

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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HERALD, April 21, 2024

61st World Day of Prayer for Vocations

Called to sow seeds of hope and to build peace



A Call to the Youth and the Importance of Prayer

Addressing the spiritual crisis of young people in shaping the future, Pope Francis exhorted a special assembly of youth to engage their vocations by engaging with Jesus through the Gospel. He reassured them that Christ respects our freedom, preparing rather than imposing, and that true happiness lies in responding to His call. Moreover, the Pope stressed the importance of prayer in discerning our vocation, encouraging daily engagement with God's voice in Scripture, liturgy and the sacraments of peace.

The Synodal Character of Vocations
The Pope's reflection on the synodal nature of Christian vocation emphasises the importance of consensus and discernment in preparing together. This approach not only aids in discernment and discerning our vocation but also in discerning the direction the Holy Spirit is guiding the Church for the common good. The upcoming Jubilee Year theme, "Pilgrims of Hope," is highlighted as an opportunity to embrace the message of unity, charity, and fraternity, showcasing the Church's commitment to being a beacon of hope and peace in a fractured world.

Embracing Our Vocation
In embracing his message, Pope Francis exhorts all Christians to rise from indifference and actively pursue their vocation, following Christ to guide their steps. By committing passionately to life and saving the world around us, we become more and more people of hope, bearing the Gospel message of hope and peace, even amidst the challenges and crises of our times. As we prepare for the Jubilee with a Year of Prayer, let us commit ourselves to being instruments of God's love, sowing seeds of hope, and building peace wherever we find ourselves.

The Pilgrimage of Hope
Central to Pope Francis' message is the concept of Christian life as a pilgrimage—a journey marked by continuous discovery, challenge, and renewal. By living out faith in the daily life of Christ, the journey of our vocation is meaningful and transformative. The Pope calls us and Catholics to view their life as a perpetual journey towards a world characterised by peace, justice, and love, driven by the hope that emanates from Christ's Resurrection. This pilgrimage is not a solitary endeavour but a shared journey, where Christians are called to listen to each other and move forward together, recognising and valuing the diverse gifts each person brings.

Get a copy of the eight-page supplement on Vocations Sunday in this issue.

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

1 John 3:1



All on board for a destiny of love and mercy

P5



Sowing seeds of change

P6



She lives in the hearts and minds of her 'children'

P12

Pope inaugurates 'School of Prayer'

VATICAN: Pope Francis surprised everyone by personally leading catechism classes at St John Vianney parish on the outskirts of Rome to inaugurate his "School of Prayer," engaging with children preparing for their First Holy Communion.

The unannounced visit took place after school on April 11, where he freely responded to numerous questions and encouraged the children to embrace their faith and turn to God in prayer, both in good times and in bad.

The Pope offered a brief catechesis on the topic of the prayer of thanksgiving, emphasising that it is one of the most important in the Christian life.

Pictures from the meeting posted on social media show the Holy Father happily greeting the children and even giving them playful "high fives."

Archbishop Rino Fisichella, pro-prefect of the Dicastery for Evangelisation's section for new evangelisation, which is coordinating preparations for the Holy Year 2025, had announced the "School of Prayer" in January.

The archbishop said the project would be like the Pope's "Fridays of Mercy" initiative during the extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy in 2015-2016, when the Pope visited people on the "peripheries," including babies in a neonatal unit, a centre for the blind and a housing project to illustrate the corporal works of mercy.

Pope Francis has asked Catholics around the world to observe 2024 as a "year of prayer" in preparation for the Jubilee Year. The encounter at St John Vianney parish, marked the first of a long series of meetings that form part of the Year of Prayer.

For these series of meetings, the Pope chose to start with children.

Of the various themes addressed with the children, Pope Francis wanted to emphasise the importance of "saying thank you for everything," to parents, friends, teachers, and catechists, but, first and foremost, "to God."

"It is important to say thank you for



Pope Francis listens to a question as he meets with about 200 children at the Church of St John Vianney on the far eastern edge of Rome, where he went April 11, 2024, to inaugurate his "School of Prayer" initiative in preparation for the Holy Year 2025. (CNS/Vatican Media)

everything. For example, if you go into someone's house and you don't say 'thank you' or 'may I' or 'hello', is that nice?" he asked. "The first word is 'thank you.'"

The Pope gave each of the children a large folder with his coat of arms on the cover and, inside, a special prayer of thanks composed for the occasion; the prayer thanked God for the gift of life, the gift of parents, the gift of creation and, especially, "the gift of your Son, our brother and saviour, friend of the small and the poor."

"You taught us to call you 'Father,' and with your word you call us to live as true sons and daughters, to be brothers and sisters who walk together in the grace of the faith we received with our baptism," the text continued. "Thank you, Lord, who loves us."

Pope Francis asked the children if they pray, and one of the youngsters said his family prays before they eat.

"You said something important," the Pope told him. They should all thank the Lord for the food they eat and for giving them families.

Alice, who is 10, asked, "How can I thank the Lord when I'm sick?"

"Even in dark times, we have to thank the Lord because he gives us the patience

to tolerate difficulties," the Pope responded. "Let's say together: 'Thank you, Lord for giving us the strength to tolerate pain.'"

Sofia, who will receive her first Communion soon, said it is hard to thank God when there are wars.

Pope Francis said there is always something to thank God for, and he shared a piece of advice: "Before you go to sleep think, 'What can I thank the Lord for?' And give thanks."

Pope Francis ended the 50-minute meeting by reciting with the children a "Thanksgiving Prayer" composed for the occasion and printed on a leaflet with the Jubilee logo.

To each child, the Holy Father handed out rosaries.

"I brought you rosaries and also chocolate eggs", Pope Francis had announced, asking, "Do you want the rosaries or the eggs?"

The little ones were divided on the issue, provoking laughter from the catechists.

To them and to the priests, the Holy Father gave the first six published volumes of the series Notes on Prayer, aids designed by the First Section of the Dicastery for Evangelisation, and published by the Vatican Publishing House, to support pastoral and prayer life ahead of the imminent Jubilee Year of Hope. — Agencies

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OPINION

Hey, you! Stop being so critical!

The “listening Church” is not afraid of criticism, but offers an open door, a place of familiar security where differing views may be expressed and a common understanding reached.

Words are funny things. We all use them, with varying degrees of success, to communicate with each other. Sometimes when we use them in a careless or slipshod manner their meaning becomes confused, and misunderstandings easily occur. One such word is “critical”.

Unfortunately, the tone of the word is often one-directional. It implies that something is wrong or not up to standard and so in its expression can be a cause of pain to others. But it is a much broader word than that. Being critical can, in fact, be a sign of sincere friendship, a friendship secure enough to cope with honesty, with a suggested adjustment in language made in good faith and with good reason. Such an exchange is in fact a sound measure of a real friendship.

Critical comment within the Church isn't always taken that way. Too often — in the past and, regrettably, still in current times — it has been presumed that critical comments are a sign of disaffection. Yet that is not necessarily so. Within a family there is usually a freedom to speak, knowing that understanding is there. The negative reaction of the Church to criticism only gives rise to further problems.

The prophet is always assumed to be the one who, in some way, foretells the future. Maybe we should re-adjust our view and accept the prophet as one who is critical

of the present circumstances, of how we got here and where we might be heading. The sadness is that we do not always listen to our prophets. They are ignored and the vibrancy of their message falls by the wayside. Later we realize our mistake as hastily discarded words are read again and their true beauty and truth realised.

When the word “critical” is followed by the word “care” we realise there is an urgent need for attention. The implication is that an emergency has been declared. It is the similar with government declarations of security levels when “critical” is the most serious of terrorist alerts.

Some would suggest that there are aspects of Church practice that have reached the critical care phase. That may be so, but as we address them we need remember that the Lord promised his presence would be with us always. Still we have to listen and act in consequence.

It is possible for an institution to silence the critical view in a heavy-handed manner as happens in totalitarian regimes. Physical repression and prohibition can severely limit free speech, however courageous and well-intentioned it might be. The alternative route involves a silent disregard for critical opinions. The regime continues to act in a pre-determined manner, regardless of comment.

The “listening Church” offers an open door, a place of familiar security where differing views may be expressed and a common understanding reached. That, after all, was the reason for calling the Council of Jerusalem where agreement was reached after discussion.

In the world of physics, the words “crit-

ical mass” refer to the point where nuclear reaction is about to begin. It has to be handled extremely cautiously. Carefully controlled in a nuclear power station, it provides the source of electricity. If it is allowed to continue without control, then we have the obscenity of nuclear weapons.

Critical conversations must be allowed to continue within the Church with the understanding and appreciation of differing points of view. Without criticism, there can be no improvement. Critical comment can be constructive if the intention of making it is sincere. Likewise, the one who is on the receiving end must also have an open attitude. Conversations conducted with a high-pitched voice rarely produce equitable agreement.

We would do well to remember this need to be sensitive when, week by week, we are deluged with controversy, for we live in difficult and rapidly changing times. The Church is not a secluded space unaffected by the secular society. In fact, the mission of the Church is to influence the times that we are presently experiencing.

That time-honoured phrase in response to the stranger asking for directions — “If I were going there, I wouldn't start from here” — begs the question. We are here, we have come from where our people started. Where we are heading depends on our skills as explorers.

Our exploration, our critical listening to the prophets of our own time, as well as those of the Scriptures, enables us to live each present step, finally knowing where we have come from for the first time. — **By Chris McDonnell, LCI**
(<https://international.la-croix.com>)

Called to be shepherds not hired help

Today we celebrate Vocations Sunday, also known as Good Shepherd Sunday. The Gospel today tells of the difference between a shepherd and a hired man and concludes by showing us that Jesus is our Good Shepherd. To be fair, for many, if not most of us, we do not understand what the role of a shepherd is in the real sense. Most of us have never seen a flock of sheep and would be lost and bewildered if we were to be given the care of them for even one hour. However, we can draw some good traits of such shepherds and apply them in our mission as shepherds.

What is the role of a shepherd? A shepherd has to be with their flock at all times, especially when they are grazing, to ensure their safety. Very often, pastures for grazing are isolated places, far from human presence. In these places, the sheep need to be protected from attacks from other animals or from other humans who may steal them away. This is why shepherds who are true to their calling will always be on the look out for danger, constantly checking on the flock. They cannot afford to be distracted by anything.

When the sheep are not grazing, a shepherd must always be aware of the needs and welfare of their flock. Even indoors, the flock will need to be cared for and nourished in other ways. Every sheep needs to be accounted for and the shepherd needs to ensure that all of them are well and not sickly. If any of them happen to fall ill, the shepherd needs to



attend to them immediately, regardless of the hour of the day. A veteran shepherd will know immediately which is calling out and what physical conditions they are in. Such is the duty and responsibility of a shepherd.

A hired person, however, looks at their role differently. To them, their job is to make sure that the flock gets to the grazing field, spend some time there then bring the flock back and their job is done. They do not really care what happens as long as they get paid and they are usually more concerned with their own safety and comfort. In other words, they will do the minimum required and that is it. From here, we can see a clear distinction between a shepherd and a hired person.

If we translate this to human nature, it is not that much different between us

and the sheep. All of us need some kind of attention, love and care from someone. We are certainly not animals because we can rationalise and think for ourselves but deep down, all of us will always want someone looking out for us. This is also where we can see who is the shepherd and who is the hired person amongst us,

In the church, when we talk about shepherds, our minds will automatically think of our priests and bishops. However, that is a very narrow way of looking at things. We are all called to be shepherds and not just hired help. Vocations Sunday is not just about the call to priesthood. It is a call to all Catholics to re-examine ourselves and see how well we have lived out our own call, whatever state of life that we are in. In this day and age, it is rather challenging for the priest to do

Reflecting on our Sunday Readings

with Fr Philip Tay, OCD

4th Sunday of Easter (B)**Readings: Acts of the Apostle 4:8-12;****1 John 3:1-2;****Gospel: John 10:11-18**

everything. This is why lay participation has been encouraged since the days of Vatican II. There are so many documents that speak about this aspect of the Church.

A parent is a shepherd to their children, a teacher is a shepherd to his students and so on. We cannot say that we are not shepherds because, if we really feel that way, then we are just hired help who will do the minimum for those under our care. A true shepherd is one who is selfless and will do everything that they can for their charge because they know them better than anyone else. Like Christ, all of us are called to be shepherds who give without counting the cost. A hired person will be calculative and petty but the true shepherd will not behave in such a manner.

Ultimately, the call of a true shepherd will always be based on the traits of the Good Shepherd, as given to us from today's Gospel. This is our call and this is what Vocations Sunday is reminding us of — motivated by love, to be a good and true shepherd who will not hesitate to lay down his life for his flock.



DIOCESE OF PENANG

PKK/BDN/2024/04/181

Blessings of the Risen Lord! Christ is truly Risen! Alleluia!

In *Christus Vivit*, we read the joyful words of Pope Francis in the opening paragraph of the Post-Synodal Exhortation to young people and to the entire people of God: "Christ is alive and He wants you to be alive!" It continues, "He is our hope, everything he touches becomes young, new, full of life. He is in you, He is with you and He never abandons you. However far you may wander, he is always there, the Risen One."

Fr Errol Fernandes, SJ in one of his reflection writes "Because of Easter, Every Area Starts To Enter Renewal!"

I wish you newness of mind, heart and soul as we journey through the 50 days of celebration in this Glorious Mystery of Easter!

1. Provincial Council For Canossians

The new Provincial Council for the year 2024 to 2027 in the Province of Mater Dei as Canossians in Malaysia are as follows:

- Sister Provincial Leader:
- Sr Christin Law
- Sister Vice Provincial Leader:
- Sr Retta Savariannan
- Sister Provincial Councillor:
- Sr Roslin Zaccharius

We congratulate them and continue to

pray for their leadership and the mission of the congregation.

2. SGRG Core Team 2024-2027

I am pleased to share with you the core team of Shekinah Glory Renewal Group (SGRG) under the umbrella of CHARIS PENANG, a service of communion with all the expressions of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal of the Church in the Diocese of Penang. For more details, go to: <https://bit.ly/4axCbaY>

3. Graduates of the Second Malaysian Cohort, Two-Year Distance Learning Programme

I congratulate the thirteen individuals from the arch/dioceses of Kuala Lumpur, Malacca Johore and Penang who were conferred with the Graduate Certificate in Leadership and Catholic Culture (GCLCC) by the Australian Catholic University (ACU). May they continue to serve in their mission with greater zeal, wisdom and courage. For more, go to: <https://bit.ly/3VYzMBM>

4. Diploma in Theology - Mandarin

I congratulate Jeanne J Saw who has recently obtained a Diploma in Theology conducted in Mandarin. This online studies is by the Catholic Theological Institute of Singapore encompassing a prerequisite

of six modules for a certificate course and six modules for a diploma course. For more go to: <https://bit.ly/4av9r2z>

5. Kitab Deuterokanonika (DC) Bahasa Malaysia Versi Borneo

I would greatly appreciate your kind assistance to share this message to all our Bahasa speaking community on the availability of this bible in Bahasa Malaysia. The contact information and other details can be found here <https://bit.ly/3Q5gZAP>

6. Ozanam Retirement Village

Ozanam Retirement Village (ORV) is a project by the National Society of St Vincent de Paul (SSVP) located at Taiping, Perak. The units are now available for booking. Contact details and other information can be found on the poster. <https://bit.ly/3Q1bl2H>

7. Arise Youth Day has been rescheduled and is now open to all the faithful

CHARIS Peninsular Malaysia Service of Communion (CPMSC) has cancelled the previous programme Arise Youth Day. A new programme titled Arise Day will be organised. This event will take place on September 13 and 14 and is open to all. It will be held at the Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam. For more go to: <https://bit.ly/49v8ENT>

8. 2024 Feast of Sts Anne and Joachim, Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam

The Novena and Feast of St Anne this year will begin from July 19 and culminate on July 28. Let us pray for all pilgrims, volunteers, celebrants and confessors as we experience a meaningful and grace-filled celebration through the intercession of St Anne and St Joachim. Go to: <https://bit.ly/49D0tit>

9. Message for the month of Ramadan and Aidilfitri 2024

I am pleased to share with you the message from the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue titled, "Christians and Muslims: Extinguish the Fire of War and Light the Candle of Peace". for the month of Ramadan and Aidilfitri. To read the message in full go to: <https://bit.ly/3xAu6ni>

10. Caritas Penang Camp, You Make A Difference - May 4 & 5

Caritas Penang will be organising a week-end camp to experience and expose youth to the ministry of Social Mission in the Diocese of Penang. For registration and other details, go to <https://bit.ly/3vGVijL>

Sebastian Francis

Cardinal Sebastian Francis



KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

April

- 22 **Mass – Infant Jesus Convent Jubilee**
- 23 **Meeting – Sri Seronok Board**
- 24 **Mass – Bentong Prison**
- 25 **Meeting – MCCBCHST Exco**
- 28 **Confirmation – Church of the Divine Mercy**



PENANG DIOCESE

Diary of Cardinal Sebastian Francis

April

- 23-24 **Clergy Monthly Recollection - Deanery Level**



MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

April

- 25 **Meeting – Caritas MJD Board at Caritas MJD Office**
- 29 **Meeting – South Johor Vicariate Cemetery Committee at Bishop's House, MAJODI Centre**



Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #171

F12
MJD NEWS
UPDATES

Greetings to you, dear friends of MJD.

Socks, shoes and bazaar *Ramadan* complaints. Amid boycotts, firebombs, rejection of apologies and apparent silence of the leadership, two Muslims and a mufti asked for forgiveness from the non-Muslims. Open houses and overtures to heal the negative impressions have been initiated by individuals, families and NGOs. The *Maaf Zahir Batin* Movement is an initiative to rejuvenate the spirit of unity among Malaysia's diverse ethnic and religious communities. This initiative signifies one's resolve to acknowledge one's mistakes, being open to forgive others, and paving the way for a peaceful future. As Catholics, be on the lookout for men and women of goodwill, who believe in unity in diversity and the ideals of the *Rukunegara*. Work with them.

Post Lent Times: Now that Lent is over, do we stop fasting, praying and giving alms? Are we Catholics for a season? Are we a switch on/switch off churchgoers?

They are three disciplines that act against the first sin, the Fall. In order to pray, we need to turn to God in trust; in order to fast, we need to put away our desire for pleasure and our distaste for suffering to do the good; in order to give alms, we need to love people and use things.

Our prayer needs to change. We need to pray as if life depends on it because many lives do. We need to intercede for the people of the world the way Abraham did for the few righteous, Moses did for the Israelites, and Jesus did on the cross for us. Jesus promised that faith the size of a mustard seed could move mountain ranges, pray for wars and violence to end and peace to return; for the planks to be removed from our eyes so that we can

be effective peacemakers, builders, and healers.

Our fasting needs to change. We need to fast like the people of Nineveh for mercy, like Moses on the mountain in reparation for the sins of Israel, like Queen Esther in petition to save her people, like Jesus, so that we might live by every word that comes from God's mouth. Some evils, the Pope reminds us, are expunged only by prayer and the corporeal petition of the body.

Our charity needs to change, as we concretely love our neighbour in our worldwide neighbourhood. We need to hear the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. We need to see like the Samaritan: if I do not step in, who will then? We need to see that "he is my brother, she is my sister."

Fasting, prayer and almsgiving is not seasonal. It becomes the *way of a disciple's life*.

Thought for the Week:

A little girl named Liz was suffering from a rare and serious disease. Her only chance of recovery appeared to be a blood transfusion from her five-year-old brother, who had miraculously survived the same disease and had developed the antibodies needed to combat the illness. The doctor explained the situation to her little brother, and asked the little boy if he would be willing to give his blood to his sister. He hesitated for only a moment and said, "Yes I'll do it if it will save her." Seeing the colour returning to her cheek during the transfusion, he smiled. Suddenly he paled, and trembling he asked: "When will I die? Right away or how soon?" (He misunderstood and thought that he had to give all his blood to his sister.)

Lesson from a five-year-old: Scripture

states "No greater love has no man than to lay down his life for a friend." Many of us would go out of our way to help a friend or family member, but how many of us would give up our lives for a person that we love?

Announcements for the Week:

1. MJD invites all young and old, boys and girls, single young people to the **World Day of Prayer for Vocations Prayer Vigil** at the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe Krubong on April 20-21.

2. The MJD's Creation Justice Ministry in collaboration with Caritas MJD and, the Forestry Department, is organising a **Save the Earth Initiative** to plant mangroves in Kukup. All parishioners are welcome to sponsor yourself, others or the tree saplings. For more info, contact your parish Creation Justice Ministry.

QnQ: The Q asked:

Are organisations born to fail?

There are the unavoidable in any human organisation. Peter Drucker said: **"Only three things happen naturally in organisations: friction, confusion, and under-performance. Everything else requires leadership."**

So, there are things we can change, and they are things we cannot change. Accept this reality.

The great season of Lent is over. Easter is in. The Resurrection is everything. After new life, we must prepare for the resurrection of God's people, the Pentecost. Something to tickle you: **"A Sufi holy man was asked what forgiveness is. He said — it is the fragrance that flowers give when they are crushed."**

Bishop Bernard Paul

Celebrating differences in autism

KLANG: On April 7, the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes (OLL) celebrated World Autism Awareness Day, an initiative championed for the first time under the guidance of parish priest, Fr Gregory Chan. With a heartfelt commitment to inclusivity, particularly for children with disabilities, this event cast a spotlight on the autistic community, aligning with the global observance on April 2.

The formation team at OLL, alongside a dedicated committee that included parents of autistic children, spearheaded the preparations. Their goal was to enhance awareness and deepen understanding of autism, showcasing the realities faced by those on the spectrum. Attracting over 120 attendees from diverse backgrounds and faiths, the event exemplified unity and a shared commitment to support and understanding.

Fr Gregory, in his opening remarks, highlighted the theme *Embracing the Spectrum: Celebrating Differences in Autism*. He commended the varied assembly of participants, stressing the importance of compassion, understanding, and kindness toward those with autism. His message was underscored by an illustrative story of an autistic child's encounter with prejudice, further emphasising the need for empathy and acceptance.

The event featured an inspiring musical performance by autistic brothers, She Jun Wei and Aidan She Jun Yuen, on violin and keyboard respectively. Their talent and determination served as a powerful reminder that disability does not limit potential.

Three speakers were on hand, each providing invaluable perspectives on autism. Among them, Ruth S. Arunasalam, an ac-

claimed authority with over 25 years of experience in the field of autism education, passionately tackled the stigma associated with autism. She emphasised the critical need for customised interventions and the recognition of each child's distinctive abilities. One of her memorable statements, highlighting the critical nature of prompt intervention, powerfully echoes: "Every minute wasted is a minute lost." Ruth continues to help countless parents and children on the spectrum through her educational initiatives at Ruth Training and Development Academy.

Joel Antony, a certified Autism Fitness Coach and the visionary behind J8 Autism Athletics, illuminated the diverse hurdles encountered by families raising children with autism in Malaysia, championing enhanced assistance and integration avenues. Amidst the formidable challenges, Joel's remarkable transition from attaining his LLB Hons to wholeheartedly embracing

the mission of empowering the autism community via sports training resonated with a powerful message of optimism and fortitude. Through a delightful group activity, he immersed the audience in the intricacies of autism, eliciting laughter while imparting a deeply moving insight.

Ivy Philip, the Founder of EmployAble Malaysia, held the audience in rapt attention with her engaging talk on creating inclusive employment opportunities for people on the autism spectrum. She urged a societal shift towards inclusivity, emphasising the need to focus on the social model of disability. This model advocates for recognising the unique needs and strengths of autistic individuals, rather than dwelling on perceived deficits, a contrast to the traditional medical model.

Ivy underscored the importance of dismantling biases, presuming competence, employing respectful language, and ensuring accessibility to cultivate an inclusive environment. She pointed out that inclusive



She Jun Wei (with violin), is a testament to the fact that disability is no barrier to thriving.

employment extends beyond the benefit of providing meaningful and sustainable opportunities to autistic individuals; it enriches organisations with diverse viewpoints and a reliable workforce, positioning these individuals as invaluable contributors rather than burdens.

The event also featured a Q&A session, offering a platform for engagement and exchange, especially beneficial for parents seeking advice and support.

Participants left with a greater awareness and a commitment to inclusivity, reflected in the feedback from attendees like Timothy and Franzeene, parents of a child with Down Syndrome, who expressed their realisation that children with disabilities can excel in various aspects of life, emphasising the importance of nurturing individual potential. Similarly, Nelisha, a mother of four, found inspiration in the event's alignment with Christian values of love and acceptance.

Those interested in connecting with the experts from the event, may reach them as follows: Ruth (016 2498169), Joel (019 9100962), and Ivy (012 5003750). — **OLL Formation Team**



Special needs youth displaying their handmade gifts.



Getting reacquainted with Jesus

KUALA LUMPUR: The Women's Ministry under the Archdiocesan Office for Human Development organised a one-day retreat for women at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre on April 6.

The session, *Five Loaves and Two Fish*, was conducted by Sr Angelin Gnanapiragasam FMDM. About 30 women from the different parishes around Klang Valley attended the session.

The session taught the participants to get reacquainted with Jesus. They also learned about coming to terms with their emotions and knowing that when they suppress their emotions, they may end up feeling overwhelmed and out of control.

The participants were also introduced to Emotional Intelligence, the ability to recognise and understand emotions. Apart from these, Sr Angelin also shared with the participants the importance of having a relationship with God in order to have a more meaningful prayer life.

After lunch, Sr Angelin led the partici-

pants into a wilderness journey to search within themselves for the true purpose of their life. The participants were taught to make full use of the gifts and talents bestowed upon them.

They were also given an insight on how the insignificant can become sufficient and significant when placed in the hands of Jesus. Another lesson learned is accepting the scars and embracing the fears in one's life to become more resilient.

"Exploring so many questions pertaining to '5 loaves and 2 fish' made me feel that I can offer back to God what He had given or blessed me with thus far, hence promoting greater glory to His name," shared one of the participants.

Another said, "I have never attended a talk with so much insight from a woman's perspective. It was very uplifting, both practically and spiritually."

The power packed session came to an end with individuals sharing their thoughts on the session. — **By Mercy Almeida Stellus**

Engaging in *sembang santai* to foster religious understanding

KUALA LUMPUR: The leaders of Masjid Mu'adz Bin Jabal in Setiawangsa, organised a *sembang santai* (casual chat) with non-Muslims on April 6 in conjunction with the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

Among the guests were Dr Florence John and members of the Parish Ministry for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Kuala Lumpur, representing the Catholic Church, representatives from the two neighbouring Methodist churches, as well as the Bahá'í community members.

Datuk Seri Zakaria, chairman of the mosque, along with several members, welcomed the diverse group. Also in attendance were Dr Hasmeet Chaal, Tengku Ameer of Skil Malaysia, Tuan Haji Tarmirzi of Bernas Nasional, Tuan Haji Shukri Zain of MARA Incorporated Sdn Bhd, and Tuan Haji Nazrul Azam Ghazali of MK Prima

Sdn Bhd Ustad Hilman Fikri Azman of Skil Malaysia led the discussion.

According to Dr Florence, the interreligious dialogue delved into topics such as the concept of God and self-consciousness in Islam, beliefs of those who follow God and those who follow Jesus, and perspectives of individuals who do not believe in God or Jesus. She added that every participant gained a deeper understanding of each other's beliefs and collectively aimed for unity and mutual respect among all Malaysians.

Following the dialogue session, the Catholic group had a photo session with the Mosque chairman and several of the members. The event concluded with the *berbuka puasa*, or breaking of the fast, held in the mosque grounds. The event, which began at 5.00pm, concluded at 8.30pm. — **By Bernard Anthony**



PMELA members from the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus with the Muslim leaders and friends.

All on board for a destiny of love and mercy

By Pamela Vinsence

PENANG: The Church of Divine Mercy in Sg Ara introduced an innovative approach to encourage parishioners and pilgrims to participate in its novena and parish feast day celebrations, culminating in grand events on April 6 and 7.



A family-colouring contest in progress.

Under the theme *Ticket: Trust and Prayer. Destination: Love and Mercy*, the festivities, with novenas starting on Good Friday till the feast day, were designed to guide devotees on a journey to encounter the limitless love of Jesus. Ticket passes distributed prior to the feast week were stamped daily during the festivities, fostering engagement among the congregation and sparking the interest of believers from near and far to delve deeper into the revered Divine Mercy devotion.

The celebration was meticulously organised and made memorable by the dedicated parishioners of CDM and parish priest Fr Michael Raymond, OFM Cap. Clergy members from the diocese, including Fr Fabian Dicom from the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit and Fr Esmond Chua, OFM, from the Church of the Risen Christ, led the week long daily Masses and concelebrated the feast day Mass, respectively. Pilgrims from Masai, Johor, and Ipoh, Perak, were also in attendance, joining in the feast day celebrations that commenced with a nine-day Novena on Good Friday.

Parishioners from diverse backgrounds had a unique experience during this feast day, with a variety of activities planned throughout the week and weekend. These included short movies for both children and adults, a family colouring contest, photo-booth sessions, games with various prizes, and daily refresh-



Devotees taking turns to carry the Divine Mercy image.

ments.

The highlight of the feast day was the veneration of relics, benediction, and the eagerly awaited procession, accompanied by the recitation of the Divine Mercy chaplet in four languages. The procession spanned a route of 2.65km and was observed by neighbours and onlookers from around the church neighbourhood. Devotees took turns carrying the image of the Divine Mercy while Frs Michael and Esmond alternately bore the Holy Eucharist aloft throughout the reverent procession, serving as a beautiful testament of the Catholic faith to the Sungai Ara community.

It was a profound fulfillment of the mission to spread the message of love and mercy through the Divine Mercy image, first revealed to a Polish nun, St Faustina, by Jesus. The Feast of the Divine Mercy is celebrated worldwide on the Sunday after Easter, with devotion to the Divine Mercy flourishing after the year 2000 when St John Paul II established Divine Mercy Sunday for the universal Church.

Fr Michael expressed immense joy at seeing the parish alive with pilgrims and devotees who had come to experience the love and mercy of God through the Feast Day celebrations. He remarked, "Let us always seek the face of God, and may this moment grant us the grace to draw ever closer to the Lord and find peace with Him and one another. To all the pilgrims who submitted your petitions and prayers, believe that Our merciful God will always grant us our earnest desires."

Elizabeth Yong, from the Church of St Theresa, Masai, praised the procession, stating, "The procession was very well-organised, and we thoroughly enjoyed the entire procession, including the novena and Mass."

These efforts reflected the dedication of the Divine Mercy parish community to instill in both young and old a deeper understanding of God's mercy. It was indeed a fulfilling week spent in prayers and petitions, learning about the Divine Mercy image, St Faustina, St Pope John Paul II, and more. The feast day concluded with food and fellowship, accompanied by favourable weather throughout the day.

Celebrating God's gracious gift of mercy

SHAH ALAM: The Church of the Divine Mercy celebrated its feast day on the Second Sunday of Easter. Streams of pilgrims arrived at the church some two hours before Mass to go for confession and chant the chaplet.

Fr Michel Dass was the main celebrant at the 3.30pm Mass on Divine Mercy Sunday. Concelebrating were Archbishop Julian Leow and Frs George Harrison and Lawrence Ng, CDD.

During the six days of the Octave Week-day Masses leading up to the celebration of Divine Mercy Sunday, the faithful contemplated the Beatitudes – one Beatitude fleshed out each day by different priests.

Children also participated in a special Mass on the morning of Easter Saturday, where Fr Lawrence preached on the line "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God".

"And the journey continues," said Fr Michel. "Blessed are we who are teachable, blessed are we who are joyful, blessed are we who are aligned with God, blessed are we who are agents of mercy, blessed are we who welcome and acknowledge that you and I are children of God," he said in his homily, reminding the faithful of the teachings of the past week.

He added that we are indeed blessed to be drinking from His font of mercy during Mass. And when we leave the church, we take with us blessings to be shared with others.

"We are all companions on this journey as we bring blessings to others. We are all not perfect. As a priest, I serve despite my failures and weaknesses.

"For it is through our weaknesses and challenges that God uses us and speaks



Members of the congregation standing with the image of the Divine Mercy for blessing.

through us to others."

He advised us to remain connected to God as His sons and daughters for this is how we can remain blessed and become a blessing unto others.

The seven weeks, starting from Ash Wednesday and leading up to Easter and the Divine Mercy feast day, saw the acting parish priest crafting and introducing a spir-

itual journey for the parishioners.

The parishioners embarked on an "adventurous" journey that began on Ash Wednesday and continued right through Lent, Easter and Divine Mercy with them seamlessly moving through the themes of Repentance, Belief and Trust.

The message was constantly at the top of our minds, thanks to the regular flow of

posters and messages which parishioners – young and old alike – received on their handphones, all inspired by Fr Michel.

We will surely miss Fr Mike, as he is fondly known, and his savvy media skills. Fr Michel is moving to the Church of St Anthony, Kuala Lumpur, effective April 15. Fr George Harrison is appointed parish priest of the Church of the Divine Mercy.

These two years, it was hard to escape Fr Michel's presence. Like a caring dad, he ensured regular communication by sharing 'love' messages through social media posters, thanking parishioners, congratulating confirmands and encouraging students before their exams. His effort extended to far-reaching videos of his homily in Bahasa that edified the faithful in the interiors of Sabah, Sarawak, and even in Indonesia.

Social media has become a vital tool in local parishes, forever changing the way we receive the Word of God, teachings and, yes, the parish bulletin. Indeed, blessed is the priest who can use this as a tool to advance God's mission. — **By Rachael Philip**



Fr Michel Dass and Fr Lawrence Ng CDD dancing along with the congregation after the Mass for children.

Sowing seeds of change

PETALING JAYA: A collaborative effort on a *Laudato Si'*, *Care for our Common Home* activity between the Church of the Assumption and the Church of St Francis Xavier (SFX) was held recently at Griffon Hall, Assumption Family House, attracting 40 participants from six parishes from as far as Kajang and Rawang. The activity was on *Hydroponic Farming and Composting*.

Fr Biju Mathew gave the opening address and opening prayer. The session kicked off with a video on Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* encyclical and a brief introduction on the implementation of the *Laudato Si'* Seven Year Plan presented by Magdalene Soyza. A video on the plight of the marginalised Orang Asli was also shown to create awareness in conjunction with the 2024 *Laudato Si'* theme, "Response to the Cry of the Poor".

Alex Fulton from the Youth Ministry shared his passion for composting with many interesting and humorous stories of his experimenting to make the best compost in this world. Remarking that while Malaysians love to eat, they also waste well over eight million metric tonnes of food each year, a staggering 260 kilos per head! A lot of that waste goes into landfills that cannot cope with the mass anymore. Landfills across the country are overflowing and producing higher levels of methane.

Introducing composting, a great way to get some of that waste out of the landfills and onto our plants which could really use the nutrition. He explained that there are hundreds of guides to basic and easy composting to follow out there and getting started is as easy as getting a basic container to start and proceeded to demonstrate how he does his composting using left over food, dead leaves and other compostable material. In ending, he appealed to his audience to do their part for God's earth and get some



Alex Fulton from the youth ministry sharing his passion for composting.

of that waste out of the methane-gassing landfills to become nutrients for our edible plants.

Irene Ng from SFX began by sharing about SFX C4C (Care for Creation) Hydroponic Garden initiative, which began in September 2022 in the church basement area. The project aligns with *Laudato Si'*'s goals to promote urban farming. Key outcomes include cost savings from growing own vegetables, healthy living through increased vegetable consumption and fostering a sense of giving and sharing within the community.

A hydroponic garden is ideal for apartment dwellers due to their efficiency. Vegetables grown hydroponically mature faster in water, with a harvest time of 4 weeks compared to the six weeks required in soil-based cultivation.

Starting a hydroponic garden is easy and it offers a sustainable way to grow fresh produce efficiently. To initiate a hydroponic garden successfully, some key considerations include choosing the appropriate type of hydroponic system, ensuring adequate lighting, regularly monitoring and maintain-



Irene Ng sharing about the Church of St Francis Xavier's Care for Creation Hydroponic Garden initiative.

ing the pH level, utilising a suitable medium like sponge to support plant growth effectively and adding the necessary nutrients.

Key steps include filling the system with water, ensuring it is level, leak-free and properly balanced, introducing the nutrient solution, testing the pH levels, planting the seeds accordingly and setting the grow light timer according to the light requirements.

The hydroponic project at SFX Parish

benefited the community in several ways:

- The project provided fresh vegetables for the community, including the parish priest, parishioners, and the C4C Garden team.
- Cultivating the vegetables brought joy and fulfilment to the team members involved in the project.
- The project cultivated a sharing and giving attitude among the team members, fostering a sense of community and generosity.

● Witnessing the growth of plants from seedlings to mature plants in the hydroponic system provided spiritual upliftment as the team members experienced and appreciated God's creation.

The talk ended with Joanna Ting from SFX who shared how she derives immense joy and therapeutic benefits from gardening, finding spiritual upliftment in witnessing the abundant life in the growth of vegetables. This experience not only inspires her but also motivates her to document and share her gardening journey through blogging, allowing her to track the progress and share her passion with others.



The participants from the six parishes at the session.

Exploring the Person-of-the-Therapist (POTT) Model

KUCHING: A Person-of-the-Therapist Training (POTT – Part II) was recently organised by Cathedral of St Joseph's Counselling Centre. It was conducted by Jesuit priest, Fr Dr Charles Sim, PhD from Singapore. POTT – Part I was conducted last year.

The fundamental lens of the POTT training is a total in-depth focus of self and the use of self in therapy session. The central pillar of the POTT model is the assumption that we all carry within us a psychological issue that is at the core to our human woundedness affecting the emotional and relational connection with others throughout our lives.

Hence, special attention was focused on trainees' emotional vulnerabilities and struggles and to allow trainees to be aware of their personal biases and convictions about ideals, morality, values, beliefs, and philosophy of life.

The ability to do the inner works of self-awareness, self-honesty and self-mastery ultimately allows for self-growth and self-healing. This essentially helps trainees to be more effective in session as they can relate and be more compassionate and understanding towards clients' pain and struggle. — *Today's Catholic*

A comprehensive guide to Catholic family catechesis

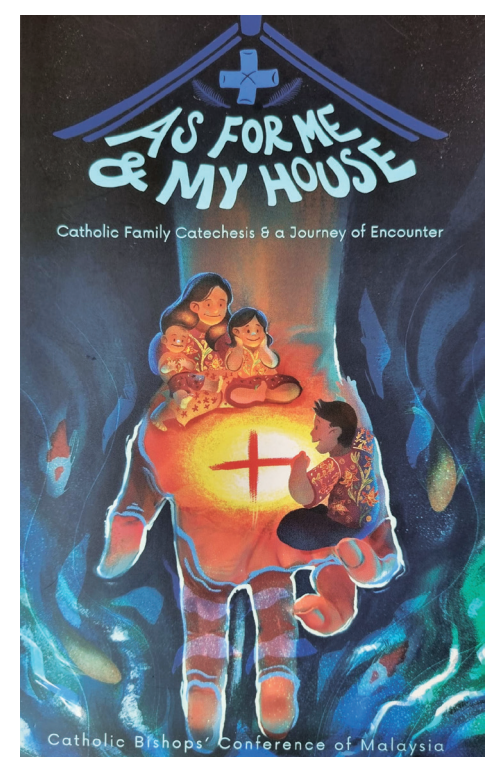
KUALA LUMPUR: The National Catechetical Office, in collaboration with the Malaysian Catechetical Commission and the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia, is pleased to announce the release of *As For Me & My House*, a comprehensive parent's guide to catechesis.

Embark on a transformative journey with your family through Catholic family catechesis, discovering the profound impact it can have on your spirituality. This book offers valuable insights and practical tools to enrich your family's faith, creating a lasting legacy of spiritual growth.

Whether you have infants, toddlers or teenagers, this resource offers tailored catechetical activities and meaningful reflections and discussions that will strengthen your family's bond, and help you integrate your faith with family life.

Within the pages of this book, you'll explore themes such as examining your role as a witness in your home, understanding the significance of faith education within your family, identifying small adjustments to prioritise it more effectively, considering the impact of mental health on family catechesis, and gaining insights from the experiences of others on similar journeys.

Available in Bahasa Malaysia, Chinese, English, Iban, and Tamil, this guide ensures accessibility for a diverse array of families. For those in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, orders can be placed through the



catechetical coordinator at your parish, or the appointed parish representative. Please reach out to them for confirmation. Parishes are then responsible for compiling their orders and forwarding them to the National Catechetical Office via email to nco@archkl.org, using the specific order form provided.



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REST IN PEACE

Indonesian church hosts *Aidilfitri* prayer

MALANG: A century-old Catholic church in Indonesia allowed Muslims to conduct the *Aidilfitri* prayers on its premises on April 10, saying such moves could help build brotherhood in the Muslim-majority nation.

Hundreds of Muslims prayed in the courtyard of Kayutangan Sacred Heart parish church in Malang, East Java province, as the nearby Grand Jami Mosque could not accommodate the festival prayer gathering.

Catholic nuns, seminarians, and lay people helped Muslims organise the prayer programme and greeted them later.

Carmelite parish priest Fr Karmel

Henrikus Suwaji said the church provided the yard "because Muslims are our brothers".

He said he invited seminarians and nuns to congratulate Muslims and to show "togetherness."

Muslims have been using the church facility for their feast gatherings since 2022. The priest said that the Mass was rescheduled when *Aidilfitri* fell on Sundays.

"We will continue with this practice to maintain togetherness," he said.

Aris, a Muslim who goes by one name, said he opted for the church as the mosque had no space.

He said he was initially hesitant. However, he felt encouraged as Catholics welcomed him and his family members.

"Church people helped us," he said.

The Kayutangan church was founded in 1905 by Jesuit priest Fr G.D.A. Jonckbloet when Indonesia was a Dutch colony. It is among Malang's 32 cultural heritage buildings that tourists visit.

In other regions like West Bangka Regency and Bangka Belitung Islands province, Catholics Youth, a Catholic organisation, facilitated Muslims in conducting the prayer by maintaining security along with the police.

"Catholics' involvement strengthens harmony," said Martinus Adi Prianto, head of the Catholic Youth in West Bangka Regency.

He said the youth wing held discussions with parish priests before providing security.

Priests, nuns, and seminarians also visit Muslim families.

In Manggarai Regency, where more than 90 per cent of the population is Catholic, Regent Hery Bertus Nabit, together with Ruteng diocese vicar-general Fr Alfons Segar, visited houses of Muslims.

Ahmad Nurcholish, deputy director of the Indonesia Conference on Religion on Peace, an interfaith organisation, said such traditions are good amid religious intolerance and strengthens ties between the different religious communities. — [ucanews.com](#)



Muslims pray on the premises of Kayutangan Sacred Heart church in Malang for Aidilfitri on April 10, 2024. (UCA News photo)

Hindus provide *iftar* meals in Pakistan

KARACHI: On the cusp of sunset, the sound of rumbling trains in the distance faded as they came to a standstill at Cantonment Railway Station in Pakistan's port city of Karachi on April 9.

A group of volunteers rushed to hand out large jugs of ice-cold Rooh Afza, a fruity drink made of squash, and platters of aromatic *biryani* to hundreds of Muslims as muezzins in nearby mosques announced through their sound systems it was time to break their Ramadan fast for the day.

From April 1-9, this was a regular scene when a group of young Hindus from the Maheshwari community started arranging *iftar* (the fast-breaking meal) for Muslims during the Islamic holy month.

"We were in a hurry to break the fast as we had missed our train and had no idea who had arranged it," Ataullah Rehmat, who ate at the *iftar* event with his wife and child, said.

"But we were really happy to see that the Maheshwari group organised it. Such acts help build better understanding between people of the two faiths."

The Maheshwaris hail from the desert region of Tharparkar in Sindh province and are known for their community mobilisation initiatives.

The organisers of the *iftar* drive, the Maheshwari Premier League, started their initiatives by organising cricket tournaments in Sindh a few years ago and later conducted educational and healthcare campaigns.

Bhevish Kumar, one of the organisers of the event, said the idea behind the drive was to promote interfaith harmony.

"We initiated it [the *iftar* drive] with a clear mindset to promote interfaith har-

mony," Kumar said on April 9. "Once such a message starts becoming a trend then we can see an inclusive and plural Pakistan."

Such acts of harmony in the country, however, come against the backdrop of persecution of religious and ethnic minorities including discrimination, blasphemy allegations, fines, death and life sentences.

Kumar said while everyone was welcome to have food at the *iftar*, the initiative targeted people specifically who could not break their fast on time as they were waiting for their trains.

"So that's why we arranged it at the railway station where there are coolies [porters], where there are travellers and tourists," Kumar explained. "It actually benefits those who are fasting."

He said the group's *iftar* drive fed an esti-

mated 5,000 people from April 1-9, adding that on some days, over 700 people showed up at the railway station to break their fasts.

And since the Maheshwaris are primarily vegetarian, the *iftar* menu consisted of vegetable *biryani*, potato samosas, *jalebi* snacks, the popular Rooh Afza drink, fruits and dates.

Kumar said they funded the *iftar* meals from their own pockets and individual donations.

"There are people in our team, including me, who are earning well through our jobs," Kumar said. "So, we contributed ourselves and also had help from some students who contributed from their pocket money and when we were still short, we had help from the elders in our community." — [ucanews.com](#)



A young Hindu volunteer distributes iftar meals to Muslims at the Cantonment Railway Station in Pakistan's port city of Karachi on April 9.

Goan Catholics rejoice over new approachable auxiliary bishop



PANAJI: Catholics in Goa say Pope Francis has given them an "approachable pastor" who is "an epitome of faithful servant" as their new auxiliary bishop.

The Pope on April 6 appointed Fr Simião Purificação Fernandes, who is the current director of the Pastoral Institute of St Pius X at Old Goa, as the auxiliary bishop of Goa and Daman.

Cardinal Filipe Neri Ferrao, archbishop of Goa and Daman, said the clergy, religious and the laity "extend our warmest felicitations" to the bishop-elect. The cardinal prayed for God's grace to accompany his auxiliary "in all his endeavours, granting him wisdom, courage and compassion."

Fr Simião, born on December 21, 1967, to late Victor Fernandes and Ana Santana Costa, brings with him a wealth of experience and dedication to his new role. Having studied philosophy and theology at the Patriarchal Seminary in Rachol, Goa, he was ordained a priest on May 10, 1993, for the Archdiocese of Goa and Daman. He furthered his studies, obtaining a License at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome and a doctorate in Biblical Theology at Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth in Pune, Maharashtra.

Throughout his ministry, Fr Simião has exhibited great pastoral care, serving in various capacities including parish administration and teaching sacred Scripture. Noteworthy is his role as director of the St Pius X Pastoral Institute since 2018, where he has introduced innovative sessions for the ongoing formation of priests in Goa.

Among those who have had the privilege of working with Fr Simião, the consensus is clear: he embodies humility, dedication, and love in all his endeavours. Fr Joseph Dias, who underwent diaconate under his guidance, praises him as a "faithful servant" and a person of dignity, courage, and kindness.

Similarly, Fr Bolmax Pereira, parish priest of St Francis Xavier Church, Chicalim, and assistant Professor of Botany at St Joseph Vaz College, lauds him as a man with a heart of gold, highlighting his approachability and pastoral concern for those under his care.

As Fr Simião assumes his new role as auxiliary bishop, the Catholic community in Goa and Daman eagerly anticipates his leadership, guided by God's grace and wisdom, in the ongoing synodal journey of the Church. — [Matters India](#)

Unique edition of the Bible crafted by African women

PARIS: "This is the first time that such diverse biblical societies, on a continent as heterogeneous as Africa, have managed to design a project of such magnitude!" says Elsbeth Scherrer, Head of Global Bible Publishing and Distribution at United Bible Societies, not hiding her enthusiasm.

The Meditation Bible by the Women of Africa was officially launched in Paris, April 13. Designed by 26 African Bible Societies, the nearly 2,000-page volume was on sale in France since February. To date, 26,000 copies have been printed, intended for about 15 French-speaking countries.

What does this unique project of a Meditation Bible by African women entail? In addition to the biblical texts, it offers a detailed introduction to each book, a plan to

read the entire Bible in one year, 365 meditations accompanying daily reading, about 50 portraits of women from the Bible, and 52 thematic articles addressing everyday life topics. "This is the great interest of this Bible," says Scherrer. The most sensitive topics for readers are discussed: female genital mutilation, widowhood, polygamy, homosexuality, divorce, curse, financial management, among others.

"The approach is emancipatory but not militant," Scherrer clarifies. The motto of this work: to illuminate these topics from the biblical text, giving readers a tool for reflection. "The interest is to offer them help for a difficult daily life and personal meditation without depending on a male pastor," continues Anne-Laure Danet, pastor of the United

Protestant Church of France and responsible for relations with Christian Churches within the French Protestant Federation.

She insists on a cultural context that leads to a different approach to the texts and results in different choices regarding the passages to meditate on. Like the story of Ruth, subject to the law of levirate, which "still exists in Africa" and requires a widow to marry her brother-in-law.

The general assembly of all the Bible Societies in the world committed in 2016 to paying more attention to readerships and their daily concerns. And they decided to address women. "It is a proof of the possible collaboration between Bible Societies," says Scherrer. This guarantees the "desire to serve women on the African continent where they

represent 60 per cent of the Church, across all Christian denominations, yet remain the least educated," she says.

This new Bible, first published in English on March 8, 2020, favours an existential and meditative approach. Designed only by African women from all walks of life, including Sr Josée Ngalula, a Congolese Catholic theologian involved in the pastoral care of abuse victims in the Church, and pastor, teacher, and researcher Laurence Ndong from Gabon, it is the result of a long effort. "Just for the French adaptation of the English version, we spent two years!" Scherrer explains. "We wanted to give a voice to those who know what they are talking about," she says. — **By Charlotte Gambert, LCI** (<https://international.la-croix.com/>)

'Emphasise Jesus' compassion for the suffering'

VATICAN: In the Bible, Jesus never explains suffering, but he reaches out to those who are hurting, heals them and ultimately, on the cross, shares and redeems the suffering of all humanity, Pope Francis said.

Jesus "does not approach pain with generic encouragement and sterile consolation, but he embraces the drama, allowing himself to be touched by it," the Pope said during a recent meeting with members of the Pontifical Biblical Commission.

The Biblical scholars and theologians on the commission explore topics in Scripture studies and interpretation as expert advisers to the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith. At their April meeting, they continued a discussion of "sickness and suffering in the Bible."

The Pope said the Bible "is illuminating" on the topic of sickness and suffering, because "it does not leave us a handbook of nice words or a collection of feelings, but shows us faces, encounters and stories — concrete ones."

Jesus' compassion for those who suffer goes even beyond consoling words and



Sr Nuria Calduch-Benages, secretary of the Pontifical Biblical Commission and a member of the Missionaries of the Holy Family of Nazareth, listens as Pope Francis speaks to commission members April 20, 2023, in the library of the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican. (CNS/Vatican Media)

miracles of healing, the pope said. He takes human suffering upon himself and, in doing so, saves humanity and "transfigures people's pain."

"Christ has transformed our pain by mak-

ing it his own to the core: inhabiting it, suffering it and offering it as a gift of love," he said. Jesus did not "give easy answers to our 'whys,' but on the cross he made our great 'why' his own," crying out on the cross, "My

God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Studying Scripture and praying with the Bible, the Pope said, helps people "purify their religious imaginations of mistaken attitudes," including those that "link suffering to divine punishment."

Instead, the Bible teaches people "to follow the path indicated by Jesus: to touch human suffering with one's own hand, with humility, meekness and serenity, in order to bring, in the name of the incarnate God, the nearness of saving and concrete support," Francis said. "To touch, not theoretically, but with the hand."

The Pope encouraged members of the commission to continue their study since suffering is an issue that affects everyone.

"The Word of God is a powerful antidote to any closure, abstraction and ideologisation of faith," he said. But "read in the spirit in which it was written, it increases passion for God and human beings, triggers charity and revives apostolic zeal. Therefore, the Church has a constant need to drink from the springs of the Word." — **By Cindy Wooden, CNS/NCR**

Vatican official meets Vietnam's PM during historic diplomatic trip

HANOI: The Vatican's foreign minister met with Vietnam's prime minister in Hanoi on April 10 during the first high-level diplomatic visit by a Church official to the country since the Vietnam War.

Archbishop Paul Gallagher, the Vatican secretary for relations with states, spoke with Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh

Chinh about the possibility of Pope Francis becoming the first pope to visit the Southeast Asian country.

The Vietnamese state-run news agency reported that both Gallagher and the prime minister agreed "on the need to push ahead with high-level contacts, including Pope Francis' visit to Vietnam."

During his six-day trip to Vietnam, Gallagher visited Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, and Hue, where he celebrated public Masses at the cathedrals in all three cities.

Gallagher met with his counterpart, Vietnamese Minister of Foreign Affairs Bui Thanh Son, on his first day in the country on April 9. He also met with seminarians in Hue and members of Vietnam's bishops' conference in Ho Chi Minh City before he left the country on April 14.

The high-level diplomatic visit comes amid a warming in Vatican-Vietnam relations. Within the last year, Vietnam has agreed to allow the Vatican to send an offi-

cial papal representative to live in the country and open an office in Hanoi.

Pope Francis appointed Archbishop Marek Zalewski, a Polish Vatican diplomat, as the resident papal representative to Vietnam in December 2023.

Zalewski's appointment was a historic step toward the possibility of someday establishing full diplomatic relations. Vietnam severed ties with the Holy See after the communist takeover of Saigon in 1975.

With the new appointment, Vietnam is the only Asian communist country to have a resident papal envoy live in the country. — **By Courtney Mares, CNA**



Vatican Secretary for Relations with States Archbishop Paul Gallagher (centre) meets with Vietnam's Foreign Minister Bui Thanh Son (unseen) and other officials at the Foreign Ministry in Hanoi on April 9, 2024. (CNA photo/NHAC NGUYEN/POOL)

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COMPLETE FUNERAL ARRANGEMENT FOR ALL FAITHS

Papal Foundation allocates RM71 million in global aid

VATICAN: The Papal Foundation, a US-based organisation that provides funding for Catholic projects around the world, announced on April 12 the distribution of nearly \$15 million (RM71.2 million) in grants, scholarships, and charitable aid “to care for those in need and grow the Catholic faith around the world.”

The group said in a press release that it would be distributing nearly \$10 million (RM47.5 million) in 2024 alone to more than 100 projects and recipients in several dozen countries. Among the beneficiaries include efforts at “providing for basic needs such as access to clean water,” “constructing schools and renovating classrooms,” and “translating Church teachings for evangelisation.”

The money will also go toward “restoring Churches, convents, and seminaries in desperate need of repairs,” “providing students in remote areas with transportation to further their education,” and “building health care facilities.”

The foundation was founded 35 years ago in response to a wish from Pope John Paul II. Stewards with the organisation donate their personal money to support projects specifically identified and requested by the pope, who is made aware of needs through his nuncios, or ambassadors, around the



Pope Francis blesses an unborn baby during the Papal Foundation's annual pilgrimage in Rome on Friday, April 12, 2024. (Vatican Media)

world.

The Papal Foundation describes itself as “the only charitable organisation in the United States that is exclusively dedicated to fulfilling the requests of the Holy Father for the needs of the Catholic Church.” The organisation said it would also be providing more than \$800,000 (RM3.8 million) via

its St John Paul II scholarship programme, which “will enable more than 100 priests, women religious, and seminarians to study in Rome.”

The Holy Father met with the Papal Foundation on April 12 during the group's annual pilgrimage to Rome. The organisation was in Rome from April 9–13.

During the audience at the Vatican's Clementine Hall, Pope Francis told the group's members that their work “enhances the integral development of so many, including the poor, refugees, immigrants, and nowadays the increasingly large numbers of those affected by war and violence.”

“Through these various worthy initiatives,” the Pope said, “you continue to help the successors of Peter to build up many local Churches and care for large numbers of the less fortunate, thus fulfilling the mandates entrusted to the apostle by Our Lord.”

David Savage, the group's executive director, described it as “a blessing to support this mission of cooperation and collaboration, bringing together laity, clergy, and Church hierarchy to address priorities identified by the Holy Father and care for his flock around the globe.”

Cardinal Sean O'Malley, the chairman of the Papal Foundation's board of trustees, quoted the Gospel of Luke, saying: “To whom much is given, much shall be required.”

“In a society where the divide between rich and poor continues to grow, stewards of St Peter of the Papal Foundation recognise their responsibility to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first,” the prelate said. — **By Daniel Payne, CNA**

Myanmar priest shot while celebrating Mass amid violent conflict

KACHIN: A Myanmar priest was shot recently while celebrating Mass in the state of Kachin, according to media reports, with the assault coming amid ongoing violent conflict between the military junta and resistance forces in the region.

Masked assailants shot Fr Paul Khwi Shane Aung as he celebrated Mass at St Patrick's Church in the town of Mohnyin in the northern region of Myanmar.

The priest “was rushed to a hospital in Mohnyin and was later moved to a hospital in Myitkyina,” according to *UCA News*.

The reason for the attack is unknown and the shooters are reportedly still at

large. Aung is listed on the Myitkyina Catholic Diocese's website as a priest in the Mohnyin Zone. He was ordained in 2013.

In February, the aid group Christian Solidarity International warned of a rise in violence against the persecuted Christian minority in Myanmar, with an advocate warning that ethnic-minority Christians there “are subjected to cruel ethnic-cleansing campaigns.”

Since a military coup ousted Aung San Suu Kyi in February 2021, Myanmar has for years been wracked by violent conflict.

Cardinal Charles Maung Bo, president

of the Burmese bishops' conference, in 2021 urged Catholics in Myanmar to share God's mercy amid the suffering caused by the military coup there.

That year the prelate noted that Myitkyina had been the victim of a “great tragedy” of “killing the innocents in the streets.”

“We need the light of God's mercy in Myanmar,” Bo said at the time.

The shooting of Fr Aung comes just weeks after the fatal shooting of a Baptist pastor, also in Kachin, while the pastor worked at his computer shop. — **By Daniel Payne, CNA**



Fr Paul Khwi Shane Aung

Pope Francis to make ambitious September trip to Asia Pacific

VATICAN: Pope Francis will embark on an ambitious 12-day trip across Asia-Pacific and Oceania in September, the Vatican announced on April 12.

The trip, which is scheduled Sept 2-13, will mark the longest trip abroad during Francis' 11-year papacy and will likely test the limits of an 87-year-old pope who has

endured a number of health challenges in recent years. It will mark the Pope's 45th international trip since his election in 2013.

The four-country journey will begin in Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia and home to the world's largest Muslim population. From there, the pontiff will also visit Papua New Guinea, East Timor and Singapore. A full schedule for the trip has yet to be released.

Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs welcomed the visit in a statement on April 12, saying the visit “holds significant importance to the Indonesian people, not only for Catholics, but also for all religious communities.”

“The visit is also expected to strengthen the message of tolerance, unity and world peace,” it said.

In recent months, there has been speculation that the Pope would also include a visit to Vietnam on this trip, though no such plans have been announced.

No pope has ever visited Communist-run Vietnam, though last year, it was announced that the Vatican would soon be allowed to set up a permanent diplomatic office in the country, which is home to about seven million Catholics.

On a flight back to Rome from Mongolia last September — where many Vietnamese pilgrims had travelled to the country to see the pope — Francis hinted that a trip to the country was possible.

“If not me, then surely John XXIV,” will visit Vietnam, he said, using a hypothetical name for his successor.

The Pope has not travelled abroad since last September for an overnight trip to Marseille, France, where he headlined a migration summit. In November, the Pope was due to travel to Dubai for the COP28 UN climate conference, but the trip was cancelled just three days prior to his departure due to respiratory issues. — **By Christopher White, NCR**



Pope Francis greets journalists aboard his flight back to Rome from Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, September 4, 2023, after his four-day visit to the Asian country. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

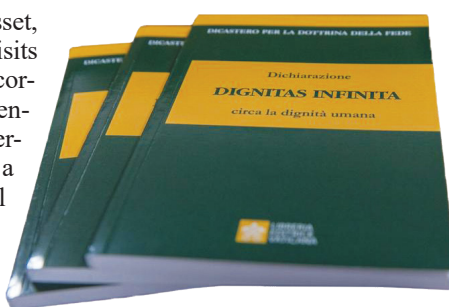
Document highlights Pope's unique approach to human dignity

The Vatican's new document on threats to human dignity mostly reaffirms already stated Church teaching, but moral theologian Fr Alain Thomasset says it also includes the unique contribution of Pope Francis — especially regarding “attacks against human dignity in the tragedy of poverty, the situation of migrants, violence against women, human trafficking, and war”.

Fr Thomasset detailed the significance of *Dignitas Infinita* (pic) in an interview with *La Croix's* Marguerite de Lasa. The Jesuit priest, who teaches at the Loyola Faculty of Theology in Paris, highlighted that while the document reiterates much of the Church's longstanding teachings, it introduces fresh perspectives particularly emphasised by Pope Francis.

According to Fr Thomasset, *Dignitas Infinita* primarily revisits themes from Vatican II, underscoring human dignity as a fundamental ethical principle, the cornerstone of human rights, and a requisite for just and peaceful societies. However, the document breaks new ground by providing clarity on the different meanings of “dignity,” which aims to reduce misunderstandings about its violations.

Pope Francis' influence is notably evident in the document's focus on contemporary issues affecting human dignity, including poverty, migration, violence against women, human trafficking, and war. These topics, according to Fr Thomasset, were specifically requested by the Pope to be included and are treated as priorities within



the document.

The theologian explained the need to reaffirm the “infinite”, “inalienable”, and “unconditional” aspects of human dignity, pointing out that dignity is often threatened in modern contexts. This includes discrimination against the disabled, elderly, and other vulnerable groups, making it imperative to recognise that dignity is inherent to life, not contingent upon abilities or appearances.

Fr Thomasset also noted that *Dignitas Infinita* addresses new ethical dilemmas arising from digital technologies, gender identity, and evolving legislation on individual rights. These issues challenge traditional notions of human dignity and call for a deeper understanding of its relational dimension, emphasising service to others and the common good.

Moreover, the document sheds light on seldom-discussed topics like digital violence, which Fr Thomasset believes warrants further theological study due to its impact on human relationships and self-perception. He also expressed surprise at the document's scant coverage of artificial intelligence and ecology, areas he feels are increasingly relevant.

On the treatment of abuse within

the Church, Fr Thomasset finds the document's inclusion significant, even if brief. It acknowledges the lifelong impact of abuse on victims, shifting focus from the actions of the perpetrator to the experiences of the victims — a necessary perspective that highlights the Church's evolving understanding of dignity violations.

Overall, *Dignitas Infinita* seems poised to influence future doctrinal developments and theological discussions, encouraging a reevaluation of ethics in light of contemporary challenges to human dignity. The document's emphasis on relational freedom could also inspire new approaches to sexual and family ethics, aiming to foster respect and justice in personal relationships. — *LCI* (<https://international.la-croix.com>)

Vatican issues new document on threats to human dignity

The Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith (DDF) has published a new declaration on human dignity, stating the Church's current position on such issues as euthanasia, surrogate motherhood, and gender identity.

The new text, which is called *Dignitas Infinita* (infinite dignity), was unveiled to the public on April 8 by its main author, Cardinal Victor Fernandez, the DDF prefect. The 20-page document, which includes four pages of end notes, was approved by Pope Francis. The new declaration is essentially an updated version of the Catholic social teaching regarding contemporary threats to human dignity.

Dignity, which has been a central concept in the Church's social doctrine for over half a century, is described by the new DDF declaration as having four dimensions: ontological dignity (by the mere fact of existing and being willed by God); moral dignity (linked to the exercise of human freedom); social dignity (linked to living conditions); and, finally, existential dignity (linked to the individual's perception of their own dignity).

“Dignified” life and “undignified” life

While this structuring is commonly used by moral theologians, it's the first time it's been used, in a magisterial text. The expression “existential dignity” had never before appeared in a document of this level.

“(This) is the type of dignity implied in the ever-increasing discussion about a ‘dignified’ life and one that is ‘not dignified,’” says *Dignitatis Infinita*. “For instance, while some people may appear to lack nothing essential for life, for various reasons, they may still struggle to live with peace, joy, and hope,” the declaration points out.

“Human dignity is a central issue in Christian thought,” Cardinal

Fernandez emphasised during his first press conference since taking up his post at the Vatican last September. The Argentine theologian justified developments in the magisterium by citing the example of two popes from some 500 years ago. He noted that Nicholas V (pope, 1447-1455) had encouraged slavery, while Paul III (pope, 1534-1549) ordered that those who engaged in the practice be excommunicated. “This is an example that shows how the Church's understanding of truth evolves,” said the 61-year-old cardinal.

He also pointed out that Pope Francis was heavily involved in the drafting of *Dignitatis Infinita*, which the theologians from the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith began developing in 2019. Fernandez found the project on his desk when he arrived at the Vatican, and last November the Pope asked him to have the DDF theologians revisit the project to integrate themes developed during his pontificate. Five months later, the result is a document that identifies thirteen areas where human dignity is subject to “grave violations”.

Themes drawn from Francis' pontificate

At the forefront of the declaration are the themes requested by the Pope, such as sexual abuse, the plight of migrants, war, and human trafficking. The document deplores the “destructive effects of the empire of money” and the “expansion of poverty”, while also emphasising the importance of considering migrants as human persons.

Quoting the Jesuit Pope's encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, the new DDF document declares that welcoming migrants “is an important and meaningful way of defending ‘the inalienable dignity of each human person regardless of origin, race or religion’”. Regarding violence



Cardinal Victor Manuel Fernández, prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, presents the new document April 8, 2024. (CNA photo/Daniel Ibáñez)

against women, it also asserts that “one cannot condemn enough the phenomenon of femicide”.

The document repeats previously stated positions on some of the issues. For instance, it is reaffirmed — with the support of texts from John Paul II — that “the Church's magisterium has always spoken out against abortion”, as well as against euthanasia, or assisted suicide.

“[It] must be strongly reiterated that suffering does not cause the sick to lose their dignity, which is intrinsically and inalienably their own,” the document says.

No such thing as a “right to a child”

Dignitas Infinita also addresses new questions, particularly the issue of surrogate motherhood, which is discussed for the first time in a magisterial document. The new DDF declaration argues that “the immensely worthy child becomes a mere object” in the practice of surrogacy, which undermines “the dignity of the child” and the mother, as well. “[The] legitimate desire to have a child cannot be transformed into a ‘right to a child’ that fails to respect the dignity of that child as

the recipient of the gift of life,” the declaration says.

It also delves into “digital violence”, calling it the “dark side of digital progress”.

“Consider, for example, how easy it is through these means to endanger a person's good name with fake news and slander,” the document says, warning against the potential dangers of the “digital world”, seen as a space “of loneliness, manipulation, exploitation, and violence, even to the extreme case of the ‘dark web’”.

Allowing room for discussion

Gender theory is another theme that the Vatican's doctrinal office addresses for the first time in a major document. “Desiring a personal self-determination, as gender theory prescribes, apart from this fundamental truth that human life is a gift, amounts to a concession to the age-old temptation to make oneself God, entering into competition with the true God of love revealed to us in the Gospel,” states *Dignitatis Infinita*.

Thus, the Church calls for “respect for both one's own body and

that of others”, and regards “sex change” as a threat to the “unique dignity the person has received from the moment of conception”.

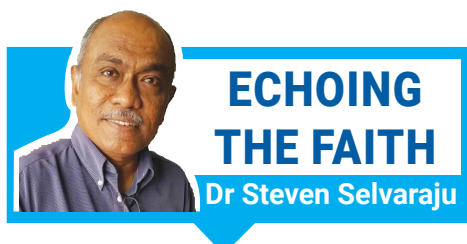
While these condemnations were somewhat expected, they also allow room for discussion on certain issues. For the first time, a magisterial document speaks out against the criminalisation of homosexual persons.

“[It] should be denounced as contrary to human dignity the fact that, in some places, not a few people are imprisoned, tortured, and even deprived of the good of life solely because of their sexual orientation,” the declaration says. But it does not go as far as to call for a universal ban on the criminalisation of homosexuality, which is still practiced in many countries, especially in Africa where it is supported by some bishops.

During the press conference to unveil the new DDF document, Cardinal Fernandez said “it's painful” that there are Catholics who defend these “unjust” laws. He said he recently read a text from some Church members who applauded the adoption of laws against homosexuals in their country.

“I thought I was going to die when I read that Catholics, who hold such a concept of human dignity, could think such a thing. Obviously, we favour the decriminalisation (of homosexuality),” he added.

Regarding “sex-change intervention”, the document says that, “as a rule”, it “risks threatening the unique dignity of the person”. But it acknowledges that this would not necessarily be the case for “a person with genital abnormalities that are already evident at birth or that develop later”. This is a testament to the pastoral approach of the Pope, who regularly meets with groups of transgender people. — **By Salvatore Cernuzio, Vatican News**



Parents are the primary catechists

In the previous article, I highlighted the role that parents play in the faith formation of their children. In this article, I will examine further why the Church calls parents the “primary catechists” of their children.

An individual’s deeper attitudes are formed primarily in early childhood

Studies by certain experts suggests that a child learns the Catholic faith the same way he or she learns other things. Intellectually, the most rapid rate of growth of a child takes place before the age of four years. By the age of six, or even earlier, the child’s basic personality, emotional life, moral conduct and basic attitudes and values, including those towards God and faith, are formed. The subsequent experiences which the individual undergoes merely reinforce or expand deeper one’s attitudes and values.

Generally, a child learns certain attitudes and values early in life and these persist throughout his or her life. Deeper attitudes acquired in childhood can rarely, if ever, be reversed or extinguished. These attitudes can only be reinforced, given new significance or expanded to take on different colorations. Therefore, what is taught in the parish catechism can match no more than one-tenth of parental influence on an individual’s basic attitude structure.

In addition, most of the attitudes which an individual holds conditions a person’s approach and subsequent response to life values in later years. Attitudes also condition virtually all learning, including religious education. The differences in what individuals learn, as well as the rate and amount they

learn, are often due as much to their individual attitudes as to their intellectual ability. As far as catechesis is concerned, children forget in a relatively short time much of the facts, concepts and theories which they acquire in catechism. The attitudes they learn, are lasting.

The family as the “first school of human values”

In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia* (*The Joy of Love*) Pope Francis calls the family the “first school of human values”. He states that most people learn basic attitudes and values in childhood which become deeply rooted that they remain throughout life. Many people think and act based on what they learned from their earliest years (274). According to the Pope, the family is the primary setting, “...where we first learn to relate with others, to listen and share, to be patient and show respect, to help one another and live as one” and “how to live alongside others who are worthy of our concern, our kindness and our affection.” (274).

The Pope mentions that it is in the family that faith is first handed on to the young generation. In spite of current lifestyles, work demands and the complexity of today’s world, the home must continue to be the place where we learn “to appreciate the meaning and beauty of the faith, to pray and to serve our neighbour” (AL, 287).

This highlights the importance of parents as the primary catechists of their children and the family as the key setting for catechesis. It is parents who exert the principal and deepest influence of faith on a child. The home is where the first catechism lessons

are taught and learned. As such, parents must not see their role as merely delegating the work of catechesis to the parish or to think that they are to supplement the work of the parish catechist. Instead, it is the work of the parish catechist that supplements the work of the parents and family.

Avoid the mentality of delegation

Imagine that there is someone who skips three basic meals daily and depends only on dietary supplements to survive. What will happen to him or her after some time? Basically, he or she will grow weak, gradually experience severe health problems and may even die. Now, let us apply this analogy to catechesis. What can happen to a child’s faith if his or her parents consistently delegate the major responsibility for the faith formation of their children to the parish catechist, expecting the latter to provide the “three basic meals” of catechesis, while they see their own role as providing the “supplements”?

The parish catechist meets a child for about an hour a week. In the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, for example, a parish is expected to have 32-34 catechetical lessons per year. If the lesson is for one hour, and a parish has 34 lessons, then in total, the child attends catechism for about 1.8 days in a year. If this figure is multiplied over 12 years (from ages 7 – 17 years), it means that a child attends about 21.6 days of catechism in 12 years. That’s about 21.6 days out of about 4,380 days! Basically, it means a child spends less than 0.5 per cent of his or her time attending parish catechism in 12 years.

If this is the case, how much difference can the parish catechists really make, even

if they do their best at every lesson?

Therefore, it is parents who have to provide the “three basic meals” of catechesis, to their children. The role of the parish catechist must be regarded as “supplementary”. The parish catechist is basically a reinforcer or amplifier (to expand) of the parent’s work in faith formation. It means that the parish catechist helps enhance (by refining and giving new meaning) the individuals attitudes and values learned from the parents and family during the earlier years.

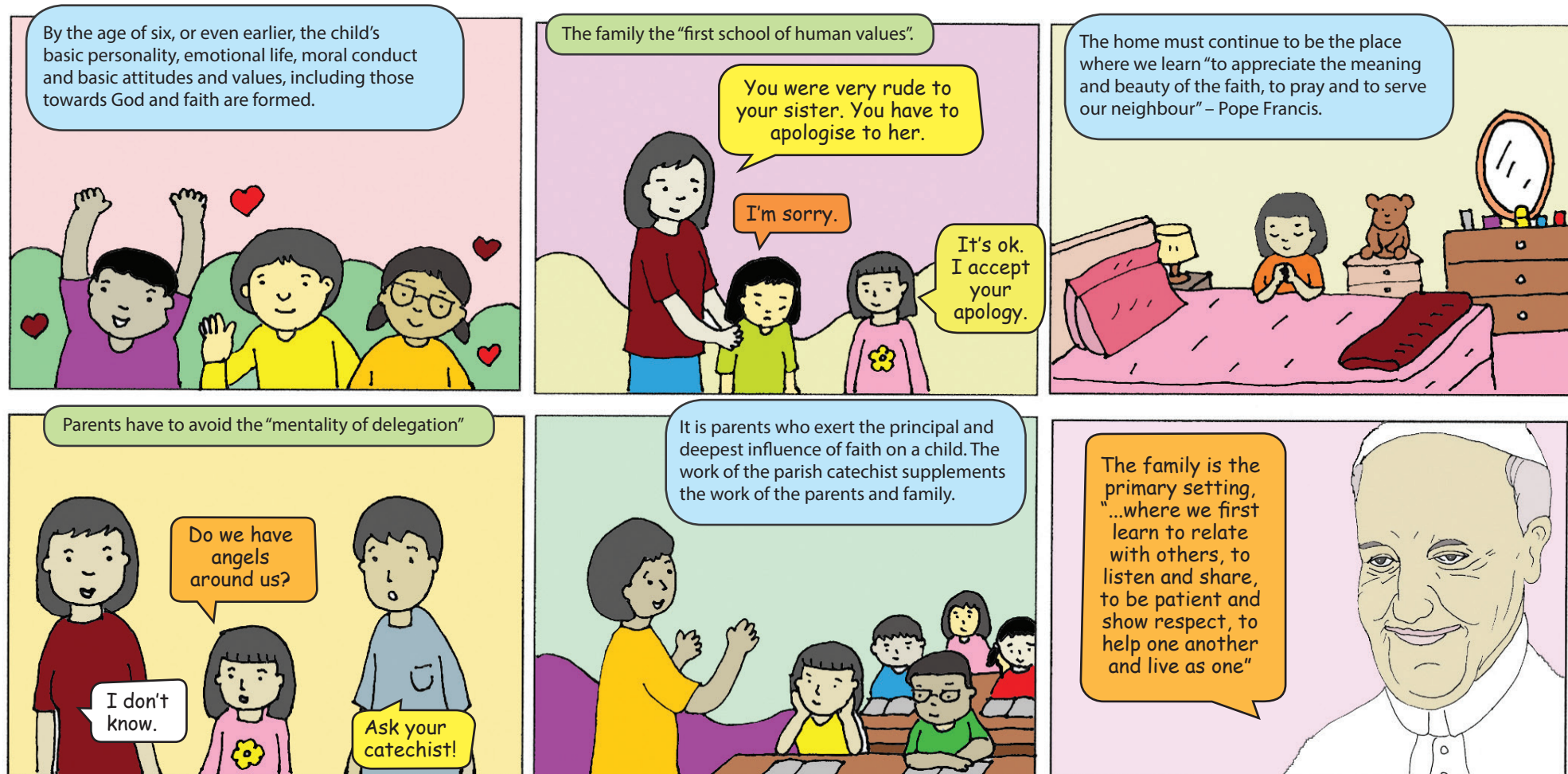
Conclusion

It is not my intention in this article to blame parents for their lack of commitment for the faith formation of their children. As I have stated repeatedly, the responsibility for the ministry of catechesis falls on the whole Christian community. However, parents have to understand that they have a fundamental role in the faith formation of their children. While they can rely on the parish to assist them in this task, they can never completely delegate this responsibility to others. They are the first and principal faith educators of their children.

The key ideas of the article are presented a simple illustrated format below. The illustrations are my own.

● Dr Steven Selvaraju, STD, STL, holds a Doctorate in Theology with Specialisation in Catechetics and Youth Ministry from Pontifical Salesian University, Rome. He serves as Director of the Archdiocesan Catechetical Centre, Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur.

PARENTS ARE THE PRIMARY CATECHISTS





She lives on in the hearts and minds of her 'children'

By Patricia Pereira

No event management company could have organised a reunion of more than a thousand alumni members spanning almost five decades in mere days. Yet, Sr Enda Ryan, FMM, in death, managed to do just that. Classmates, some not having crossed paths for years, gathered in a blend of sorrow and joy to honour a cherished educator and headmistress.

Despite the sombre occasion of paying tribute to the 96-year-old nun who passed away on April 7, many of the women, after paying their respects at the wake, let go of their inhibitions and reverted to their carefree schoolgirl days. Laughter and chatter filled the air, a fitting tribute to Sr Enda, who was known for her joyous spirit and infectious laughter. She would have preferred this lively atmosphere over a sombre one, as it reflected her own approach to life.

Sr Enda has inspired generations of students with her kindness, wisdom, and sense of humour. She was not only a teacher but also a mentor and friend to many, guiding them through the challenges of youth and shaping their characters with her strong values. Her influence extended far beyond the classroom, shaping awkward girls navigating childhood and adolescence into the accomplished women they are today, whether excelling in their roles as homemakers or thriving in their careers.

"Calcutta had Mother Teresa, and Petaling Jaya had Sr Enda," remarked Pat Lu, a member of the Class of 1978 and the former president of the Assunta Alumni (2011-2013).

"They are testaments of how one life can make a difference. Their lives were given so that others could find it. Their call wasn't part-

time but it meant going all the way and no turning back. They believed in doing their best and that God would do the rest. Their aim was never greatness but in touching one life at a time."

"Although Sr Enda is no longer with us physically, the seeds of focused passion, strong courage, and deep faith she sowed throughout her life continue to flourish in the hearts and minds of her 'children' — as she fondly called us — and will inspire future generations of Assuntarians. Her legacy lives on as a vibrant embodiment of the Assunta spirit, uniting us as one extensive family."

"We are fortunate to have had Sr Enda as our Mama, guiding us from our school days to our roles now as parents, grandparents, and even great-grandparents for many. Her values endure through us. In her passing, I see only hope and love, reinforcing that together, nothing is beyond our reach. Sr Enda united all her former students, from her 'firstborn' to today's Assuntarians, forging a strong family bond for the betterment of our beloved country, Malaysia," she added.

The influence of the Irish nun reached well beyond the classroom walls, as noted by Jacinta Vythilingam from the Class of 1991.

"Sr Enda built more than just a school; she created a community — a tribe, some might even call it an empire — of empowered, independent, disciplined, kind, and driven women. Many of these women, including myself, have gone on to excel in corporate Malaysia. To me, she was not just a school principal, but my earliest role model for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI).

"Sr Enda fostered an environment where girls could thrive on their own terms and lead with confidence. She instilled in us the values of DEI long before it became a corporate buzzword. In our school, there were no divisions based on race or religion; we were all simply Assuntarians — that was our bond."

"If you had the ambition to lead, you didn't wait for permission; you claimed your seat at the table boldly and fearlessly. It's thanks to her mentorship that I am the person I am today. I feel incredibly privileged to have been shaped by the school she established, nurtured, and continues to influence in countless ways," said Jacinta.

Anne Gomez, who served as head prefect at Assunta Secondary School in 1980, lauded Sr Enda as a fearless leader, a visionary founder, a mentor, a cherished teacher, and a friend. "We cannot think of our Alma Mater, Assunta,



Sr Enda's Archives

without remembering her. We will carry the Assunta spirit with us, whether over land, sea, or sky. Sister's example — her faith in action, her humanity and compassion, and her steadfast commitment to living her values — will forever be our guiding star," she expressed.

"Sr Enda nurtured us to become good citizens, loving mothers, wives, partners, and daughters, caring friends, active community members, and compassionate global citizens dedicated to fostering a peaceful and just world. We will continue to make her proud and uphold our ideals," she added.

"Each of us was touched differently by her," said Shareen Chua, a 1991 alumna. "For me, she imparted lessons on grace, humility, and giving in various forms at any opportunity, and she taught that there's always a song for every occasion — a lesson I carry with me to this day."

"Her energy, positivity, and zest for life were legendary, and wonderfully contagious. It's because of her that I developed a love for tuning into the BBC World Service."

"In one of Brian Friel's plays, he describes a Franciscan priest who leaves Ireland, learns the language of his new home, and becomes deeply integrated into the local culture, both enriching it and being enriched by it. While the parallels with this fictional character end there, it reminded me of the 'smiling Irish eyes' we often sang about and came to know so well in our early teens."

"I'm sure many will recall Sister's 'Testing, testing...' (with scratchy noise interference) echoing through the PA system each day, addressed to 'murid-murid dan cikgu-cikgu,' followed by her pearls of wisdom, and signing off to the tunes of Gershwin and Rachmaninoff."

"On so many levels, we thank her for educating generations of us to navigate life," said Shareen.

Speaking at Sr Enda's funeral Mass at the Church of St Francis Xavier, Petaling Jaya on April 11, Archbishop Julian Leow reflected, "As I stood amongst those gathered to mourn Sr Enda yesterday, I was moved by the sight of Assuntarians from diverse backgrounds — different faiths, different races — coming together to honour her memory, and it was the same scene the day before."

He continued, "Sr Enda was more than just a figure from Ireland, she became an emblem of unity for Malaysia. We owe a debt of gratitude to the remarkable person she was."

Archbishop Julian expressed his hope that Sr Enda's legacy of inclusivity and empowerment would endure. "May her example inspire us to embrace others, to meet them where they are, and to uplift them towards greater heights of goodness and compassion. As we bid farewell to Sr Enda, her influence lives on in every Assuntarian, every FMM sister, and in all whose paths she crossed."

"May we continue her work of being unifiers wherever God has placed us," added the prelate.

Sr Enda's legacy will continue to echo within the community she nurtured, inspiring future generations to embrace the values she cherished and to cultivate unity and purpose beyond the confines of the classroom. As these alumni resume their lives, they will carry the indelible imprint of Sr Enda's guidance, a testament to her profound influence on their personal trajectories and on society at large.

• See more on page 23



Fr Alvin Ho, SJ incensing the coffin. (photo/Agnes Cheong)



The religious and laity at the funeral. (photo/Agnes Cheong)



Assuntarians bidding farewell to Sr Enda as the hearse passes by the schools she founded. (photo/Agnes Cheong)



TO BE HONEST

Martin Arul

*"He touched me, oh He touched me,
and oh the joy that floods my soul!
Something happened and now I
know, He touched me and made
me whole!"*

Throughout the entire Holy Week 2024, this song was incessantly playing in my head at random intervals of the day; unbeknown to me what was to unfold.

See, I was born into a very staunch Catholic family, spending most of my childhood and teenage life serving the church in various ministries. The obligation of attending Mass and giving back to the church in acts of service was instilled in us for generations, going back to my great grandfather in Sri Lanka, to now, scattered through Klang Valley with the extended family members.

Somewhere through my teenage life, I disconnected from the Church; rebelling against its teachings, defying my obligations, and blatantly vanishing from the scene. While some may argue that it is unfair to drop everything and disappear, it took a lot for me to get to that point.

My biggest gripe to this day remains this one - the people and how they appear to be self-righteous. Whilst many fulfil their obligation and live a life seemingly exemplary by the book, sadly, this is only a façade for some, while in the presence of the church and its people. Once they exit the gates of the church, minutes after receiving the body of Christ — present in the Eucharist, the horns grow and their true colours come shining through.

See, friends, the Church is never the problem, it has always been the people (not

all, though) who dictate and police others. This is what drove me out of the gates of the church faster than lightning could strike the crows of Klang. Most of my teenage and adult life was about discovering God on my own; finding the balance between what the Church teaches and implementing that into my daily life. In essence, religion teaches us one thing: to love. The word LOVE appears 574 times in the Bible which, if taken on average, gives us 1.6 opportunities a day to exude love. But how many of us put that into practise?

As the years progressed and I matured into adulthood, I thought I had it all down to a tee; I live my life, I do good, I do not harm anyone and I believe in God omnipresent. I do attend Masses on days of obligation, and I identify very much as a Catholic, and a practising one. All said and done, deep down, there was still a resentment that the Church (the people, and not the institution), is unwelcoming of people; an establishment for people who are self-righteous, parading their superior faith to the very people within their circle.

He touched me



mind was racing with all sorts of thoughts, and I was anxious. How could I, a sinner, unworthy and undeserving, be given such an honour? Is this how the disciples felt, when their Lord and Master assumed the form of a servant, and knelt to wash their feet?

During the act of the washing of the feet, I was filled with great grief. My heart was heavy, and I desperately tried to fight back tears. It remains unexplainable, now weeks later. It is a sensation that weighs you down. But I will attest to the warmth and love you feel as you walk away that night; a burden lifted off your shoulder, an embrace of love of the Father, cleansed from our iniquities, and born again.

It was that very night that reignited my fire for the faith, representing the communities who are marginalised, sidelined, shunned by the people of the Church; being accepted and embraced by the likeness of the Lord Himself. This affirms my belief that we are called to live a life of LOVE outside of the walls of the church building, being an example of the LIVING Church in our daily lives, families, communities, social circles.

To be honest, the Church is evolving to be more accepting towards people from all walks of life, and so must we. The crux of Christianity is LOVE, and love we shall, through all its adversities. My hope is for a positive change in the way we embrace our societies and welcome them into a community that is non-judgmental, but one of healing and love.

● **Martin Arul** is a believer, who questions everything that is wrong, believing that everyone is equal in the eyes of God, and one must live as a Christian outside of the walls of the church.



FAITHFULLY SPEAKING

Julie Lim Seet Yin

Recently, I met up with a former college mate whom I've not met in person for more than 20 years. After college, we went our separate ways and merely kept in touch through Facebook and Instagram. He regularly uploads his travel photos in social media and I would make comments and ask questions about them. Communication between us was far and rare.

When we finally met up, we spoke for nine hours. We did lunch, and carried on conversing till tea time and then dinner. That was how much we had to share after more than 20 years apart.

When I reflected upon the situation, I realised that before this, neither of us made the effort to meet up. It was until one of us had a spur of the moment motivation to meet up, that we reconnected after all these years.

All of us meet different people in our journey of life. They can be school mates, college mates, colleagues, church friends, family members, people in the same interest groups, etc. But how many of us make the effort to keep in touch with people whom we meet?

Connecting with others

At the office, we tend to do lunch with

colleagues within our own department because we have things in common such as the same reporting manager or similar job scope. Some of us prefer to lunch alone, and some prefer to eat with colleagues whom they can gain something from such as information or advice.

In order to expand our connection to a wider group of co-workers, we need to do lunch with colleagues from outside our regular circle.

I remember at the end of a training session; the trainer gave us participants a post-training task of doing lunch with a colleague whom we had not eaten with before. After completing the task, we had to write a short sharing on the experience and send it to our reporting manager.

A couple of months ago, the company that I work for had an initiative to encourage staff to get to know one another on a deeper level. In this initiative, the heads of departments were given a budget to organise lunch with their staff members. However, in order to reimburse the lunch expenses, they would need to invite staff from other departments. That was a great initiative to encourage staff to get to know one another on a deeper level. The outcome is that work tended to become easier when we work with colleagues whom we know well and whom we are comfortable with.

Reach out, connect and maintain relationships

Maintaining the connection

Nurturing and maintaining relationships requires effort from both parties. Whether it is a friendship, a marriage, a parent-child relationship or even a working relationship with colleagues, it requires effort to sustain the relationship. When one party doesn't make the effort to remain connected, the relationship will begin to weaken and perhaps dissolve for good.

Many times, I had sent messages to friends and relatives whom I'd not heard from for a long time, just to see how they were doing. However, I soon stopped when I didn't receive any reply. Both parties must make the effort to remain connected.

I've had ex-colleagues who confessed that they find it difficult to maintain a connection with colleagues who have left the company. In such cases, the ex-colleagues become a memory. Perhaps the only updates about their life that we see is what they upload to social media. Nevertheless, I have ex-colleagues and even schoolmates who turned into lifelong friends.

Connecting in parishes and ministries

When we attend church activities or Mass, the words "Communion", "Participation" and "Mission" are mentioned regularly and

drummed into our minds. As a people of God, we are called to be in communion with one another, to participate in the life of the Church and to journey together in mission. The main ingredient for the success of the "campaign" is connection. We must connect and maintain that connection. However, this is not the case for everyone. I've met people who keep to themselves and tend not to mix around. I see regular faces attending Mass every week without speaking to anyone. After Mass they rush off without saying anything to anyone, not even a simple, "Hi." They may have their reasons for not mixing with their fellow Catholics. And perhaps I need to be the first person to reach out to them.

Conclusion

No man (or woman) is an island because we all live connected to one another. To form new friendships, let me be the first to reach out and connect with the other person. However, the challenge is to maintain the relationship, just like a wise person once said, "Maintaining relationships is more important than making them."

● **Julie Lim Seet Yin** believes that a satisfied life measured by one's heart, mind and soul is better than a successful life measured by worldly yardsticks.



Fr Ron Rolheiser

Go crazy or turn holy

In a poem, *Serenade*, Brazilian poet Adelia Prado speaks of a painful ache we feel inside us as we forever wait for something or someone to come and make us whole. What are we waiting for? Love? A soulmate? God? No matter, the frustration eventually pushes us towards a choice, go crazy or turn holy:

*I am beginning to despair
And can see only two choices:
Either go crazy or turn holy.
And when that someone or something
finally does come:
How will I open the window,
unless I'm crazy?
How will I close it, unless I'm holy?*

Either go crazy or turn holy. The older we get the more we realise how true that is, how eventually that's the choice forced on all of us, both by the way we are built and the limitations inherent in life itself. Why? Is there something wrong with life and with us? Why can't we find a peaceful space somewhere between crazy and holy?

Well, the biblical preacher in the *Book of Ecclesiastes* offers a reason. After penning that beautiful, oft-quoted text about how there is a time for everything — *a time to be born and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to harvest; a time to break down and a time to heal; a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance; a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to keep silent and a time to speak; a*

time for love and a time for hate; and a time for war and a time for peace — he offers us this. God has laid out a beautiful rhythm for life and has made everything beautiful in its own time, but God has put timelessness into the human heart so that we are out of sync with the seasons from beginning to end. God has established a beautiful rhythm to nature; but we, unlike the physical elements and the plants and the animals who don't have timelessness in their souls, never quite fit into that rhythm. We are overcharged for life on this planet. (Ecclesiastes 3, 1-11)

You find expressions of this in literature everywhere in both religious and secular circles. For example, the renowned German theologian Karl Rahner used to affirm that *in the torment of the insufficiency of everything attainable we learn that here in this life there is no finished symphony*. In that, he echoes St Augustine's famous line that is as true and apropos today as it was seventeen hundred years ago when he wrote it: *You have made us for Yourself, Lord, and our*

hearts are restless until they rest in You. That single line expresses both a non-negotiable understanding of the human person and a non-negotiable path he or she must walk. We don't have a final home here and that's why, at the end of the day, there is no option other than going crazy or turning holy. It's no surprise that Ruth Burrows, the renowned spiritual writer, begins her autobiography with these words: *I was born into this world with a tortured sensitivity and my path has not been an easy one*.

While this motif is everywhere present in religious literature, it is also present in the thought of many secular poets, novelists, and philosophers. For instance, after he won the Nobel Prize for Literature, Albert Camus, a professed atheist, was asked by a journalist if he believed in God. He answered: No, I don't believe in God, but that doesn't mean I am not obsessed with the question of God. Why that obsession? Because in his thought he could not make sense of the world, nor find a fully sensible place in it for humans, unless there was a God.



Without a God, human existence cannot make peace with itself. He likened the condition of someone in this world to that of a prisoner in certain medieval prisons, where they would put a prisoner in a cell that was so small that he or she could never stand fully upright or ever fully stretch out. The perpetual feeling of being cramped, it was believed, would eventually break the prisoner's spirit. For Camus, that's our situation in life. We can never really stand up fully or ever stretch out fully. Eventually, this breaks our spirit — and we either go crazy or get holy. That's also the basic view of other atheistic existentialists like Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre.

Go crazy or get holy! Richard Rohr offers us a third option, get bitter. He submits that once we get to a certain age, we have only three options left open to us: We can become a *pathetic old fool*; or we can become a *bitter old fool*; or we can become a *holy old fool*. Notice what's non-negotiable. We will all eventually become old fools. We have the choice only as to what kind of old fool we will be — crazy, bitter, or holy.

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

Jesus in prayer teaches all of us how to pray

There is no better teacher or witness to prayer than Jesus Christ. This point is emphasised throughout the written Gospels. The evangelists want to reveal to us that the Lord was a man of deep prayer and union with the Father, in both His divine and human nature.

As such, the Gospel books contain heart-warming, provocative, and encouraging accounts of the Lord Jesus in prayer.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* echoes two such prayerful accounts with the introduction: "The evangelists have preserved two more explicit prayers offered by Christ during his public ministry. Each begins with thanksgiving."

The Lord's moments of prayer begin with thanksgiving. This initial point itself is a strong challenge to wayward or

incomplete notions of prayer. Prayer is not principally about supplication and intercession. Prayer is about communion with God and — when fully lived — our prayer spontaneously begins with thanksgiving and it is marked by an undercurrent of love and gratitude.

The *Catechism* elaborates on its first selected moment of prayer in the Lord's life. The account is taken from chapter eleven of Matthew's Gospel. It is placed within the context of the Lord's public ministry, right between His woes for the unrepentant cities and the plucking of grain on the Sabbath by His disciples. It is a consoling glimpse into the interior life of our Lord's human soul, as He admonishes those who reject Him and begins to reveal Himself as the Messiah, the Lord of the Sabbath.

The *Catechism* explains to us: "In the first, Jesus confesses the Father, acknowledges, and blesses Him because He has hidden the mysteries of the Kingdom from those who think themselves learned and has revealed them to infants, the poor of the Beatitudes. His exclamation, 'Yes, Father!' expresses the depth of His heart, His adherence to the Father's 'good pleasure,' echoing His mother's *Fiat* at the time of His conception and prefiguring what He will say to the Father in His agony."

In its teachings, the *Catechism*

describes His prayer by referencing His conception in the womb, through the *Fiat* of His mother, and the cries He offers in Gethsemane as He begins His passion and prepares for His death. In summary, the *Catechism* is teaching us that the Lord's entire life — from beginning to end — was consumed in prayer.

The *Catechism* further stresses the connection between obedience and prayer in the life of the Lord: "The whole prayer of Jesus is contained in this loving adherence of His human heart to the mystery of the will of the Father."

After explaining this first moment of prayer, the *Catechism* moves to its second selected moment of prayer in the Lord's life. This is the prayer of the Lord Jesus before Lazarus' tomb that's contained on chapter eleven of St John's Gospel. The Lord Jesus prays aloud so that all may hear and know that He is loved by God the Father and has been sent by the Father.

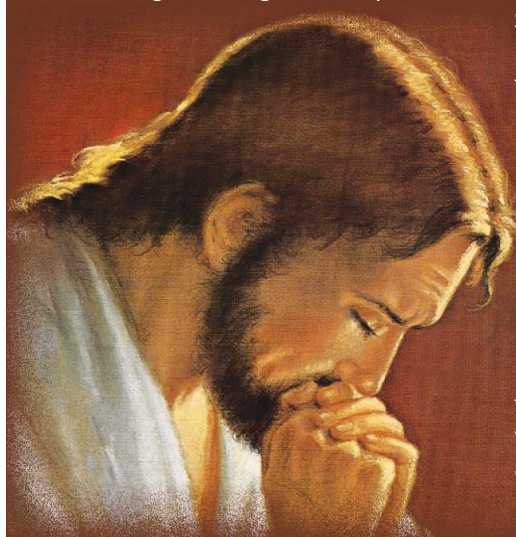
In describing the scene, the *Catechism* teaches: "The second prayer, before the raising of Lazarus, is recorded by St John. Thanksgiving precedes the event: 'Father, I thank You for having heard Me,' which implies that the Father always hears His petitions. Jesus immediately adds: 'I know that You always hear Me,' which implies that Jesus, on His part, constantly made such petitions. Jesus' prayer, characterised by thanksgiving, reveals to us how to ask: before the gift is given, Jesus commits

Himself to the One who, in giving, gives Himself. the Giver is more precious than the gift; He is the 'treasure'; in Him abides His Son's heart; the gift is given 'as well.'

The Son was always in prayer before the Father and the Father always hears and receives the Son. As with the Lord Jesus — the Son by nature — so with each of us, the sons and daughters of God by the grace of adoption. We are to pray constantly and have confidence in the Father's closeness and goodness to us.

At this point, the *Catechism* breaks form and addresses the reader directly. In giving two accounts of the Lord Jesus at prayer, it acknowledges why it has not selected the High Priestly Prayer for this catechesis and explains that it will be addressed later in the volume: "The priestly prayer of Jesus holds a unique place in the economy of salvation. A meditation on it will conclude Section One. It reveals the ever present prayer of our High Priest and, at the same time, contains what He teaches us about our prayer to our Father, which will be developed in Section Two."

The images, words, and witness of the Lord Jesus at prayer assist us in seeing prayer as an opportunity for encountering God, speaking and listening to Him, being consoled by His presence and rejoicing in His love. As the Lord was a man of prayer, so each of us are called to do our best — stumble as we might — to be a people of prayer. — **By Fr Jeffrey F. Kirby, *Crux***



Little Catholics' Corner

Dear Children,

This Sunday is called Good Shepherd Sunday because, in the Gospel reading, Jesus tells His friends that He is the Good Shepherd Who loves His sheep. When sheep are out graz-

ing in open fields, the shepherd watches them and protects them from hurting themselves, getting lost, or being killed by wild animals.

Jesus looks after us like a shepherd looks after his sheep. He gave us the Church so we

could know what is good for us and He protects us from being ruined by the devil by giving us grace in the sacraments.

Now, Jesus did something that an ordinary shepherd would not do. Besides guiding and protecting us, He died to save us!

Because He died for our sins, all of His sheep can now go to Heaven where they will be happy forever!

How blessed we are to have such a loving Shepherd!

Auntie Eliz

Jesus' Sheep Word Puzzle

Use the words in the list to fill in the blanks.

Use the numbered letters to fill in the blanks at the very end.

Jesus _____⁴ John 10:27-30
 "My sheep hear my voice;
 I _____³ them
 and they _____² _____⁷
 I give them eternal life;
 and they shall never _____⁸ _____
 and no one can take them out of my _____¹²
 My Father, who has _____¹ _____¹⁰ them to me,
 _____⁵ _____⁶ than all,
 and no one can take _____⁹ _____
 out of the Father's hand.
 The _____¹¹ and I _____¹¹ one."

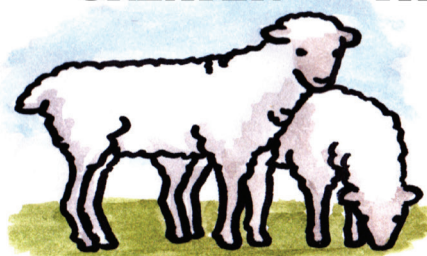
FOLLOW	ME	FATHER
GIVEN	SAID	KNOW
PERISH	IS	HAND
GREATER	THEM	ARE

Jesus is the

1 2 3 4

5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Answer: GOOD SHEPHERD



Find these objects hidden in the picture below:
 needle and thread, magnet, book, star, snail, fish,
 football, sock, spoon, moon, badge, and cake.



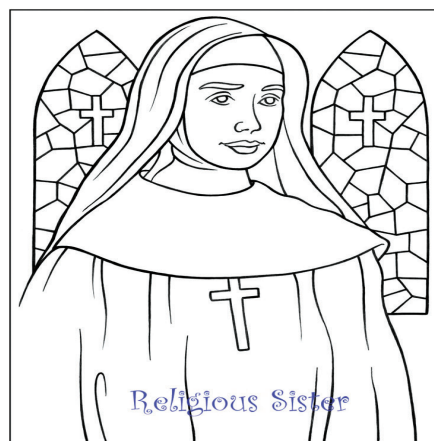
The Good Shepherd



Make all words fit into this crossword.



Sheepfold
 Gate
 Robber
 Sheep
 Shepherd
 Voice
 Stranger
 Life
 Wolf
 Father
 Flock
 Hired



Religious Sister

Colour the picture

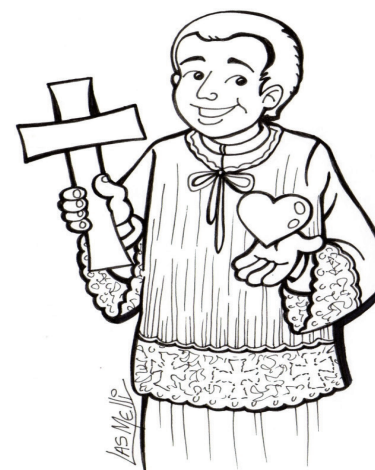


Priesthood



Holy Matrimony

Religious Brother



April 21 is Vocations Sunday. The word "vocation" means "God's Call." When you get older, Jesus may call you to get married or Jesus may give you a special mission — to be a priest, brother or religious sister. How will you know? By praying and always saying "Yes" to God, no matter what He asks!

YOUTH

April 21, 2024

YOUTH CROSS AND ICON OF MOTHER MARY IS ON THE MOVE

JOURNEY FROM KOTA KINABALU TO SANDAKAN

SANDAKAN: Over 300 young individuals from the Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu joined in escorting the Youth Cross and the icon of Mother Mary to the Diocese of Sandakan.

The journey with the Youth Cross and Mother Mary's icon signifies the commencement of Sabah Youth Day (SYD), Sabah's largest youth gathering. This year marks the sixth edition of SYD, which will take place at the Cathedral of St Francis Xavier in Keningau from September 16-20.



Leading the Icon and Cross.

Archbishop John Wong inaugurated SYD-6 on November 3, 2023, at St Joseph's Church in Papar. Following the launch, the pilgrimage with the Youth Cross and icon began, moving from the Papar parish to the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in Kota Kinabalu on February 24. It reached St Mary's Cathedral in Sandakan on March 16.

Cultural diversity welcomes the Youth Cross

As 200 youth gathered at the Cathedral of

St Mary, they engaged in hymn singing and an ice-breaking session led by the Sandakan Parish Youth Apostolate in anticipation of the Youth Cross and icon of Mother Mary.

The arrival of the Youth Cross and the icon was celebrated with an array of traditional performances, including the Hedung dance by Church of St Mark, the Dusun Labuk dance from Church of St Martin in Telupid, and traditional Chinese drums from the Cathedral of St Mary.

Fr Isidore Gilbert, the Youth Spiritual

Advisor of the Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu, officially handed over the Youth Cross and icon of Mother Mary to the Sandakan diocese, represented by Sr Noemi Mejia, FSIC, the Youth Coordinator of the Diocese of Sandakan. The ceremony was also graced by the presence of Bishop Julius Dusin, Fr Dafrinn Diwol, and other religious brothers and sisters.

Bishop Julius led the congregation in a welcoming Mass to celebrate this significant event.

The cross is a symbol of life

In his homily, Bishop Julius highlighted the relevance of the Youth Cross and the icon of Mother Mary's arrival in light of the day's reading, which centred on themes of death and life. "The cross is a symbol of life for those of us who believe in Him," he noted. "We are reminded to stay close to God, the source of life. If you feel bound like Lazarus, wrapped in his shroud, remember that only Jesus has the power to set us free, as the Gospel today tells us: 'Untie his bands and let him go free.'"

Bishop Julius prayed over the young people, wishing that they remain receptive to the grace of God's deliverance during this Easter season, that their faith may be renewed and strengthened, and that they have the courage to follow Jesus.

The Youth Cross and the icon of Mother Mary will remain at the Cathedral of St Mary until June 15, after which youth representatives will deliver the cross and icon to the Cathedral of St Francis Xavier in the Diocese of Keningau.



Youth of St Michael Penampang and Holy Nativity Terawi spending time in prayer with the Youth Cross and the icon of Mother Mary at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, Kota Kinabalu.



The youth during the action songs.

Youth are living hope of a Church on the move

VATICAN: The “certainty” that “Christ is alive and He wants you to be alive” has inspired Pope Francis to write again to young people, on the fifth anniversary of his Apostolic Exhortation, *Christus Vivit*, written in the wake of the 2018 Synod on “young people, faith, and vocational discernment.”

“Above all,” Pope Francis says in the message released recently, “I would like my words to be a source of renewed hope” to young people who may feel discouraged in a world “marked by so many conflicts and so much suffering.”

Christ is alive and loves you

The Holy Father assures young people that “Christ is alive and He loves you with an infinite love.” The Holy Father invites them to “walk with Him as a friend, welcome Him into your life, and let Him share all the joys and hopes, the problems and struggles of this time in your life.”

He goes on to remind people of the “great mission” they have received “to bear witness before everyone to the joy born of friendship with Christ,” reminding them of his invitation to make their voices heard and his encouragement to “make a mess,” famously expressed in Spanish as “Hagan lío!”

Living in the presence of Jesus, the Pope tells young people, will allow their “memory of the past” to prove fruitful and help them to “find courage in the present” and “face the future with hope.”

The hope of the Church ‘on the move’

The Exhortation *Christus Vivit*, Pope Francis says, “is the fruit of a Church that wants to move forward together by listening, dialogue, and the constant discernment of the Lord’s will,” the result of the 2018 Synod on Youth that prepared the way for the current Synod on Synodality.

“Now, at this new stage in our ecclesial journey,” the Pope says to young people,



An Armenian youth group at WYD in Lisbon, 2023. (Vatican News)

“we need more than ever to draw upon your creativity in order to explore new paths, always in fidelity to our roots.”

Reminding the youth that they are “the living hope of the Church on the move,” Pope Francis thanks them for their presence in and contribution to the life of the Church.

He concludes his message by encouraging them “never to leave us without your good way of ‘making a mess’; your drive, like that of a clean and well-tuned engine; and your own particular way of living and proclaiming the joy of the risen Jesus!” — **By Christopher Wells, Vatican News**

CHERAS: Love & Life Kick-Start 2024 was held from March 11 to 16 at the Church of St Francis of Assisi, with the theme, *For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.* (Jeremiah 29:11).

This programme delves into aspects of identity and relationships with God and others. It covered topics such as self-discovery, the meaning of Mass, relationships with others, the Church, and the world. Participants also engaged in various forms of prayer and spiritual experiences, including Taizé prayer, contemplative prayer, praise and worship, and the Way of the Cross. Community-building activities like station games and scavenger hunts emphasised the importance of community and collaboration.

A significant highlight for the young participants was the presence of Archbishop Julian Leow, who spoke about the Church as their ‘Home’. Over tea and snacks, the archbishop discussed the baptismal role of each person and their importance to the body of Christ. Participants had the opportunity to ask questions about his vocation and life, leading to candid and heartfelt exchanges. The session concluded with the young people praying for their shepherd.

The Love & Life programme will be an annual event for young people in the post-confirmation category. Follow ASAYOKL on Instagram (@asayo_kl) for updates on future Love & Life events.

Here are some testimonies by the Love & Life Kick-start 2024 participants:

“Before attending Love & Life, I was drawn in by its intriguing title and the mention in the church bulletin. Curiosity led me to experience it firsthand. During the ini-

Love & Life Kick-Start 2024



tial days, nervousness engulfed me, but as the camp progressed, I found myself immersed in meaningful interactions with fellow participants and facilitators. The enforced disconnect from our devices, though brutal at first, proved liberating, allowing genuine connections to flourish. This experience taught me resilience and the value of stepping out of my comfort zone.

After Love & Life, its profound impact lingers, leaving me with a sense of belonging to a newfound family. The camp was a transformative journey of learning, particularly in life skills and embracing unfamiliar roles. Amidst the messiness of first-time endeavours, I discovered clarity in identifying my strengths and how to serve God with them.

While the days progressed and were generally uplifting, there were still moments of challenge and introspection. These instances,

though mixed, added depth to the overall experience and reinforced the importance of perseverance and growth.

Personally, what touched me deeply was the opportunity to deepen my understanding of the Catholic faith. Throughout my life, I struggled to grasp its teachings, but the sessions provided during the camp offered a starting point for me to unravel its depth. Despite the gradual nature of comprehension, each session felt like a step closer to God.

Looking ahead, my hope for the future is to maintain a curiosity about the Catholic faith and allow God to guide me further. I’m encouraged by the abundance of resources available to deepen my understanding and strengthen my relationship with God. May other young people embark on similar journeys of discovery and find fulfilment in their faith. — **Natalia Hiew, Church of St Ignatius**

“Love & Life (LNL) was something I only recently became aware of, despite the fact that it had been around for years. I was quite delighted to be preparing for a camp outside of my church for the first time. The prospect of being away from home, making new friends, and learning new things made it even more exciting.

When the day finally arrived, everything was a breath of fresh air. I was in a new parish with folks I didn’t know. As the days progressed, not only did I participate in a variety of enjoyable activities, but I was also introduced to new concepts like the value of each

step taken in Mass and how to discern and make decisions in three simple stages. The Mass explained and receiving the Body and Blood of Christ was certainly the icing on the cake. In addition, the meals prepared were excellent; it’s as if God was always feeding me. I never went hungry.

As the camp came to an end, not only did I feel sad, but so did everyone else. We didn’t want to leave because we had just formed this new bond. We were like a family, not by blood, but because of the promise we made with God.

Throughout the camp, I learned not only about myself, but also about love, how the Catholic church perceives love, God’s love for us, how love is linked to life and cannot be separated, and how it affects both families and friends. These three components work together to keep the church strong. And they are God, myself, and those around me. Learning this in a deeper way moved me.

What I wish for in the future is that more young people participate in LNL. Yes, it may appear to be simply another ordinary church camp with sessions and such; but, set that thinking away for a moment. At the end of the day, what we remember most are the friends we made, the inside jokes, and most importantly, the insight into ourselves and our relationship with Jesus Christ. With that in mind, go to camp and feel the same delight and excitement that I did. You’ll end up saying, “Please, extend?” — **Yesmin Nesarajah, Church of the Holy Redeemer, Klang.**



Young people praying the Stations of the Cross.

A remarkable legacy

Sr Enda Rayan, FMM (1928-2024)

Throughout her lifetime, Sr Enda made remarkable contributions, from advocating for women's education to nurturing the growth of the Ave Maria Clinic, which later evolved into the renowned Assunta Hospital in Petaling Jaya.

Born Eileen Philomena Ryan in Galbally, Ireland, on December 30, 1928, she joined the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary (FMM) in 1947 and dedicated her life to serving others. She graduated from the National University of Ireland in the Summer of 1954, with a B. A. and Higher Diploma in Education.

In response to a request by Sir Michael Hogan, the then-Chief Justice of Malaya, Sr Enda arrived in what was then Malaya in 1954. She was tasked with establishing schools for girls whose education had been disrupted by the Communist insurgency. Without hesitation, she helped found Assunta Primary School and concurrently

prepared older girls for the Secondary School Entry Exam in late 1957. Thus, in January 1958, Assunta Secondary School commenced its journey, with Sr Enda serving as its pioneering headmistress. She even composed the school song, which remains sung by Assunta students to this day.

In 1966, Sr Enda became a Malaysian citizen, solidifying her commitment to the nation. Over her 31 years of dedicated service, she received numerous accolades, including the Excellent Service Award from the Education Ministry (1985), the Pingat Jasa Cemerlang (1986), and the Pingat Jasa Kebaktian (PJK) from the Sultan of Selangor (1987), among others.

Upon her retirement in 1989, Sr Enda continued to take a keen interest in the affairs of the school, attending occasions like Teachers' Day, Prize Giving Day, Assunta Spirit Week and the annual



Sports Day.

In 2007, she was honoured with the Darjah Kebesaran Dato' Sultan Sharafuddin Idris Shah title by the Sultan of Selangor, earning the prestigious title of Datin Paduka.

Her dedication and impact were further recognised in 2022 when she was awarded an honorary doctorate in humanities from Taylor's University, a testament to her legacy of service and compassion.

MEMORIAM

For enquiries, please contact:
Email: memoriam@herald.com.my
Tel: 03-2026 8291

5th Anniversary In Loving Memory of



Edwin Lawrence

**Departed:
25th April 2019**

*Eternal rest
grant unto him, O Lord
and let Your perpetual
light shine upon him.
May his soul rest in
peace. Amen.*

Fifth Year Anniversary
Mass will be offered on
25th April 2024
(Thursday) at 6.45am
at the Church of the
Visitation, Seremban.

Deeply missed and
forever cherished by:
Wife: Margaret
Children: Anne, Agnes,
Agatha, Anastasia and
Andrew and loved ones.

Foundation to release never-before-seen images of Padre Pio

To mark its 10th anniversary, the St Pio Foundation in the United States is releasing 10 never-before-seen photographs of St Pio of Pietrelcina, better known as Padre Pio, on April 29.

The candid images show the Italian priest celebrating Mass and deep in prayer but also in lighter moments of laughter, rarely captured

of the friar. The foundation's director, Luciano Lamonarca, discovered the photos when visiting photographer Elia Stelluto's studio.

EWTN News Vatican correspondent Colm Flynn sat down with Lamonarca in a recent interview for "EWTN News Nightly" to discuss the images. One of the most surprising photos was of Padre Pio smiling.

"One is nice because [it shows everybody] hey, Padre Pio is smiling. Yes, he was smiling because he was a man. So we always think that Padre Pio was a serious man. We know that faith is also about laughing ... sometimes," Lamonarca said.

The professional opera singer grew up in Italy aware of the giant figure that Padre Pio was in the Catholic Church but didn't have a particular devotion to the saint until he and his wife faced the great suffering of having a stillborn baby and receiving the news that they would probably not be able to have more children.

It was then that the couple turned to St Pio's intercession and, in the process, began to learn more about his life.

Lamonarca said he learned about St Pio's "simplicity and humility."

"He was the grandfather I never had," he told Flynn.

Lamonarca said he felt such a connection to the saintly friar that he wanted to help bring his story and message to as many people as possible — especially in the United States — so he founded the St Pio Foundation.

Today Lamonarca and his wife live in the United States with their son, Sebastian, who was born the year after Lamonarca founded the foundation. As an Italian living in the US, he is passionate about strengthening the ties between the two countries in the name of St Pio.

In addition to the release of all the photos to celebrate its 10th anniversary, the foundation has also produced a documentary drama about Padre Pio, which will air on *EWTN* later this year. — **By Zoe Romanowsky, CNA**



St Padre Pio prays while celebrating Mass. (CNA photo/Saint Pio Foundation)

Prayer to the Blessed Virgin (never know to fail)

*Oh! Most beautiful flower of
mount Carmel, fruitful and fine
splendour of heaven,
Blessed Mother of the Son of God,
Immaculate Virgin assist me in
this necessity,
(make your request)*

*Oh! Star of the Sea,
help me and show me herein,
that you are my mother.
Oh! Holy Mother of God, Queen
of heaven and earth, I humbly
beseech you, from the bottom of
my heart to succour me in this
my necessity (make your request)
There is none Dear Mother that
can withstand thy Power.*

*Oh! Mary conceived without sin
pray for us who have recourse to
thee (thrice Hail Mary)
Thank you Dear Mother, for your
mercy towards us.....
to me and mine.*

NOTICE

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placing a
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Heatwaves put millions of children in Asia at risk

BANGKOK: Massive heatwaves across East Asia and the Pacific could place millions of children at risk, the UN warned recently, calling for action to protect vulnerable people from the soaring temperatures.

Global monitors have warned that 2024 is shaping up to be the hottest year on record, marked by climate extremes and rising greenhouse gas emissions.

The UNICEF data showed over 243 million children across the Pacific and East Asia were

estimated to be affected by heatwaves, putting them at risk of heat-related illnesses and death.

Several countries in the region are currently smouldering in the summer heat, with temperatures nearing record levels as they regularly hit over 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit).

Local forecasters are predicting steeper rises in the coming weeks.

Some Philippine schools suspended in-person classes in April, with the state weather forecaster saying temperatures could reach

a “danger” level of 42 or 43 degrees Celsius in parts of the country.

In Thailand, a temperature of 43.5 degrees Celsius was recorded in the northern province of Mae Hong Son early April — just a few degrees shy of the record 44.6 degrees Celsius.

Around 40 people die from heat-related illnesses annually, according to the Thai Ministry of Health.

And in February, neighbouring Vietnam endured a monster heat-

wave in its southern “rice bowl” when temperatures reached up to 38 degrees Celsius — an “abnormal” high for the period.

According to the UNICEF report, children are more at risk than adults as they are less able to regulate their body temperature.

“Children are more vulnerable than adults to the effects of climate change, and excess heat is a potentially lethal threat to them,” said Debora Comini, Director of UNICEF Regional Office for East Asia and the Pacific.

The report said heatwaves and high humidity levels — commonly experienced in the region — can have a deadly effect as the heat will “hinder the body’s natural cooling mechanisms.”

“We must be on high alert this summer to protect children and vulnerable communities from worsening heatwaves and other climate shocks,” Comini said.

The UN projected that over two billion children are expected to be exposed to heatwaves by 2050. — **AFP/LiCAS**

Sudan civil war

No seminarians, almost no Catholic Church



SUDAN: The third Sudanese civil war has terribly affected the entire country but especially the local Catholic Church, which — according to the pontifical foundation Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) — has no seminarians and has practically disappeared from the country.

Since April 15, 2023, armed clashes have broken out in Sudan between the Army, commanded by President Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a paramilitary group led by Mohammed “Hemedti” Hamdan Dagalo, the vice president of the country.

Both sides jointly deposed the transitional regime, established after the overthrow of dictator Omar al-Bashir in 2019. Once their objective was achieved, the Sudanese Army and the RSF clashed for control of the country’s wealth, especially for the gold and oil.

Hamdan owns several gold mines in the country’s north. In 2022, according to official figures, Sudan exported nearly \$2.5 billion (RM11.92 billion) in gold (41.8 tons), making it the third-largest producer of this precious metal in Africa.

The army side of the conflict controls real estate and companies of all kinds, which they refuse to hand over to a civilian government that doesn’t align with their interests.

According to ACN, none of the belligerents is willing to give in, and the future of the civil war looks

A priest celebrates Mass in Sudan before the outset of war. (CNA photo/ACN) bleak.

During the last year, more than 13,900 people have died as a result of the violence and more than 8.1 million people have been forced to leave their homes (1.8 million people have fled the country), according to official figures.

This tragic situation has reduced the presence of the Catholic Church in Sudan “to almost nothing,” according to the pontifical foundation. Kinga Schierstaedt, head of ACN projects in Sudan, noted that before the war, Catholics represented only five per cent of the population.

The Catholic Church “was tolerated and could run some hospitals and schools, although it wasn’t allowed to openly proclaim the faith,” he said. More than 90 per cent of the Sudanese population professes Sunni Islam as a religion.

After the overthrow of the dictator Al-Bashir, some guarantees of religious freedom improved in the African country, such as the abolition of various punishments mandated by the *Syariah* penal code (Islamic religious law regulating all public and private aspects of life).

ACN explained that the Sudanese people have always considered the Church as a “safe haven” and that when the war broke out many took refuge in churches. However, many missionaries and religious communities have been forced to leave the country, so parishes,

hospitals, and schools have stopped functioning.

The Khartoum preparatory seminary also closed its doors. Some seminarians managed to flee to the neighbouring country of South Sudan, where they continue their training. Many Christians have had to leave the country on foot or by way of the Nile, only to end up in refugee camps, where survival “is a daily battle.”

Meanwhile, the bishop of Khartoum, Michael Didi, has not been able to return to the city, and the bishop of El Obeid, Tombe Trile, now lives in the cathedral because his house was partially destroyed.

While the continued existence of the Church in Sudan is in question, there are hopeful signs that the destruction will not be total: “Sixteen new Christians were baptised in Port Sudan during the Easter Vigil and 34 adults were confirmed in Kosti. So we have to keep hope alive in the midst of darkness,” one of ACN’s project partners in the country said.

Sudan and South Sudan share the same bishops’ conference. From this sign of unity, ACN continues to support the most vulnerable and the victims of the violence of war.

“The Church in South Sudan is getting ready for the future by helping the Sudanese Christians to prepare for tomorrow’s peace,” Schierstaedt said. — **By Andrés Henriquez, CNA**

Religious superiors explore ‘heartbeat of the Church’

KERALA: Publishers of *L’Osservatore Romano* in India recently organised an intensive programme at the Eco-Spirituality center at Sengulam near Munnar in the District of Idukki, Kerala, India, specifically for the Major Superiors of Women Religious in Kerala, India.

Themed *Ignite, Inspire, and Empower: Together, We Feel the Heartbeat of the Church*, the initiative saw 105 participants, boasting the presence of 4 Superior Generals, 25 Provincials, and 76 General/Provincial Councillors at the April 1 to 5 programme.

The primary objectives of this immersive programme were twofold: to equip Major Superiors with the tools necessary to navigate the mounting challenges confronting religious life globally, and to embolden them in fulfilling their duties with efficacy and grace.

Leadership, the central motif, was dissected into three distinct dimensions: Institutional Leadership, Personal Leadership, and Extra-rational Leadership.

Drawing upon the timeless wisdom enshrined in Biblical teachings and Church doctrines, participants were urged to find ways to rekindle their inspiration and that of their members.

Guided by the Holy Spirit and the authoritative directives of the Church as described in *Perfectae Caritatis*, Superiors were instructed to guide those under their care as children of God and manage their assets as Ecclesial goods with prudence and fidelity.

The Major Superiors and members were also introduced to the document published by the Dicastery for Communication, *Towards Full Presence - A Pastoral Reflection on Engagement*, with social media, as a guideline for communication best-practices in religious institutions.

The curriculum blended theological insights with practical di-

rectives, furnishing Superiors with the requisite acumen to tackle the issues they face in their daily responsibilities. Interactive sessions, workshops, and conversations facilitated the discussion of practical strategies, to help the superiors serve as beacons amidst the seas of religious administration.

The programme advocated for the practical integration of Synodality, a principle championed by Pope Francis, both within and beyond the Synod of Bishops.

The initiative sought to equip Major Superiors with the tools necessary to guide others with vision as part of the fabric of everyday religious life.

The importance of *Sentire cum Ecclesia* was insisted in the class requiring the Major Superiors to be always open to the needs of the local Church and the Universal Church in the inspiring model of St Teresa of Avila, who had ardently proclaimed, “I am the daughter of the Church.”

The Superiors were offered a subscription of *L’Osservatore Romano* and access to other documents of the Church. The Major Superiors also gave their support to the *One Library for one Parish, One L’Osservatore Romano for one Family* Programme, aimed at bringing the teachings of the Church to each Catholic, especially to younger generations.

The Superiors pledged their support and cooperation to diffuse understanding of the documents of the Church through various competitions, such as quiz competitions.

The programme represented a unique initiative put on by the Carmel International Publishing House, the publishers of the *L’Osservatore Romano* in India, with the purpose of spreading the news of the Church and the sermons of the Pope. — **By Don Jinu Jacob, Vatican News**