

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

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Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God.

2 Timothy 1:8



Mastering entrepreneurship

P4



Caritas Penang gives out RM102k

P5



Go beyond parallel lines that never meet

P11

# Everyone has a voice



For a synodal Church

communion,  
participation,  
mission

Prayer for the Synod

Adsumus Sancte Spiritus

We stand before You,  
Holy Spirit,  
as we gather together  
in Your name.  
With You alone to guide  
us, make Yourself at  
home  
in our hearts;  
Teach us the way we  
must go and how we are  
to pursue it.  
We are weak and sinful;  
do not let us promote  
disorder.

Do not let ignorance lead  
us down the wrong path  
nor partiality influence  
our actions.

Let us find in You our  
unity so that we may  
journey together to  
eternal life and not stray  
from the way of truth  
and what is right.  
All this we ask of You,  
who are at work in  
every place and time,  
in the communion of  
the Father and the Son,  
forever and ever. Amen.



**B**ANGKOK: Asian Catholic Church leaders were reminded “to be more attentive to the voices within the Church” at the start of the Asian Continental Assembly on Synodality in Thailand recently.

“Be more attentive to the voices within the Church, especially to those voices which agitate and also to the ones that ‘do not speak,’” said Cardinal Mario Grech, secretary general of the Vatican’s Secretariat of the Synod, in his opening address on February 24.

The cardinal stressed that “a synodal Church is a Church of listening,” adding that the success of the process depends on the active participation of the people.

He reminded the delegates that they were all “learners in synodality” and stressed that “the success of the process depended on the active participation of the people of God and the pastors [who are also members of the People of God].”

Cardinal Grech also reminded the delegates that synodality is not about pitting the pastors against

Delegates to the Asian continental phase of the “synod on synodality” of the Catholic Church gather in Thailand from February 24-27, 2023. (Photo courtesy of the FABC)

the faithful, but maintaining them in “constant relation, allowing both to fulfil their own roles and responsibilities.”

The Cardinal then characterised the Continental Stage of the Synod as “a further moment of listening to which the Church is called: ‘mutual listening, in which each one has something to learn.’”

Cardinal Grech reminded the delegates that the request to listen to everyone meant just that — everyone, with no exceptions, was to be invited into synodal conversation with the Church. But, he also acknowledged, many did not participate for various reasons. “In the consultation, we were able to listen to all voices, except the voice of those who did not speak, either because they could not or did not want to speak. We also listened to the silence! We have also listened to the empty chair!” he said.

Concluding his remarks, Cardinal Grech reiterated that the goal of the process is that of tracing the “Catholic path to synodality.” “Our desire,” he explained, “is to preserve the legacy of a tradition

that always keeps synodality, collegiality and primacy in relation as necessary and inalienable elements of the synodal process, built on the respective functions of the People of God, the College of Bishops, and the Bishop of Rome.”

The three-day synodal assembly from February 24 to 27 was attended by more than 100 Church leaders consisting of cardinals, bishops, priests, lay men and women from across Asia. The event was marked by group reading and reflection of draft documents, moments of sharing, listening, personal and community prayer and silence.

The cardinal also addressed the assembly once again on the final day, expressing his gratitude for a “wonderful experience.” “After this experience,” he continued, “I will not be able to forget this Church,” which was followed by a round of applause. The Synod on Synodality is about the People of God, he continued. The question is not “What is the Church?” but “Who is the Church?” He reiterated that everyone is invited to walk together so “Christ will be able to encounter humanity today.” Thus, a synodal Church naturally moves towards the goal of mission, evangelisation.

In these last few days,” he said, “you managed to strike the right balance,” he told the Asian Assembly participants. He then affirmed that the Asian characteristics of the Church will benefit the entire Church. “Let us hope that with this exercise... your document,” will contribute in the work the bishops have before them in the synod sessions, and that “synodality will bring a change.” — *Agencies*

We will feature more reports on the Asian Continental Assembly on Synodality together with insights from our Malaysian delegation in the next issue.



The Malaysian delegation at the Asian Continental Assembly on Synodality in Bangkok, Thailand. (From left): Fr Dr Clarence Devadass, Fr Jude Miranda, Ms Anna Amandus and Bishop Bernard Paul.



# HERALD

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## COMMENTARY

## Why can't we live in peace?

**“W**hy can't we live in peace? It's so simple...” With those heartbreaking words and much emotion, a Ukrainian child posed that question to the world in the documentary *Freedom on Fire: Ukraine's Fight for Freedom*. The production by film director Evgeny Afineevsky was viewed on February 25 at the Vatican's New Synod Hall on the day marking the one-year anniversary of what Pope Francis has called an “absurd” war.

The Pope himself, seated in the back row, watched the documentary and met at the conclusion with some of the documentary's protagonists. The Pope gave his blessing to all of them and asked them to pray together at the end of the documentary. “Let us pray!” he said in English, visibly moved by the documentary, characterised by its stark images and realism, revealing the horrors of war. The documentary expresses the fear of an entire people, particularly in one scene when one of the protagonists makes an appeal for an end to the war as soon as possible, or if it continues on this path “we will all destroy ourselves”.

Pope Francis also spoke of war destruction in the prayer he recited with those present, asking the Lord to heal humanity from the flow of hatred that fuels war: “When God made man, he said to take the earth, make it grow, make it beautiful. The spirit of war is the opposite: to destroy, to destroy, not to let grow, to destroy everyone, men, women, children, the elderly, everyone,” the Pope explained. He added, “Today marks one year of this war. Let us look at Ukraine, let us pray for Ukraine, and open our hearts to sorrow. Let us not be ashamed to suffer and weep, for war is destruction, a war always diminishes us. May God make us understand this.”

The Pope offered a prayer in conclusion, saying, “Our Father who art in heaven... look on our failings, look at our wounds, see our pain, look also on our selfishness, our lowly interests and the capacity we have to destroy. Heal our hearts, heal our minds, heal our eyes so that they are able to see the beauty that you have made and that we may not destroy it through our selfishness. Sow in us the seed of peace.”

One year after the aggression against Ukraine perpetrated by the Russian Federation, more than seventeen million people in the attacked country are in need of humanitarian assistance; eight million are refugees abroad; and six million are internally displaced. There are more than twenty thousand civilian casualties, and about

one hundred thousand military casualties on both fronts.

In the face of this senseless carnage in the heart of Christian Europe, where soldiers who share the same baptism are fighting each other, a massacre that is leading humanity towards self-destruction by ever faster steps, one cannot help but take up the dramatic question that the Successor of Peter addressed to the international community and to each one of us: “Has everything possible been done to stop the war?” It is difficult to answer “yes” in the face of the apathy and lack of creativity of diplomacy and of international bodies. It is difficult to answer “yes” in the face of the acceleration of the arms race and the single-minded militaristic rhetoric that stigmatises any doubts about war escalation.

Pope Francis has made countless appeals, crying out, in harmony with his predecessors, his heartfelt “No to war!” It is the same “Never again war!” that St Paul VI pleaded in front of the United Nations Assembly on October 4, 1965; it is that “Never again war!” that St John Paul II cried out – ill and unfortunately unheard – at the *Angelus* of March 16, 2003, to avert the wretched invasion of Iraq, the consequences of which are still visible to all after the transformation for many years of that country into the breeding ground of all fundamentalist terrorism.

Pope Francis' appeal is addressed to “those who have authority over nations to make a concrete commitment to end the conflict, to achieve a cease-fire and to start peace negotiations,” because a victory “built on rubble will never be a true victory!” And the wounds of hatred and resentment that the barbarity of war has caused will remain for certainly longer than the time needed to rebuild Ukraine.

In the face of all this, the commitment of those who help the victims and welcome the displaced is a concrete sign of hope, pointing the way to fraternity, non-violence, and peace. There is a civil society that marches, prays, works for, and invokes peace — like the one that walked from Perugia to Assisi on Feb 25. A civil society whose voice deserves more space. There are people, believers and non-believers, who are asking the aggressor, Vladimir Putin, to stop; and asking all governments — beginning with those of the most powerful countries — to bet on peace and not on the inevitability of a devastating conflict that is destined to increasingly mark the future of Europe and all humanity. Are we doing all we can to stop this war? — *Vatican Media*

## His face shone like the sun

**M**ost of us start off our Lenten journey by making big and ambitious resolutions - we will stop smoking, stop drinking, stop watching seedy movies over Netflix, we resolve to go vegan for the next 40 days, we will make sure we attend daily Mass and the list goes on. It's one thing to feel energised at the start, but it's another thing to sustain the momentum. This seems to be a reflection of life too. There are lots of things we set out to do early in life or at significant moments of transition, resolutions to amend our lives and better ourselves, promises we make to God and others that we will be “the better man” or “the better woman,” only to find all the initial enthusiasm fizzling out as time passes and as the painful reality sets in.

We soon realise that both Lent and life demand more than just quick spurts of speed to the finishing line. It often feels more like a long-distance marathon stretching on-and-on with no sight of the end. How do we sustain our resolve for the long haul? This Sunday's readings provide us with the encouragement needed to persevere, not just for Lent but also for life, especially when the going gets tough, the obstacles seem too daunting, and the end of our trials seem beyond the horizon of our vision.

In our second reading, we see how Paul in expecting that death would come soon, took a final opportunity to spur on his beloved son in the faith, Timothy. He did this by writing a second letter to him in the form of encouragements, warnings, and other practical advice. St Paul exhorts him to “bear the

hardships for the sake of the Good News, relying on the power of God who has saved us and called us to be holy — not because of anything we ourselves have done but for His own purpose and by His own grace.” Paul is telling us that sharing in his sufferings and in the sufferings of Christ, we are doing so not to earn salvation (as one would be rewarded for a meritorious act) but as a response to the grace of salvation which “had already been granted to us, in Christ Jesus, before the beginning of time, but it has only been revealed by the Appearing of our saviour Christ Jesus.” This again is what the Transfiguration reveals. That victory stands in the middle of defeat, glory in the middle of humiliation, and life in the middle of death. And that is why we can bear current hardships and trials, knowing that we would not only receive the reward of salvation at the end of our lives, but we are already recipients of that grace here and now.

We now come to the story of the Transfiguration in the Gospel. It is important to note that we would hear this story, told by the different Evangelists, every Second Sunday of Lent. It provides us with a kind of teaser of how the story of Lent ends, a needed motivation, since it is easy to just give up before we even get to hear how the story plays out in the events of Holy Week. As the story of Holy Week progresses, we see how the crowds gradually leave our Lord and turn against Him. Even His own disciples flee at the very end when our Lord is arrested. They will be denied the privilege of witnessing our



Lord's resurrection because they had refused to witness His passion and crucifixion. But though none was there to see our Lord resurrect and emerge from the tomb, here at the Transfiguration they get a glimpse of our Lord's true glory.

The Transfiguration occurs in a context where the Lord had just revealed to His disciples that He would be put to death in Jerusalem. His prediction of His imminent death was met with denial and even anger. They were shaken by the thought that their Master, the awaited Messiah, would meet such a horrific fate. This is why the Lord took them up to the mountain where “He was transfigured before them.” This experience of the Transfiguration was, therefore, God's way of de-

### Reflecting on our Sunday Readings with Fr Michael Chua

**2nd Sunday of Lent (A)**

**Readings: Genesis 12:1-4;**

**2 Timothy 1:8-10;**

**Gospel: Matthew 17:1-9**

livering the disciples from a crisis of faith by providing them with a glimpse into the glory of heaven. When we have sight of the finishing line, the rigours of the race become less demanding and we gain a second wind.

The cause of a crisis of faith often arises from the way in which we see people and things around us. Death, suffering, separation seem to be defining moments in our lives. The disciples needed a vision from God's point of view, to see that in spite of the death sentence hanging over the head of Jesus, God was still with Him, God was still in control of events, God would see to it that, in the end, He would be victorious over His foes, even over death. In the Transfiguration, Peter, James and John saw that there was more to Jesus than what they could see and hear and touch; they got a glimpse of the future glory of the Lord's resurrection. His death would not be the end; it would only inaugurate the beginning of Eternal Life. It would open the gates of heaven

*Fr Michael Chua is the parish priest of the Church of the Holy Family, Kajang.*



# Celebration of the Chrism Mass

The Chrism Mass is traditionally held during Holy Week in every Catholic diocese. However in Malaysia, due to logistics and other reasons, the Chrism Mass is celebrated at an earlier date (usually during the Clergy Recollection). During this Mass, the priests, deacons and representatives of the entire diocesan community gather around the archbishop, who blesses the Holy Oils for use in the coming year. These are:

- Oil of the Sick
- Oil of Catechumens
- Sacred Chrism

Whenever the Holy Oils are used in a diocese, the ministry of the bishop who consecrated them is symbolically present.

Unity, Renewal of Vows and

## Promises

The Chrism Mass reminds us of our oneness in Christ through Baptism and its holy anointing, made possible by the ministry of the archbishop and his priests. The Chrism Mass is also a key moment in which the unity of the archbishop with his priests (together, they form the presbyterate) is manifested and renewed.

During the liturgy, the entire assembly is called to renew its baptismal promises; deacons and priests also renew their vow of obedience to the local (arch)bishop and their commitment to serve God's people.

At the end of the Chrism Mass, the Holy Oils are brought to parishes of the arch/diocese for use in the coming year.

This quote from the *Catechism of*

the Catholic Church gives a good summary of the importance of the three holy oils:

Anointing with oil has all these meanings in the sacramental life. The pre-baptismal anointing with the oil of catechumens signifies cleansing and strengthening; the anointing of the sick expresses healing and comfort. The post-baptismal anointing with sacred chrism in Confirmation and Ordination is the sign of consecration. By Confirmation, Christians, that is, those who are anointed, share more completely in the mission of Jesus Christ and the fullness of the Holy Spirit with which he is filled, so that their lives may give off 'the aroma of Christ' [2 Cor 2, 15] *Catechism of the Catholic Church No. 1294.*

## Chrism Mass Times

**DIOCESE OF SANDAKAN:** Wednesday, March 8 at 7.30pm at the Cathedral of St Mary.

**ARCHDIOCESE OF KUALA LUMPUR:** Tuesday, March 14 at 7.00pm at the Church of Holy Redeemer, Klang.

**DIOCESE OF PENANG:** Tuesday, March 28 at 7.00pm at the Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam.

**DIOCESE OF MIRI:** Wednesday, March 29 at 7.30pm at the Cathedral of St Joseph.

**DIOCESE OF SIBU:** Wednesday, March 29 at 7.30pm at the Cathedral of Sacred Heart.

**ARCHDIOCESE OF KOTA KINABALU:** Thursday, March 30 at 7.30pm at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart.

**DIOCESE OF MALACCA JOHORE:** Tuesday, April 4, at the Church of St Francis Xavier, Melaka.

**DIOCESE OF KENINGAU:** Tuesday, April 4, at 7.00pm at the Cathedral of St Francis Xavier.



## KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

### Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

#### March

- 7 **Yayasan Tan Sri Vandargon Board Meeting**
- 8 **PMPT Core Team Meeting**
- 8 **Peninsular Malaysia Diocese Finance Meeting**
- 11 **Parish Finance Committee Workshop**
- 12 **10th anniversary of Pope Francis' pontificate Mass – Church of Our Lady of Fatima, KL**
- 13 **Christian Federation of Malaysia EXCO Meeting**
- 14 **Chrism Mass – Church of Holy Redeemer, Klang**
- 14&15 **Clergy Monthly Recollection**
- 19 **Parish Pastoral Assembly – Chapel of Kristus Aman, TTDI**



## MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

### Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

#### March

- 8 **PMPT Core Team Meet – APC, KL**
- 8 **Peninsular Malaysia Finance Meeting – Cardijn House, KL**
- 10 **Outdoor Way of the Cross – MAJODI Centre Plentong followed by Mass**
- 14-15 **Clergy Monthly Recollection – Good Shepherd Catholic Seminary, Melaka**
- 16 **MJDYPN (MJD Young People Network) Staff Meeting**
- 16 **MJ Diocesan Animating Team – Mission Pastoral Institute**
- 17 **Outdoor Way of the Cross – MAJODI Centre Plentong followed by Mass**



## Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #122

**F12**  
NEWS  
UPDATES

### Greetings, dear People of God

The Lenten boxes, the purple vestments, the absence of festivity, the *Gloria* and the *Alleluia*, are here. The Pandora Box, the green army and the election scheming are unbelievable. Strange that aid or donations do not reach the victims and those suffering. Charity sees no race, religion or rank.

### Sacrificing Times. Choosing a Lenten Sacrifice that's Just Right Matt Dunn wrote:

As Lent has come upon us again, we spiritually focus on penitent preparation for the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ.

A survey was conducted with 1,500 Catholics, asking them about their plans for Lent.

- Seventy-two per cent will increase prayer time this Lent.
- Seventy-one per cent said fasting or giving something up.
- Eighteen per cent selected giving alms.
- Ten per cent selected "other."
- Thirteen per cent still weren't sure.

To help those who are unsure, when asked for some concrete examples, they suggested:

- Daily Mass or adoration were among the most commonly listed ideas.
- More spiritual reading, whether the Bible, lives of the saints, or the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.
- Giving up: some mentioned sweets or alcohol; fasting from Facebook and other social media platforms; using their phones to make phone calls only;
- Adding additional fast and abstinence days.
- Helping the poor with donations, volunteering at shelters, or taking time to make or donate clothes to those in need.

Where does the tradition of giving something up for Lent come from?

Lent traces itself back to the early days of the Church.

St Athanasius mentioned a period of fasting for forty days before Holy Week as far back as AD 331.

### A THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: Graduates of UL

For thousands and thousands of years, numerous people have tried to explain simple concepts and truths that have stood the test of time. Three short stories illustrate three Truths in simple and straightforward ways.

- Once upon a time, all the villagers decided to pray for rain. On that day, everyone gathered together but only one little child came with an umbrella. – That's **FAITH**

- When you toss a one-year-old into the air, he laughs because he knows his father will catch him. – That's **TRUST**

- Every night, when we go to bed, we have no assurance that we will wake up alive the next morning, but we still set the alarm for tomorrow. – That's **HOPE**

*The lesson from the simple:* Our life experiences are our greatest teacher. Stop! Breathe! Observe! Hear! Listen! Live! There is no university greater than UL...the University of Life.

### Announcements for this Week

1. Calling all single women, age 18-50 to explore a special lay vocation committed to the Bishop of the Diocese. It is to become Auxiliaries. A programme entitled, *Discover Your Vocation*, will be facilitated by the Auxiliaries from Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, from Apr 29 - 30 (Saturday from 3.00pm to Sunday 4.00pm) at MAJODI Centre, JB. Contact Clara Paul (+6012-250 9527) for more info.

2. **Ash Wednesday** is already over. The Malacca Johore Diocese reverts to the usual solemn practices eg. Imposition of ashes, not sprinkling, no to Ash Sunday and no to taking home ashes. The Way of the Cross (WOC) can be done at personal, small group, BEC and big community levels with your parish priest's approval. The outdoor WOC and Mass will take place at MAJODI Centre at 3.00pm every Friday. The washing of the feet, and full bap-

tismal rituals are permitted. Communion in two species has to be avoided for now.

3. The Terendak Camp Christians will be celebrating **Hari Tentera** on March 5 at 10.30am at the Corpus Christi Chapel.

4. The *Lenten Reflection 2023* is available in all languages. It can be viewed every Thursday in Lent.

### This week's Question and Query.

The Q asks: Any Lenten Message for 2023? Any focus?

*Lent pep-talk by Pope Francis: Listen to God's Word and Face Reality*  
By Robert Mickens

It seems like it was only a few weeks ago that we took down our Christmas trees and put away our Nativity scenes... And, lo and behold, **Lent is already upon us**. And as the Church officially opened the 40 day penitential season on Ash Wednesday, Pope Francis has a couple of pointers to encourage us on our journey towards Easter.

1. "**Lenten penance is a commitment**, sustained by grace, to overcoming our lack of faith and our resistance to following Jesus on the way of the cross," the Pope says in his 2023 message for Lent.

2. In the brief message, he likens the **Lenten journey to the Church's "synodal experience", the "walking together"** that has become a defining feature of his pontificate.

3. For it is **in togetherness that we follow Jesus**. Together too, as a pilgrim Church in time, we experience the liturgical year and Lent within it, walking alongside those whom the Lord has placed among us as fellow travelers, the Pope said.  
[bit.ly/3m4HFFN](http://bit.ly/3m4HFFN)

*God bless you all. Have a great weekend.*

*Enter the Season of Lent together with Jesus who took up the Cross.*

**Bishop Bernard Paul**



# Mastering entrepreneurship

By Katarina Nisha & Terence Roche

KUALA LUMPUR: The *Generating Income from Talents - Micro Entrepreneurship Development* (GIFT-MED) 2022/2023 hosted a graduation ceremony for 22 participants at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre February 19.

The five-month micro-entrepreneurship programme aims at transforming job-seekers into job creators via entrepreneurship training. It marked its sixth consecutive year in building a blueprint for MED, targeted mainly at the B40 income group. There were 61 applications, of which 25 participants were selected, and 22 graduated.

The programme transforms graduates into holistic, entrepreneurial, and balanced mindset individuals, emphasising talent excellence, irrespective of disci-



The graduates with Archbishop Julian Leow and the sponsors of GIFT-MED.

pline. It also helps create lifelong learners as education is not just seeking paper qualifications and employment opportunities but also gaining entrepreneurial skills and training.

Some 100 people attended the ceremony, including Archbishop Julian Leow, Fr Leonard Lexon and Fr Biju Mathew from the Church of the Assumption, Fr. Simon Lau from the Church of Jesus Caritas, Ecclesiastical Assistant for Creation Justice Fr Andrew

Manickam, OFM Cap, and Msgr Stanislaus Soosaimariam from the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Archbishop Julian reminded the graduates to share the fruits of their labour with society. "It is vital to share the knowledge gained, implement it and become successful in entrepreneurship. But more importantly, when you are successful, return some kindness to society," said the prelate.

Armed with facts from the

programme, participant Stephanie is excited to see what the future holds. "From costing, finance, marketing to branding, we gained valuable knowledge to put into practice in our business and to sustain our lives," said the 52-year-old.

Participant Bernadette, 61, said her best memories were meeting other participants. "Behind their smiles, each had a painful but beautiful story. We have become a family. I was a timid speaker but

after practising public speaking and interacting with customers at the bazaar, I gained more confidence. Now I know how beneficial it is to speak with confidence, not just in business, but in life," she said.

The project manager for GIFT-MED 2022/2023, Lourdsmary Joseph, attributed the success of the programme to her team, sponsors and participants. "Congratulations graduates, you persevered for five months through thick and thin. Thanks to my mentors, trainers, and volunteers who were my backbone, giving endless support despite their busy schedules. I also thank the sponsors for funding this project," she said.

The GIFT-MED 2022/2023 programme was sponsored by the Archdiocese Office for Human Development (AOHD), Catholic Business Fraternity (CBF), and The Arch Place (TAP).

## Jesuit makes final vows



Fr Simon Yong SJ professing his final vows.

JOHOR BAHRU: On the Feast of St Claude la Colombiere, February 15, parishioners of the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart witnessed parish priest, Fr Simon Yong Kong Beng SJ, make his final vows after 37 years as a Jesuit.

The new Regional Superior of the Malaysia-Singapore Region of the Society of Jesus, Fr Francis Lim SJ, was the main celebrant. He accepted the vows of Fr Simon on behalf of Fr General Arturo Sosa SJ.

Concelebrating were Bishop Bernard Paul, and other Jesuit priests. The Jesuit Conference of Asia Pacific reported that Bishop Bernard said he came to "witness what a Jesuit vow ceremony looks like".

During the homily, Fr Francis explained the difference in the rite used for the profession of First Vows and Final Vows. It is not the *professio super altare* (profession on the altar) or *professio in manus* (profession into the hands), but *professio ad hostiam*, to signify it is neither a stable monastic order nor a mendicant one.

During his Final Vows, the Jesuit, who had given himself unconditionally to the Society of Jesus during his First Vows, is accepted unconditionally by the Society. He also spoke of the need to find the balance between the head and the heart, the intellectual dimension and the inner desires of the

heart. This is why the Final Vows happen many years after the ordination of Jesuit priests.

In his speech, Fr Simon said he chose this particular date because it was the date he entered the novitiate in Petaling Jaya in 1986. It is also because Feb 15 is the memorial of St Claude la Colombiere. St Claude was the Jesuit who first promoted the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus as spiritual director to St Margaret Mary Alacoque, the visionary nun of the Sacred Heart. As Fr Simon has been the parish priest of the Cathedral named after the Sacred Heart of Jesus since 2018, it was an apt date to choose for the occasion.

Fr Yong SJ said, "It felt almost 'anticlimactic' not because it was not important. The danger would be to look at it as a defining moment but closer to the truth, the vows have always been there. Just that tonight it took a formal turn.

"I wasn't thinking of doing much because it was like a run-of-the-mill kind of thing but when the news travelled a little bit more, I got into the spirit of preparing for it and welcoming those coming to share my joy. There seems to be a kind closure ... I had left the happy place of SFX PJ and now I have found a place of happiness here in JB. Such a blessing by the Lord." — **By Angila Yong ofs**

## What is the spirit of the law telling us?

KUALA SELANGOR: The feast of the Holy Infant Jesus was celebrated from February 9 to 12.

Preachers for the four-day celebrations were Archbishop Julian Leow, parish administrator Fr James Gabriel, Fr Vincent Thomas, Fr Andrew Kooi, and Fr Bonaventure Rayappan.

As this chapel is also dedicated to children (Matthews 19:14), many parents brought their children and actively participated in Mass, serving as choir members, lectors, gift bearers, and altar servers.

On the final day, Feb 12, three Masses were celebrated, with Archbishop Julian presiding over the English Mass, while Fr Gabriel preached the Tamil Mass and Fr Andrew, the Mandarin one.

The prelate, in his homily said, blessed are they that follow the law of the Lord. "We have the Ten Commandments. The Jews in those days had more than 600 different laws. Jesus came and taught us to love God and one another. We are told to be like little children, for the Kingdom of God belongs to them. We must distinguish between being childish and being childlike.

"We need the Spirit of God to help us to discern. Jesus came, not to abolish the law but to fulfil it. The prelate quoted the sixth Command-

ment "Thou shalt not kill" and said that Jesus explains that it means more than just not killing someone physically. We can destroy or kill someone's reputation or good name by slander, lies, and untruth."

Jesus asked us to go beyond the letter of the law, and ask what is the spirit of the law telling us? That we shall not even allow anger to take control of us. This anger can become something we cannot control and if this anger is left unchecked, can even bring us to kill. Jesus is telling us to look at what causes these feelings. The prelate said "feelings alone are not wrong. Feelings do not result in moral judgment. I can feel angry. But sin comes when I do something harmful with that anger."

The prelate said being a disciple of Jesus is demanding. To be a follower of Christ is difficult but a beautiful religion to die in. Because we are assured that if we are faithful to Him and follow His commands and please God, we will have eternal life with Him.

As it was also World Day for Married Life, the prelate said we are the domestic Church, we are the Church, the Body of Christ, and are called to live out our vocations as husbands, as wives, and as children.

Pope Francis has not changed any Church laws, added the prelate. The pontiff told us not to be terrorists of gossip but to be priests, pastors, to be fathers to our people who are struggling in their marriages, who are struggling in their faith lives and their moral lives. As pastors, we are called to listen, not to judge but to be a companion to those who are struggling.

Fr Gabriel, who is also the parish priest of the Church of St Paul the Hermit in Bestari Jaya, thanked his parishioners and sponsors for making this year's feast a meaningful one. He also thanked the archbishop for his presence. He said this chapel, which was closed since the pandemic, has now 'resurrected' and will be open for all, including pilgrims. The chapel sported a new coat of paint and a new stainless steel main gate. He said that there would be more facilities soon and that they would publish Mass times upon confirmation.

Archbishop Julian thanked Fr Gabriel for his pastoral care as he has to take care of close to 10 chapels in the Kuala Selangor district. The prelate also extended feast day wishes to all.

Fellowship was part of the four-day celebrations. — **By Bernard Anthony**



Children were among those present at the feast day celebration.



# Caritas Penang gives RM102k to social mission groups



By Carmel Dominic

*Bishop Sebastian Francis with Caritas Penang and the recipients.*

PENANG: Cheques amounting to RM102,200 were presented to 10 social mission groups in the diocese by Caritas Penang on February 21.

The selected groups were the Fr Julien Agape Centre, the New Thessalonian Apostolate School for Refugee Children, Mount Miriam Cancer Hospital, Mercy Home (AIDS), Persatuan Pembela Wanita Pulau Pinang, St Anne Dialysis Centre, St Joseph's Home, Home of the Aged (CWS) Simee Care Centre, Little Sisters of the Poor and Orang Asli Mission Work. Representatives from the groups also did short presentations about their organisations and their plans for 2023.

Across the board, one thing was clear – the pandemic caused an upheaval in their daily operations. From 2020 until 2022, these groups severely lacked funds and relied heavily on the generosity of others. It came to a point where some of these groups had no choice but to shut down parts of their programmes due to the lack of donations and manpower. Therefore, the funds they received from Caritas Penang Diocese this year will go towards being faithful to their missions and charisms.

“We asked them to do short presentations about their social missions because it is important that we get to know each other and what our missions are. When we get to know each other, we can help

should the need arise. We can make connections through our networks and support each other with prayer and supplication,” said Caritas Penang Diocese administrator, Juanita Chin.

After the presentations, Caritas Penang Diocese Head Fr Joachim Robert, thanked the representatives for attending and sharing their mission work. He encouraged them to keep their faith and run the race.

Later, Bishop Sebastian Francis presented the cheques and said a prayer for the social missionaries and their missions. He lauded them for rising above their challenges and urged them to continue to be a beacon of hope to the needy, marginalised, poor and ostracised.

## New Catechist Formation in Tamil

KUALA LUMPUR: First-time Tamil-speaking catechists from various parishes in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur attended a formation by the Catechetical Centre.

The online “New Catechist Formation”, conducted by Manikam Sinnappan and Sr Retta Savariannan fdcc, was from February 7 to 9.

Topics covered were: *The Vocation and Mission of the Catechist*; *The Spirituality of the Catechist* and the *catechetical process*.

Their vocation and mission objectives include realising that it is a special calling and not a voluntary job; recognising their ability to impart faith knowledge to children and teens; being aware that they are called to be convinced of their faith and be evangelised and that they are also called to renew their baptismal consecration and to be evangelisers.

On the topic of spirituality, the faith edu-

cators need to have a firm understanding of Christian spirituality, live according to the Catholic Church's teachings, guide learners on how to feed their souls, help them to grow in a life-giving faith, teach them how to share their faith with others and motivate students to the newness of Spirit.

In line with the Catechetical Skills Process, catechists must understand that faith education is an ecclesial act, arising from the missionary mandate of the Lord (Mt. 28:19-20). Jesus is our model catechist.

The Malaysian Catechetical Series initiates them to lead those being catechised to know and grow in communion with Jesus, and also to profess and live their faith. The role of a catechist is to facilitate and ensure understanding of the topics, meaning content, and relevance to life.

The sessions were an eye-opener for me on how to be an effective catechist. Furthermore, a self-realisation and earnest prayer life is needed to be an effective teacher,

while guiding children in their faith formation.

One of the key takeaways was “to practise what I preach” that is, to be an example in the way I carry myself as a catechism teacher.

Jesus, being the role model, and I, as a new catechist, learned some useful methods while conducting the classes. I use simple prayers, Bible readings, and reflections to encourage the children to be more involved and participate effectively. Group discussion and appropriate activities according to topics can be creative and interesting.

This formation helped me understand the importance of Catholic teaching in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC). As a catechist, it challenged me to know and understand its content. In guiding children, I am also being challenged to practise my faith well while acknowledging the Tradition of the Catholic Church. — **By Santhana Sinnappan**

## Fundraiser for children's home

MELAKA: Fatima Home hosted a sumptuous Daun Pisang Briyani lunch on February 19 to raise awareness and funds for their maintenance. At RM30 per pax, 300 tickets were sold and people from all walks of life, Catholics and non-Catholics alike, streamed into the Home for an enjoyable meal and fellowship.

Many volunteers stepped forward to make the event a success. Several priests and religious sisters from around the state were also present.

After the delectable meal, the children took guests on a tour of the Home and proudly exhibited their handiwork. They also screened a video depicting their various activities.

Bishop Bernard Paul initiated the non-profit Home for children from broken and dysfunctional families in 2018. With Spiritual Director Msgr Michel Mannayagam's guidance, the Home took a year to set up. Although it started with just one child, today there are 18 children, ranging from Standard One to Form Six. They attend government schools nearby and return to the Home where they are cared for by the house mother.

The Vision and Mission of Fatima Home is to ensure that every child in the Home has an opportunity to live a meaningful and fruitful life within a loving and caring environment. Every child learns to exercise his or her right to lead an empowered life in an environment that focuses on the entire person and facilitates their mental, emotional, and spiritual growth.

Fatima Home accepts non-Muslim school-going children from around the country after the management board vets the applications. Successful applicants may stay in the Home until age 18 or until they have completed their sixth form, after which they can, hopefully, further their studies and fend for themselves.

Fatima Home is grateful for any contribution to help serve the children. Please contact 06-2813074 for details — **By June Chew**



*The children of Fatima Home learning about the environment through hands-on experience.*

## Learning to write commentaries for Mass

KUALA LUMPUR: Fifty-one parishioners of the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus attended a Liturgical workshop on February 18. The objective was to guide participants on how to write commentaries and prayers of the faithful.

During the two-hour session organised by the parish's liturgical ministry, liturgy and ministry representatives and BEC core team members listened to parish priest, Msgr Stanislaus Soosaimariam briefly explain the Liturgy and its importance.

Msgr Stanislaus said Liturgy, the Eucharistic celebration or Mass, means public worship of Christian congregation in the name of Jesus Christ. Besides Mass, the Divine Office is another form of public worship involving the liturgical prayers of the Church.

He also explained that Jesus, as the mediator between man and God at Mass, allows us



*The participants working together on the commentary.*

to experience the impact of His suffering, death, and resurrection in the Paschal Mystery. Therefore, our bodily gestures of kneeling, standing, and sitting during different parts of the Liturgy are signs of uniformity and the unity of the community in worshipping God.

Attendees were guided on how to write a commentary, which includes the introduction of the liturgical calendar day/week and informing the congregation of any special celebration or events to be highlighted during Mass. The workshop also covered ways to manoeuvre

through the lectionary.

On the prayer of the faithful, participants were reminded that the spiritual goal of said prayers was to draw the faithful closer to God, and the prayers should be kept short and simple.

Ideas were thrown back and forth on categorising the prayers and the best ways to compose a prayer based on the scripture readings.

Attendees were placed in small groups for a hands-on exercise on composing commentaries and prayers of the faithful. They were encouraged to refer to the Ordo, parish bulletin, Missal, and the *HERALD*, as guides to find the necessary information.

Many who attended the workshop said they had a better understanding and were more confident to craft commentaries and prayers of faithful. — **By Christina Andrew**



# Inclusivity unites

KUCHING: The Malaysia Interfaith Harmony Week Forum 2023 was held on February 20. Organised by the Unit for Other Religions (UNIFOR) under the Premier's Department, the forum was held in conjunction with the 60th anniversary of Sarawak Merdeka. The event was graced by Sarawak Premier Datuk Patinggi Tan Sri Abang Johari Tun Openg.

Seven panellists representing the various religions and faiths of Baha'i, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, and Taoism in the country, shared their perspectives on the theme: *Love of God, Love of the neighbour, Love of the Good, and Love of the neighbour.*

Chairman of the Association of Churches in Sarawak (ACS), Archbishop Simon Poh shared on Christianity.

Archbishop Simon began by saying that harmony is "God's design for the world." Quoting from the Bible, he said the chapter on Creation in the *Book of Genesis* said that out of chaos, God created a world that is in harmony. God saw everything that He had created "and it was very good."

He pointed out that God is the source of all goodness, and nature and the human race belong to one ecosystem. It was God who gave life by breathing His Spirit into



man who became a living being on earth. (Genesis 2:7)

Archbishop Simon explained the consequences of sins. Good relationships and harmony are broken by humanity when the following happens — harbouring hatred and resentment in one's heart, oppressing the lowly through arrogance and pride; being prejudiced leads to racism, and intolerant of others' beliefs, to name a few.

However, religion seeks to overcome sin and selfishness with forgiveness, mercy, love, and reconciliation.

The prelate said that the pandemic "brought NGOs, government, and many of us together to respond to the needs of all who lacked food and basic needs. I have learnt that the COVID-19

virus does not distinguish race, creed, or social status. The pandemic showed us that we are all in it, together as ONE human family."

Archbishop Simon said love cannot hurt our neighbours, but "love builds harmony, trust and neighbourhood" as seen in the Scriptures (James 2:14-17). "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,' and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead."

Faith in action can be seen in

*Malaysia Interfaith Harmony Week Forum 2023. (Today's Catholic photo)*

individuals and families, by being good neighbours with families around (my/our) home, doing acts of charity like blood donations and charity drives, and protecting (my) heart so as not to allow prejudice, malice, jealousy, resentment, hatred or anger to grow within.

Quoting John 15:12-13, Archbishop Simon said, "Let our willingness to make sacrifices for others be the tangible expression of following our Lord. Our faith will then be visible and experienced by others through our actual actions of love towards neighbours, strangers, and poor."

In closing his sharing on Christianity, Archbishop Simon Poh expressed his preference to adopt the concept of sincere love of God and

neighbour through "a behaviour of mutual acceptance and respect" and to embrace a mindset change of "tolerance" for diversity in unity of the various race, faith and culture in Sarawak. We need "to love God and love our neighbour as God loves us."

As an *anak Sarawak*, the Archbishop credited Sarawak leaders for setting up UNIFOR to address and promote the welfare of various Faiths. He implored that "the harmony and unity be protected and promoted at all levels of education, employment, and civil service," and "work for the development of the common good and welfare of all peoples, irrespective of race, culture or creed." — **By Ivy Chai, Today's Catholic**

## Mount Miriam Cancer Hospital celebrates 47th anniversary



*Celebrating Mount Miriam Cancer Hospital's anniversary with Mass.*

PENANG: God has been gracious to Mount Miriam Cancer Hospital (MMCH), from the day it opened its doors to serve cancer patients on February 21, 1976. For 47 years, MMCH endeavoured to live its divine call to serve all persons needing cancer treatment — regardless of nationality, financial means, race, or religion. The mission continues today.

To celebrate this 47th-year milestone, a Mass was held on Feb 21 at our in-house Chapel celebrated by Bishop Sebastian Francis. Concelebrating were 11 other priests.

Bishop Sebastian gave thanks to God for the many people (past and present) who have supported MMCH on this walk of faith and love to touch and heal the sick, in

line with the call of the Synod to journey with each other.

The message from the first reading of the day from Ecclesiasticus 2:1-11 is a loving reminder from God that He walks with us in all situations — but we are called to 'be sincere of heart, be steadfast' and 'to cling to Him' ... for 'the Lord is compassionate and merciful'.

Among those who came to give praise, and thanksgiving to God were patients, staff, religious, members of MMCH board of directors and Catholic Health Care Asia (CHCA), volunteers, friends, and neighbours of the hospital reflecting the love, commitment, and support of the community. — **Mount Miriam Cancer Hospital**

## Faith activities to strengthen parishioners

PLENTONG, Johor: More than 60 parishioners participated in the Church of St Joseph's pastoral assembly on February 19. Parish priest, Friar Moses Yap, OFM, headed and initiated the assembly with an opening prayer. Also present were Bishop Bernard Paul, Parish Pastoral Council chairman, Joseph Pong, and his assistant, Peter Wong.

During the assembly, Fr. Moses presented the financial report for 2021-2022 and the upcoming project to repair and uplift the front of the church due to wear and tear.

Across parishes in the Melaka Johor Diocese, reflection questions were formulated for the Ba-

sic Ecclesial Communities (BEC) members to answer before the assembly. Their responses were then discussed, collated, and presented during the pastoral assembly.

The questions included listing your blessings in 2021-2022; choosing a parish programme you participated in, and sharing how it benefited you; briefly sharing your thoughts and feelings on your relationship with the parish; giving concrete examples of what parish-level faith activities you think will effectively strengthen and deepen parishioners' belief to experience God's presence and trust Him?

How can the parish empower parishioners to evangelise and clearly

articulate the message of redemption and the salvation of Jesus Christ to the non-baptised? How do we encourage parents to stay for Mass after the children's catechism instead of rushing off?

Some responses to parish programmes they benefited from were student-animated Mass, which encourages children's faith formation; ministries like Catechesis, and being Communion Ministers help in personal faith formation, and in understanding the Church's teaching; they also felt faith formation activities like Young People's Day, altar server training, and Bible classes helped them appreciate Mass, their faith and discover the meaning of

being Christian. Some also felt carolling helped them bond with others.

On how they felt towards the parish, some said it is a warm, welcoming, and friendly community and it's like a second home. Several felt they couldn't relate well with others, that it was just an obligation, and that the parish priests didn't take enough initiative to approach the people to understand their wants, likes, and expectations.

To strengthen a connection with God, they suggested holding retreats for groups and individuals; potluck fellowships, and family day and formation sessions that relate to daily life notions, which then lead to

the desire to comprehend dogmas, etc.

Friar Sixtus Pitah Amit, OFM, presented the responses for the English and Bahasa Malaysia apostolate BECs, while Mark Yen presented on behalf of the Chinese community.

Bishop Bernard, in his closing remarks, encouraged the assembly and praised the vibrant and multi-lingual community for their desire to reach out to the non-baptised. The prelate also stressed the importance of a proper structure for an assembly which includes reporting, listening, reviewing, sharing, discerning, designing, and making decisions. — **By Friar Sixtus Pitah Amit, OFM**



# Cardinal Tagle ordains new Philippine bishop

MANILA: Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, pro-prefect of the Vatican's Dicastery for Evangelisation, ordained Bishop Pablito Tagura, 61, of the Apostolic Vicariate of San Jose in Occidental Mindoro on February 17.

About a thousand faithful attended the episcopal ordination at the Diocesan Shrine of Jesus the Divine Word in Quezon City.

"Please pray for me and with me as I journey in faith with the laity and the clergy of San Jose in Occidental Mindoro," said the newly ordained prelate.

"May we grow together in love as missionary disciples of the Lord

and that I may always look at them through the 'graced-filled eyes of compassion' like that of the Good Shepherd," he said.

Cardinal Tagle was the principal consecrator during the ordination with Archbishop Charles Brown, papal nuncio to the Philippines, and Archbishop Gilbert Garcera of Lipa as co-consecrators.

About 20 bishops and 200 priests, mostly members of the Society of the Divine Word, attended the event.

Bishop Tagura, whose episcopal motto is *I lay down my life for the sheep*, was presented with the Book of Gospels as a symbol of

his commission to evangelise.

He also was invested with a ring symbolising his fidelity to Christ and that he is wedded to the Church; a mitre which signifies the bishop's role as a herald of truth; and a pastoral staff as a sign of his ministry as a shepherd.

In his homily, Cardinal Tagle said the new bishop must be "watchful" to God's active presence in our lives.

"If you allow yourself to be distracted and you lose your focus that you don't watch Jesus anymore, it will be difficult for you to watch over the community," said the cardinal.

"So, watch over yourself that you will always watch Jesus," he added.

Pope Francis appointed Bishop Tagura, who was serving as the Rector at Christ the King Mission Seminary in Quezon City, as the new apostolic vicar of San Jose on Dec 22, 2022.

The apostolic vicariate has been without a prelate since March 2018, after the resignation of the late Bishop Antonio Palang. Since then, it has been under the care of Bishop David William Antonio of Ilagan as apostolic administrator.

Born in Abra province's Lagangilang town, Bishop Tagura



Bishop Pablito Tagura

was ordained a priest in 1985. For the last 28 years, he spent his priestly life teaching in the seminary.

Archbishop Brown formally installed Bishop Tagura as San Jose apostolic vicariate's new shepherd on February 25. — *LiCAS/from a CBCP News report*

## Singapore Catholic editors win US literary award



Singapore-based Catholic editors Desmond Francis Xavier Kon Zhicheng-Mingde (left) and Eric Francis Tinsay Valles won top prize at the 2023 Illumination Christian Book Awards under the category of Digital Media.

SINGAPORE: Two Singapore-based Catholic editors clinched the top award for the second consecutive year from a US-based group that honours the best titles written and published with a Christian worldview.

The e-anthology, *The Jesuit: Finding God in All Things*, bagged the Gold Award at the 2023 Illumination Christian Book Awards under the category of Digital Media.

Desmond Francis Xavier Kon Zhicheng-Mingde and Eric Francis Tinsay Valles edited the book, exclusively composed to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the canonisation of St Francis Xavier and St Ignatius of Loyola in 2022.

The 250-page book features articles from 21 eminent authors from around the world.

The Illumination Book Awards are designed to "shine a light" on the best of new Christian books. Award categories range from Bible Study and Devotional to family-oriented subjects like Education and Children's Picture Books.

The editors said the recognition inspires them.

"The Illumination Prize is a great affirmation I am most grateful for. It is also an incentive to write better, try to inspire others, and give witness to God's tender mercies," said

Valles.

"It totally made my day, receiving news that *The Jesuit* won this award. Eric and I share this with the many eminent contributing authors whose luminous work grace these pages," said Zhicheng-Mingde.

He said their writings reflect their great love for God.

"Literary awards are always a wonderful surprise; yet, they usually best serve us when they humble us to do more of such edifying, gratifying work. For a project like *The Jesuit*, the love that emanates is a much grander love, that great love both Eric and I have for God," he added.

Zhicheng-Mingde was born in 1971. He studied sociology and mass communication at the National University of Singapore and later received his theology master's from Harvard University and another master's in creative writing from the University of Notre Dame.

Valles was born in 1968. He obtained a graduation in Business Management from Ateneo de Manila University and a master's in English from the University of the Philippines. He received his doctorate in English, with a specialisation in creative writing, from Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. — *ucanews.com*

## South Korean Church records decline in priestly vocation

SEOUL: Church officials in South Korea have asked for research and education plans as Catholics in the country experience a drop in priestly ordinations amid decreasing birth rate and religiosity.

The number of newly ordained priests dropped to 87 in 2023 from 131 in 2011, a decrease of 35 per cent, according to the Statistics of the Catholic Church in Korea.

This year, the Jeonju Diocese had no priestly ordination as there was no candidate. The number of priests ordained in the diocese had dropped from six in 2011 to two in 2021.

The Diocese of Daejeon ordained three new priests this year, compared to 19 in 2011 and five in 2016, the data shows.

Although some dioceses saw a slight increase in priestly ordinations, the overall trend shows a decline.

"Research and education plans for vocational development must be established at the parish level, and efforts such as strengthening the vo-

cational manual and increasing the role of the vocational division of the parish must be followed," said Fr John Chrysostom Lee Sang-yong, director of vocations in the Diocese of Suwon.

The priest said the most important thing is "a change in consciousness" among Catholics, requiring them to recognise that the development of vocations is the basic duty of all faithful.

Besides, the number of students at seminaries nationwide decreased by about 30 percent from 1,587 in 2011 to 1,137 in 2021.

During the same period, the number of students enrolled in seminaries decreased by 40 per cent from 223 to 138.

The number of students admitted to Gwangju Catholic University Theological Seminary has dropped from 24 in 2013 to 13 in 2023.

The seminary trains students from the dioceses of Masan, Jeonju, Jeju, and the archdiocese of Gwangju.

Meanwhile, Daejeon Catholic

University did not receive seminarians from the Diocese of Cheongju this year. In 2019, the Busan Catholic University Theological Seminary was closed due to the lack of applicants.

Fr James Lee Sang-gyu, president of Daejeon Catholic University, said that it was the first time that the Diocese of Cheongju did not send any student.

The priest also insisted that Catholic families should move forward to ensure their children follow the footsteps of Jesus to serve the Church by becoming priests.

The vocational offices of Catholic dioceses carried out individual research on the decline of priestly vocations. Among the factors identified are low birth rate, increasing indifference to religion and faith, realism, and secularism. Increasing apathy at home towards religious education and prioritising career success over faith are also identified as reasons for low priestly vocations. — *ucanews.com*

## 7 out of 10 Filipino Catholics pray at least once daily, says survey

MANILA: Most Filipino Catholics pray at least once a day.

This was the result of a survey done by pollster Social Weather Stations (SWS) conducted in December and released on February 21.

The survey found that seven out of ten Filipino Catholics pray at least once a day.

The survey, however, also found that only 38 per cent of Filipinos attend religious services at least once a week.

The SWS said 79 per cent of their respondents were Catholics.

The survey result showed that 24 per cent of the respondents attend religious services twice or more in a month while 20 per cent attend once a month.

It said that nine per cent attend religious ceremonies from two to 11 times a year and seven per cent take part in religious activities once a year.

Three percent of the respondents said they never attend church services.

Ninety-three per cent of the respondents have gone to a place of worship in the past three months while three per cent watched religious services online or on television.

In October last year, Bishop Pablo Virgilio David of Kalookan, president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, called on the faithful to return to churches for Mass, especially on Sundays.

"We strongly encourage our faithful to return to the Sunday Eucharist with a purified heart, renewed amazement, and increased desire to meet the Lord, to be with Him, to receive Him and bring Him to our brothers and sisters with the witness of a life full of faith, love and hope," the prelate wrote in a circular.

He said "The faithful are to hold the Eucharist in highest honour, taking active part in the celebration, receiving the sacrament devoutly and frequently, and worshipping it with supreme adoration."

The bishop said that "no broadcast is comparable to personal participation" in the Mass "or can replace it." — *By Jose Torres Jr, LiCAS.news*



# New Archbishop of Toronto pledges 'all my heart' to new ministry

TORONTO, Canada: Bishop Frank Leo was appointed auxiliary Bishop of Montreal just five months ago – and so, he says, it was “a big surprise” to receive a call from the Apostolic Nuncio in January, informing him that the Holy Father intended to name him as Archbishop of Toronto.

But, he said, “I’m happy to be able to serve... that’s the important thing.”

“We are called to serve. That’s our whole life; it’s what Jesus did. It’s what our vocation is all about.”

In an interview with Vatican News, Bishop Leo said that he looked to the image of Mary as he prayed and discerned about his new calling. Taking her as his model, he considered what the Church was asking of him through the Holy Father.

“I really looked at the image of our Blessed Mother and how she must have felt and received her Annunciation in Nazareth, and the gamut of emotions that she went

through; and at the end she gave her ‘Fiat’,” the bishop said. “And so, I, too, said my ‘yes’ to continue to serve the Lord in this new ministry.”

The archbishop-elect has a close connection to the Blessed Mother, having specialised in Marian studies for his licentiate and doctorate in theology. His nomination to the Archdiocese of Toronto was announced on the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, and his installation in the See will take place on the Solemnity of the Annunciation.

Asked about his priorities in his new ministry, Bishop Leo said, “I’m there to discern. I’m there to observe. I’m there to, first of all, take stock of what is already going on.”

He explained, “The Holy Spirit is the protagonist building up the Body of Christ, the first evangeliser. So, what is the Holy Spirit doing? How is He present? How is He active?” The archbishop-elect said it will be a priority for him and his collaborators to “discern the signs



Bishop Frank Leo

of the times.”

He added, “For me, the whole concept of charisms is key, the charisms that the Holy Spirit gives all members of the Body of Christ – clergy, laity, consecrated – helping everyone to discern and call forth a greater generosity and bringing those charisms to the larger community again, to build up the Body of Christ.”

The path of discernment corre-

sponds with the ongoing synodal process undertaken by the Church under Pope Francis. Bishop Leo said the synodal journey is “a grace-filled moment of learning to walk together, learning to discern together, learning to make decisions together, and seeing what’s already there, rejoicing in it, celebrating it, and letting ourselves be challenged together.”

“And as we accompany each other, we are accompanied by the Holy Spirit first and foremost.”

That walking together, he continued, involves humility and moments of conversion, as well as “a lot of courage” in order to respond to the call to give “even more of ourselves,” the call to “greater love, to greater selflessness, to greater humility, so that the Holy Spirit may work in and through us, and build up the Body of Christ.”

Archbishop-elect Leo said he is “excited and happy” to assume his new ministry in Canada’s largest city, saying it is “an opportunity to

grow in my faith” and “share.”

Ahead of his upcoming installation, Bishop Leo highlighted the “nuptial” aspect of the episcopacy. “One key element in my understanding [of the episcopate], and that of Holy Mother Church, is that a bishop is wedded, he is married to his diocese, and I take that very seriously.”

He added, “I want to be a loyal husband and a loyal father, a spiritual father. And so, I see my ministry in those nuptial terms, if you will, as a giving, loving, selfless father and husband, ready to make sacrifices for the good of his family.”

Calling to mind the image of the Church as the bride of Christ, he emphasised the qualities of “fidelity and loyalty, of selfless, unconditional love and self-sacrifice for the good of the family.”

“This is very important for me. And I hope to contribute that, and give all of my heart to this new ministry.” — **By Christopher Wells, Vatican News**

## “Humanitarian corridors” initiative brings a hundred Afghan refugees to Rome

VATICAN: Around a hundred refugees from Afghanistan arrived in Rome on February 23, as part of the “Humanitarian Corridors” initiative, which is sponsored by groups, including Italy’s Catholic and Evangelical churches, the Italian government, the Community of Sant’Egidio, and other groups.

Around half of them will be in the care of Caritas Italiana, the charitable arm of the Italian Bishops Conference, and half will be looked after by the Federation of Evangelical Churches in Italy. One family will be taken in by the

Community of Sant’Egidio.

Vatican News spoke briefly to Laura Stopponi, a representative of Caritas Italiana, about the humanitarian corridors project.

Pope Francis has praised the initiative – which aims to bring refugees safely to Europe, removing the need for dangerous sea crossings – and called for it to become a model for refugee resettlement schemes.

Asked whether she thought there had been any progress toward this goal, Stopponi replied, “Well, I don’t think there is progress. We think that they are a



A shot from the arrival of a previous group of Afghan refugees in Rome (ANSA)

model, in a sense: instead of making these people travel for a long time and risk their lives in the

hands of criminals, this could be really a good way to bring people here that have the right to have

asylum, because they are coming from a situation of war.” — **By Joseph Tulloch, Vatican News**

## Newly-discovered asteroids named after Jesuits — and a pope

VATICAN: The Vatican Observatory announced recently the naming of four newly-discovered asteroids after notable Catholics, including Pope Gregory XIII, who began the tradition of papal astronomers and observatories.

Christopher Graney, a scientist at the Vatican Observatory, said in a press release that the Working Group for Small Bodies Nomenclature (WGSBN) of the International Astronomical Union published its latest batch of named asteroids in early February.

The newly-named asteroids include “560974 Ugoboncompagni,” which honours Ugo Boncompagni (1502–1585), Pope Gregory XIII. Gregory commissioned the astronomer Father Christopher Clavius, SJ — who also has an asteroid named after him — to reform the calendar

in the 16th century, leading to his namesake Gregorian calendar, still in use today.

The other three names honour Jesuit priests who work or worked at the Vatican Observatory.

● “562971 Johannhagen” honours Jesuit Fr Johann Hagen (1847–1930), director of the Vatican Observatory from 1906 to 1930.

● “551878 Stoecker” honours Fr Bill Stoecker, SJ (1943–2014), a cosmologist and theologian at the Vatican Observatory.

● Finally, “565184 Janusz” honours Jesuit Fr Robert Janusz (b. 1964), currently on the staff of the observatory.

The naming process for asteroids can take decades, Graney said. After the asteroid’s discovery, it is given a permanent designation number once the object’s orbit is determined

well enough that its position can be reliably predicted far into the future.

Graney noted that Catholic priests have in the past, and continue to, exert an influence on the world of astronomy. Jesuit Fr Giovanni Battista Riccioli (1598–1671), for example, developed the system of lunar nomenclature that is still used today. When the Apollo 11 mission landed in the lunar “Sea of Tranquility” in 1969, the name “Tranquility” came from Riccioli, Graney said, adding that more than 30 asteroids now bear the names of Jesuits.

With roots dating to 1582, the Vatican Observatory is one of the oldest active astronomical observatories in the world. Its headquarters are in Castel Gandolfo, a town just outside Rome and the location of the summer residence of the popes. Pope Leo XIII formally refounded

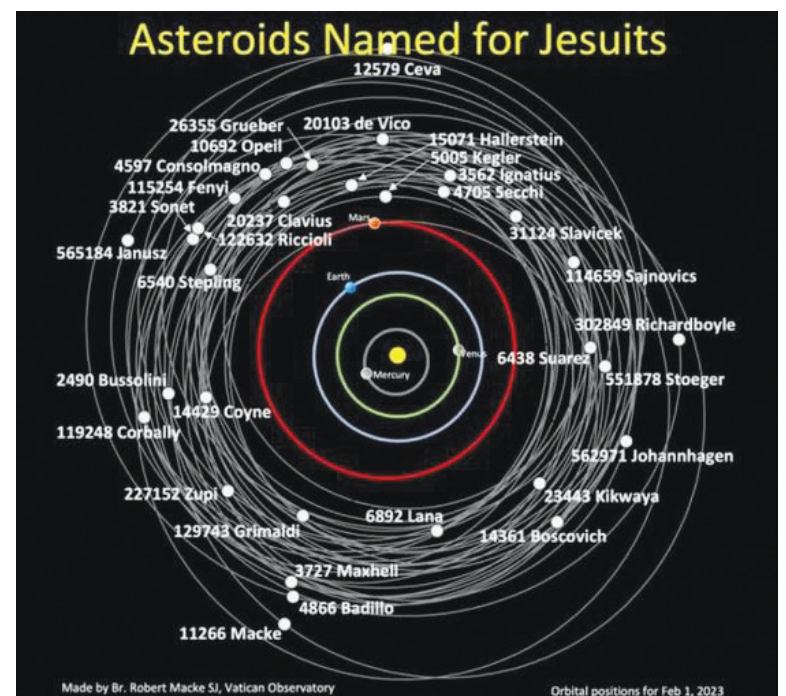


Chart showing asteroids named after Jesuits. (Vatican Observatory/Bro Robert Macke SJ)

the present observatory in 1891. The Vatican Observatory also operates the Vatican Advanced Technology

Telescope, located in rural Arizona about 200 miles southeast of Phoenix. — **By Jonah McKeown, CNA**



# Can Taiwan's new Catholic PM change its future course?

Taiwan's former vice president, Chen Chien-jen, a Catholic, who became the country's new prime minister at the end of January, can do a lot. But his term in office will be short as the East Asian nation goes to presidential and parliamentary polls next year.

Beneath all the harsh words and military maneuverings, Taiwan enjoys robust ties with China, which wants to annex it, and the US, which will come to its aid in case of an attack by the communist nation.

China, which lays claim to Taiwan as its renegade province, takes in 37 per cent of all Taiwanese exports, which rose by 14.2 per cent last year. China also provides 20 per cent of Taiwan's imports, which increased by 9.5 per cent in 2022.

As neighbours, they face a raft of mutual risks, from the depletion of marine stocks to global supply chain challenges. So, they co-operate one way or the other.

But still, Chen has to worry because there are enough strategic reasons why China won't consider Taiwanese independence from the mainland.

Though the appellation "Taiwan" appears in brackets after the Republic of China, (the official name of Taiwan) and only 14 nations, including the Vatican, have diplomatic ties with it, Taiwan proudly occupies the United States' eighth-largest trading partner position among the nearly 200 nations in the world.

Though about 267 times smaller than China in size, Taiwan's trade ties with the US are constantly strengthening.

For the world's two superpowers, strategy is not the same as economics, which makes Chen's days in office fraught with less risk.

A devout Catholic, Chen, who attended Pope Benedict's funeral at the Vatican as the president's envoy, took up the new assignment as part of a reshuffle by the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) after it suffered heavy losses during local elections four months ago.

Chen will have to lift the fortunes of the party before presidential and parliamentary polls next year. It is a task within his reach, as all three players — Taiwan, China, and the US — will prefer a continuation of the status quo at least on the economic front.

An epidemiologist by profession, Chen was Taiwan's health minister during the 2003 SARS outbreak and played a key role in shaping Taiwan's response to COVID-19.

While serving as vice president from 2016-2020, he helped earn kudos for Taiwan from world health bodies and governments at the height of the pandemic. A few even went to the extent of hinting at admitting Taiwan to the World Health Organisation (WHO).

However, the 71-year-old will have to watch out as Taiwan's cordial trade ties can go topsy-turvy as the US has started a resource-depleting war against China.

As part of this strategy, the US has kept Chinese tech majors at bay and has given dik-tats to its Western and Asian allies to follow suit. In fact, some of them have fallen in line in banning Chinese tech firms like Tik Tok

and Huawei.

Under the Indo-Pacific policy by the US administration to contain China, Taiwan is viewed as a crucial piece, along with a string of nations stretching from Japan to the Philippines and Indonesia.

Though the US still sticks to its commitment to a One China policy and to a strategic ambiguity policy, much to the solace of Chen, President Joe Biden has repeatedly and unambiguously said that the US has an obligation to defend Taiwan if attacked by China.

After last year's election rout, people in Taiwan are expecting a DPP image makeover. No wonder Chen's new cabinet has the most women ever. Already, Taiwan's economy is passing through a bad phase as it posted negative growth in the fourth quarter of last year, its worst since the global financial crisis in 2009.

On the domestic front, Chen will have to address climate change, a declining birth rate, income inequality, and being banned from all major global organisations and agreements.

It has been three years since the outbreak of COVID-19, but it shows no sign of ebbing. More than 16,000 Taiwanese have died due to the pandemic, and the number of new cases remains at about 10,000 to 20,000. Chen's priority should be to reduce the death rate as most cases now display mild symptoms.

Though Chen is called a transitional prime minister, he has more than he can chew, both on the external and domestic fronts, and has to make a difference to the ruling party slogan of



Taiwan's former vice president and new prime minister, Chen Chien-Jen

"DPP governance is quality assurance."

Unless Chen delivers on the DPP's promises, his transition cabinet, as claimed by the opposition, will be nothing more than old wine in a new bottle.

For the Chinese, land has historically been the focus of intense struggles. In the 20th century, the Communist Party mobilised peasants around the demand for land reform before seizing power in 1949.

Since it is a militarily and economically costly affair for China to annex Taiwan against the overwhelming desire of the Taiwanese people, the communist nation may not prefer democracy to thrive there.

Next year's presidential polls are of vital importance as China has already started a cognitive war against Taiwan to counter the Biden administration's China containment policy, calling for caution on the part of Chen and his new cabinet. — **By Ben Joseph, ucanews.com**

## Eight billion and the count-up to disaster

The world's population exceeds eight billion people; more than the planet can easily bear. The environment, other species, and all of us face a bleak future that calls us to a deeper trust in God's love that used Jesus' embrace of the Way of the Cross to bring about an unexpected hope for the world.

In January 2011, the cover story in *National Geographic* magazine was titled *Population 7 billion: How your world will change*. The report was in response to a projection that, towards the end of that year the world population would reach seven billion.

Somewhere on November 15 of last year, a child was born who is the eight billionth human inhabitant of planet Earth. God alone can know who that particular child is, but the whole world can know the significance of that birth.

Eight billion is a lot of people. In fact, it is practically impossible for any of us to even count that high, let alone grasp the magnitude of the number. We could probably not finish counting to 8,000,000,000 before the end of the century if we were to start counting today and went without resting, eating, or doing anything else for all that time.

I pray that the child can have a happy life that brings joy to many people and, knowingly or not, becomes a clear reminder of God's love.

And yet I also wonder if the world's population reaching such a high number, and projected to reach a peak of 10.4 billion in only a few decades, is unmitigated good news.

If that child born on Nov 15 survives infancy and childhood, in what sort of world will she or he grow up and live?

It will almost certainly not be a pleasant one. We are probably already well into a period of universal crisis unmatched in human history except, perhaps, by the bubonic plagues of the



sixth and fourteenth centuries and the Second World War of the twentieth.

The lifetime of that child will be marked by various crises made worse by our huge population. In fact, some of those crises are undoubtedly caused by our unprecedentedly enormous presence on the planet.

Our impact is so drastic that earth scientists speak of a new geologic epoch they dub the "Anthropocene." That epochal name comes from the Greek "anthropos," meaning "human." It is superseding the Holocene that began some 11,650 years ago when the latest ice age ended and humans began to spread and develop agriculture, technology and civilisations.

The end of an epoch is generally marked by mass extinctions, and our Holocene is no exception. The sixth mass extinction, the one we are witnessing when we choose to, or are forced to look, is called the beginning of the

Anthropocene because besides witnessing it, we are causing it.

Scientists estimate that the current rate of species extinction may be as much as one thousand times the normal rate at which life forms naturally disappear.

Those extinctions are brought about by habitat destruction when population pressure causes people to take over other species' homes. Pollution of air and water are further causes. Over them all is climate change brought about by burning the fossils of earlier flora and fauna, now oil, gas and coal.

As the population increases, more habitats must be taken over and modified to provide space for people. That means less space for others of God's beloved creatures.

Increased population means increased demands for power, leading to increased pollution of air and water. That pollution, aptly dubbed "population," speeds climate change

that threatens agriculture and raises seawater levels that force further limits on space available for human habitation and food production.

Climate- and scarcity-driven refugees increase social disruption as they move from place to place to flee disaster. As societies seek, hoard, or protect scarce resources, militarism and the risk of confrontation increase.

None of this is news to people who have paid attention to what is happening around the world.

Neither is it news what must be done, or what should have been done before we reached this point: decreased consumption by the wealthy, political and social justice, clean energy, education and empowerment of girls and women (the most effective means of controlling population growth), equitable access to food, health care, and resources.

Is any of that going to happen in time and on the necessary scale? No. It is too late to fix the world in which that newborn eight-billionth child will live. Even if all those "fixes" were unexpectedly to happen, it would only ease, not end, "population".

What does that mean for followers of Christ? Perhaps we should look to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. He knew that His prospects were not good in any worldly sense. In fact, they were dismal. But though He wished it were otherwise, He continued to do the will of the Father, confident that faithfulness in the face of futility would ultimately be worked into the building of the Kingdom.

If we can develop that same confidence in the face of our inevitable planet-wide disaster, we may find a hope that can transcend the here and now and enable us to trust that the damage we inflict on God's world will not damage God's life-giving love for us. — **By Fr William Grimm, ucanews.com**



# Bishops must get Vatican approval to allow Latin Mass

By Gerard O'Connell

Pope Francis has unequivocally confirmed that bishops must obtain authorisation from the Holy See before granting permission to celebrate the pre-Vatican II Mass in parish churches and before allowing priests ordained after July 16, 2021, to use the 1962 Roman Missal.

The latest instruction also makes clear that bishops cannot take the law into their own hands and interpret in a different way the restrictions on the Latin Mass issued by the Pope in 2021.

The rescript was published on February 21, following an audience that Pope Francis granted the previous day to Cardinal Arthur Roche, the prefect of the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, who signed the rescript.

In July 2021, Pope Francis promulgated his apostolic letter *Traditionis Custodes* (*Guardians of the Tradition*), declaring only the liturgical books promulgated after the Second Vatican Council to be “the unique expression of the *lex orandi* (law of worship) of the Roman Rite,” restoring the obligation of priests to have their bishops’ permission to celebrate according to the “extraordinary” or pre-Vatican II Mass and ordering bishops not to establish any new groups or parishes in their dioceses devoted to the former liturgy.

Pope Francis said, then, that his decision was meant “to promote the concord and unity of the Church.”

Many bishops granted temporary permission in the summer of 2021 for the liturgies to continue while they studied the papal document and consulted their priests and faithful.

Some bishops then granted individual dis-



Pope Francis has unequivocally confirmed that bishops must obtain authorisation from the Holy See before granting permission to celebrate the pre-Vatican II Mass in parish churches.

pensations from the rules, citing a paragraph of *Traditionis Custodes* that affirmed “it belongs to the diocesan bishop, as moderator, promoter and guardian of the whole liturgical life of the particular church entrusted to him, to regulate the liturgical celebrations of his diocese.”

With the rescript, Pope Francis confirms that dispensations from *Traditionis Custodes* are “reserved in a special way to the Apostolic See.”

The rescript identifies the following reserved dispensations:

“The use of the parish church, or the use of parish churches and or the erection of a personal parish for the Eucharistic celebration using the Roman Missal of 1962 (c.f. *Traditionis Custodes* Art. 3, par. 2);”

“The concession of permission to priests ordained after the publication of the *Motu*

*Proprio Traditionis Custodes* to celebrate with the Roman Missal of 1962 (c.f. *Traditionis Custodes*, Art. 4).”

The Pope again confirmed what he had already established with Art. 7 of *Traditionis Custodes*, namely that “the dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments exercises the authority of the Holy See in the above-mentioned cases, watching over the observance of what has been laid down.”

Today’s rescript explicitly references Canon 87, par. 1 of the code of Canon Law. A minority of bishops, mainly in the United States, and some canon lawyers, have cited that canon to interpret the dispensations in a different way to what Francis intended.

The rescript makes clear that “should a diocesan bishop have granted dispensations in the two cases mentioned above, he is obliged

to inform the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, which will evaluate the individual cases.”

*Vatican Media* said this means “every bishop who has conceded the use of parish churches, established personal parishes, or given the *nihil obstat* for the use of the 1962 Missal to priests ordained after July 16, 2021 without the assent of the Apostolic See, will be required to submit a request to the Dicastery and await its response.”

Furthermore, the rescript “confirms, what [the Pope] had already expressed in his assent in the audience of November 18, 2021, in responses to the *dubia* [questions] that had emerged after the publication of *Traditionis Custodes*.” Those responses were published along with explanatory notes on Dec 4, 2021.

The rescript concluded by ordering that the rescript “be published in *L’Osservatore Romano*,” the Vatican’s daily newspaper, “and in the official commentary of the Acts of the Apostolic See.”

This last instruction seeks both to remove any further doubt among bishops or canon lawyers regarding the correct interpretation of *Traditionis Custodes* and to affirm, yet again that the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments has final authority over dispensations.

The document also removes the confusion raised by a minority of bishops, some canon lawyers and others who disagree with the restrictions issued by Pope Francis. It also seeks to rebut charges from various quarters of the Church against Cardinal Arthur Roche, whom they have accused of exceeding his authority in this matter when, as the rescript makes clear, he was only faithfully carrying out papal directives. — *America*

## Dear Father, are you prepared for a crisis?

Many people received, via WhatsApp, photos of the damage caused by the ceiling collapse at the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist, Kuala Lumpur on February 10. With the photos came lots of speculation as to the cause, before parish priest, Fr Gerard Theraviam, issued an official statement via a Facebook post and laid all the rumours to rest.

The parish has now shifted its weekday Masses to the parish house and the weekend Masses are being held at the nearby St John’s Institution hall while repairs are being carried out.

Imagine a similar crisis, or worse, happening in your parish. Are you prepared? You have little information to go on, and everyone is depending on you to make the right calls ... fast! You feel ill-equipped to make decisions and a million thoughts are running through your mind. You suddenly feel alone with this overwhelming task in front of you.

Your parish community may be relying on your leadership through this crisis, but no one expects you to do it alone. As a pastor, you’ll have to lean on your team and delegate tasks to get you through those hardships so that you can begin to turn things around for your community.

Every parish has unique needs and will need a specialised leadership team to respond and manage a crisis. Your team won’t need every ministry leader involved — it’s important to keep your team small to ensure that decisions can be made quickly



Part of the ceiling at St John’s Cathedral collapsed due to termite infestation. (Pic credit/Cathedral of St John the Evangelist Facebook)

and efficiently. Here are few other tips as you choose members to lead your parish through crisis:

- Choose an individual to manage the team and set the priorities for each day while you’re in crisis mode.

- Recruit a strong communicator who will stay in touch with your community and be able to handle questions and concerns under pressure.

- Assign someone who can document, evaluate, and recommend priorities that would likely shift daily.

- Select an operational or logistics leader who can help you create a safety plan, assess initial damage, manage a tactical team of volunteers, and help you return to normal operations.

- Choose a financial expert to start an emergency fund and manage spending and

risks while you’re in crisis.

Continue to be Christ to your community and provide spiritual guidance to those in need of it. It’s a gift that no other organisation or business can provide, especially in a global crisis like we witnessed with the COVID-19 pandemic.

The more physically and spiritually prepared you are, the better equipped you’ll be to pastor, care, and love your community.





# Go beyond parallel lines that never meet

By Charles Bertille

## The holy faithful People of God

Pope Francis, in his address to the assembly called out clearly to everyone in the Church to make efforts to change: “Go beyond acting along parallel lines that never meet: the clergy separated from the laity, consecrated persons separated from the clergy and from the faithful, the intellectual faith of certain *élites* separated from popular faith, the Roman Curia separated from the particular Churches, bishops separated from priests, the young separated from the elderly, married couples and families involved little in the life of communities, charismatic movements separated from parishes, and so on.”

The differences may seem deep and those who wish to take advantage will attempt to justify or push it further apart. But the Pope recalled from the Vatican II Council teachings that “the Church is the *holy faithful People of God*, as affirmed in *Lumen Gentium* (8, 12); and this is neither populism nor elitism.” This sense of the People of God is not something learned theoretically but understood by immersion and daily living – and if it is not lived out, then it cannot be transmitted to others either. “In this one People of God, which is the Church, the fundamental element is belonging to Christ” – this is our shared baptismal identity.

## Co-responsibility in the Church

Prefect of the Dicastery, Cardinal Kevin Farrell, spoke of the theme chosen for the conference as very much in tune with the synodal pathway calling for a greater commitment of the whole Church to “go forward together”, involving all the People of God, so that everyone is an active ‘subject’ of the ecclesial community. “All are called to bring their original contribution to the life and mission of the Church, and all are called to think for themselves and make use of their respective charisms.” He allayed the

The recently concluded international conference on *Pastors and lay faithful called to walk together* was aimed at exploring the nature and foundation of lay co-responsibility in the Church. The participants listened to inputs and reflections on improving and enhancing the collaboration among laity, priests and consecrated persons, as baptised, in the service of the Church. Hosted by the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life, the February 16 to 18 conference brought together 210 presidents and representatives of Episcopal Commissions for the Laity from across the five continents.

fears that to consult the laity, “does not detract from a bishop’s personal responsibility for the decisions to be taken”, as “decision is a ministerial responsibility” and it affects the larger community.

He referred to *Lumen Gentium*, which also invites pastors to entrust lay people with ecclesial offices. Of course for shared responsibility to “be actually practised”, the cardinal noted the need for adequate training or formation for both pastors and laity. A wide cross-section of participants also echoed the call to re-think the seminary and on-

going formation of priests, as much as there is a great need for the Church to invest in lay formation.

## Identity of Laity

Pope Francis recalled that valuing lay people in the Church is not something fashionable, like a “theological novelty”, or a “functional” solution to the shortage of priests, or “pay back” for the past when laity were side-lined. Rather, he said, it is based on a correct vision of the Church: the “Church as the People of God, of which the laity are

full members together with ordained ministers.” This goes back to Scriptures and the early tradition of the Church. “It is therefore a question of recovering an “integral ecclesiology”, as it was in the first centuries, in which everything is unified by belonging to Christ and by supernatural communion with Him and with one’s brothers/sisters, overcoming a sociological vision which distinguishes social classes and ranks and is ultimately based on the “power” assigned to each category.

In this unitary vision of the Church, where we are first and foremost baptised Christians, the laity live in the world and at the same part, form part of the faithful People of God. The Pope quoted from the *Puebla Document* (South America) to give a heartening definition of the laity: the laity are men and women “of the Church in the heart of the world” and men and women “of the world in the heart of the Church”. This dual identity of laity resonates also with their role as Christians and citizens (cf. FABC), as Church living and acting in the world, though not of the world.



The laity are men and women “of the Church in the heart of the world” and men and women “of the world in the heart of the Church”.

## A people united in the mission

It is in this shared mission that we find our unity. The Pope pointed to the example of Jesus from the Gospels, where He surrounded Himself from the very beginning with a group of disciples, men and women, and lived out His public ministry with them. And when He sent the Twelve to pro-

claim the Kingdom of God, He sent them “two by two”. We see the same style in St Paul, who always evangelised with collaborators, including laypeople and married couples, never alone.

The Pope emphasised that synodality, or walking together, finds its source and ul-

timate purpose in the mission, “It is born out of the mission and guided towards the mission.” In this vision, the lay faithful are not “guests” in the Church, nor mere collaborators to the clergy; they are at home, and therefore they are called to take care of their own home. The Pope spoke at length on the laity, especially women, who must be more valued in their skills and their human and spiritual gifts for the life of parishes and dioceses.

One of the worst things, the Pope said, that can happen in a pastor is forgetting the People from whom he has come, the lack of memory — that our respective vocations and states of life find their reciprocity in Christ. To such a pastor, one can address that oft-repeated word from the Bible, “Remember, remember from whence you came, from the flock you were removed from so as to return to serve it, remember your roots (cf. 2 Tim 1).”

This shared identity of baptism was a point that emerged strongly from all the dioceses under the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei (CBCMSB) in the continental Synod consultation process (see report: <https://cbc-msb.org/synod-of-bishops-2023/>).

Synodality is not just about relationships

— but relationships founded in this correct understanding of Church as the holy faithful People of God, called and sent in mission by our baptism in Christ.

## Conclusion

As one participant and theologian remarked, the topics discussed were not new. However, the fact that 200 persons from so many countries and continents explored together, was stimulating and gave hope. There was a sense of confidence and commitment on the path that needs to be walked upon together. The discussions had offered participants an opportunity to explore the nature and foundation of co-responsibility in the Church, in light of the ongoing synodal process.

One wonders what drives our Pope — an elderly man, with health conditions, seated on a wheelchair — but who never tires of calling to conversion and true reform of the institution. Let us pray for him, as he always requests, and join him in this challenge to build a synodal Church where all have their place.

Charles Bertille is the executive secretary of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei.





# My duty to serve

By Gwen Manickam

At age 13, Katrina Mariswamy felt her purpose was to help people and make a difference in the world of the underprivileged and downtrodden.

Currently, the Deputy Regional Director for Aftercare – Asia, Operation Underground Railroad (a US-based NGO), the 33-year-old said that while watching an episode of *Oprah*, she learned about the organisation Women for Women International, a non-profit that provides care and support to female survivors of war and conflict. At that point, they were helping women and children in the Democratic Republic of Congo facing sexual violence.

“That episode planted the seed to want to do more for those in such situations. However at that age, I didn’t know what I could do or how to assist, but the desire to help remained,” said Katrina.

She went on to pursue a degree in Psychology in the United States but upon returning in 2012, felt clueless about what career path best suited her studies, especially since little importance or awareness was given to mental health issues back then.

In 2013, Katrina joined Dignity for Children – a non-governmental organisation that provides holistic care and education for marginalised and urban poor children. The organisation focused on empowering underprivileged children from refugee communities, asylum seekers, etc.

She worked with them on the programme “Empower-a-Child” for a year, helping children interested in furthering their education by assessing their living conditions, obtaining sponsorships and even finding vocational training for those who learn differently.

The following year, Katrina began part-time classes to earn her Masters in Counselling while working with the International Catholic Migrant Commission (ICMC). Founded by Pope Pius XII,

this global organisation focuses on different issues around the world. In Malaysia, it combats gender-based violence against refugees and asylum seekers and is funded by the US Department of State.

As a case officer and later coordinator for case management, Katrina received reports on domestic violence, rape, child abuse, sexual harassment and assault, and child sexual abuse.

“Five years later, juggling work, internship for my Masters with Pink Triangle, and some personal battles, I burnt out and left ICMC. I felt jaded and didn’t know if I wanted to continue in the field. I took a six-month break to spend time with family and re-evaluate my life,” said the middle child of three girls.

When she was ready to rejoin the workforce, there was an opportunity with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in the Risk, Integrity, and Oversight department. Still not ready to work with survivors of abuse again, Katrina took on the three-month contract and dealt with fraud cases. Just then, COVID-19 hit and her contract was extended to a year.

Seeking opportunities to work abroad, she joined another global non-profit, Operation Underground Railroad which fights to

end human trafficking and child sexual exploitation.

The organisation has an Operations team that responds to international government requests to develop intelligence and assist in carrying out rescue efforts. This team carries out interventions by working closely with host governments and law enforcement to provide support and training, as they best understand the situations in their countries.

They also have an Aftercare team that works with the Operations team in caring for survivors. Before any intervention, the team ensures credible aftercare is ready and available to cater to the survivors’ needs.

Katrina’s role is to co-manage the Aftercare initiatives in Asia with the support of after-care staff and collaboration with stakeholders around the region who help provide care for survivors.

On how she went back to working in a similar scenario after burning out once, Katrina said, “I don’t see myself doing anything else that will make me feel like I am contributing to the world in some way. Some people face so much hardship while others go about their daily lives unaware.

“We need to protect our children, and as a society, we can do much more.”

In 2021, Katrina worked on a three-month research project with Interpol, UNICEF, and ECPAT International, regarding online child sexual exploitation and abuse in Southeast Asian countries and Africa.

As the local Trauma Inform Consultant, she interviewed Malaysian survivors on their lives before, during, and after the ordeal.

“They were willing to tell their stories, hoping it would protect other women and children from a similar fate.”

At the end of the project, a report was released,

and Katrina took part in a panel discussion to share the stories of the survivors to ensure their voices were heard. To listen to the panel discussion, visit <https://bit.ly/41kYOv4>.

UNICEF resonated with the sharing and invited Katrina to be on a podcast with their mental health

consultant Dr Shermaine Sim and Malaysian 17-year-old Ain Husniza Saiful Nizam, whose TikTok video exposing a teacher’s rape joke during a PE class went viral. The video inspired thousands to share their own experiences of verbal and physical harassment.

Although it’s hard work and emotionally draining, Katrina is very happy with the cause and the organisation she’s attached to.

“I just wish there was more awareness. In Malaysia, sex education in schools or even our catechism classes is almost non-existent. Adults may think that by talking about it, children will be curious to explore. They forget children go through physical, psychological and social developmental changes, and they struggle to understand it.

“Most children don’t know they are being exploited or abused because they don’t know the boundaries or what a healthy relationship is, or what love is. They are being tricked into thinking the sexual abuse they endure is normal ... that it is love,” said an exasperated Katrina.

While striving to be a good human being, she hopes that during this season of Lent and moving forward, Christians are reminded of the role they play in society, particularly in helping the underprivileged, marginalised, voiceless, downtrodden. A helping hand goes a long way. There’s a lot going on in the world today, wars, disasters, oppression, social injustice etc.

“Find a cause you are passionate about and figure out ways you can give back to society.”



Katrina Mariswamy



Katrina with her family members.

## Missionary biker, last foreign bishop, says goodbye to Kalimantan

At the wheel of his “two-wheeler”, he covered miles and miles on the rough roads of West Kalimantan. He visited villages, celebrated the Eucharist and gave the sacraments, catechised children, young people and adults, brought the proclamation of the Gospel to indigenous groups who had never heard of Christ, led caravans with humanitarian aid, or simply made long journeys to spend a few days with communities in remote places that very rarely saw a priest.

This is why Msgr Giulio Mencuccini, a religious of the Congregation of the Passion (Passionists), is nicknamed and known to all as the “motorcycle missionary”, the means of transport that has accompanied his 48 years of missionary work in the forests of Borneo in Indonesia.

In mid-2022, the bishop handed over, with joy in his heart, the leadership of the Diocese of Sanggau, in the province of West Kalimantan, to his Indonesian confrere, Valentinus Saeng, also a Passionist, who was ordained bishop in November 2022.

Msgr Mencuccini ended his missionary and pastoral service in Indonesia with emotion and gratitude, a nation to which he dedicated 48 years of his life, including 32 as bishop.

“I say goodbye to you with joy in my heart, I leave you in good hands”, he said to the faithful. Msgr Mencuccini sees the

presence of a new indigenous bishop (Valentinus Saeng is a Dayak indigenous) and also young (54 years old) as “a great blessing for our diocese of Sanggau”.

With Msgr Saeng’s appointment, all dioceses in Indonesia are now led by Indonesian bishops, with Mencuccini having been the last foreign bishop (and missionary) in the country.

The bishop remembers with enthusiasm the time of his mission in Borneo, which he accomplished with a particular dynamism, always moving a lot: “I often wanted to make several visits to all the villages of the diocese and participate fully in the cultural and traditional festivities of the different places, so that I can really be with the faithful. Their faces, their simplicity, their faith, all these beautiful memories will always remain in my heart. I told the faithful that I consider them, and will always consider them, as brothers and sisters in the same faith”.

“When I was chosen as bishop of the diocese of Sanggau,” he continues, I chose *Ministerium meum in ministrando* (It is my duty to serve) as my pastoral motto. In such a vast and densely forested territory, there were great difficulties in reaching remote areas. Over time, I realised that my pastoral service could even be “fun”, always surprising, never static, made many motorcycle trips, in the company of many young people”.

During the 48 years of his mission, the Catholic population of the two civil districts of Sanggau and Sekadau, which are part of the diocese, grew to about 340,000 faithful out of a total population of 700,000. The bishop said to the faithful: “Now it’s your turn: I hope you will be the salt, the light and the leaven in this diocese, walking together for the spiritual enrichment and human prosperity of all. I will always be close to you with my prayers”.

The people of the Sanggau and Sekadau districts sent many messages of deep gratitude to the bishop-motorcyclist. Local civil authorities also thanked him and recognised his meritorious work for the development of local communities, recalling the many churches, schools, kindergartens, social centres and structures for young people that he built and organised and which operates today for the benefit of the local community. — *Fides*



Missionary biker, Msgr Giulio Mencuccini, leaves West Kalimantan after 42 years.



# Starting them young

I left school decades ago but one of the proverbs or *peribahasa* I remember clearly till today is *Melentur buluh biarlah daripada rebungunya*. Literally translated, it means to bend the bamboo while it's still a shoot (when it's soft and pliable).

It refers to moulding someone's character while they are still young.

It still rings true for me after having gone through almost 36 years as a mother, and now grandmother, to three young ones aged between five months old and four years old. Not to mention the dozens of nephews and nieces I've had the privilege of engaging with throughout their early years.

When I was growing up, going to church every Sunday was mandatory, not an option that was negotiable. We went to church, sat quietly all in the same row, and went on to catechism classes when we started going to school. If we even tried to whisper to one another during Mass, we would incur the wrath of my mom or dad when we got home. Church was not a place for fun or play, period.

Fast forward decades later, my grandson's favourite line on a Sunday morning when he started talking used to be: "No church, no church" whenever he saw his mom laying out his clothes for Sunday Mass. He didn't find attending Mass interesting and I don't blame him for feeling that way. How do you make a toddler understand what it was all about?

While those aged six and above are allowed to go for children's liturgy during Mass, there is literally no engagement whatsoever for the younger ones.

Just last year, the church my daughter and family attend in Houston, Texas — Mary Queen Catholic Church — started its Friday Family Fun Ministry where activities are held once a month to engage families with children, even as young as toddlers.

I had the privilege of attending one of the Friday Family Fun gatherings where the children and their parents engaged in various activities for a couple of hours. The activities are mostly tailored to be all inclusive and fun for children and adults alike.



## FROM THE OTHER SIDE

Regina William

The one I attended was for board and card games, with toys being brought by families for the younger ones to share and play with. Among the activities lined up were treasure hunts, themed sessions like pancakes, pyjamas and prayers, pets and popsicles, taco about a fiesta where the sessions are tailored to be fun with elements of Christian values being included for the children.

Attending the Friday Family Fun Ministry has indeed been the game changer for my grandson William, who is four years old. Now, he no longer dreads going to church every Sunday, though he would ask his parents, "Are we going to church to play or pray?" At least now, he knows that he can have fun in church too, and make friends along the way.

He loves attending Mass on Sundays now, also partly because he gets his favourite chocolate covered doughnut at the Parish Centre as a treat when he behaves well during Mass. He has, since last year "graduated" from sitting in the cry room to joining the rest of the congregation. Hopefully, in a few years, his one-year-old sister will follow in his footsteps and sit with him and his parents.

The cry room, for me, is another important aspect which I think is overlooked by many parishes. While many would argue that there is no need for such a facility to be provided, I seriously believe that cry rooms can be a refuge for parents, especially those with infants/toddlers, to attend Mass "peacefully". How often do we see parents taking their babies or toddlers out of the church to pacify them so as to not "disrupt" the Mass.

As adults, we are equally guilty of feeling entitled to peace, quietness and orderliness at all times during Mass and crying



*We should be encouraging parents to bring their babies and toddlers to church at that age to participate in the Mass without having to leave at any time.*

children would often be construed as "misbehaving" in church.

I remember when the new Church of St Anne's in Bukit Mertajam was constructed, cry rooms were also included. Sadly, the next parish priest who came in decided it was unnecessary and did away with the cry rooms.

I remember my mum telling me that when I was an infant and screaming my head off in church, the priest asked my parents to take me out so as not to "disrupt" the Mass.

Many would argue that we never had these "comforts" in past years, and neither did we have air-conditioned churches back then.

Times have changed and we too need to change our outlook to be more inclusive of the younger ones.

To encourage families with infants and toddlers to attend Mass, the church my daughter attends here in the US has a

soundproof cry room with a nursing room for mothers to feed their infants. A mother feeding her child would not miss out following Mass as there are speakers in the nursing room. Besides that, there is also an attached bathroom with a diaper-changing table to boot.

Maybe it is time for churches in Malaysia to consider these facilities to be included in future building plans or even renovations/refurbishments being carried out in the years to come. We should be encouraging parents to bring their babies and toddlers to church at that age to participate in the Mass without having to leave at any time. A cry room would most definitely make them feel welcome.

Just thinking aloud.

● **Regina William** is an ex-journalist turned head of communications, now full-time grandmother to three, crisscrossing the globe to play the role.

## SOCIAL JUSTICE



## Making a Difference

Tony Magliano

Jesus was totally nonviolent. Any serious contextual reading of the Gospel reveals Jesus courageously, prophetically proclaiming the Kingdom of God — often amidst hostile opposition — while never resorting to violence.

"But to you who hear" said Jesus, "love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you."

So then, why does the headline here read, "And so we fight"? Because we, like Jesus, are indeed in a battle. But our response to the battle must not be waged with bullets and bombs; for our ultimate struggle is "not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness," against the spiritual forces of evil — that is, against Satan and his minions.

Therefore, we would be wise to adhere to the firm instruction of St Paul: "Put on the armour of God so that you may be able to

stand firm against the tactics of the devil," arming ourselves with the invincible spiritual weapons of truth, righteousness, the Gospel of peace, faith, salvation and the "sword of the Spirit," which is the Word of God. And of course, the sacraments, the various forms of prayer, and ongoing good works are also indispensable in our battle against evil (see: Eph 6:10-17).

But also, we must keep in mind that Satan and his forces of evil, using their powerful weapons of temptation, are very regularly assaulting us. Their aim is to destroy each of us — especially our eternal souls. A short, creatively helpful must-read here is *The Screwtape Letters*, by the late Anglican lay theologian C.S. Lewis.

But for the forces of evil to be successful, they require our cooperation, they require us to sin — especially to seriously sin.

Even a cursory observation of the world's state of affairs reveals how much unspeakable harm Satan and his minions have caused — with much of humanity's cooperation.

From abortion to euthanasia, from individual gun violence to mass shootings, from gang turf battles to national internal

## And so we fight!

armed conflicts, from all-out wars between countries to the real and present threat of global nuclear war, from widespread hunger and poverty to preventable diseases, from homelessness in our cities to refugees at our closed borders, from the modern slavery of human trafficking to child labour, from the pollution of our land, oceans and air to climate change and global warming, countless numbers of human beings clearly appear to be cooperating with the temptations of Satan — or are indifferent to them. In either case, the forces of evil are being allowed to wreak tremendous suffering upon humanity and humanity's earth-home.

A serious practice for Christians here should be to regularly pray for our ongoing conversions away from all of this sinfulness; to pray for a Gospel *metanoia*, meaning a total change of mind and heart toward love displayed by goodness, kindness, generosity, justice, nonviolence, peace and grace — that is, toward God.

And we should especially pray for those in government, corporate and social power who are seriously cooperating with the forces of darkness, to instead turn to the

light of Christ.

But while prayer is absolutely and indispensably essential in our struggle against evil, our active resistance to those humans who seriously cooperate with evil spiritual principalities and powers, is also absolutely and indispensably essential.

And so we fight!

We fight with the nonviolent weapons of disseminating truthful information, demonstrations at corporate facilities that make weapons of war or promote activities which cause climate change. We peacefully, prayerfully, provide an ongoing presence at abortion facilities. And we persistently email and call our political representatives, pressuring them to promote and pass legislation designed to protect all human life and dignity — with no exceptions.

In short, we must, non-violently, fight for the vulnerable, the poor, and the earth. And we must pray that those whose actions we oppose will discover the love of God!

● **Tony Magliano** is an internationally syndicated Catholic social justice and peace columnist. He can be reached at [tmag6@comcast.net](mailto:tmag6@comcast.net).





Fr Ron Rolheiser

# Lost innocence

The biblical story of Saul is one of the great tragedies in all of literature. Saul's story makes Hamlet look like a Disney character. Hamlet, at least, had good reasons for the bitterness that beset him. Saul, given what he started with, should have fared better, much better.

His story begins with the announcement that, in all of Israel, none measured up to him in height, strength, goodness, or acclaim. A natural leader, a prince among peers; his extraordinary character was recognised and proclaimed by the people. They made him their king. The beginning of his story is the stuff of fairy tales, and it goes on in this way for a while.

However, at a point, things begin to sour. That point was the arrival of David on the scene — a man younger, more handsome, more-gifted, and more-acclaimed than he was. Jealousy sets in and envy begins to poison Saul's soul. Looking at David, he sees only a popularity that eclipses his own, not another man's goodness, nor indeed what that goodness offers to others. Instead, he grows bitter, petty, hostile, tries to kill David, and eventually dies by his own hand, an angry man who has fallen far from the innocence and goodness of his youth.

What happened here? How does someone who has so much going for him — goodness, talent, acclaim, power, blessing — grow into a bitter, petty man who ends up taking his own life? How does it happen? The late Margaret Laurence, in a brilliant, dark novel, *The Stone Angel*, offers a good description of how this happens and how it happens in ways that are hidden to the one undergoing the transition.

Her main character, Hagar Shipley, is a "Saul" of sorts. Hagar's story begins like his: She is young, innocent, and full of potential. What's to become of such a beautiful, bright,



How can we, imperceptible to ourselves, grow into someone we don't know or like?

talented, young woman? Sadly, not much at all. She drifts into everything: adulthood, an unhappy marriage, and into a deep unrecognised and unspoken disappointment that eventually leaves her slovenly, frigid, bitter, and without energy or ambition. What's as remarkable as sad is that she doesn't see any of this herself. In her mind, she remains the young, innocent, gracious, popular, attractive young girl she once was in high school. She doesn't notice how small her world has become, how few real friends she has, how little she admires anything or anyone, or even how physically unkempt she has become.

Her awakening is sudden and cruel. One winter day, shabbily dressed in an old parka, she rings the doorbell of a house where she is delivering some eggs. A bright young child

answers the door and Hagar overhears the child tell her mother: That horrible, old egg-woman is at the door! The penny drops.

Stunned, she leaves the house and finds her way to a public bathroom where she turns on all the lights and studies her face in a mirror. What looks back is a face she doesn't recognise, someone pathetically at odds with whom she imagines herself to be. She sees in fact the horrible, old egg-woman that the child saw at the door rather than the young, gracious, attractive, big-hearted woman that she imagines herself still to be. "How can this have happened?" she asks herself. How can we, imperceptible to ourselves, grow into someone we don't know or like?

In some way, it happens to all of us. It's not easy to age, to accept the fall from what we dreamed for ourselves, to watch the young

take over and receive the popularity and acclaim that once were ours. Like Saul, we can fill with a jealousy that we don't recognise, and like Hagar, we can grow bitter and ugly without knowing it. Others, of course, do notice.

It's not that we don't gain something as this happens. Usually we grow smarter, wiser in the ways of the world, and remain good-hearted, generous people. However, we tend to be nastier than we once were, whine too much, feel too sorry for ourselves, and give ourselves over more to curse rather than bless those who have replaced us, the young, the popular, the acclaimed.

And so, the penultimate spiritual and human task of the second half of life is to give up this jealousy and ugliness and come back again to the love, innocence, and goodness of our youth, to revirginise, move towards a second naiveté, and begin again to admire something.

At the beginning of the *Book of Revelations*, John, purporting to speak for God, has some advice for us, at least for those of us beyond the bloom of youth: "I've seen how hard you work. I recognise your generosity and all the good work you do, but I have this against you — you have less love in you now than when you were young! Go back and look from where you have fallen!"

We might want to hear this from Scripture before we overhear it from some young girl telling her mother that some dour, bitter, old person is at the door.

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## Let's make the Beatitudes our guide for Lent

Lent, that time of sombre reflection, has begun. Many of us, after years of warmed-over helpings of pulpit porridge calling us to penance and fasting, might be ready for a new approach. Maybe something a little edgier than giving up chocolates or the occasional beer to connect to the world's suffering.

These days, who needs to be reminded of suffering? In a world of 24/7 digital media, we all bear witness to almost unspeakable tragedies daily. Yet, if your life is like mine, in a cushy suburb with a loving family, realities like homelessness, the war in Ukraine, and the environmental catastrophes piling up everywhere can feel at once both overwhelming and distant.

We can do something to close the gap between us and those living on what Pope Francis calls the margins of society. We can also act to make the overwhelming manageable in our own communities and neighbourhoods.

I believe the Church has something critically important to offer in all of this, especially during Lent. We all deeply hunger for unifying, sacramental, even mystical experiences that can reveal the sweetness of the Gospel, the Word that makes a difference in our lives.

As Catholics, we traditionally do our Lenten inner work through a discipline of fasting, prayer and almsgiving. Turns out, the discipline of fasting is now actually a "thing" in the non-churchgoing crowd, with

measurable health and wellness benefits. Meditation and prayer are go-to practices by many who seek a calm-fix, or something more lasting, in the midst of hectic lives. Giving to worthy causes is something we all reflexively do when called to respond, be it for an animal shelter down the street or for earthquake victims in Syria or Turkey.

### So what's left for the Catholic in Lent?

Perhaps the answer lies at the heart of our Gospel. Maybe this Lent, as we step away from the busyness to do some inner work, as we try to more closely align how we see with how Jesus sees, the Beatitudes would be a good starting point.

Jesus saw the world through a lens trained on the poor, the sorrowful, the meek, the powerless, the cast out and thrown-away, the persecuted, the insulted. He offered them hope by His word and action. We can hear His words in the Beatitudes. And with compassion, He would "cross the street," go to their side of the road and be with the poor in spirit where they live. What if we use this Lent to learn more about His approach, and about Him?

The mystical experience we Catholics hunger for today is not otherworldly, but is right here.

Let's imagine Jesus here, and start as He would start, go where He might go and invite His instinct to become our own. Let this be the Lenten fruit that ripens by Easter.

Here are a few suggestions for reviving

and updating our Lenten practice this year.

● **Fast purposefully.** Fast to see through the eyes of the homeless, hungry, naked, imprisoned, thrown-away, mentally ill or addicted, bullied, the people God especially loves.

● Fast from comfort: Switch off the air-conditioner/fan and sleep without a blanket — as a way to feel what the homeless feel at night.

● Fast from sleep, for a night or two — in solidarity with those who don't or can't have a peaceful moment to close their eyes — who today must live in fear for their basic safety. Fast from the rest and safety of our normal lives, to sense the risks, the fatigue, the anxiety of not knowing where next week's rent money will come from, or if a stray bullet will enter my window tonight or when the next missile attack will happen.

● Fast from the confidence of feeling clean: Go without a bath/shower, for a day, or two, or three ... and feel the buildup of whatever it is that our unhoused or imprisoned brothers and sisters have no choice but to endure.

● **Pray expectantly.** Invite God to share the flood of feelings and insights your fasting will surely bring about.

● Notice the difference between your "normal" and the normal of those who have no option but live it perpetually.

● Bring your fasting experiences

(fatigue, cold, irritability, discomfort, pain, maybe shame or guilt) as an offering to God.

● Be open to being changed. In fact, hope for it.

● Offer God your fast as a symbol of your desire to be his change agent.

● **Respond generously.** Let your fasting and prayer bear fruit by responding creatively, intelligently, compassionately, immediately.

● Almsgiving doesn't have to be about money. Make it about what money represents, which is the potential power to effect change. Give your power, mine your potential, and give generously, and immediately — as immediately as you would to your lover, or to your child, or to your aging elder, or to a friend whom you love, when they come to you needing what you have to give.

● Respond with immediacy, with the instinct to drop everything, because now is the only time that matters.

The mystical experience we Catholics hunger for today is not otherworldly, but is right here. It will be the fruit of compassion, born from purposeful fasting, prayer and creative alms focused on those whom God especially loves, the people Jesus sees in the Beatitudes.

By Easter, the fruit will ripen, the taste will be sweet, and the bite juicy and overflowing. — **By Antonio Remedios, NCR**



# Little Catholics' Corner

Hello children,

Readings for the second Sunday of Lent focus on our personal encounter with God.

The first reading tells of how Abraham encountered God and trusted in the call he heard. The psalm is "Lord, let Your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in You," which echoes the theme of trust heard in the first reading.

The second reading reminds us that God is always present in our lives, giving us strength.

The Gospel recounts the story of the Transfiguration, when Peter, James, and John encountered Jesus in all His glory.

He shone as bright as the sun - so bright they could hardly look at Him. But what they saw was only a tiny bit of the true glory of God.

Jesus gave this experience to the three Apostles just a little while before He went to Jerusalem to suffer and die on the cross. He knew they would be terrified and very sad when He died so He gave them a preview of the glory He would go back to, after He rose from the dead. That way they knew they had a reason to hope even when He was crucified.

Love Aunty Gwen

Lent is a special time for us to repent for our wrongdoings by fasting and giving our lives more fully to God during the 40 days. It is a "spring cleaning" of our lives spiritually.

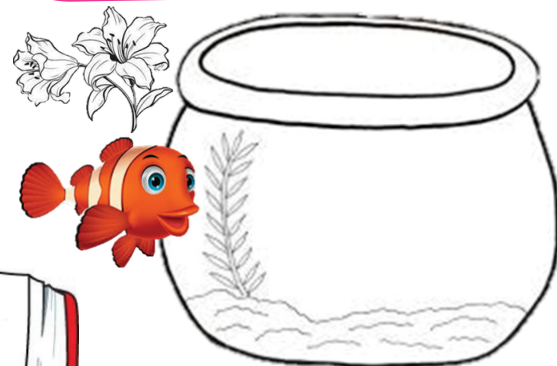
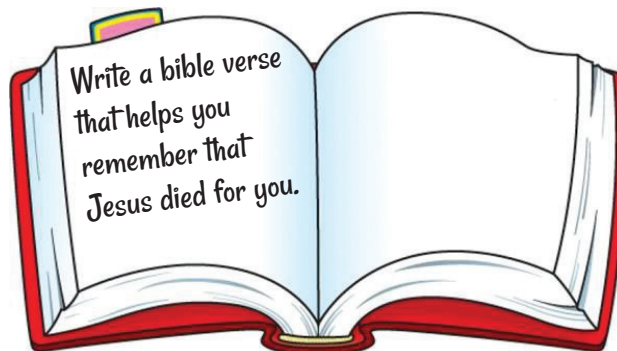


Jesus prayed in the Gardens of Gethsemane. We too must remember to say extra prayers during Lent. I will pray for.....



## lent

prepares our hearts and minds for Easter



Draw a fish in the bowl as a reminder to fast during Lent.

Catholics practise almsgiving during Lent to show we are grateful for God's blessings to us and to share our gifts with the unfortunate.



The colour purple reminds us that Lent is a sombre season and we are to think of Jesus' passion. Draw a picture of your favourite item that is purple.

I will offer the Lord.....

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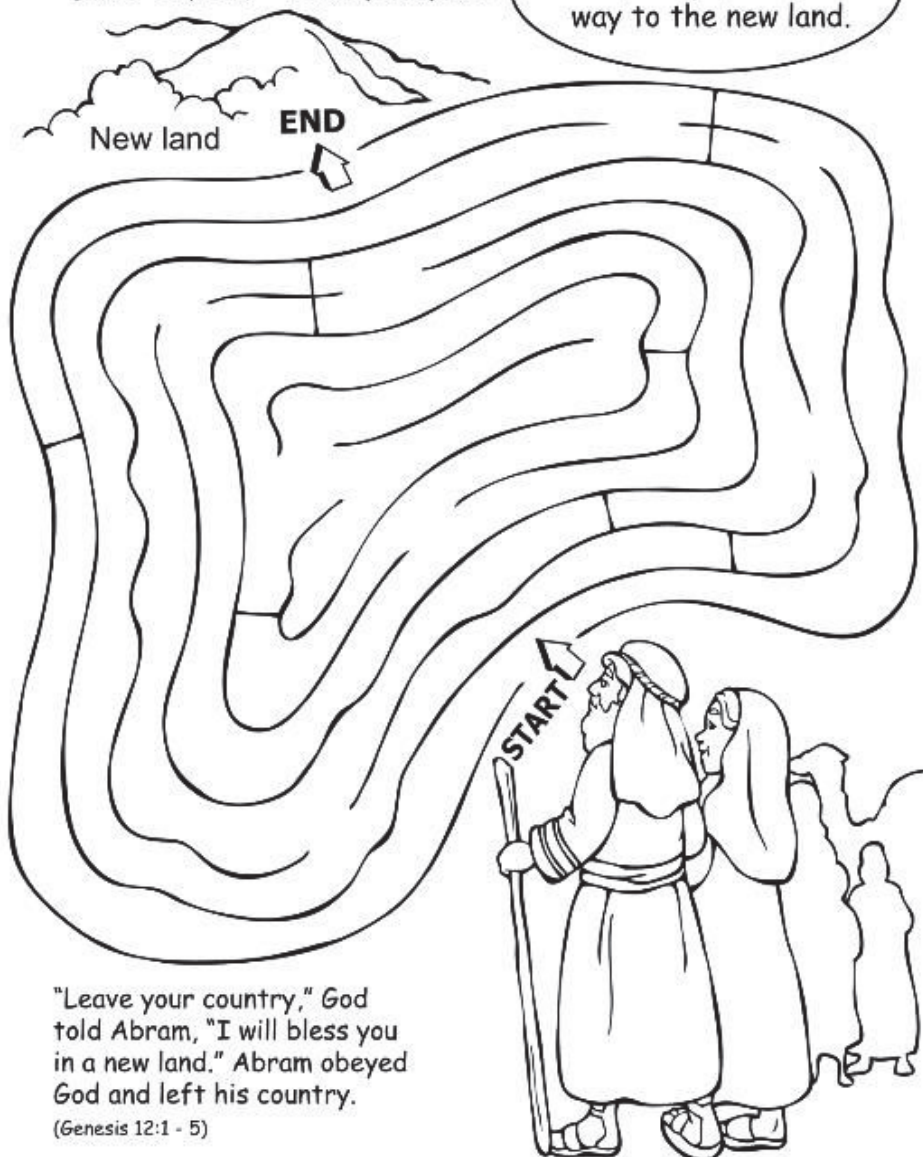
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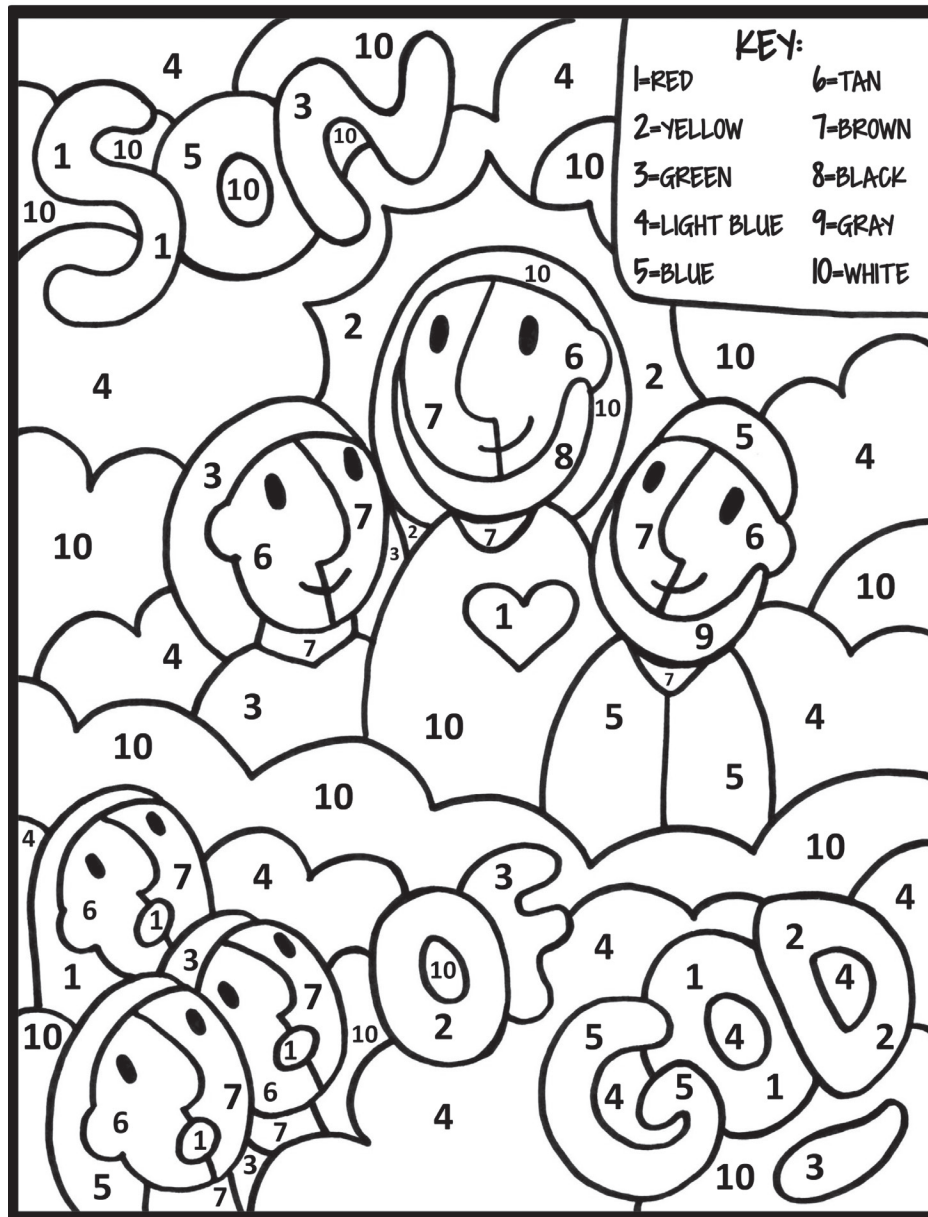
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## THE NEW BEGINNING

Help Abram and his family find their way to the new land.



"Leave your country," God told Abram, "I will bless you in a new land." Abram obeyed God and left his country. (Genesis 12:1 - 5)





# YOUTH

MARCH 5, 2023

## Congo to send 500 kids to World Youth Day in Portugal

KINSHASA, Congo: At least 500 young Congolese are expected in Lisbon (Portugal) this summer. Preparations for the World Youth Day (WYD) were launched in the 48 dioceses of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in July 2022 in order to promote strong participation from the youth. The theme of the meeting will be: *Mary rose up and went with haste* (Luke 1, 39).

"Registration forms have been sent to all the dioceses," assures Fr Zéphyrin Ligopi, secretary of the Episcopal Commission for the Apostolate of the Laity (ACEAL) and national coordinator of the preparations for WYD.

"There are even a dozen dioceses that have already sent the list of their pilgrims."

For the secretary of ACEAL, the major difficulty remains the socio-economic crisis

suffered by the youth, who form the majority of the Congolese people - nearly 65 per cent of the population is under 25 years old. "Despite this, the DRC will be present at the 2023 WYD in Lisbon," he assures.

In the diocese of Butembo-Beni in eastern DRC, a region that has experienced a serious security crisis for the past 25 years, young people are counting on the Church to give them the opportunity to participate in WYD, which will open them up a bit more to the rest of the world.

"Few are able to afford the travel costs," explains Kambale Mandela, coordinator of the Catholic Youth Union in the diocese of Butembo-Beni.

"Until then, we are continuing with awareness-raising and registrations that are tenta-

tively being made," he said. The participation fee is \$2,500 (RM10,805), a sum that many young people cannot afford to pay. So, they rely on the dioceses and people of good will.

In the diocese of Lubumbashi, in the south of the country, the awareness and registration period has already ended. A total of 47 youth will participate in the WYD in Lisbon. Fr Alphonse Abedi, priest of this diocese on the border with Zambia, assures us that "the number could be even higher, but certain criteria have been respected".

In Goma, the capital of the province of North Kivu, in eastern DRC, on the border with Rwanda, the youths' motivation to go to WYD is very strong. The diocesan youth ministry of Goma is in the information and registration phase, which should be completed by

the end of February.

"We are giving enough time because the vast majority of our young people are unemployed and do not have the necessary means," says Father Olivier Nshuti, diocesan youth chaplain.

"In collaboration with the young people of the Neocatechumenal Way, as well as a few volunteers, we are close to 90 young people," he states.

Preempting the temptation of some young people to take advantage of this trip to stay in Europe, the chaplain warns: "The young person must have a good intention and the will to return to the country, especially at this time of migratory crises, and also to pay the participation fee." — **By Prisca Materanya, LCI** (<https://international.la-croix.com/>)

## Team leaders join in a pilgrimage to Fátima



(WYD Lisbon 2023 Photo/Sebastião Roxo)

LISBON: The volunteer team leaders made a pilgrimage to the Shrine of Fátima. The starting point was the river beach of Olhos d'Água that "came alive on Saturday morning, February 18, when it welcomed the group of young people", said Camila Gonçalves, a young team leader.

Along the way there was space for prayer, for sharing and also for moments of entertainment and leisure. In addition, the team leaders were able to hear two testimonies: that of Madalena Fontoura, a psychologist by training, and that of Bartosz, a long-term volunteer for World Youth Day (WYD) Lisbon 2023.

Madalena spoke about the true meaning of this pilgrimage and the service that will be entrusted to the team leaders of volunteers during the week of WYD Lisbon 2023. Camila also said that, during this testimony, "we were asked to look at the

footprints that guide us, where we placed our feet and to think about where we found Jesus".

Bartosz gave his personal testimony about his first participation in a World Youth Day and the mission that he feels he has had since then. He also spoke to the group of team leaders about the importance of trusting in God and how this trust "can never end".

When they arrived at the parish church of Covão do Coelho, the Eucharist was celebrated and there was also time for a last moment of reflection before they rested. The night was then spent in the Covão do Coelho parish hall, before continuing on their way to Fátima on Sunday morning.

When they arrived at the Shrine of Our Lady of the Rosary of Fatima, "we formed a chain and walked in silence through part

of the enclosure, thanking everyone symbolically for having managed to arrive together", said Camila Gonçalves.

For Sandra Bileu, from the parish of Our Lady of the Incarnation in Ameixoeira, and Margarida Castro Lopes, from the parish of Carnide, this pilgrimage was important for their training as "it is important for a team leader to have contact with other realities and other team leaders", to "share experiences and also foster the spirit of mutual help".

In addition, they also highlighted the importance of walking as a group, since "it is we, all together, who will build this event". Despite the "great challenge" to be a team leader during WYD Lisbon 2023, "we are super willing to receive, welcome, participate, have fun and be there with each other, with God and with the Pope at World Youth Day," they stressed. — **Lisboa.org**

## CONFESSION AT THE PARK OF FORGIVENESS

LISBON: This will be the confessional where pilgrims can go to Confession at the Park of Forgiveness, during the week of WYD Lisbon 2023!

The aesthetic minimalism of the structure and the very materials used in the construction of the confessionals represent the Church in its simplicity.

It is a simple and small structure, with a silhouette referring to the design of a house, where God invites us to enter to welcome and forgive us, reminiscent of the typical houses of some regions of Portugal, white in colour where a yellow stripe stands out.

The Cross, slightly inclined, also reminds one of a cross to carry, like the one Jesus carried on His *Via Crucis*, where He carried the weight of our sins to save us!

O Forgiveness Park will have 150 confessionals built by Portuguese inmates, and the protocol will be made official tomorrow, with a ceremony at the headquarters of WYD Lisbon 2023. — **WYD Lisbon/Lisboa.org**





# Youth collaborate to digitise Christian music

KUCHING: EMPOWERED Music Team and the Kuching Archdiocesan Youth Commission (KAYC) recently came together for a collaborative effort to digitise music sheets.

Over the course of three nights, more than 20 young people from groups such as the FLAME Youth Group, Kuching Young Christian Students (KYCS), and

members of KAYC, along with the EMPOWERED Music Team, participated in the event held at the St Thomas Room in St Joseph's Cathedral Parish Centre.

The purpose of this project was to digitise public domain Christian worship songs and music resources for the Order of the Mass, making them readily available for use by various lay

groups within the Kuching Archdiocese.

The digital music sheets will be managed and stored in a digital repository by KAYC for use by any youth groups within the Archdiocese.

Contact KAYC at 082-237 237 or 016-889 3237, or via email at [kchadyouth.office@gmail.com](mailto:kchadyouth.office@gmail.com) for info. — *Today's Catholic*



## Preparing for diocesan youth festival



*The organising committee meeting online.*

SANDAKAN: Members of the Sandakan Diocese Youth Apostolate (SDYA) met online recently to discuss the second series of the Sandakan Diocesan Youth Festival (TBK 2). The first series was held in August 2019, with the participation of 450 youths from all over Sandakan diocese.

This meeting was to discuss organising activities and programmes at the diocese level. After almost two years of virtual activity, the youth were excited to come together and embrace the friendship.

SDYA took this initiative to jointly organise the second series of the Diocesan Youth Festival that will be held from Aug 28 till Sept 1 at St Mary's Cathedral. The theme is *Mary*

*arose and went with haste*, taken from Luke 1:39.

The Main Organising Team (MOT) had their first virtual meeting on Jan 25 to highlight the issues faced by the youths in their respective places and the rationale for organising TBK 2.

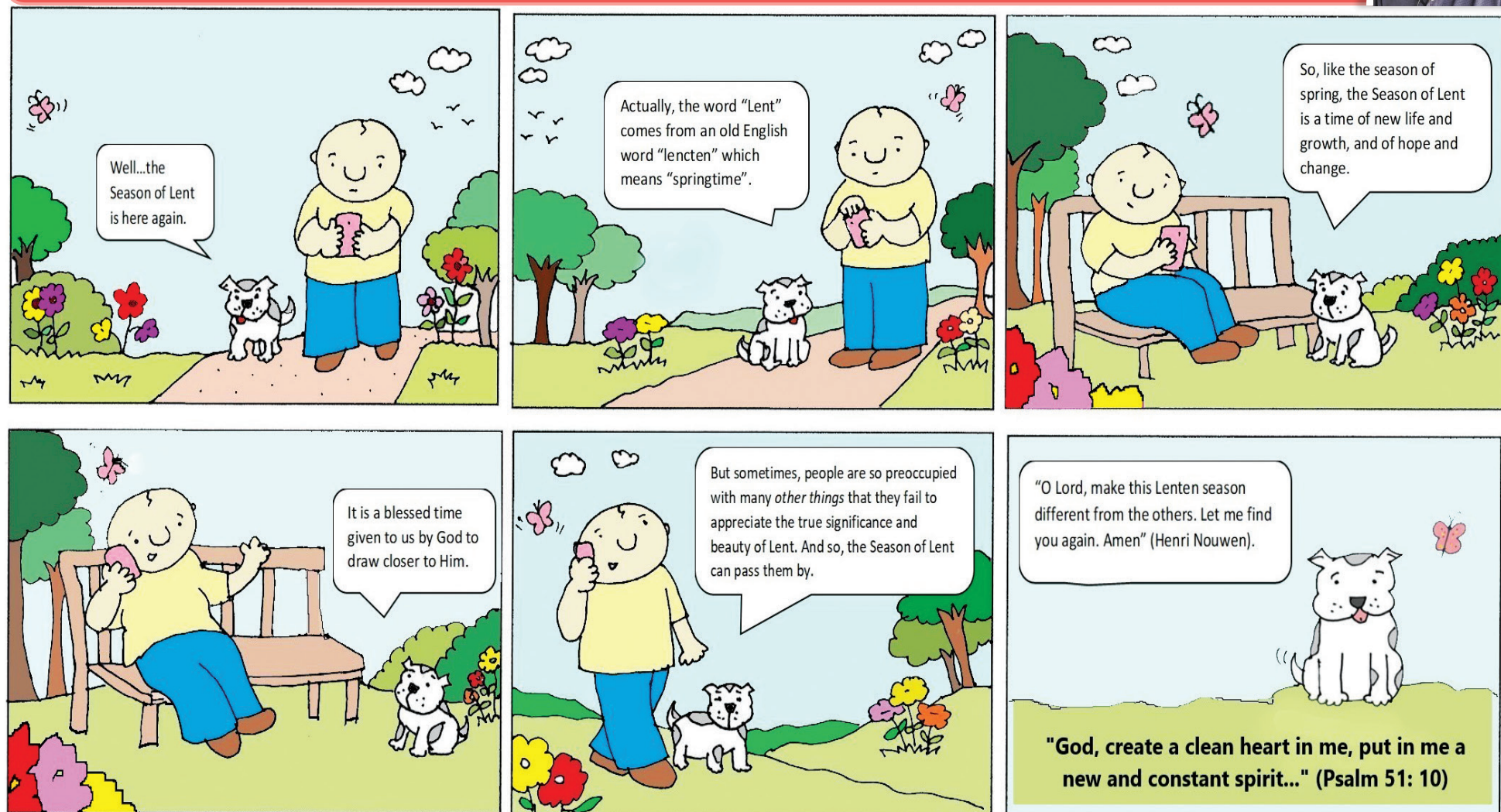
Among the youth, there are those who desire to serve but do not know how or where to begin. There are also those who are comfortable in their space and not active in their parish. The MOT agreed that these issues need to be addressed so that the youths will not drift away.

We pray that the main organising team of TBK 2 be given the wisdom to see, evaluate and plan programmes according to the current needs. — *TBK2 Multimedia and Publicity Team*

## THE SIMPLE LIFE... by Dr Steven Selvaraju



Created by Dr Steven Selvaraju, this is a comic strip that wishes to tell simple stories of life and faith.





## MEMORIAM

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# A father figure with a 'shepherd's heart'



Bishop David O'Connell is seen in 2019 with young adults at a Mass celebrating the 40th anniversary of his priesthood, at St. John Vianney Church in Hacienda Heights. (San Gabriel Valley Tribune/Michael Ramirez)

CALIFORNIA: Devoted, humble, "down to earth" and a "father figure" — this was how many young Catholics describe the late Auxiliary Bishop David O'Connell.

Santa Ana resident Beverli Reyna said he "genuinely cared" about people. Being a bishop — one of the highest clergy rankings in the Roman Catholic Church — made him that much more "approachable," no matter your age, race, what you believe or where you come from.

"He was always very invested, driving himself, even showing up at the small parish events," she said. "You could tell that he was always interested in our well-being to grow as young adults, in community. It always made me want to do more in my faith."

O'Connell's sudden death stunned many in the Roman Catholic faith who worked with and encountered him throughout his ministry. And that includes the Church's youth and young adult community, whom the bishop was closely connected with.

On February 18, authorities found O'Connell, 69, dead by gunshot wound at his Hacienda Heights home. The suspect, whom officials say had previously worked at the bishop's home and whose wife was the bishop's housekeeper, has since been arrested.

O'Connell was named an auxiliary bishop for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles by Pope Francis in 2015, and was assigned to oversee the San Gabriel Valley region. Officials said he served as a priest and later bishop in the archdiocese for 45 years.

Local Catholics say that O'Connell's deep dedication to ministering to young people — along with involvement in region-wide Church initiatives and ministries — was what made him genuine and accessible.

Young adult Michael Ramirez has been working with O'Connell for years, as part of a regional council representing different parishes in the area. He and a group of volunteers had regular meetings with the bishop at his office in Irwindale. Ramirez said a meeting was scheduled for that Saturday — the day the bishop was killed — but he never showed.

"We were worried because he hadn't responded, and he never missed our meetings without communicating," said Ramirez, who lives in Gardena. "We were going to discuss a new project he wanted to start that would teach people to be peacemakers. That's who he was; always so enthusiastic, starting and supporting new initiatives... everyone who met him felt close to him because of his tenderness. You felt like he really saw you (and) knew you."

Ramirez and other young adults said that O'Connell was always involved in ministry events throughout the area; from parish retreats and Bible

studies, to big public Masses and displays of faith. The bishop sometimes celebrated open Masses, including one on Huntington Beach, with the goal of evangelising and getting peoples' attention.

He often visited the poor and homeless on Skid Row, supported immigration reform programmes, was known to drop by L.A.-area Catholic schools and raise funds to help keep them open, and gave passionate talks at conferences packed with youth. He helped establish several community-style homes for young men and women, and often held retreats for them. His office often had a line out the door, full of young people waiting to talk to him.

As local churches and fellowship events were shut down during the pandemic, O'Connell would share video messages to stay connected and encourage young Catholics, stuck in their homes, to remain faithful.

"Bishop Dave saw the loneliness, the hurt, the effect of brokenness from our culture on young people, and he had a heart to bring healing to these places," Ramirez said. "He pursued youth and young adults in the Church with a father's heart, a shepherd's heart."

Ramirez also said that the bishop — who was born in County Cork, Ireland — had a "deep Irish humour," sometimes joking about being a "wild young adult himself."

"He'd use humour to teach the Gospel, the message of Jesus, and share his deep devotion to Our Lady, to the Divine Mercy," he said. "He always broke down barriers and was so down to earth; he never exalted himself."

Laura Corza, a parishioner at St John Neumann church in Irvine, said that the bishop "had a heart for people," regardless of their race, creed, legal status or other factors.

Mariela Arellano said she first met O'Connell in her later teen years, and watched him grow his ministry by working closely with immigrants and young people. She called O'Connell a "man of action, who always showed up; never boasting."

Studies have shown more youth and young adults — including those who are baptised — are leaving the Catholic Church in droves. Those who knew Bishop O'Connell said he encouraged many young people to find their hope and reason to stay.

— **By Allyson Vergara, Los Angeles Daily News**

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Lawerance Balachandran  
13.02.1959 – 26.02.2017

## 6th Anniversary In Loving Memory of

Here's to our gentle giant,  
forever in our hearts.  
Today marks another year since  
our Lord called you back into heaven.  
Years have passed,  
but the mark you left on this world  
will never fade away.  
We will always cherish  
the beautiful memories,  
never ending love, humility,  
invaluable lessons,  
unique humour, and words of wisdom.  
This journey without you is hard,  
but we know you're watching over us.  
We will forever miss you,  
our dear Johnny Cash.  
May your sweet soul rest  
in God's eternal kingdom.

Deeply missed and cherished by  
the LB family and loved ones

## 14th Anniversary M. M. Chandapillai



Departed: 11-03-2009

"Darling Papa, We miss you.  
We are comforted with the thought  
that you are always watching over  
us. We are truly doing our best to  
make you proud of us and to live  
up to all that you had wanted for  
us. Your sacrifice and  
unconditional love are always in  
our minds and hearts and for that,  
we thank you Papa.  
We love and miss you."

Always  
Your Family

## 12th Anniversary In Loving Memory of



Mr Jagarow Rathinam  
s/o Anthony Rathinam

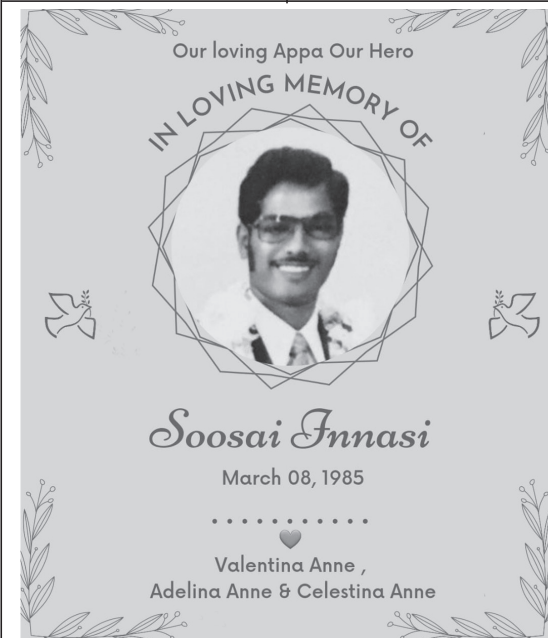
Departed: 06-03-2011

To live is to love with  
all our heart. The greatest  
thing in all his life was  
serving you, Heavenly  
Father. Please grant him  
eternal Rest and Blessings.

Deeply missed  
and remembered by  
Family & Loved ones.

Peace I  
leave with  
you; my  
peace I give  
to you. Not  
as the world  
gives do I  
give to you.  
Let not your  
hearts be  
troubled,  
neither let  
them be  
afraid.

John 14:27



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# Will you pray 10 Hail Marys for the Pope?

ROME: No other phrase has been repeated by Pope Francis more than the seven words he utters at the end of almost every speech he has delivered since his election as pontiff in March 2013.

“Do not forget to pray for me!”

When he first appeared on the loggia of St Peter’s Basilica on the night of his election, Francis stunned the world by asking those gathered in the square below to pray for him — an unconventional gesture signalling that something was shifting in this new papacy.

At the end of every Sunday *Angelus*, before wishing everyone an enjoyable lunch, Francis makes the same request. And even when world leaders come to visit, he often bids them farewell with the same reminder.

Last October, when French President Emmanuel Macron and his wife, Brigitte, visited the Pope, he parted ways with his signature sign-off, and the First Lady of France quickly responded: “I pray for you every day.”

Now — on the eve of the 10-year anniversary of his election as pontiff — a new initiative is underway asking Catholics around the world to commit to doing just that and making good on the Pope’s request.

“The Petrine ministry is a grace that God grants to His Church, and the 10th anniversary of the pontificate of Pope Francis is an occasion to thank God for the gift of a pastor,” said Msgr Lucio Ruiz, secretary of the Vatican’s Dicastery for Communication. “We must remember that it is a gift.”

And the gift that Ruiz, who is spearheading the anniversary initiative, wants Catholics to give in return is an outpouring of prayers — specifically, Hail Marys — next month on the day of the anniversary of his election, March 13.

“A significant date like this gives us an oppor-



A new website was launched February 13 where visitors can commit to signing up to offer their prayers on Pope Francis’ behalf on March 13, the day of the 10th anniversary of his election as pontiff. (NCR screenshot/Decimus-annus.org)

tunity to remember in our hearts what it means to be a Church on pilgrimage with Peter, as Jesus wanted,” he told me.

Those prayers come at a critical time: In recent months, the successor of Peter has been under attack by those inside the Vatican not aligned with his pastoral priorities. At 86 years old, he struggles with mobility issues, but Francis has dismissed his naysayers and indicated he will press ahead with a full agenda, including presiding over two major summits in Rome in October 2023 and 2024 and pursuing travel plans to far-flung destinations like Mongolia and India.

Ruiz, who for over two decades has been

working to evangelise in digital environments, both in his native Latin America and in Rome, said the idea for the project came from the “digital missionaries” who took part in the synodal meetings, an effort that sought to hold virtual dialogues during the first phase of the ongoing synod consultation process last fall. At the time, a group of about 250 Catholic digital influencers sent out questionnaires to some 115 countries, resulting in more than 150,000 responses and proposals.

Building on the success of the online community created from the synod, Ruiz’s “digital missionaries” began considering how to mark the 10-year anniversary of Francis’ election.

“This campaign seeks to respond to this request for prayer made by Pope Francis throughout these 10 years of his pontificate, so that on March 13 we can offer our prayers for him from different parts of the world, representing the universality of the Church, a response that also comes from the digital world,” said Ruiz.

On Feb 13, a new website was launched where, in about 10 seconds, visitors can commit to signing up to offer their prayers on Pope Francis’ behalf on March 13. Upon doing so, a little candle will appear on the virtual map displaying digital solidarity with Pope Francis around the globe.

Despite being launched less than a week ago, more than 45,000 prayers have been committed from every continent (minus Antarctica). More than 700 digital influencers have been using their networks to promote the campaign and these digital missionaries are looking for more disciples to spread the word.

“It is a symbolic gesture but one that wishes to express the unity of the Church around its pastor, with the most important gifts of prayer and unity,” said Ruiz, who says that the initiative shows that the Church is trying to speak the language of the culture.

“We know that being at the head of the whole Church is a mission that can only be carried out and sustained by the grace of the Holy Spirit and with the prayers of all the faithful,” he added.

“This awareness of being in need of the support of the prayer of the people of God has always accompanied him throughout his pontificate,” Ruiz added — hence the Pope’s constant plea: “Do not forget to pray for me!” — **By Christopher White, NCR**

To sign up, go to <https://www.decimus-annus.org/>

## Indonesian cardinal wants Catholics to fight trafficking during Lent

JAKARTA: Indonesian Cardinal Ignatius Suharyo Hardjoatmodjo has called on Catholics to fight the scourge of human trafficking during this Season of Lent.

Hardjoatmodjo termed human trafficking as “one of the greatest crimes against humanity, which directly contradicts the ideals of the common good” in a pastoral letter issued ahead of Lent.

“Our poorest, most vulnerable and disabled sisters, as well as women of all ages and children, migrants, refugees and our sisters who come from disharmonious families, are very vulnerable to being exploited by human trafficking practices,” the prelate stated in the letter read at Sunday Mass throughout the archdiocese on February 19.

He wanted Catholics to fight the crime and said poverty causes many to become victims of human trafficking.

“Help our less fortunate brothers and sisters,” the cardinal said.

The Indonesian church leader urged Catholics to help poor people get formal or informal jobs in micro, small and medium enterprises.

Catholics can also provide them with skills, capital, and technical assistance to create new jobs. They can also create awareness in society and families about the dangers of human



trafficking, he said.

The cardinal’s Lenten pastoral letter focused on human trafficking as the Indonesian Church has accelerated efforts to fight the evil.

The Church people started an anti-trafficking group in 2018 and are now part of the Zero Human Trafficking Network (ZHTN).

A meeting of the network last December requested the cardinal to support the campaign.

Gabriel Goa Sola from ZHTN, who attended the meeting, said he was very happy that the cardinal had finally voiced his concerns.

He said the cardinal’s statement became important because there were attempts to intimidate activists against trafficking in per-

sons, such as what happened to Fr Chrisanctur Paschalis Saturnus, head of the Migrant and Overseas Pastoral Peace Justice Commission of Pangkalpinang diocese who recently faced a police report from a state official for accusing him of complicity in trafficking.

“The cardinal pastor’s letter makes humanitarian fighters against the human trafficking mafia, such as Fr Paschal, even bolder in real Lenten action to defend the voice of the voiceless,” he said.

Sola said he also hoped that the cardinal’s statement could open the eyes and conscience of other religious figures to speak up about the issue.

He said that officials who back trafficking must be arrested and prosecuted, and the state must form the National Agency for Combating the Crime of Trafficking in Persons.

He also said the government needs to review the 2007 law on the Crime of Trafficking in Persons, which only targeted field actors, not the backers.

The Christian-majority province of East Nusa Tenggara is the largest contributor to victims of human trafficking, as many migrant workers work abroad through illegal channels, according to ZHTN. — **By Ryan Dagur, ucanews.com**

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