mass – Golden Jubilee, Church of the Risen Christ, KL*
- 11** *Meeting – Sri Seronok Board*



### PENANG DIOCESE

#### Diary of Bishop Sebastian Francis

##### March

- 26** *Installation of Parish Priest & Mass – Church of Our Lady of Good Health, Parit Buntar at 8.00am*
- 28-29** *Clergy Monthly Recollection*
- 28** *Chrism Mass & Priestly Ordination of Deacon Raymond Raj & Deacon Desmond Jansen – Minor Basilica of St Anne, BM at 7.00pm*
- 29** *Bishops' Staff Meeting at 9.00am – College General Major Seminary, Penang*



### MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

#### Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

##### March & April

- 29/3** *Seminary Staff Meeting – College General Penang*
- 31/3** *Caritas IDCS – Good Shepherd Catholic Seminary, Melaka*
- 4/4** *Chrism Mass – Church of St Francis Xavier, Melaka*
- 4-5/4** *Clergy Monthly Recollection – Good Shepherd Catholic Seminary, Melaka*

# Towards the Diocesan Pastoral Assembly 2023 and beyond

KUALA LUMPUR: The core-team members of the Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Team (PMPT) met at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre on March 8 for a half-day meeting. The team is formed by the bishops and a small number of representatives from the three dioceses in Peninsular Malaysia.

The chairperson, Msgr Jude Miranda, *pic*, started the meeting by sharing his insights on a reflection by Pope Francis on the Synodal Journey. Msgr. Jude spoke about the need for a Spirituality of Synodality to be cultivated at all levels in the Church. Then, he traced the journey of the Church in Peninsular Malaysia from the time of the *Aggiornamento* (1976), through the Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Conventions (1986, 1996, 2006, 2016), and linked it to the synodal process which will lead up to the Diocesan Pastoral Assembly (2023), Regional Pastoral Assembly (2024) and Malaysian Pastoral Convention (2026).

Msgr Jude pointed out that he was present at the Asian Continental Assembly



for the Synod held in Bangkok from Feb 24 to 26. Taking into consideration the unique and diverse realities and challenges in Asia, the following priorities were highlighted: formation, inclusivity, accountability, prayer and worship, the environment and the call to become missionary disciples.

With regards to the synodal report of the Malaysian Church, the following were key priorities: formation, reform of institutions, the need to hear the “cry of the earth” and the “cry of the poor”, inculturation and dialogue, and the call to map new paths. The national report also points out that the three main issues to be addressed in the Church are: leadership, evangelisation and mission.

The major part of the meeting was taken up by discussions on the Diocesan Pastoral Assembly which will be held later this year. In this regard, two questions were put forward to the members: “How can we move forward towards the Diocesan Pastoral Assembly?” and “What would be the

priorities of the Diocesan Pastoral Assembly?” The representatives were placed into groups to discuss these questions using the “Spiritual Conversation” method. Later, the fruits of the “Spiritual Conversation” of each group were shared with the larger group.

In response, some members, including the bishops, voiced their views as to how best to move towards the Diocesan Pastoral Assembly (*see page 4 for the views of the bishops*).

The members then discussed the dates for the Diocesan Pastoral Assembly. A number of dates in August 2023 were put forward which the bishops will decide on when the Assembly will be held in their respective dioceses. There were also general reports by representatives from the three dioceses on the initiatives taken for the family. Other matters were discussed too. Later, Bishop Bernard and Msgr Jude shared their experiences at the Asian Continental Assembly for the Synod. Msgr Jude concluded the meeting by thanking the bishops and other diocesan representatives for their presence and participation. — *By PMPT Secretary*



## Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #125

**F12**  
NEWS  
MJD  
UPDATES

### Greetings, dear People of God.

The floods have been testing people's resolve. Some politicians are testing the laws of the country. A few are testing the rulers' directives. Outrightly one is testing the unity government with threats of overthrowing the incumbent. The pandemic was a great test for many. And the nation is just picking up the pieces. It is also a testing time for Pope Francis and the Church. The news is a test for us — whether we want to see deeper, swallow everything, or succumb to despair.

**Resetting Times.** Individuals, companies, corporations and governments talk of resetting. When the unity government was formed, there was a call to reset too. It is an opportunity to heal, to let go the old and create the new. It means letting go of the ‘survival mindset’ for the ‘ease mindset’. There is a lot of power in stepping out of that cycle, to refocus our attention, reset our goals and be adaptable. Is the Pope calling the Church to reset herself? The Synodal process, its exercise, its spirit, its vision and mission indicate that. The hardest part in any reset is beginning. It takes guts to choose change and to believe in oneself. But do we want to change?

### A THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: The Not-So-Cute Dog

A psychologist and meditation teacher, Tara Brach shared this story: Walking through the woods you see a small dog. It looks cute and friendly. You approach and move to pet the dog. Suddenly it snarls and tries to bite you. The dog no longer seems cute and you feel fear

and possibly anger. Then, as the wind blows, the leaves on the ground are carried away and you see the dog has one of its legs caught in a trap. Now, you feel compassion for the dog. You know it became aggressive because it is in pain and is suffering.

*Lesson from the woods:* Judging other people can be a struggle for almost anyone. People judge others on how they look or on how they act, their government affiliation or their religious beliefs. Our judgments change once we understand the situation. The Malay saying is apt here: “*Tak kenal tak cinta*”.

### Announcements for this Week

1. From March 31 to April 2, the Church of the Immaculate Conception JB is organising a *Life in the Spirit Seminar (E)*. Registration is RM20 each. Contact Fidelis 0197488389 or Magdalene 0197541409

2. To the *Caritas-Malacca Johore Diocesan Office of Human Development, the many parish Society of St Vincent de Paul and Parish Office of Human Development, the many volunteers and support from parish-ioners*, thank you for your generosity and gift of time and self to collect and distribute essential supplies; to “*turun padang*” to clear up and clean homes, schools and churches. Never stop doing good.

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

### This week's Question and Query.

**The Q asks: What does Change entail?**

1. According to Thomas Merton, in all of us, there is *an instinct for newness*, for renewal, and for liberation of creative power. There is a search for excellence.

2. We seek to awaken in ourselves a *force* which really changes our lives from within. Yet this force, this instinct tells us that this change is a recovery... a regaining, a restoration of that which is deepest, most original, most personal in us.

3. St John calls this being *born again*. It is not about becoming somebody else, but to *become ourselves*. The woman at the well found herself...found her lost self in her encounter with Jesus. The Lord gave her back a *healed self*.

4. Change means singing “once I was lost but now I am found”.

**Pope Francis wrote: “Give me a drink”** is a cry heard in our society where the fast pace, the rush to consume, and especially indifference, that culture of indifference, generate aridity and interior emptiness.

Today's Gospel offers living water to every one of us who can become a refreshing spring for others.

Hear the cry of the poor. Hear the cry of the world. *Let our acts of penance make us perceptive and responsive to the hungry and thirsty around us.* Have a great weekend. God loves you.

Bishop Bernard Paul



## Towards the Diocesan Pastoral Assembly 2023

### What are our shepherds saying ...

**"D**iocesan assemblies have been held before in the Malaysian Church, but now the process will include the synodal journey, as proposed by Pope Francis.

This time, there is a shift in the way we will approach the Diocesan Pastoral Assembly. This is because together, the Malaysian bishops have proposed a 'common thrust', that is, the focus on the Family, Church, Ecology and Society. It may cause a 'psychological shift' in some of us because we may be used to doing things in a certain way. We have to be ready to accept that there will be those who may not be able to keep up, or wish to take their own path in this journey." — **Bishop Sebastian Francis**



**"T**he Diocesan Pastoral Assembly could have the orientation: firstly, gather the people so that they may 'walk together' and 'celebrate a sense of togetherness'. Secondly, lead them to re-discover the ministerial priesthood, whereby the laity, clergy and religious come to the greater realisation that they all share in the one baptism in Christ. Thirdly, help them discover the existing 'gaps' and here, the synodal reports and highlighted issues and priorities can be put forward and discussed through the "spiritual conversation" approach in order to sense the general movement of the Spirit. It may lead the people to realise the need for spiritual conversion at all levels. Let us not 'tailor-make' the process, but let the Holy Spirit lead." — **Bishop Bernard Paul**



**"W**e have to keep the focus on Family, Church, Ecology, Society in the light of the Synodal process. All that has happened, and will happen, is connected. It is a continuity and not a 'break' in the journey of the Malaysian Church. The question is: how can all our previous experiences and the current synodal reports be used to prepare effectively for the Diocesan Pastoral Assembly? There are different levels and areas to look into. We can give broad guidelines to the dioceses for the preparation of the Assembly. However, at the PMPT level, we can also focus on areas of commonality which will be helpful as we journey towards the Regional Pastoral Assembly in 2024 and the Malaysian Pastoral Convention in 2026." — **Archbishop Julian Leow**



# Constructive criticism helps build the community

By Gwen Manickam

KLANG: The clergy of the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur renewed their priestly promise and fidelity to their shepherd and Jesus during the Chrism Mass on March 14 at the Church of the Holy Redeemer.

Archbishop Julian Leow in his homily focused on the readings of the day from the *Book of Isaiah* and the *Gospel of St Luke*.

"What is the mission of Christ that we share as priests and bishops?"

"The spirit of the Lord is in us and we are sent to bring Good News to the poor. This is what we do as priests, to preach the Good News."

"To proclaim liberty to the captives, to proclaim freedom to those in chains, those who are bound."

As priests and guides, we are also to bring understanding/sight to the blind. To bring clarity to our teachings and to free the downtrodden and the oppressed.

The archbishop also reflected on the last three years, and how the priests struggled to cope with the sudden shutdown of churches.

"As pastors, our identity is so entwined with what we do, our rituals of celebrating the sacraments, visiting the sick, bringing the Lord to the homebound, etc. When we were only allowed to say Masses online, with a few people present, we may have felt that we had lost our identity."

"Dear fathers, identities don't change. Our functions may change but we do not stop being priests."

"Please remember, I treasure each of you who have kept our parishes open. You have



Archbishop Julian Leow stirring the balsam oil into the chrism. (Holy Redeemer Church facebook)

responded in the most difficult times, often putting yourselves at risk to bring anointing to those in need and being creative in ways for the faithful to receive Jesus in Holy Communion," said the prelate.

"I pray you will continue to trust in the Lord and to respond to the heavy demands of your time and vocation to the priesthood, and service to the people."

He then asked the congregation to continue praying for their priests as it can sometimes be a tall order to be praising God and being beacons of hope and light to their congregation while struggling with their own identities and issues.

"Some of you challenge us and some give criticisms. I welcome them when they are constructive and when it helps build the community. Together, I believe the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur will grow and rise to new heights because the religious, clergy and laity work together."

Following the homily, the clergy stood to renew their priestly promise to their bishop and to Jesus.

Apostolic Nuncio for Malaysia, Archbishop Wojciech Zaluski, conveyed his best wishes to the priests and said, not only was he happy to meet his fellow priests once again but also for the opportunity to meet the HRC parish community.

The nuncio said it is always very nice when he visits and meets the people from the different parishes.

"I extend the blessings and greetings of the Holy Father, as he has asked all nuncios representing him to do when visiting Catholic communities, regardless of how large or small they are."

He also expressed his heartfelt gratitude for everyone's prayers for the Holy Father and for standing with him in solidarity, especially during this time when there is so much going on in the Church.

## The ministry of priests is a ministry of love

SANDAKAN: "The Church is human and ordinary in so many ways, and yet, like the oils, God consecrates us to become extraordinary." Bishop Julius Dusin Gitom said this during this year's Chrism Mass on March 8.

The Chrism Mass at the Cathedral of St Mary was presided over by Bishop Julius and celebrated with nine diocesan priests. A seminarian, undergoing his pastoral exposures also assisted in the liturgy.

In his homily, the prelate started by explaining the significance of the Holy Oils. Although oil, specifically olive oil, may be ordinary and common in our everyday lives, once blessed through the power of the Holy Spirit, it becomes extraordinary. The Holy Oil is used for the respective Sacraments and can be defined as an encounter between us with God, through Christ.

From anointing us into the Body of Christ through Baptism, to giving birth to priestly people through Holy Orders, once we are consecrated with the Holy Oils, we are incorporated into the Christ, who is the Anointed One Himself, sharing in His divinity to become a priestly, prophetic and kingly people. The prelate also highlighted that Christ consecrates us,

the Church, to become part of His Body not because of anything we have done, but because of what God does for us.

Thus, as the oils were blessed, the bishop invited all to look upon Christ the Anointed One who, despite being crucified by our sinfulness, still chose us to be His "oil".

The prelate also emphasised the celebration of the ordained ministers of the Church as they renewed their priestly vows and conveyed a fruitful message to his fellow priests. Coming from our community, who are also ordinary people, priests are called to act in the name of Christ to serve God's people by mediating His blessing in the world through the Church.

Bishop Julius reminded his brother priests, "While we serve to be the blessing to the people, we are also nourished from within God's people. We cannot be isolated from the community as we are, together, His chosen people. That is what we call a Synodal church, being united and nourished by God. Our service as priests calls us to nourish God's people through the Word of God and His Sacraments and renew Jesus's sacrifice by setting before the people a pastoral banquet to lead them into charity."

Charity means that once nourished by the Word and Sacraments, together, we can act as Godly people, imparting His blessing and mercy in the world."

The prelate then highlighted that the ministry of the priests is the ministry of love which acts out God's mercy to those with hardened or broken hearts. "But before that, we must change our hearts, and always configure our life to Christ", he pointed out to his fellow ministers.

Bishop Julius continued by sharing his personal experience of being fascinated and called to the life of a priest during his early years. However, once ordained, along the way, he experienced a loss of that same attraction due to the familiar routine. Thus, it is vital to maintain an intimate relationship with the Lord through personal prayers and journeying with the laity through service, while being nourished by one another with God's love and mercy. That is exactly the Synodal process we have undergone.

"We may be attracted to the Lord in our way but before we realise it, it is the Lord who comes to us first," said the prelate. As he ended his homily, he urged all to commit to being one Body of Christ and His powerful witnesses through our services by first recognising our sinfulness, but then letting God heal and transform our hearts anew so we can bring new life to our families, and our communities and Church.

After the homily, the nine diocesan priests stood before Bishop Julius to renew their priestly vow to serve the Church, a promise they first made at their ordination.

After the renewal of priestly commitments, the blessing of the Oils of Catechumen and the Sick, followed by the consecration of the Chrism Oil, took place. — **By Jonathan J. Lucas, SOCCOM**



Sandakan clergy stand before Bishop Julius Dusin to renew their priestly vows.



# Laity persevere to complete Bible studies

By Lucille Dass

PENANG: “Congratulations and jubilation ... I want the world to know I’m happy as can be!” This 1968 Cliff Richard song aptly records the post-COVID-19 joy of the 25 brave hearts who stayed the marathon (2018-2023) Diploma in Biblical Studies course under the aegis of the Regional Biblical Commission (RBC) of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei (CBCMSB).

Bishop Sebastian Francis, President of CBCMSB, graced the occasion to confer the coveted certificates at the celebration dinner held on March 3 at the Penang Swimming Club. Fr David Reegon OFM Cap — Executive Secretary of RBC — and the principal-cum-Bible instructor/facilitator, and Deacon Lazarus Jonathan, were also present.

Lee Li Mei, Head of Biblical Apostolate of Penang Diocese



The graduates with Bishop Sebastian Francis and Fr David Reegon OFM Cap.

(BAPD), welcomed all present. She made a note of thanks to Frs Ryan Innas and Stanley Antoni, who stepped in to help resume the course in June 2022. Both the priests were unable to attend the function.

Fr David also expressed his gratitude to the two priests for pitching in to help during his absence; also, the core team and the shepherds,

who all tacked together to keep the course going.

Bishop Sebastian praised all for persevering, “When the going gets tough, the tough get going!” He thanked Fr David and Li Mei, reminding us of our now “licensed” role in the synodal Church: communion-participation-mission. Fr David gave due credit to Archbish-

op Emeritus John Ha who initiated the RBC diploma course some 20 years ago.

In October 2022, a ‘COVID-19 convalesced’ Fr David returned to guide his sheep till year-end. Fr David customarily applies the biblical shepherd-sheep (group) relationship motif in his courses to underscore the pastoral/practical theol-

ogy leanings to an otherwise purely academic course. Understandably, this came with challenges, given the members’ diverse backgrounds, personalities, predispositions, and level of task participation. Academically speaking, this entailed the now classical (Tuckman 1965) four-stage process of how groups evolve: forming, storming, norming, and performing ... and adjourning!

What helped was our learning from Jesus (John 10) about having a shepherd’s heart and focus — observing, caring, generously sharing, and gently leading the flock (Is. 40:11) to “green pastures” — a place of favourable and fresh ideas for an enhanced understanding and undertaking of all academic tasks and project-based learning through involvement in community work. Reflective journaling was encouraged. A group progress chart based on a set of categorical variables was also called for.

## Celebrating a decade of Pope Francis’ papacy

KUALA LUMPUR: The Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur celebrated the 10th anniversary of the pontificate of Pope Francis at the Church of Our Lady of Fatima (OLF) on March 12.

It has been the tradition for this to be celebrated at the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist, presided over by the Apostolic Nuncio to Malaysia.

Unfortunately, the cathedral is closed for repairs, following a termite infestation. Archbishop Julian Leow then approached OLF parish priest, Fr William Michael, to host the event at his parish.

Fr William and team set to work to ensure the celebrations would be conducted in a manner befitting the Vicar of Christ on earth.

A larger than usual number of faithful gathered on the Third Sunday of Lent to celebrate the 266th successor of St Peter, including



Archbishop Wojciech Zaluski, flanked by Archbishop Simon Poh and Archbishop Julian Leow during the Mass on March 13, 2023. (photo/Jeffrey Chee)

diplomats and dignitaries. The congregation prayed the Rosary for the intentions of the Pope before the Mass.

The liturgical celebration was presided over by the Apostolic Nuncio to Malaysia, Archbishop Wojciech Zaluski. Concelebrating were Archbishop Julian Leow, Archbishop Simon Poh of Kuching, Msgr Stanislaus Soosaima-

riam, Msgr Patrick Boudville, Fr William, Fr Andrew Manickam OFM Cap, and Fr Konstand Gnanapragasam from the Diocese of Penang.

Archbishop Julian, in his homily, reflected on the papacy of Pope Francis and how His Holiness has constantly reminded us “of our role as Catholics, of who we are and more importantly, of who God

is”. The prelate added that the Holy Father has never feared courting controversy in his efforts to bring about change that reflected the mercy and compassion of God.

Archbishop Wojciech asked the congregation to pray for the Holy Father — something the Holy Father requested from the first day of his pontificate. The faithful recited a special prayer for Pope Francis and, led by the choir, concluded the celebration with echoes of ‘God Bless Our Pope, the Great the Good’ as they belted out ‘Full in the Panting Heart of Rome’.

The following day, the apostolic nuncio hosted a reception at his residence. Among those present were the Deputy Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation. Datuk Arthur Joseph Kurup, ambassadors, dignitaries and church representatives. — By Susai Anthony Muthu

## Soaring through turbulent times on eagles’ wings

PETALING JAYA: More than 60 people, made up of those with cancer, cancer survivors and caregivers and family members, gathered at the Church of St Ignatius (SIC), to hear a biblical motivational talk by Martin Jalleh on March 11.

The speaker, basing his talk on Isaiah 40: 28-31, highlighted the poignant and powerful image of God as a Mother Eagle who is Supreme, supplies all our needs, is our security and protector, stirs our nest, and shakes us loose — that

we may be great Spiritual Eagles.

Martin gave many real and practical examples of God as a Mother Eagle, being an unfailing source of great comfort, consolation, and courage to those who had, or still have, a cancer-related experience and/or struggle.

In the second part of his talk, Martin opened the Scriptures to the audience and revealed that God wants to make great Spiritual Eagles and “Storm-Riders” of those who have gone through, or

are still going through, tough, turbulent, and trying times (related to Cancer).

Martin ended with a thought-provoking quote by Pope Francis: “The worldwide coronavirus pandemic is not God’s judgment on humanity, but God’s call on people to judge what is most important to them and resolve to act accordingly from now on.

“It is not the time of your judgment, but of our judgment: a time to choose what matters and what

passes away, a time to separate what is necessary from what is not. It is a time to get our lives back on track about you, the Lord, and others.”

Martin emphatically reminded those present that the “Cancer you have or had is NOT a judgment from God, but in your suffering, it is a time for you to make a judgment — to choose what matters to you....”

“May you patiently wait upon the Lord each day, press on in perseverance, and proudly be that great Spiritual Eagle that God wants you to be.”

The one-liner by Kim Ang of SIC parish is an apt conclusion of the day: “Martin Jalleh’s talk gave us something most important in the cancer journey — HOPE!”

The event was organised by the SIC Cancer Support Group, in collaboration with the parish Family Life Ministry. — By Percy Chiew



Martin Jalleh with the participants at the Church of St Ignatius, Petaling Jaya.

## New parish priest welcomed in Parit Buntar



Fr Martin Arlando cutting the cake together with the children from his new parish, the Church of Our Lady of Good Health.

P A R I T BUNTAR, Perak: Fr Martin Arlando took responsibility as parish priest of the Church of Our Lady of Good Health on March 1.

The parishioners welcomed him with joy and love by performing the “aarti”.

Before Mass, Fr Martin asked the parishioners to bless him and pray for him as he takes on his new role. He knelt before all present and was prayed over by the congregation.

After Mass, there was a cake for him, to cut with the children present there. — By Reetha Harindranath





# A sweet smelling almsgiving

By J Wong

KUALA LUMPUR: As part of the 2023 Lenten celebration, the Kristus Aman (KA) Women's Ministry sold handmade soap, with the proceeds contributing to the Archdiocesan Office for Human Development's aim of raising RM2 million to carry out programmes in various ministries.

As there are many Lenten initiatives available, and to avoid duplication, the idea for this initiative came about when the team had an International Women's Day event, coupled with an element of almsgiving.

"We had the idea of a girls' night out two-in-one activity to celebrate Women's Day, as well as to give back to the community. We purchased handmade soap from micro entrepreneurs and got together to pack them while praying and fellowshiping together. One of the entrepreneurs, on knowing the project was for almsgiving, donated the soaps" said Ida Chin, the coordinator for KA Women's Ministry.

The ladies formed a 'factory line' to wrap

the handmade soap, made from natural ingredients which came in a variety of shapes and scents. Bearing in mind the inspiration behind *Laudato Si'*, the materials used to package the soaps were also made of kraft paper, paper doily and cotton twine which can be recycled (kraft paper and paper doily) or reused / upcycled (twine).

"This is my first Women's Day and Lenten event that I am celebrating with KA. I enjoyed the fellowship as we packed the soap and it was therapeutic to work together for a common goal. By spending time to package and sell the soap, we came together as a community to observe Lent, and for me, that was very meaningful," said Joanne Wong, a new member to the KA Women's Group.

"We wanted our parishioners, family and friends to purchase the handmade soap to appreciate the women in their lives or as gifts, as well as to contribute alms to the Lenten campaign. I am glad that we managed to raise about RM2,500 not only from the sale of soaps but from additional alms



The Kristus Aman Women's Ministry, celebrating International Women's Day in a meaningful way by selling handmade soaps to raise funds for the Archdiocesan Office for Human Development.

by the KA parishioners. It was very touching to see so many people coming forward to purchase the soap and asking us to keep the change for alms. Even Fr Jean-Claude Lourdes purchased the soap as gifts," said Ida.

"We look forward to coming together and organising more initiatives such as this so that we can not only bond and fellowship together as sisters in Christ, but also to help those in need while caring for the environment," she added.

## Women — inspiring and empowering one another

KUALA LUMPUR: The Archdiocesan Office for Human Development (AOHD) hosted an evening of fellowship and networking to honour the fairer sex.

Held at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre on March 9, to mark International Women's Day, saw more than 100 women from all walks of life and faiths, gather to celebrate each other.

AOHD director, Teo Kar Im and team, worked diligently to pull the event together on short notice. Close at hand to offer assistance were members from the Archdiocesan Single Adults and Youth Office.

Archbishop Julian Leow and YB Teresa Kok were present for a short while to render support and briefly address the guest, before leaving for their respective commitments.

The archbishop thanked the AOHD team and their helpers for quickly making the event a reality. He also acknowledged YB Teresa's presence and the Sikh women's group, who came from Ipoh to support the event.

On this year's IWD theme, *Embracing Equity*, the prelate said, "Back in the day, everyone was clamouring for equality with men, today we want equity. Equality, for



YB Teresa Kok sharing on how far the nation has come in pushing for equity for women.

example, gives everyone a pair of shoes, regardless of shape, colour, size or fit to their need. Equity, on the other hand, gives everyone shoes that fits their needs. We all need different things, and equity looks into one's specific needs.

"Moving forward, I hope the government will be sensitive to these two words. I also hope AOHD will be able to provide assistance and support where needed."

YB Teresa's brief address touched on

how far the nation has come, although it has a long way to go.

"Malaysia has broken several records. She has seen her first female Deputy Prime Minister. We have also have a female Governor of Bank Negara, Auditor General, Attorney General, and Deputy Chief Police Officer Kuala Lumpur, to name a few.

"We are in a time when anything can happen. So, we need to keep campaigning to see other changes," she added.

While enjoying a generous high-tea spread, guests listened to several women who came forward to share their struggles and success stories, giving inspiration to others fighting their own battles.

Booths were set up for graduates of the GIFT-MED (Generating Income from Talents-Micro Entrepreneurship Development) training programme to showcase their goods and skills including henna drawing. There were also four blind masseuse from Brickfields offering shoulder massages.

Curator of the GIFT-MEDS programme, 3E Training & Education Sdn Bhd's Founder and Managing Director, Sandra Ghouse, said, "The GIFT MED graduates, Yvette & Bernadette, have proven that despite the challenges many women face in life, if they believe in themselves, focus and are willing to change and improve, becoming a woman business owner is not impossible.

"It was a wonderful event, pampering and showcasing the women who have been supporting the diocese. More women should come forward with their God given talents to help inspire and empower other women," she added. — **By Gwen Manickam**

## Cathedral celebrates IWD by appreciating their adoptees



Volunteers guiding participants in decorating Easter candles using doilies and ribbons.

KUALA LUMPUR: In conjunction with International Women's Day, the Parish Integral Human Development Ministry (PIHDM) and the *Laudato Si'* Ministry of the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist organised an event for its adoptees. Adoptees are individuals and their families who receive regular aid from PIHDM such as groceries and financial assistance. They are mostly from the B40 category and come from different racial and religious backgrounds.

Coordinator of the event, Dolly Cox said, "Most of our adoptees are women. They work hard and do not receive the recognition they deserve. Therefore, we want to recognise their efforts and the best time to do this is during International Women's Day."

Joint coordinator, Shanthi Nathan added, "Where there's a lady there's magic. And women bring magic to the people around them every day."

A total of 11 adoptees and their families participated in the event held on March 11

in the Cathedral compound.

The programme comprised of a variety of events. It kicked off with a talk by Franciska Savarimuthu on women empowerment.

The adoptees and their families learnt the art of making *teh tarik*, a milk tea concocted by pouring the hot beverage from one container to another in long streams (or "pulling") to create a frothy head.

Since Easter is approaching, there were workshops on decorating Easter candles, as well as on flower arrangement.

A member of the parish's *Laudato Si'* Ministry, Veronica Tan, demonstrated the method to prepare Mexican Tomato Salsa. The recipe is from a vegan recipe book launched by the parish's *Laudato Si'* Ministry to promote a plant-based diet and healthy eating.

Towards the end of the event, the adoptees cut a cake and received presents. The cake was sponsored by the All Malaysia Malayalee Association Ladies Council. The event ended with lunch. — **By Julie Lim**



## Kajang church organises exhibition for parish anniversary

KAJANG: The 125th Anniversary Steering Committee of the Church of the Holy Family organised an exhibition to 'relive the history' of the 1901 parish.

It was held on the first two weekends of March at the former church building.

Several hundred parishioners visited the exhibition designed to help the faithful trace their roots, and look back on the path where the Lord had accompanied this parish for close to 125 years.

The exhibition, with the focused theme *HFK: A Journey of Remembrance*, is to help the faithful to recollect the parish's journey and be inspired for a blessed future together. The exhibition showcased artefacts, relics, pictures and photos of the parish's rich and colourful heritage over the last 122 years.

Many came to visit the exhibition at the invitation of parish priest, Fr Michael Chua. They walked down memory lane and looked back with gratitude and thanksgiving to God for how far they had come, and that, in one spirit, they would be inspired to work as one family towards a more vibrant and caring Church.

On February 18, 2023, the parish's 125th Jubilee celebration was launched with a Thanksgiving Mass. With the theme *Behold, I Make All Things New (Rev 21:5)*, the celebration promises to be a four-year (2023 - 2026) journey to Remember, Renew, Revive and Rejoice. — **By Bernard Anthony**

# Being a light to the marginalised



**By Bernard Anthony**

KALUMPANG: A Lenten Outreach programme was held in the interior of Kalumpang, some 20km from Kuala Kubu Bharu town, on March 12.

The Catholic migrant community, numbering 65, were present for their weekly Sunday Mass celebrated by Fr VA Michael, in a wooden sawmill.

Some 37 others from Kuala Lumpur were present with the Indonesian migrants for the morning Mass.

The city group came with essential food items, Rosaries, pillows and toothbrushes for the outreach.

After Mass, Fr VA told the migrants to share the foodstuff among themselves. There was a large stack of pre-loved clothes as

well to be distributed.

Fr VA, the parish priest of the Church of St Paul the Apostle in Kuala Kubu Bharu (KKB), also provides pastoral care to the migrant community here. He thanked the KL group for coming the second time here in their mission to reach out to those marginalised and living on the fringe of society.

Manggae, a leader of the migrant community, said they are thankful to God not just for the "gifts" but the presence of the KL group which encourages them to be good Catholics, as they came not to be served but to serve.

Alex, another leader of the migrants, said there are 100 Catholic families, with 60 in Kalumpang and the rest in Batang Kali, Rasa, Kerling and KKB. All come for

weekly Sunday Mass celebrated in Bahasa Malaysia.

Most of the migrants work in the sawmill or in the estate earning a meagre wage and live in simple wooden huts. Most are from Flores in Indonesia.

Fr VA said the migrants are also blessed to be able to bring three adults to be baptised, with seven more to be confirmed at the forthcoming Easter Vigil.

The KL group said they are called to be light of hope to others and came with the mission of Christ to love and care for those in need.

There was interaction between the migrants and their guests. After the closing prayer, the KL group departed with some experiencing their first visit to a rural area.



Parishioners visiting the exhibition held at the former church.

## SFX launches First Aid Room

PETALING JAYA: The Church of St Francis Xavier has taken the initiative to set up a First Aid Room (F.A.R) and medical team for the safety and well-being of its congregation.

Parish priest, Fr Norris Seenivasan SJ, blessed the room, situated next to the statue of the parish's patron saint, after the 8.30am Mass on March 12.

The idea to have a medical team was mooted in May 2022, as having trained medical personnel on hand during Masses and parish activities could potentially save lives in emergencies.

Dr Joseph Manavalan and Dr Geethan Royan jointly head the team, made up of doctors, and serving and retired nurses.

Hospitality ministers, RCIA facilitators, and the medical team underwent First Aid training by St John's Ambulance Malaysia, and later, a refresher course to ensure they are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to provide effective First Aid.

The team has been on duty for various events since its formation, including the recently concluded Lenten Retreat by Fr Michael Payyapilly VC, and will continue to serve during upcoming celebrations, notably Holy Week. Recruitment for more members is ongoing, and those interested may leave their names at the parish office or call 03-79565977. — **By Francis Lai**

The team has been on duty for various events since its formation, including the recently concluded Lenten Retreat by Fr Michael Payyapilly VC, and will continue to serve during upcoming celebrations, notably Holy Week. Recruitment for more members is ongoing, and those interested may leave their names at the parish office or call 03-79565977. — **By Francis Lai**



The team undergoing a first aid course conducted by a member of St John's Ambulance Malaysia.

### Letters to Editor

## AI in Asia's Synod Document

Dear Editor,

As a 'New Kid on the Block', ChatGPT can be alluring even to Church circles wanting first place to automate analysis from survey exercises for instance.

However, considering complex security risks that envelope this new Artificial Intelligence technology, jumping into its utility without due diligence can invite leaks or even data loss or data inflation at unexpected times. It is important to note that personal identifiable information, once introduced into 'the system', becomes part of its knowledge bank and can potentially appear in other organisations' work or in their data bank.

Additionally, since ChatGPT is connected to the internet, cyber attacks can occur. Data can be breached by unauthorised parties and re-introduced as original information [even if it has been tempered with]. Hence, the Church must, with due diligence, implement strong security protocols and unique guidelines for the use of ChatGPT within its workspace.

As the Church moves forward in dealing with ChatGPT, my strong recommendation is to limit access to this new technology to only those who are trained and appointed to use it.

John George  
Petaling Jaya

Send your letters to ► [letterseditor@herald.com.my](mailto:letterseditor@herald.com.my)  
The Editor, HERALD, 5 Jalan Robertson, 50150 KL

Please include your name and address. *Letters without name and address will not be entertained.*



# Caritas Asia Regional Conference

SIBU: The 2023 Caritas Asia Regional Conference was held in Bangkok, Thailand, from March 7 to 8 with the theme *Building New Paths of Fraternity*.

Malaysia was represented by Executive Secretary from the National Office, Eta Ting (Caritas Sarawak Region), Fr Martinian Lee (Caritas Semenanjung Region) from Caritas Malacca-Johor and Fr Wilfred James (Caritas Sabah Region) from Caritas Keningau.

This annual meeting of the 25 Caritas Member Organisations in Asia is an important gathering for members to discuss their national and regional matters concerning the Caritas confederations in the region.

The first day began with Mass. Bishop Paul Daisuke, President of Caritas Japan, exhorted us to remember that despite Caritas' rules and laws, it is the love of God that compels us to work for one Master and for us all to be connected with one another in love. All we need is Jesus, the one Master-builder, with us as His co-workers, to continue trusting Him always to be of service to the poor.

He shared the powerful testimony of

how the police did not stop his Caritas Niigata members from distributing food daily for the homeless during the lockdown period the last two years.

Dr Pier Francesco Pinelli, Caritas Internationalis Temporary Administrator, shared with the delegates the latest report and updates from Caritas Internationalis as tasked to him and another two appointed Caritas members by our Holy Father.

Dr Pinelli expressed Pope Francis' wish to welcome the women and youth representatives from Caritas Asia to become Representative Council members of Caritas Internationalis in May for the General Assembly in Rome.

An estimated 400 Caritas members from the seven regions: Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East and North Africa, North America and Oceania, are expected to gather for this.

Then, Fr Tony Labiao, Representative of SEA to the Regional Commission, presented the updates of the 10 Caritas from Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, CHARIS Singa-



Eta Ting with the Malaysia representatives (Fr Wilfred James and Fr Martinian Lee) handing the Malaysia report to Dr Pier Francesco Pinelli.



Eta Ting presenting the Malaysia report at the Caritas Asia Regional Conference.

pore, Thailand, Timor Leste and Vietnam.

Eta presented for Caritas Malaysia. She highlighted the common flooding issue in Malaysia and hoped for better collaboration in long term projects to curb the frequent floods in the three regions of Semenanjung, Sarawak and Sabah.

Sr Anne Waturua, as Representative of Central Asia to the Regional Commission, gave the updates of Central Asia Sub-region that is from Caritas Kazakhstan, Caritas Kyrgyzstan, Caritas Mongolia, Caritas Tajikistan, and Church of Turkmenistan.

Fr Paul Choo reported on the East Asia Sub-region from Caritas Hong Kong, Caritas Japan, Caritas Korea, Caritas Taiwan and Caritas Macau.

Lastly, Fr Lalit Tudu summarised the updates from South Asia Sub-region comprising of Caritas Bangladesh, Caritas India, Caritas Nepal, Caritas Pakistan and Caritas Sri Lanka.

The Solidarity Dinner was a memorable and fun time to celebrate the new friendship and to enjoy singing praises and giving thanks to God. Caritas Malaysia and Caritas Indonesia got the Caritas members to sing and dance to *Hari Ini Aku Rasa Bahagia* to close the happy hour.

On the second day, Bishop Jose Colin M. Bagaforo, President of Caritas Philippines,

in his homily reminded the delegates to be proactive, to serve to give life rather than to be reactive and waiting to be served.

Mungreiphy Shimray, from Caritas India, was chosen as Caritas Asia Regional Coordinator. She replaces Zar Gomez, who has served for two terms.

Shimray has served Caritas India for 25 years and she looks forward to joining Caritas Asia Regional Secretariat in June 2023. The election of the nominated Caritas Asia Regional President will be known on May 10 in Rome, prior the Caritas Internationalis General Assembly. The new Caritas Asia Regional Commission Members for 2023 to 2027 are: Caritas Kazakhstan, Caritas Japan, Caritas India and Caritas Cambodia.

Overall, the takeaway learning points from Dr Benedict were: Trust each other, participate openly and authentically, support each other fraternally, coordinate for equal dignity and be proactive.

This conference was enriching and fruitful for all three as first timers from Malaysia. Caritas Malaysia looks forward to the next events: *Institutional Development and Capacity Strengthening (IDCS) Workshop* organised by Caritas Asia to be held in Malaysia, and the Caritas Internationalis General Assembly in Rome.

## Servant leadership is exercising godly leadership

KUALA LUMPUR: Approximately 75 lay leaders from the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus attended a one-day *Servant Leadership* seminar recently. Held at the parish's



Dewan Louis Guittat, parish priest Msgr Stanislaus Soosaimariam, and Human Resource Development Fund (HRDF) trainer, Simon Samuel Dass (pic left)

facilitated the seminar.

Msgr Stanislaus (pic) emphasised the importance of service humility and humbleness in serving, using St Paul as an example. He also pointed out that a good Christian servant-leader invests in others' development and well-being for the common good and the glory of God.



He quoted the *Acts of the Apostles* 20:19 in reminding all to serve the Lord with great humility.

Msgr Stanislaus shared how the Bible keeps him going and his motivation comes from Rev. 21:5.

Simon touched on the Principles of Ministerial Entrepreneurship and the Power of the Holy Spirit which Jesus Christ's ministry is anchored onto. The Servant Leadership is one of the parametres Jesus Christ used in the empowerments of His ministry.

Simon referred to Scripture texts as he shared on the *21 Irrefutable Laws of Engagement* and *Foundation of Influence* (law of placement, law of identity and the

law of oneness), for changing ourselves into the temple of the Holy Spirit.

There was also group discussion for the respective language groups. Four questions were posed, namely *What will I do less or stop doing? What will I do, moreover start doing? What will I do differently? and What am I aiming to advise?*

Seminar attendee and ministry lay leader, Dr Florence John said, "The seminar taught me to be humbler in my leadership and in serving my PMEIA ministry. It reminded me that everyone who serves must do it with humility and love. Being a servant means putting others before yourself."

— By Bernard Anthony



The parish leaders at the Servant Leadership seminar.

• PROFESSIONAL ADVISORY & CONSULTATION ON BEREAVEMENT MATTERS •

**诺曼殯儀服務**

**NORMAN FUNERAL SERVICES**

Honouring Lives Since 1966 ☎ 24 HOURS

**012 212 0677 / 012 333 5753 / 019 333 5753**

Norman Christian Funeral Services (002882028-X)  
No. 112, Jalan Gasing, 46000 Petaling Jaya  
Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia  
603 7931 6639  
✉ normanfuneralservice@gmail.com  
f Norman Funeral Services  
www.normanfuneralservices.com

COMPLETE FUNERAL ARRANGEMENT FOR ALL FAITHS

• BUILDING OF MONUMENTS • SUPPLY OF CONDOLENCE WREATHS •



# Gender ideology

## ‘One of the most dangerous ideological colonisations’ today

ROME: Pope Francis has said that gender ideology is “one of the most dangerous ideological colonisations” today.

In an interview with journalist Elisabetta Piqué for the Argentine daily newspaper *La Nación*, Pope Francis explained the reasoning behind his strong statement.

“Gender ideology, today, is one of the most dangerous ideological colonisations,” Francis said in the interview published on the evening of March 10.

“Why is it dangerous? Because it blurs differences and the value of men and women,” he added.

“All humanity is the tension of differences. It is to grow through the tension of differences. The question of gender is diluting the

differences and making the world the same, all dull, all alike, and that is contrary to the human vocation.”

Pope Francis has frequently used the term “ideological colonisation” throughout the 10 years of his pontificate, particularly to describe instances when aid money for developing countries has been tied to contraceptives, abortion, sterilisation, and gender ideologies.

In a conversation with Polish bishops in 2016, Pope Francis said: “Today children — children — are taught in school that everyone can choose his or her sex. Why are they teaching this? Because the books are provided by the people and institutions that

give you money. These forms of ideological colonisation are also supported by influential countries. And this is terrible!”

The Pope told Piqué that he was not currently writing a new encyclical and denied that he had been asked to write a document on the subject of gender.

While he is not writing something on gender ideology, the Pope said that he talks about the subject “because some people are a bit naive and believe that it is the way to progress.”

He said that they “do not distinguish what is respect for sexual diversity or diverse sexual preferences from what is already an anthropology of gender, which is extremely dangerous because it



eliminates differences, and that erases humanity, the richness of humanity, both personal, cultural, and social, the diversities and the tensions between differences.”

The Pope noted that he always distinguishes “between what pastoral care is for people who have a different sexual orientation and what gender ideology is.”

“They are two different things,” he added.

When Piqué asked Pope Francis if he knew that in Argentina peo-

ple are asked to indicate on official forms if they are male, female, or non-binary sex, the Pope said that it reminded him of the “futuristic” novel, *Lord of the World*, written by Msgr Robert Hugh Benson in 1907.

He said that the book presents the idea of “a future in which differences are disappearing and everything is the same, everything is uniform, a single leader of the whole world.” — **By Courtney Mares, CNA**

## Biden calls bans on transgender treatments for children ‘close to sinful’

WASHINGTON DC: US President Joe Biden (*pic*), criticised Florida’s regulation of transgender medical care for children and ban on gender ideology in the classroom, calling the measures “close to sinful.”

Biden said in an interview with *Daily Show* guest host Kal Penn: “What’s going on in Florida is, as my mother would say, close to sinful. I mean it’s just terrible what they’re doing.”

Although the president did not specify which laws he was referring to, Republican lawmakers in Florida and other states have introduced bills and regulations to protect children from transgender medical interventions and restrict classroom instruction in gender ideology.

During his interview, Biden added that federal legislation might be necessary to prevent states from



adopting certain bills that affect transgender policies related to children.

“It’s not like, you know, a kid wakes up one morning and says, ‘You know, I decided I want to become a man or I want to become a woman,’” the president said. “I mean, what are they thinking about here? They’re human beings, they love and have feelings. ... It’s

cruel. We [should] make sure we pass [federal] legislation like we passed on same-sex marriage. You mess with that, you’re breaking the law and you’re going to be held accountable.”

In Florida, a ban on transgender surgeries and medications for children, issued by the state’s Board of Medicine, went into effect March 16. Lawmakers have also proposed legislation banning transgender medical procedures.

Florida Gov Ron DeSantis has signed legislation that prevents schools from promoting gender ideology through discussions of transgenderism and sexual orientation to young children in kindergarten through third grade. The legislation requires such discussions in later grades to be age appropriate.

Other states, such as Mississippi, Utah, and South Dakota, have

adopted similar legislation to ban sex change operations for children. Most states do not restrict sex change surgery for minors at this time.

Although Biden, the nation’s second Catholic president, called the Florida bills “close to sinful,” his interpretation sets him on the opposite side of the issue from the Vatican and Pope Francis.

The Vatican’s Congregation for Catholic Education on June 10, 2019, published a document titled *Male and Female He Created Them*, which rejects the idea that a person can choose his or her gender.

“There is a need to reaffirm the metaphysical roots of sexual difference, as an anthropological refutation of attempts to negate the male-female duality of human nature, from which the family is generated,” the 31-page document states.

“The denial of this duality not only erases the vision of human beings as the fruit of an act of creation but creates the idea of the human person as a sort of abstraction who ‘chooses for himself what his nature is to be,’” the document continues, citing Pope Benedict’s December 21, 2012, address to the Roman Curia.

“Man and woman in their created state as complementary versions of what it means to be human are disputed. But if there is no pre-ordained duality of man and woman in creation, then neither is the family any longer a reality established by creation. Likewise, the child has lost the place he had occupied hitherto and the dignity pertaining to him,” it continued.

Pope Francis has consistently voiced his opposition to what he calls gender ideology. (*see article above*). — **By Tyler Arnold, CNA**

## Catholic Union launches religion in the workplace survey

UNITED KINGDOM: The Catholic Union has launched a major new survey on people’s experiences and attitudes towards faith in the workplace.

The survey was set up in response to a new inquiry into human rights at work from the UK Parliament’s Joint Committee on Human Rights. Part of that inquiry is considering freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and freedom of expression in the workplace. It includes questions on whether our law strikes the right balance between employee rights to freedom of religion or belief and the rights of employers.

The Catholic Union will use the

responses to the survey as the basis for its written evidence to the Committee’s inquiry. The call for evidence closed on March 24. The Committee, which is made up of a cross-party group of MPs and peers, is expected to report and make recommendations to the UK Government later this year.

The inquiry comes as the Government considers giving Ministers the power to remove or amend retained EU law, including in respect of workers’ rights.

Nigel Parker, Director of the Catholic Union, said, “We are fortunate enough to live in a country where human rights, such as freedom of conscience and religious

freedom, are enshrined in law. However, it appears that, despite the protections we enjoy for religious freedom, a number of people feel that there are increasing difficulties about being a faithful and open Catholic in the workplace. We would like to gather evidence about what is happening on the ground in order to present the Committee with a clearer picture of these problems in practice. I’m pleased that the Committee has included religious freedom as part of this inquiry. This is an important subject and the Catholic Union will do all we can to help the Committee to form a true picture.” — **ICN**

## ST. JOSEPH

## DYING AID ASSOCIATION

## 圣若瑟助终社

Full-time Funeral Crew Required  
Salary ranges from SGD2,000 to SGD3,000 a month

**Job Requirement:**

- Class 3 driving license
- Willing to learn
- Good working attitude
- Able to do shift work, and work on Public Holidays and Overtime
- With or without experience
- Team player
- Diligent

**Job Scope:**  
As part of the Funeral Team, you will be working with bereaved families and helping them.  
You will plan, coordinate and provide funeral service from beginning to end. (Training will be given)

Interested candidates, please contact Theresa or Magdalene at telephone number +65 6288-0154, or email your resume to [sccsjda@yahoo.com.sg](mailto:sccsjda@yahoo.com.sg)





# African bishops say they'll listen to synod but also have something to teach

YAOUNDÉ, Cameroon: African prelates wrapped up their end of Pope Francis' on-going Synod on Synodality in early March, vowing that Africa will listen to the rest of the Church but also insisting that it has much to teach.

"African society is a vibrant society with rich cultural values that need to be carefully preserved," said Bishop Musie Ghebregiorghis of Ethiopia.

"African values should not be diluted by the dictatorship of democracy or globalisation because these values have much to teach to the whole world," Ghebregiorghis said. "Our synodal journey should help us to deepen further on these African values, which may have a great impact on the world."

The Continental Assembly of the Synod on Synodality took place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, March 1-6.

"We speak different languages; we have different cultural backgrounds; we have different liturgies and yet we feel we are all members of the one family of God here in Africa," Ghebregiorghis said during a March 4 Eucharistic celebration at the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Cathedral of the Addis Ababa Archdiocese.

Some 200 delegates from across the continent pledged to "form the Synodal Family of God in the practice of integral and life-giving leadership that is relational and collaborative, and capable of generating solidarity and co-responsibility."

That Synodal Family of God, the clerics said, will "create spaces and enlarge our tent for the possible exercise of various forms of lay ministry."

Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo of the Democratic Republic of Congo, president of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) and also



During the Mass of their Plenary Assembly in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. (ACI Africa)

a newly appointed member of Pope Francis' council of cardinal advisors, called the gathering "a *kairos* for renewal of the Church in Africa."

"It has been a moment to study, but also to live synodality. It has been a moment to experience the sense of family of God in Africa," Ambongo said.

"It has been a moment to listen to one another, to listen to the Holy Spirit on the delicate issues affecting the Continent of Africa," he said. "It is a synodal assembly to mutually renew our mission here in Africa."

Participants identified a number of key priority areas for the Church in Africa:

- Family pastoral care that focuses on present-day challenges such as divorce, broken marriages and re-married people,

elective and circumstantial single parents.

- Deepening African cultural values as already enshrined in the concept of the Church as the family of God since the first African synod in 1995, with no disregard to the doctrine of the Church.

- Consideration of the African communitarian culture as expressed in philosophies such as Ubuntu, Ujamaa, Indaba and Palaver where co-responsibility and subsidiarity are key principles.

- Commitment to fighting against the exploitation of natural resources which often leads to wars and social conflicts on the continent.

- Promoting liturgical renewal for active participation of the faithful with respect to the guidelines of divine worship.

- Formation of the people of God where

the notion of inclusivity is emphasised as a way of promoting synodality in Church governance.

- Promoting the inclusion of women, the youth and all groups of the people of God that feel marginalised.

- Ecological justice and stewardship as a way of living a synodal change in order to address the ecological crisis.

These priorities, according to the bishops, mean that "the Synodal Continental Assembly has confirmed the Church's way of doing things in Africa. The Family of God in Africa is firmly rooted in the synodal dynamic."

"Synodality is no longer a remote desire, a faint hope or a distant future objective. We have tasted the nourishing fruits of synodality by encountering, dialoguing with and listening to, one another, and all together listening to the Holy Spirit," they said.

The Pope's envoy in Ethiopia, Archbishop Antoine Camilleri, cautioned against misrepresentations of the synodal process, noting that it was neither "a study group or a parliamentary assembly" but an "ecclesial moment."

"We are all aware that this synodal encounter is not an event to theorise about issues and problems; neither is it a Church convention, a study group or a parliamentary assembly," he said.

"The synodal process that brings us together today, and which has been our special focus as a universal Church over the past two years is a quintessentially ecclesial moment, in the etymological sense of the term," Camilleri explained.

"We are the Church in synod: the Family of God is our Tent in Africa," the SECAM bishops stated simply. — **By Ngala Killian Chintom, Crux**

## German Catholics conclude their "Synodal Path"

BERLIN: The Catholic Church in Germany has finally completed its highly publicised "Synodal Path" (*der Synodale Weg*), a project for ecclesial reform that the bishops launched three years ago, together with lay leaders, in response to the country's clergy sex abuse crisis.

The fifth and final assembly of the Synodal Path was brought to conclusion on a positive note on March 11 in Frankfurt and the sense of relief was palpable.

It is true that the debates were sometimes heated and, more surprisingly, that Bishop Georg Bätzing, president of the German Bishops Conference (DBK), had to warn some of his episcopal confreres not to make any last-minute attempts to block proposals. But, in the end, almost all the texts presented were approved by the synodal assembly and by two-thirds of the bishops.

### More attention to same-sex couples and transgender people

One of the key measures concerns blessings for "committed couples", whether they are divorced-and-remarried or of the same sex. Disciplinary sanctions against pastoral workers who organise such celebrations may now be lifted. While the

practice is already taking place in some dioceses in Germany and will remain at the discretion of the bishops, it could soon become a reality throughout the country. 81 per cent of the bishops approved this measure.

Another central measure, long applauded by the participants, is that the Catholic Church in Germany says it wants to give more attention to intersex and transsexual people. Following the example of the diocese of Freiburg, a pioneer in this field, it will now be possible to omit the corresponding entry in the baptismal register or to use the word "miscellaneous" for children whose gender identity is unclear. Transgender Catholics will also be able to change their marital status and first names in the baptismal register.

### A text in favour of women deacons

The synodal assembly also approved texts that require Pope Francis' approval. Among other things, the Synodal Path asks him to allow women to preach at Eucharistic celebrations and to re-examine the link between ministerial functions and the obligation of celibacy.

At the end of an emotional final debate on March 11, the participants also ap-

proved a text in favour of women deacons and called on the German bishops to push the issue in Rome. The question of ordaining women priests, however, was postponed at the request of some bishops.

"The diaconate for women is long overdue," said Bishop Gebhard Fürst of Rottenburg-Stuttgart. He cited the Synod of Würzburg, which had requested it already in 1974.

The Pope and some cardinals have been increasingly critical of Germany's reform process in recent weeks. At one point, Francis even called it "elitist". But while such criticism hovered over the discussions in Frankfurt, it did not halt the momentum. Thus, the proposal that was approved last September to set up a synodal council, should see the light of day despite Rome's criticism. The assembly in Frankfurt elected the members of the committee responsible for its creation.

"The Synodal Path has worked. It is not a paper tiger," said Bishop Bätzing, noting that 15 reform texts were adopted over the last three years. "It leads neither to a division of the Church nor to the creation of a national Church," he insisted, calling the "headwinds" a "reaction to the spiritual strength" of the process.

### "Do not respond in a bureaucratic way"

Others were less enthusiastic.

Irme Stetter Karp, president of the Central Committee of Catholics (ZdK) and the Synodal Path's co-chair, welcomed a "new culture of dialogue". But she lamented that "a small group of bishops prevented structural change in the Church".

The heads of three Bavarian dioceses (Regensburg, Passau and Augsburg), as well as the bishop of Münster and cardinal-archbishop Cologne almost systematically opposed the texts for reform.

Decisions that are directly applicable in the dioceses, such as the blessing of same-sex couples, have yet to be implemented. Those requiring papal approval must now go through a new process and Bishop Bätzing warned that this "will take time". The DBK president called on Vatican authorities "not to respond in a bureaucratic way", but through an "open and synodal process".

"The issues we have discussed here are not purely German, but are taken up by the universal Church," he insisted. Bätzing now wants more than ever to bring them before the international gathering of the Synod in Rome. — **By Delphine Nerbollier, LCI** (<https://international.la-croix.com/>)





# All roads lead to... the Synod in Rome

## A bit of synodal wisdom

By Massimo Faggioli

The next six months are likely to be a bumpy road on the way to Rome where the first of two Synod assemblies on the very issue of synodality will take place this coming October. This gathering, and a second one in October 2024, are the culmination of the Synodal Path on which Pope Francis launched the Catholic Church in late 2021.

The various churches around the world have experienced the synodal process in very different ways due to their distinct national and continental characteristics. But there have also been dissimilarities even within the same nation. Important issues that Catholics have been wanting to address for a long time will surface in one way or another at the Synod assembly in Rome. That will be done with differing if not divergent expectations. Catholics in some places are less patient than others. Interestingly, many bishops seem fearful of what Catho-

lics in countries other than their own (especially in Germany) might do in response to the Synod, even more than they fret about what might come from Rome during or after the two assemblies. This is a remarkable sign of our ecclesial times.

Synodality relies on rules and procedures that are now in a transitional stage, in the process of being established and tried out. The theological and magisterial tradition on synodality is being refashioned before our very eyes. Synodality today cannot be an identical copy of synodality as it was in the early Church. This moment is showing us the plasticity that exists in the ecclesial and ecclesiastical forms of the one subject the Church. This is why the approach to this moment requires an unwritten wisdom for a synodal conversion that has to face a variety of obstacles. Here I intend to propose five of them, in an effort to develop a synodal wisdom. But first a word of caution: we are in for the long haul; synodality will not be a done deal after October 2024.



File photo of Pope Francis meeting with Cardinals in the Synod Hall (Vatican Media)

### First obstacle: Polarisation

There is real challenge to being a synodal Church in our current climate of hyper-polarisation. The two-party mindset has become part of the cultural DNA, where everything is a contest or a choice between two — and only two — options that are mutually exclusive and where each side is tempted to excommunicate the other and win over the other.

In the United States, for instance, this has led to the formation of two ecclesial parties that mirror the country's two-party political system — not only in shaping orientations on social and cultural issues, but also in terms of style of communication, of ethics of belonging and relating to the other side. This has created an almost automatic instinct to talk to the other side as a group that is different, rather than talk with those who — although they do not agree with you — are still part of the same family.

Dismantling this partisan way of understanding synodality is important at this moment in which listening to the voices of the people will have consequences on the representatives to the Synod. Like never before, the members of the Synod assembly will have a sort of ecclesial mandate, precisely because the listening period now is so central to the process.

### Second obstacle: Synodality as “paperwork Church”

Unfortunately, sceptics often see synodality as just another example of the “paperwork Church”; that is, an exercise that ultimately produces documents that will feed a bureaucratic ecclesiastical apparatus but have no impact (or perhaps a negative one) on the spiritual life of Catholics. This is why it is extremely important to see synodality in the context of the Church as a “field hospital”, to use Pope Francis’ moving image.

Synodality is about rediscovering the inter-personal and relational experience of the Christian faith, where healing is never just the application of procedures and protocols but always has a human face. Synodality in the Church as field hospital is an antidote to the temptation of lifeless, contactless Christianity.



### Third obstacle: An unreasonable desire for the spectacular

Synodality is a slow communal and spiritual process that requires patience. It challenges the habits and expectations on our horizon, as well as our ecclesial expectations. We live in a “society of the spectacle”, which emphasises the “ground-breaking event” or the “paradigm shift” at every moment, and where every election is “the most consequential election in our history”. But synodality is not the drama that puts the individual at the centre, the *homo faber* or maker of Promethean decisions that turn his fortune upside down. Neither is synodality one more evidence of the theological tragedy of modern Catholicism; that is, the impossibility of Church reform, of the inevitable and inescapable fate of decline.

### Fourth obstacle: Risk of getting hung up on structures

Synodality will certainly have to find a structural way to favour new modes of participation. But it is not only about creating new structures. In some churches, the decision to revive (or give life for the first time to) structures of participation that should exist already — such as parish and diocesan pastoral councils, for example — would be a synodal event. In many places, this would be like discovering Vatican II for the first time (or starting a reception of Vatican II that was interrupted many years ago). It would not simply be applying structures that were created almost 60 years ago to today. Rather, it would mean living them in a different way.

### Fifth obstacle: Wanting to decide everything all at once

This is probably the most difficult and unpopular obstacle of all. There are issues that must be very present in the synodal process, like the participation of women in new roles in the life of the Church and the consequences of the abuse crisis. But there are also issues that may be better addressed by postponing them, especially those do not require new legislation or do not rise to the level of doctrinal decisions.

Synodality has a long history in the Christian tradition, but it's a history full of interruptions, detours, and deviations. The current synodal process is, by nature, experimental. If our local communities develop a more synodal way of being, it's an energy that the Church — that is, the people of God, as well as the institutional Church — will not give up. There are the synodal moments proper, but there are also “peri-synodal” events that can contribute to the Synod without having to be sanctioned by the hierarchy of the Church.

After the Synod assemblies take place, the Catholic Church is likely to look less monarchical and more synodal. Nonetheless, a hierarchical structure will continue to exist. It is important to remember that the lived experience of many Catholics is not, and will not be, involved in the synodal process. This is fine: no one should wish for a synodal Jacobinism. To paraphrase what Pope Francis says about holiness in *Gaudete et Exsultate*, there is also “middle class of synodality”. If we were to stake our staying or leaving the Catholic Church on the outcome of this two-year synodal process it would be a mortal risk. — LCI (<https://international.la-croix.com/>)



## Ruminations

## A token or a sacrifice

While moving house 10 years ago, my late mother came across two shiny marbles in my room. She was about to discard them, thinking it silly for a grown-up man like me to keep childhood possessions. I remember telling her not to throw them away for there was a story behind those two marbles.

The story of those marbles began sometime in the mid-90s on a rail ride in the blazing Indian summer. The sweltering heat seared bodies as the train made its way from station to station.

At one particular station, my reverie was jolted by the sudden appearance of a tiny outstretched hand. I looked at the intruder. It was a boy of six or seven years of age, begging for alms. This is a common sight in India. But something about the boy made me take a closer look at him, and I was startled.

Why, if he had been scrubbed clean, hair plastered, in St John's school uniform, he could easily have passed for me at that age, sitting in the back seat of a Mercedes, being chauffeured to school. He looked so much like me at that age that I thought I had met my young alter ego. Instead, here he was pleading 'paisa, paisa' (money, money). I thought no more, dug into my pocket and handed him two rupees.

He was delighted. In exchange, he took two marbles from his pocket, placed them in my hand and ran off as the whistle blew for the train to move on. I watched him standing on the platform, gleefully looking at his money. As the train chugged out of the station, I watched him until he disappeared out of sight.

For a while, I sat and looked at the two marbles in my hand. Marbles were a precious possession for any boy. I should know. I had played with marbles before. They weren't cheap to buy, and were hard to win in a game. You had to be skilful to win and you certainly don't give them away easily. The poor boy had parted with his prized possession for a mere two rupees.

Not only did he remind me of myself, he reminded me of the widow, in the days when Jesus walked on earth, who, poor as she was, gave of all that she had — two coins. Jesus praised her for her sincerity in giving and condemned the Pharisees for giving a small fraction of their plenty and making a great show of it, hoping to impress people.

Which leads now to the fabled conversation between a chicken and a pig in a certain land experiencing great famine. Everywhere people were starving and dying of hunger. The chicken hatched a scheme and called her friend, the pig, to discuss it.

"Mr Pig, I have a great idea how to help these hungry, starving people. I will lay the eggs, and you provide the bacon, so these people can have bacon and eggs," said the chicken.

"Fine with you, chicken, what you are offering is a token. What I am offering is a sacrifice," replied the pig.

In thought, word and deed, what are we offering God today? Is it a token or a sacrifice? Is it such as the giving of my two rupees, the giving of the Pharisees, or the "hard labour" of laying an egg?

Or is our giving like two prized marbles (which I still have in my possession), like a widow in abject poverty giving all her wealth, or like a pig being asked to be sacrificed in exchange for bacon to feed the hungry?

This Easter is a time to reflect on what God offered to ransom us. The sacrifice of the Cross, the sacrifice of the death of His Son. In exchange, is whatever we offer to God today a token or a sacrifice? It is a time for us to reflect, to think of the worthiness of our giving in the light of the sacrifice of the Cross. It is a time to consider, in the span of our time on earth, of what really counts and of what really matters to us and to God.

**Christopher Fernandez is a parishioner of the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist, Kuala Lumpur.**

# Your tears are my tears; your pain is my pain

By Sr María de Lourdes López Munguía

The missionary life is a continuous process of incarnation in which a part of me remains with the people to whom I am sent and a part of the people remains in me. There are experiences that mark me deeply and fill my heart with names and stories. To quote the late bishop Pedro Casaldàliga:

At the end of the road they will tell me: "You've lived? You have loved?"

And I, without saying anything, I will open the heart full of names.

In December 2019, I arrived in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo, in the east of the country. There, people have lived in constant tension since the displacement of the Rwandan population by the genocide. Goma has been a place of welcoming refugees from conflicts that end and start over.

It is in this reality where God accompanies me, and for them I consecrate myself (John 17:19).

One of our sisters had begun to accompany women survivors of the sexual violence that comes with armed conflicts, and realised the number of vulnerable boys and girls, orphaned, abandoned on the streets, sexually abused girls and ex-soldiers. That is why she founded the Tulizeni Centre, which welcomes children and women who survive these realities.

Here, I have had the grace of accompanying some women who have lived terrible experiences — sexual violence linked to the situation of instability, to the fratricidal war — and women who are revictimised by their own families. We have cried together with them; we have shouted anger and impotence.

I stayed with them on their Holy Saturday, opening my ears and my heart to allow them to tell their stories over and over again until they begin to re-know and re-create themselves. We danced because it is in dance that these women try to express their pain, their deaths and finally begin to live again.

As a psychologist and spiritual companion, I feel deeply called to accompany people on their personal journeys — usually, for me, women who have suffered sexual violence. I do that from my formation, but much more as a call from God.

It is true that each person I accompany leaves me with new wisdom, makes me re-know myself once again, from the shared pain and from resilience that is generated in the love required for deep listening.

In another sense, the boys and girls that God has entrusted to our care at the Tulizeni Centre have awakened in me a sense of motherhood that I had not experienced before, knowing that I was responsible not only for feeding and dressing them, but above all for exercising such an essential role as emotional bonding, and opening a space for listening and welcoming so that they too can retell their stories and heal. Certainly, the little ones have an incredible ability to rebuild themselves.

Last October, the war once again



*A group of women survivors in a therapy group at the Tulizeni Centre in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo.*

gained momentum in view of this year's presidential elections and political-economic interests in the region. At first, I faced fear — a different fear because it is not the fear of losing my life, but fear for the safety of the children. I have discovered in them this great trust in God that allows them to pray with all their being.

In short, in the midst of this town to which we are called, we live together with our people, with insecurity and hope.

A few weeks ago, as a community, we went to visit a refugee camp located less than a kilometre from our community. The living conditions are shocking: There are more than 7,000 families living in small shacks made of canvas and sticks, without access to electricity and little drinking water delivered every day.

I am convinced that God contemplates through our eyes the pain of His people, the hunger of His sons and daughters. They are images that remain engraved on my retina and in my heart — and these images do not leave me indifferent. It hurts deeply to see babies and children crying for lack of food, and already in different stages of malnutrition.

Here I am.

Yes, here I am, and I am not saying it as an affirmation, but rather because each day I'm becoming aware of the depth of the incarnation of God in this town and in me.

Here I am with my story, with my failures and with all the ways God is calling me.

Here I am, in a deep moment of self-reflection, allowing myself to contemplate this reality through various prisms and find that it is our wounded humanity that prevents us from finding love and reconciliation.

Here I am, in silence, because my throat has run out of voice, because it is time for the survivors to take up their voices again to seek and find justice.

Here I am, trying to listen: listen to God in the silence of each morning to discover what he is asking of us; listen to God's people, their cries, their anguish, their hopes; listen to the boys and girls who are in the centre and who have



*Sr María de Lourdes López Munguía with preschoolers at the Tulizeni Centre in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo (Pictures courtesy of the writer)*

already suffered enough.

Here I am, rediscovering God's invitation to *maternar* (mothering) in this movement to give life and to care for the life in the midst of death.

So, living in this sacred land and witnessing the visit of Pope Francis has been a *kairos* moment. Listening to his words — "Your tears are my tears; your pain is my pain" — gives a new impetus to our presence in the midst of these people, and we have felt that the world has heard what had been silenced so many times.

If today I would ask myself, how has this experience in Congo transformed me? — my first response is silence, a silence full of lives, names, stories; a silence that I find at dawn and that is a stubborn hope that does not allow death and war to win in the heart.

It is that same silence that is engendering a new way in my prayer, this letting myself be mothered by God, letting God cuddle me, allowing myself to cry in His arms so that I can later comfort and console His people. — **Global Sisters Report, NCR**

● *Sr María de Lourdes López Munguía is a Franciscan Missionary of Mary from Mexico who now lives in the Democratic Republic of Congo*



# Was Jesus mistaken in warning of impending catastrophe?

One of the most dramatic scenes of the “end of the world” in the movie *2012* was the destruction of St Peter’s Basilica in the Vatican.

Now this was clearly a movie depiction, but if such a thing were to happen in modern times, well, it would be an apocalyptic moment.

In modern times, the first images of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre crumbling on September 11, 2001 conjured up similar fears of the end of the world.

The Gospel accounts speak of an imminent catastrophe on the horizon in the First Century.

In Matthew 3:11, John the Baptist warned that the one who would come after him had a “winnowing-fan in his hand; he would clear his threshing-floor and gather his wheat into his barn; but the chaff he would burn in a fire that would never go out”.

John was clearly warning of impending disaster: if the people of Israel did not repent, they could expect a catastrophe, and God would raise new children for Abraham (Matthew 3:9).

Given the ferment and upheaval, the rebellions and Roman reprisals, Jesus could probably have sensed that Israel was on a collision course with the Roman military occupiers.

In Luke 19, Jesus warns: 43 “Yes, a time is coming when your enemies will raise fortifications all round you, when they will encircle you and hem you in on every side; 44 they dash you and the children and your walls to the ground; they will leave not one stone standing on another within you, because you did not recognise the moment of your visitation.”

In Luke 21: 20-21, Jesus predicts: “When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then you must realise that it will soon be laid desolate. Then those in Judaea must escape to the mountains, those inside the city must



## SUNDAY OBSERVER

Anil Netto

*leave it, and those in country districts must not take refuge in it.”*

Some have claimed that these warnings of an impending apocalypse did not materialise during the era of the immediate followers of Jesus, and thus their expectation of the end of the world, and the Second Coming, were unfounded or mistaken. They claim that the early disciples then merely extended the timeframe for the Second Coming.

But such a theory ignores the reality that the Romans destroyed the Temple of Jerusalem and much of the city after encircling the city four years after a Jewish rebellion in 66 AD. Before their final onslaught on the city in 70 AD, the Romans encircled it with raised fortifications to cut off supplies to the city. They finally breached the city walls and destroyed the Temple, setting it ablaze. Hundreds of thousands were slaughtered or captured.

In the distance, the plumes of smoke from the fire over Jerusalem must have seemed like the end of the world. The Temple, which was a central part of their lives, had been utterly destroyed. This was the people’s worst nightmare. [It wouldn’t be the first time — the First Temple on the same site had been similarly totally destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon, in 587-586 BC, with the Jews then deported to Babylonia.

So given what happened to the Temple and Jerusalem itself, Jesus and John the Baptist were not wrong in warning the people of impending catastrophe and doom just four dec-

ades earlier.

Perhaps they differed in their approach. Whereas John preached a repentance from sin, Jesus set about proclaiming that the Kingdom of God was imminent. But you can almost feel the urgency in their words: both seem to sense they had limited time to act and preach.

It also explains why Jesus focused His attention on the “House of Israel” as a strategic approach. He would have seen that the Romans were clearly the military occupying power, employing brute force to suppress the people. But He also knew that the local political and religious elite of His time were oppressing and burdening the people.

The rulers seemed to employ a classic case of divide and rule. While they exploited the ordinary people, they divided them between the religiously clean and “unclean/impure”, many of them from marginalised groups. Once unclean, it was almost impossible for them to become ritually “clean” as that would involve an onerous cleansing process.

All the time, they enjoyed lavish lifestyles. To divide the people further, they allowed xenophobia — hatred and suspicion towards people different from them, whether it was the Galilean Jews, the Samaritans, the foreigners or Gentiles.

Jesus condemned greed and hypocrisy. He could see that the local political, religious and aristocratic classes were in cahoots with the Romans occupiers. Together, they extracted wealth (through heavy taxes, tolls, levies and portions of harvest) and confiscated land and property from the people.

This fuelled resentment and seething anger and the Romans responded by crushing rebellions with ferocious violence, torture and crucifixion of rebels, who were labelled “bandits” and thieves.

Jesus reserved His anger and fury at the money changers in the Temple, the ‘frontlin-

ers’ of the corrupt and oppressive financial system of His day.

There are many lessons we can learn from what John the Baptist and Jesus taught the people in the face of imminent catastrophe. Like the people of the First Century, today, we too are faced with a possible apocalypse.

How do we respond to rumours of war, climate change and rising sea levels, deforestation, poverty and inequality? How do we deal with international financial institutions and vested business interests that facilitate global injustice, environmental degradation and suffering?

For Jesus, the change had to come from the bottom up. He was racing against time, the only “weapons” in His arsenal being deep compassion, a passion against injustice, and love and solidarity with all Creation and abiding faith. He broke social boundaries and preached reconciliation, forgiveness, and love of enemies.

This was in sharp contrast to the Zealots, who resorted to hatred, violence and killings to counter the Roman occupiers and their collaborators.

In the end, John’s and Jesus’ warnings were not enough to stop the Jewish uprising against the Romans in 66 AD and the destruction of Jerusalem. The movement to build a kingdom of a different kind would take much longer.

Today, the world is confronted with much more serious challenges that threaten its destruction. But we have the same arsenal of “weapons” of the Spirit at our disposal: love and compassion, faith and solidarity with Creation. Let us do what we can to create a better world. The stakes are higher, the urgency even greater.

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



## WORD MADE FRESH

Nicholas Lye

In my many years as a Catholic, I have tried to fast from many different things such as meat, coffee, sweets, or social media, particularly in the season of Lent. While I do acknowledge some fruits from these practices such as growing in self-control and perseverance, or growing in my awareness of God’s presence in my life, I have found that, as soon as Lent is over, it is easy to quickly revert to indulging (or even over-indulging) in these things again, giving myself the excuse to celebrate Easter with these temporal delights.

This Lent, I was inspired to move away from external and material practices of fasting, and consider a kind of fast that is not only reserved for Lent or Fridays, but the kind that is meant to last forever.

“Only 40 days more and Nineveh is going to be destroyed.” And the people of Nineveh believed in God; they proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least.” (Jonah 3:4-5)

What first struck me when I came across this Scripture passage, was how the people of Nineveh fasted, not so much to gain bragging rights or check off a Lenten practice, but to prevent destruction upon themselves. When I

was led to reflect on what was really destroying me of late, I realised they were the many internal lies and scripts that have been wearing me down and taking my life away.

As a single lay missionary who depends on God to provide for me and send me opportunities to carry out His work, it is often so easy to compare my life with others, especially when little seems to be going on in my life right now, while others seem so much busier, and doing so much more, whether at home, in the corporate world, or even in the churches. This gradually causes me to think or believe that others were doing more or better than me, leaving me to often see myself as useless or lesser.

Yet what also struck me was how the people of Nineveh took time to stop whatever they were doing in order to fast and put on sackcloth. In the same light, God was inviting me to do the exact opposite of what I have been tempted to do, that instead of doing more, it was to do less, and make more space and time for me to acknowledge the unhealthy scripts and lies that I am invited to FAST from, in order that I may then FEAST on the deeper truths that He desires for me to live on and flourish from.

Eventually, upon reflecting and listening to His voice, this was the list that I came up with for Lent:

FAST: I need to do more.

FEAST: Less is more; being more than doing; I am precious, not useless.

FAST: I need to impact more numbers.

FEAST: Make every moment and interaction with every individual count.

FAST: Others are doing more / better than me. FEAST: I am unique and unrepeatable, therefore incomparable; I am invited to live life my way, the way I was created to be.

FAST: I am driven by the many needs out there.

FEAST: I am led by the Spirit within, even if it means entering the wilderness to care for my needs first.

FAST: I am driven by the expectations of others.

FEAST: I am led by the Lord; I do whatever He tells me.

FAST: I am not doing enough work out there. FEAST: Inner work is real work; Being present to myself and being a present to others as my better self is great work.

FAST: I have given up everything for nothing. FEAST: I have given up everything for Him who gives me everything I need.

FAST: I do not know where I am going in life. FEAST: God knows where I can best thrive and He is taking me there at the right pace.

FAST: Nobody sees me or values me.

FEAST: God sees and values me, and so do those who are of value to me.

FAST: I am wasting my time (doing nothing). FEAST: Wasting time with people I love (including God and myself) is valuable time; Connection with God, self and others is more important than productivity and visible results.

Looking at this list, I know that these are the lies that I wish to fast from for life, not only for this Lenten season. But I have also come to realise that such fasting can feel very uncomfortable, like wearing ‘sackcloth’, because I have become so used to, and comfortable with them such that putting on the new truths can feel like putting on something foreign to me. Still, I believe that these truths that God is feeding me and inviting me to feast on, not only fits me better, they are also what sets me free to live life with greater joy and freedom.

May you too be inspired to come up with your own list, so that come Easter, you will not only be indulging in temporal delights, but new and life-giving truths that are meant to last forever

● **Nicholas Lye** loves exploring fresh and creative ways to connect with God in prayer. Check out his upcoming Lenten series of Prayer through Art workshops at [www.tinyurl.com/restartlent](http://www.tinyurl.com/restartlent).

## The kind of fast that lasts





Fr Ron Rolheiser

# Losing a loved one to suicide

New York Times columnist David Brooks recently wrote an article about a lifelong friend who died by suicide. In describing his friend and his descent into a suicidal illness, Brooks sheds some needed light on how we still have a long ways to go in our understanding of suicide. (*New York Times*, February 9, 2023)

His friend, Peter, seemed a most unlikely candidate to die by suicide. He had a wonderful marriage, two loving sons, a warm circle of friends, and a fulfilling career as a doctor within which he took a lot of satisfaction in helping others. He was also physically healthy, active and athletic. Yet, at a point, he began to sink into a crushing depression before which all the love in the world stood helpless. Eventually, he took his own life.

What Brooks highlights in documenting his friend's journey should be required reading for everyone. What does he highlight?

First, that in most cases, suicide is an illness. People don't choose to sink into this kind of depression any more than people choose to have cancer, diabetes, or a heart condition. They are hit with an illness, and they cannot will themselves out of it any more than someone with a major physical illness can cure himself or herself through

simple willpower and attitude. You don't just will your way out of a suicidal depression. Moreover, suicidal depression is not something that any of us, as outsiders, really understand.

Second, the depression is horrible, the ultimate nightmare. Note how William Styron describes his own depression in his memoir, *Darkness Visible*, "I experienced a curious inner convulsion that I can only describe as despair beyond despair. It came out of the cold night; I did not think such anguish possible." Then, the suffering is compounded by the fact that part of the anatomy of the disease (most times) is that the person undergoing it finds it impossible to articulate what the pain exactly consists of. Hence, they are alone inside it, unanimity-minus-one, and with that aloneness comes the overpowering feeling that one is doing a favour to family and friends by removing oneself through suicide.

Moreover, in the face of suicidal depression, medicine and psychiatry can be helpful but they are limited in effectively treating this kind of depression.

What should we do when we are dealing with someone who is undergoing this kind of paralysing depression? In trying to answer that, it can be helpful to start with the *via negativa* — what shouldn't we do?

Brooks shares some of his sincere, but

ultimately misguided, efforts to reach his friend. For example, he reminded Peter of all the wonderful blessings he enjoyed and how blessed his life was. Later he realised that "this might make sufferers feel even worse about themselves for not being able to enjoy all the things that are palpably enjoyable." As well, we should not ask the person if he is thinking of hurting himself. The person is already hurting so badly that everything inside of him wants only to stop the pain, and suicide is perceived as the only means of doing that.

What should we do? Brooks is clear: "The experts say if you know someone who is depressed, it's OK to ask explicitly about suicide. The experts emphasise that you're not going to be putting the thought into the person's head. Very often, it's already on her or his mind. And if it is, the person should be getting professional help." Experts also agree that we should take the risk and ask the person openly if he or she is thinking of suicide. If the person isn't thinking about suicide, he or she will forgive you for asking; but if he or she is thinking of suicide and you are too timid to ask, your timidity might stand in the way of saving that person's life.

Brooks points out that despite all the work that has been done in medicine and psychology in recent years, suicide rates

today are 30 per cent higher than they were even 20 years ago and one in five American adults experiences mental illness.

My own life has been much affected by suicide, the suicide of relatives, friends, neighbours, colleagues, classmates, former students, and trusted mentors. In my experience, in every one of these deaths, the person who died was a good, honest, gentle, sensitive, and over-sensitive soul who, at a point in his or her life, was too bruised, too full of pain, and too overpowered by illness to continue to live. Each of these deaths also left behind a tragic sadness that was massively compounded by our lack of understanding of what really caused this person's death.

In his assessment of his friend's suicide, Brooks says that in the end "the beast was bigger than Pete; it was bigger than us." It still is. Simply put, we are still a long way from understanding mental health and its fragility.

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

## ENVIRONMENT

# Creation at the Crossroads

"How dare you?"

With this bold challenge, Greta Thunberg, then 16 years old, addressed delegates to the Climate Action Summit at the United Nations in New York on September 23, 2019: "People are suffering. People are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are in the beginning of a mass extinction, and all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth. How dare you?"

Author Fr Edward J. Ciuba takes on these themes in depth in RENEW International's *Creation at the Crossroads*, a faith-sharing resource designed for small groups. The book draws on *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis' encyclical letter on "care for our common home," in which the Pope strikes a note similar to the young Thunberg's, writing:

*It is remarkable how weak international political responses have been. The failure of global summits on the environment make it plain that our politics are subject to technology and finance. There are too many special interests, and economic interests easily end up trumping the common good and manipulating information so that their own plans will not be affected.... Consequently, the most one can expect is superficial rhetoric, sporadic acts of philanthropy and perfunctory expressions of concern for the environment, whereas any genuine attempt by groups within society to introduce change is viewed as a nuisance based on romantic illusions or an obstacle to be circumvented.*

A priest of the Archdiocese of Newark, Fr Ciuba, has spoken extensively on the subject of the environment and humanity's relationship to it. Each of his book's 12 faith-sharing sessions includes prayer; a Scripture passage and opportunity to respond; an

example of the impact of neglect or abuse of the environment; a reflection by Fr Ciuba, followed by faith-sharing questions; examples of individual and group action; and resources for further learning.

An appendix presents responses to *Laudato Si'* from Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, and Muslim perspectives.

*Creation at the Crossroads* directs attention to the environmental crisis in several specific areas treated in the papal encyclical: our relationship with God, each other, and the earth; access to clean water; the disproportionate impact of these issues on those living in poverty; all of creation as an expression of God's love; the vulnerability of natural resources; responsible use of modern technology; the imperative to serve the common good; the need for an "ecological spirituality"; and caring for the earth as a way of living the Word of God.

This book gives stunning examples of environmental injustice, neglect, and abuse, pointing out, for example, that an estimated 700 million people worldwide lack access to clean water — something so many take for granted, and waste without a second thought. It reports that, due to climate change and rising sea levels, the island nation of the Maldives — home to more than a half million people — will likely be under water by the end of the century.

Besides absorbing the dimensions of this crisis, participants in *Creation at the Crossroads* small groups are invited to reflection and sharing about how their lives are affected with questions such as:

● "As you go about your everyday activities, how conscious are you of God's love for everything He has created? How does

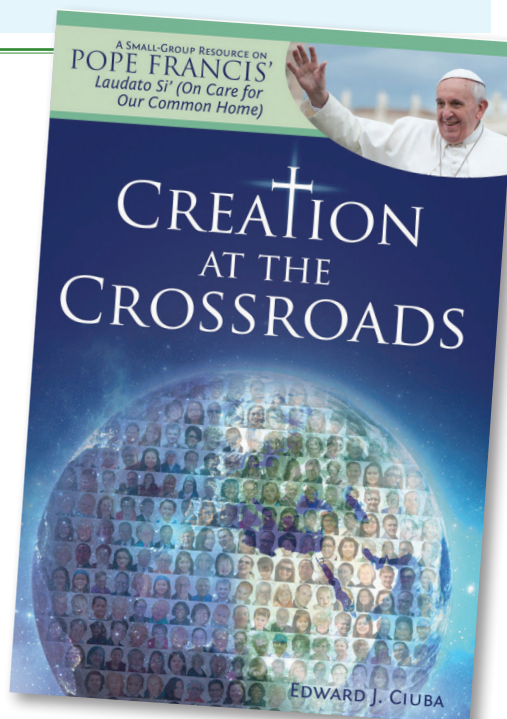
your answer affect your behaviour?"

- "What is your reaction to the suggestion by Pope Francis that developed nations should recognise their 'ecological debt' to undeveloped countries? Do you think that we, as individuals, have a similar 'debt'?"
- "The author writes that creation is 'telling us something' about how it is being neglected or misused. How have you experienced this?"

The goal of *Creation at the Crossroads* is not to overwhelm participants with the scope of the environmental crisis but, rather, to help them embrace their role in addressing it. Participants are reminded that the crisis will not be overcome by depending only on governments and corporations ("How dare you?") but also, by necessity, by the individual and group actions of tens of millions of people. By failing to contribute to the solution, in no matter how limited a way, we contribute to the problem, implies Fr Ciuba.

In each session, participants are encouraged to take action to restore the earth for their own wellbeing — and for that of future generations, who will face increasingly dire consequences of climate change. These are some actions suggested in the programme:

- "Determine and put in place the steps needed to carry out the principle 'reduce, reuse, recapture' in your home, your school, your community."
- "Discuss with your parish leadership how your parish might 'adopt' a distant community by providing sustained assistance to help protect and restore the environment in that area—through such activities as tree planting, clean-water projects, sustainable agricultural projects."
- "Search your house for obsolete electronic



and electrical devices, cables, and power cords. Research how these objects can be recycled or safely disposed of and act on what you learn."

The book's account of various manifestations of the environmental crisis may be no surprise to Americans who hear or read reports almost every day of chronic drought; wildfires; dying lakes and rivers; "super storms"; pollution of air, soil, and water; warming temperatures, and rising sea levels. But *Creation at the Crossroads* goes a giant step further, by addressing — and embracing — the moral imperative described in this book by the late "eco-theologian" Rabbi Lawrence Troster of West Chester, Pennsylvania:

"In our ignorance and our greed, we have damaged the world and silenced many of the voices of the choir of Creation. Now we must fix it. There is no one else to repair it but us."

— **By RENEW International, Crux**



# Little Catholics' Corner

Hello children,

The readings for the fifth Sunday of Lent are about how God can take us from death to new life. The first reading tells us of God's desire to bring us back to life. The second reading tells us if Christ dwells in us, we will have new life as He does. And the Gospel tells how Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead.

God does not like death. We all have to die because we are sinful, but God wants to raise us from the dead, like Lazarus.

Did you know that there is something worse than dying? Sinning is worse than dying, because when we commit a mortal sin, we kill God's life in our soul. When we die, we know that our body will rise again, but if we are not sorry for any serious sins then our soul will go to Hell because it doesn't have God's life in it.

During Lent, we should try to get rid of all the sin in our souls by going to Confession so our souls will have God's life in them and be ready to celebrate Jesus' resurrection at Easter.

Love Aunty Gwen

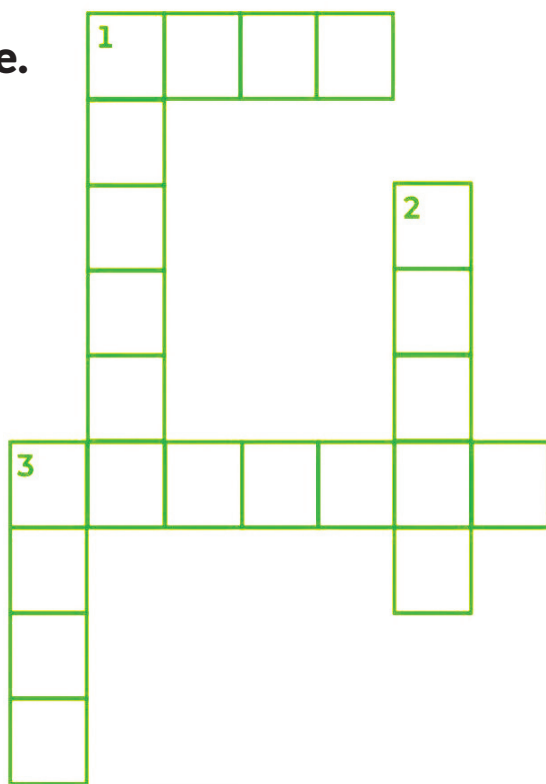
## Complete the crossword puzzle.

### Across

1. The name of one of Lazarus' sisters
3. The name of Jesus' friend who died

### Down

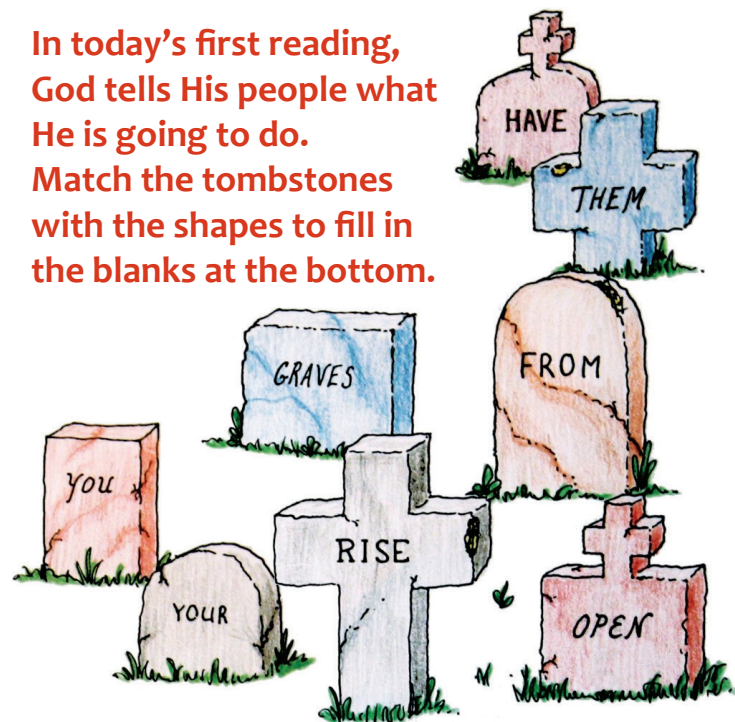
1. The name of Lazarus' other sister
2. Who raised Lazarus from the dead?
3. What did Jesus give to Lazarus? New...



## An Ezekiel Puzzle

In today's first reading, God tells His people what He is going to do.

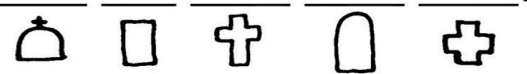
Match the tombstones with the shapes to fill in the blanks at the bottom.



I will



and



God gives life to us all. And God wants us all to have the things we need to grow and be happy. In the picture draw all the things the children need to grow and be happy. One example, food, has been added to get you started.





# YOUTH

MARCH 26, 2023

## LOVE YOURSELF AND BE YOURSELF

MELAKA: Studying the Theology of the Body is the right choice as it leads to an appreciation for the nobility of human dignity.

The Malacca Vicariate Malaysian Language Youth Group organised a “Theology of the Body” seminar in the hall of the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe, with 45 participants March 4-5.

The sessions were delivered by Sr Maria Magdalena Kopong FSIC (Sr Mag) and Sr Shanti Mariadass FdCC.

Sr Mag delivered three sessions which emphasised on the importance of appreciating and loving yourself and being able to accept oneself.

She gave examples from the seven saints and guided them through group discussion to learn the purity of the body.

On the second day, Sr Mag, together with Sr Shanti, brought the youths to a deeper understanding on the calling for vocation and to follow the examples of Jesus who is married to the Church.

The youth were divided into several groups to discuss the topics given by Sr Shanti. Through this group discussion, participants



*The presenters, facilitators and participants of the TOB seminar at the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe, March 4-5, 2023.*

had the opportunity to share their opinions and experiences.

Emily Gregory, one of the participants, said that through the Theology of the Body seminar, “I was able to learn about the bound-

aries between men and women that are taken for granted by teenagers or people today.

“I also understand that the marriage accepted by the Church is between a man and a woman and

why the Church rejects same-sex marriage.”

Emily also acknowledged Mary as an example of the Theology of the Body where the virgin kept her body pure until she was taken to

heaven.

The participants felt happy to be able to gather face-to-face like this, and they hope that programs like this will be held again in the future. — **By Rowena Rodney**

## MISSIONARY WORK

### GIVING ALMS TO THE POOR

TAMPIN: The youth ministry from the Church of St John Marie Vianney continued their Missionary Sunday. For the Third Week of Lent, their theme focused on “Giving Alms to the Poor”.

Almsgiving is the act of donating money or goods to the poor or performing other acts of charity. The roots of the word “alms” can be found in ancient Latin and Greek

words meaning mercy and pity. Similarly, the root of the word “charity” comes from the Latin “caritas,” meaning love.

For this mission, the ministry opted to collect pre-loved clothes from the youth to be given to the needy in the parish. Extra clothes will be distributed to the indigenous people and to a charitable organisation.

The youth opened two different counters, for male and female wear, at the church hall – Casa De Vianney. The young people brought their pre-loved clothes and placed them on the respective counters. Many parishioners visited the hall to either take clothes for those in need or for themselves.

This missionary Sunday taught us on the importance of clothing the naked and gained insight into the plight of those who are suffering greatly.



We also learnt that donating clothes helps the planet in amazing ways. By donating your clothes instead of throwing them in the trash, you prevent them from ending up in a landfill, where they may take years to fully break down, releasing harmful gases into the environment in the process.

Every single donation, no matter how big or small, makes a meaningful difference in the lives of people within your community! — **By Jeyshiella and Benchman Amos**



# A TRANSFORMATIVE SEMINAR FOR MONTFORT YOUTHS

SHAH ALAM: Montfort Boys Town (MBT) was buzzing with energy and excitement, on the weekend of March 11 and 12, as approximately 50 young individuals from MBT and the Montfort Girls Centre gathered to participate in a transformative seminar on St. John Paul II's *Theology of the Body for Teens*. The two-day event provided a safe and nurturing environment for participants to learn, grow, and ask questions about their bodies, faith, and relationships.

The seminar was carefully designed to cover essential topics, such as *Created for Love, Free, Total, Faithful and Fruitful Love, Vocation, Dating with a Purpose, and Purity*. The organisers aimed to provide participants with a comprehensive understanding of the beauty and value of human love and relationships, as seen through the lens of Catholic teachings, particularly those of St. John Paul II.

Throughout the seminar, the students displayed a remarkable level of engagement, actively participated in discussions and asked insightful questions. Their curiosity and openness to learning demonstrated their commitment to personal growth and eagerness to embrace the teachings of the *Theology of the Body*.

The event emphasised the importance of understanding our bodies as sacred gifts from God, created for love and connection. Participants were encouraged to reflect on their personal experiences and relationships, to foster a deeper appreciation for the

## THEOLOGY OF THE BODY FOR TEENS

gift of life and the powerful role they play in nurturing healthy and fulfilling relationships.

The session on vocation was particularly impactful, as it invited the young people to consider their unique calling in life and how they could share their gifts and talents with others. This topic resonated with the participants, inspiring them to think critically about their life purpose and the role faith plays in guiding their decisions.

The seminar also addressed the challenges of navigating relationships in today's fast-paced and often confusing world. The topics on *Dating with a Purpose* and *Purity* provided practical advice and guidance on how to approach dating and relationships with intentionality, acknowledging one's body as a gift, and a strong commitment to one's faith and values.

The seminar's success is a testament to the importance of providing young people with the knowledge and tools they need to navigate the complexities of life and relationships from a faith-based perspective. We hope that these students carry the lessons learned during this seminar with them throughout their lives, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation for the beauty of the *Theology of the Body*. — **By Brian and Christina Lazaroo**



The youth with Sr Retta Savarianan fdcc during one of the sessions.

## Be a good influence to others

KENINGAU: *Arise, I am sending you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me (Acts 26:16)* was the theme of the Sixth Zone Youth Camp (KBZ-6) which combined youth from several zones.

Based on the theme, Bishop Cornelius Piong invited the youth to be witnesses of Christ and be good influences to the people they meet.

KBZ-6 was held in Magatang Zone at the beginning of March. More than 150 youth from Magatang and Minawo zones, as well as several other zones such as Apin-Apin,

Bingkor, Senagang and Kepayan attended the event.

Msgr Gilbert Lasius celebrated the opening Mass. He congratulated the youth for enthusiastically participating in the programme after the pandemic.

He also urged them to use their knowledge and experience in this camp to strengthen their faith and encouraged them to be the salt and light of the world.

The four-day camp led the young people to look back on their personal relationship with

God, their family, others and the environment.

KBZ-6 ended with a closing Mass led by Bishop Cornelius at St Blasiur Church, Magatang.

"Our faith is not to be kept, we need to bear witness, to be salt and light for others," said the prelate.

"Young people, remember that our life does not end in this world, the purpose of our lives is to go to the Father's house in heaven," said Bishop Cornelius.

"Therefore, we need to establish a close

relationship with Jesus because, only through Him can we reach the Father's house in heaven, as in (John 14:6) 'I am the way of truth, and the life; no man comes to the Father without me'."

Florence Doon and Fevian Felix, as KBK chairman for Magatang and Minawo zone, and coordinators for KBZ-6, expressed their gratitude and thanks for the support and co-operation from all the participants involved in making the camp a success. — **By Melissa Floley**



Msgr Gilbert Lasius with the youth and facilitators.



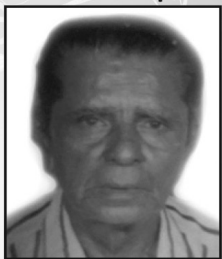
## MEMORIAM

24<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY

In Ever Loving Memory of Our beloved parents

**Theresa Margaret**

Born: 18-4-1926 Departed: 17-3-1999

**Joseph Maniam**

Born: 1-5-1919 Departed: 31-3-1999

Today, we recall 24 years ago when you both left us to a better place in a space of two weeks. Pappa couldn't wait to join you amma. Amma, Pappa, you planted the seed of love, faith, charity and above all the bond in us your children to be always together.

Today we live in the warmth of all the beautiful memories that you left with us that we continue with our children and grandchildren. You both are always in our hearts and minds.

Deeply missed and cherished by your loving children, in-laws, grandchildren, great grandchildren and loved ones.

Seremban

## 10th year Memorial



30/3/1980

**Phillip Prakash Edmond**  
(Age 33)

29/3/2013

"Remembering you is easy, I do it everyday,  
Missing you is a heartache, That never goes away."

- Evelyn Alphonsa Irudayasamy

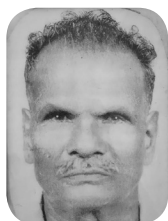
Mass: 1st April 2023 (Saturday)  
at 6pm,  
Church of Christ the Light

## In Loving Memory of

**Francis Louis PPN**  
14.6.1931 – 27.3.1987**Julia Louis**  
22.4.1936 – 2.1.2023

In our hearts, the memories left behind,  
will be cherished forever.

Deeply missed by  
family, relatives and loved ones

In Ever Loving Memory of  
25th Anniversary 59th Anniversary**Ayakanu@Kitriyan  
Savarimuthu**

Returned to the Lord:  
25th March 1998

**Rayamal Ayakanu**

Returned to the Lord:  
16th September 1964

**Our hearts will always love and cherish you.**

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

Dearly missed by:

Daniel Gnanapragasam Ayakanu,  
Antoinette Daniel, Priscilla Daniel,  
Alexander Daniel & Natasha Daniel.

12th Anniversary  
In Ever Loving Memory  
of Louis Danasamy

13th February 1935 -  
1st April 2011

Sadly missed along life's way,  
quietly remembered every day.  
No longer in our life to share,  
but in our hearts,  
you're always there.

We love you, we miss you and  
wish you are here with us  
Your loving wife Rose,  
daughters, sons-in-law &  
grandchildren.

## 15th Year Anniversary

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  
all the days of my life: And I will dwell in the  
house of the Lord forever: Psalm 23:6

In loving memory of our dear

**RETNASAMY MANUEL**

Born: 1 January 1945  
Joined the Lord: 25 March 2008

He never looked for praises  
He was never one to boast  
He just went on quietly working  
For the ones he loved the most  
His dreams were seldom spoken  
His wants were very few  
And most of the time his worries  
Went unspoken too.

He was there... A firm foundation  
Through all our storms of life  
A sturdy hand to hold on to at our side  
In times of stress and strife.

A true friend we could turn to  
When times were good or bad  
One of our greatest blessings  
The man that we called Papa.

Deeply missed and fondly remembered by

Wife: Esther Catherine

Daughters: Jessica &amp; Jasmine

Grandson: Gregory Alexander Nathan,

Granddaughter: Rachelle Arriana Rae,  
relatives and friends.

11th Anniversary  
In Cherished Memory of**Mary Sarojam  
Cherian**

12-3-27 ~ 27-3-12

Precious beautiful mother,  
angel  
Angel all our lives  
By your walk of  
faith and love  
Suffering and compassion  
Patience and  
forebearance  
Giving and ever-forgiving  
Honesty, humility  
and simplicity  
You shine a blessed light.  
Blessed mother  
Faithful child of God  
Angel of the Lord  
Pray for us.  
Your beloved family.

## 'God's pilgrim' dies

KERALA: Sadhu Ittiyavirah, an itinerant preacher, a spiritual guide, a renowned writer, and a social reformer who had inspired several generations, died March 14 in Kothamangalam in the southern Indian state of Kerala.

He would have turned 101 on March 18.

The death, due to age related illness, occurred at his residence in Jeevayothi in Iramalappadi, Kothamangalam.

A former Jesuit theology student, Ittiyavirah left the seminary nine months before ordination and walked on foot throughout Kerala and other parts of India for 20 years.

Before entering the Society of Jesus, he joined the Army during the Second World War, but soon came out of the regimental framework.

The tall charismatic leader shared about God's love at more than 60,000 venues. His talks were on love based on the classics of major religions.

He had also authored 60 books in English and 38 in Malayalam. He had written more than 7,000 articles for various periodicals and magazines.

He had preached in several countries. His journeys in northern India had earned him the title, "Sadhu" (sage).

Ittiyavirah was born on March 18, 1922, in Kollappilly near Pala in Kottayam district to Anna and



Mathai Perumattikunnel.

On his 100th birthday in 2022, the Kerala Catholic Bishops' Council hailed him as a prophet of love who spread Christ's message through an innocent smile. He preached the Gospel with his words and deeds, the council said.

A sadhu's travels, the council added, are a guide for those who want to walk in love. Sadhu Ittiyavirah had travelled as a mendicant, wearing clothes with "God loves us" written on them. — **By Jose Kavi, Matters India**

In Loving Memory  
Of**AROKIASAMY ANTONISAMY**

20 OCTOBER 1937 - 30 MARCH 2022

**On his 1st Death Anniversary**

Memorial Mass will be celebrated at the Church of Our  
Lady Of Lourdes Klang on 30th March 2023 at 6.30am.

Deeply missed by his wife, sons, daughters-in-law,  
grandchildren, relatives and friends

They can no longer die, for they are like angels; and they are the  
children of God because they are the ones who will rise.

LUKE 20 : 36

**Casket Paradise**  
& Funeral Care Sdn. Bhd. (311899-W)

## PERSONAL ATTENTION AT ALL TIMES

- \* Specialised In Christian Funerals
- \* Exclusive Handmade And Polished Wooden Casket
- \* Restoration And Cosmetology
- \* British Trained & Qualified MBIE Embalming Service (Only One In Malaysia)
- \* Member Of The European Association Of Embalmers
- \* Private Chapel Of Rest And Coldroom Facilities
- \* Economical, Budget Planned & 24 hrs Service

TEL: 03-2148 5776 / 2148 4855  
FAX: 03-2143 1442

19B, Jalan Jalan Dewan Bahasa, Bukit Seputeh,  
50460 Kuala Lumpur.

H/P: 012-333 4899 / 012-333 4646 / 019-777 5537



## UK asylum policy is 'dramatically lacking'

LEICESTER, United Kingdom: As the UK government pushes controversial legislation banning the settlement of migrants crossing the English Channel in small boats, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales is calling on policy makers "to recognise migrants and refugees as people."

In a new document called *Love the Stranger*, the bishops offer a list of 24 principles to guide immigration policy, based on "the innate worth of each human person." The bishops also say, "Nationalist or individualistic tendencies should not be allowed to take hold and prevent us seeing humanity as a single family."

The document is being released just days after Prime Minister Rishi Sunak introduced the Illegal Migration Bill, which would remove migrants who cross the Channel in small boats from the country and ban them from entering the UK in the future.

"Our starting point as a society must be to recognise migrants and refugees as people. We need to understand their stories, their reasons for leaving their homelands and hopes for building a future here," said Bishop Paul McAleenan, the Lead Bishop for Migrants and Refugees for the Bishops' Conference.

"We should never view people arriving from elsewhere as a political problem to be solved but rather, as brothers and sisters who we have a responsibility towards, and who greatly enrich our communities," he said.

"People are driven to leave their countries, sometimes making dangerous journeys



Migrants arriving at a beach on the south-east coast of England after being rescued in the English Channel.

or risking exploitation, because of conflict, poverty, oppression, or lack of opportunities. Looking beyond our own borders, we have a duty to help people flourish in their homelands, as well as welcoming those who leave in search of a better life," the bishop continued.

*Love the Stranger* emphasises people's right to migrate, while acknowledging a nation's right to control its borders.

"However, the acceptability of such measures is limited to circumstances in which they are clearly required to protect the receiving community. Controls on migration should be exercised with compassion, giving special attention to people who need to leave their country in order to flourish and live in dignity," the document says.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols, president of the Bishops' Conference, said *Love the Stranger* draws together more than 100 years of Catholic teaching to guide the response to migration in the country.

"While it does not propose detailed solutions to complex problems, it clearly calls for procedures which permit safe and controlled access and a fair hearing to those seeking asylum. Present arrangements in this country are dramatically lacking in both of these requirements," the cardinal said.

According to the *BBC*, 45,756 migrants crossed the English Channel to Britain in small boats in 2022.

In *Love the Stranger*, the bishops also call for the establishment of safe routes, such as resettlement programmes and humanitarian

corridors, for the passage of refugees.

"It is also important that visa schemes are well managed so that migrants can quickly contribute to the common good of their new communities and so that they and their families are not beset by uncertainty or inhumane conditions," the document says.

"The Church in England and Wales is fully engaged with public policy relating to migration, the status of refugees, and tackling human trafficking, in order to promote the dignified treatment of all those who come to our country. Catholic social teaching recognises the dilemmas that governments face but emphasises that the dignity of each and every human person must come first," the document says. — **By Charles Collins, Crux**

## Catholics in Indonesia go green

JAKARTA: Catholics in Indonesia have gone green to make Lent a time of realising ecological justice for all creatures, a call made by their prelates.

Taking inspiration from Pope Francis' ecological encyclical *Laudato Si'*, the Indonesian Bishops' Conference has set *Ecological Justice for All Creation: More Loving and More Caring* as the theme for its pastoral letter for Lent this year.

In the letter, the bishops asked Catholics to take concrete actions to respond to environmental damage that has caused global climate change.

In St Laurentius Wasior parish, Manokwari-Sorong Diocese in West Papua province, Catholics worked with the local forestry service to plant mangroves on the coast of Wondama Bay district on March 11.

Silvanus Surung, secretary of the parish council, said that the planting of 200 mangrove seedlings was part of efforts to carry out the mission set by the bishops.

"This is our contribution as Catholic Church members to preserving the environment," he said.

"God has given us the environment, we don't necessarily manage it however we want, but we are asked to be responsible for preserving it," he said, alluding to the message of the bishops' letter.

Eli Leihitu, an official from the district's forestry service, said the department was grateful for the participation of Catholics, considering that 25 hectares of mangrove forests in the area are threatened with destruction.

"So, we really hope for the role of the reli-

gious community, indigenous people, and the general public to take care of this beach," she said.

In West Kalimantan, an area where many forest areas have been converted for palm oil plantations, an awareness programme on the environment is undertaken among the faithful, according to Fr Desideramus Ansbi Baum.

"We also invite people, especially young people, to take concrete actions, such as planting trees, especially on lands that are increasingly critical," the Franciscan priest from St Montfort Badau parish in Sintang Diocese, said.

"So, messages to protect the environment must be conveyed through concrete actions, even if they are small," he said.

In Flores, a predominantly Catholic area, the local Church gave tips to school students about the importance of caring for the environment.

Fr Thobias Harman from St Mary Archangel Khuruboko parish in Ende Archdiocese organised an awareness drive that asked students to plant trees.

The priest said he invited students to realise that "in the beginning, God created everything good, but it was humans who destroyed it."

Students from the Ledalero Institute of Philosophy and Technology, most of whom are seminarians, held a road show and an art performance in the city of Maumere called *Caring for the Earth* at the end of last month.

They cleaned up the local market and planted mangroves on Magepanda beach, Sikka district. — **ucanews.com**

WALK WHERE JESUS WALKED

**2023 Holy Land**

All Inclusive + Hassle Free + No Hidden Cost

**10D HOLY LAND**

AN EXCLUSIVE CUSTOMISED ITINERARY HIGHLIGHTS:

- FLY INTO TEL AVIV
- SEA OF GALILEE + BOAT RIDE
- CHURCH OF HOLY SEPULCHRE

22 Oct

Msgr Henry Rajoo

RM 12,600 ex Penang

**13D HOLY LAND**

FOLLOW THE FOOTSTEPS OF JESUS CHRIST

8 Sept	6 Oct	7 Nov	8 Dec	9 Dec
Historical	Fr Frederick Joseph	Historical	Fr V.A Michael	Historical

FROM RM 11,500

**16D HISTORICAL**

AN EXCLUSIVE CUSTOMISED ITINERARY WITH ADDITIONAL VISITS TO MASADA + CITY OF DAVID + WADI RUM

6 Oct

RM 16,900

**14D CHRISTMAS AT BETHLEHEM**

AN EXCITING WAY TO CELEBRATE THE BIRTH OF JESUS AT BETHLEHEM

18 Dec

Fr Gilbert James

RM 13,500

**2023 Catholic Pilgrimages**

**14D Marian Shrines**

Italy - France - Spain - Portugal

28 Mar FULL Charles

11 Sep Fr Victor

9 Oct Fr Richard A.

Immerse yourself in Papal's blessing and venerate before the shrines of Our Lady

RM 13,900

**15D Medjugorje + Eastern Europe**

Croatia - Bosnia - Hungary - Poland - Czech

5 Mar FULL Peter A.

7 Oct Fr Kevin C.

A journey of peace, prayer, conversion, and reconciliation

RM 13,900

**TOPAZ TRAVEL & TOURS SDN BHD**

(237364 - TIKKKP8377)

No. 10 (1st Floor) Jalan 17/54, 46400 Petaling Jaya, Selangor

Email: [tours@topaztravels.com](mailto:tours@topaztravels.com)

For more info: +6 019-6688471

[www.topaztravels.com](http://www.topaztravels.com)