

HERALD

The Catholic Weekly

Mission Statement

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

TERHAD

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Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him.

1 John 3:18-19



A pilgrimage to green parishes

■ P4



Discernment a necessary precaution for exorcism

■ P6



CCR creates 'Church On Fire' with God's love

■ P9



(Vatican News)

YAOUNDÉ, Cameroon: One year has passed since the outbreak of war in Sudan, unleashing twelve months of relentless violence and conflict. The toll has been immense: countless lives lost, millions displaced, widespread hunger, and an ongoing humanitarian crisis of staggering proportions.

It began on April 15, 2023, leaving behind a trail of death, destruction, and unspeakable atrocities including rapes and murders. The magnitude of the tragedy is catastrophic, with at least 15,000 lives lost, eight million people displaced, and another 25 million reliant on humanitarian aid for survival. The streets of the Northeast African country are littered with corpses, and as the crisis deepens, funding for NGOs and UN agencies dwindles, dimming the hopes of the suffering population.

The Catholic Church's major international charitable organisation is now warning of massive new challenges on virtually every imaginable humanitarian front.

"After having already endured years of protracted crisis in the country, the

Sudanese people now face much greater threats to their safety and security, housing, water, food, essential health infrastructure and education," said Caritas Internationalis in a statement.

According to Caritas, nearly one-third of Sudan's population, approximately 18 million people, is now grappling with acute food shortages.

Even before the war, Sudan's living conditions were harsh and unjust due to economic instability and ethnic violence. Though humanitarian supplies are available, getting them to those in need remains an enormous challenge, and NGOs and aid organisations face looting, bureaucratic hurdles, and severe struggles with communication.

As is often, if not always the case, women, children and displaced people bear the brunt of the suffering. Children born amidst the violence face a difficult future whilst malnourished mothers struggle to feed them.

The Caritas statement also talked about outbreaks in such diseases as cholera, which it said are "compounding the impact on the population, two-thirds of whom lack access to healthcare."

The World Health Organisation reports that assaults on healthcare facilities have ex-

acerbated the struggle for women and girls to obtain essential medical services. With almost 75 per cent of health institutions non-functional and outbreaks of diseases on the rise, access to healthcare remains out of reach for two-thirds of the populace.

Caritas has warned that the situation is likely to get worse "given the radically reduced production of Sudan's main staple cereals of sorghum and millet."

Caritas complained that even as the needs continue to rise, the humanitarian appeal wasn't getting the necessary response, with only seven per cent currently being funded. Yet, the group said, "the 2024 Sudan Regional Refugee Response Plan urgently requires \$1.4 billion (RM6.6 billion) to continue critical life-saving interventions and protection to 2.7 million refugees, returnees and host communities in five neighbouring countries."

Amidst worsening conditions, Caritas has issued an urgent appeal for the mobilisation of fresh resources and the forging of partnerships with diaspora networks and agencies to ensure vital assistance reaches those most affected. Highlighting the need for a robust and collaborative international response, Caritas emphasises the importance of cross-border initiatives from Chad and South Sudan to expand humanitarian

access, aiming for an immediate ceasefire and the resolution of the conflict fuelling the severe hunger crisis of 2024.

"We implore the international community not to forsake the people of Sudan, notwithstanding the attention drawn to conflicts elsewhere," states the Caritas statement.

"While acknowledging the commendable grassroots efforts and the support from the Sudanese diaspora, including peace-building initiatives led by religious and traditional leaders, we urgently appeal for significantly increased international humanitarian aid to alleviate the immense suffering of the populace."

This plea resonates with the sentiments expressed by Pope Francis on February 18, wherein he urged the conflicting factions in Sudan to lay down their arms and pursue peace.

"Ten months have passed since the eruption of armed conflict in Sudan, resulting in a dire humanitarian crisis," remarked Francis during his *Angelus* Prayer.

"I reiterate my call to the belligerents to halt this destructive war, which inflicts grievous harm upon the people and the nation's future. Let us pray for the swift emergence of peaceful avenues to chart the path forward for beloved Sudan," he concluded.

— Agencies

HERALD

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EDITOR'S NOTE

In today's fast-paced world of media and information, the Catholic community, like many others, finds itself navigating a landscape filled with sensitive topics that demand careful consideration. As a publication committed to upholding the values and teachings of the Catholic Church, it is incumbent upon us to approach these subjects with a sense of prudence and discernment. While the temptation to sensationalise or rush to judgment may be strong, we must resist these urges in favour of a more measured and thoughtful approach.

One of the primary reasons for exercising caution in reporting on sensitive topics is the potential for misinformation or misinterpretation. Issues such as religious doctrine, moral teachings, and social issues are complex and nuanced, requiring a deep understanding and expertise to navigate effectively. Without the proper context or background knowledge, there is a real danger of misrepresenting the Church's position or inadvertently spreading falsehoods.

Furthermore, sensitive topics often touch upon deeply held beliefs and convictions, both within the Catholic community and beyond. Discussions surrounding topics such as

abortion, euthanasia, and same-sex marriage can evoke strong emotions and reactions. As such, it is essential to approach these subjects with empathy and sensitivity, recognising the diverse perspectives and experiences of our readership.

Another reason for exercising caution in reporting on sensitive topics is the potential for harm, both to individuals and to the reputation of the Church. Inaccurate or inflammatory reporting can lead to misunderstandings, division, and even harm to individuals or communities. By seeking out expert opinions and carefully considering our approach, we can help to ensure that our reporting is fair, accurate, and respectful of all parties involved.

It is also important to recognise that our caution in reporting on sensitive topics is not rooted in fear or a desire to avoid controversy. Rather, it is an expression of our commitment to truth, justice, and the dignity of every human person. As Catholics, we are called to seek the truth in all things and to uphold the dignity of every person, even when discussing difficult or contentious issues.

In seeking out expert opinions, we are not abdicating our responsibility as journalists or

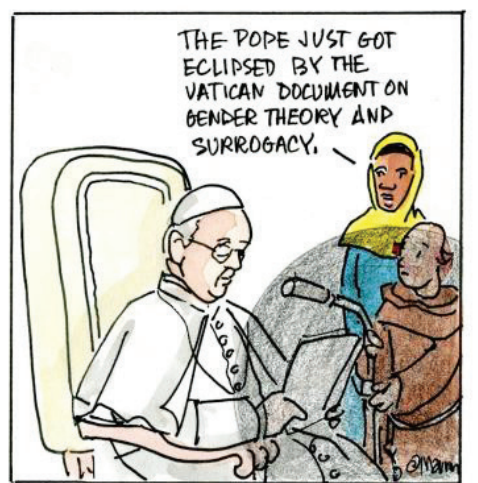
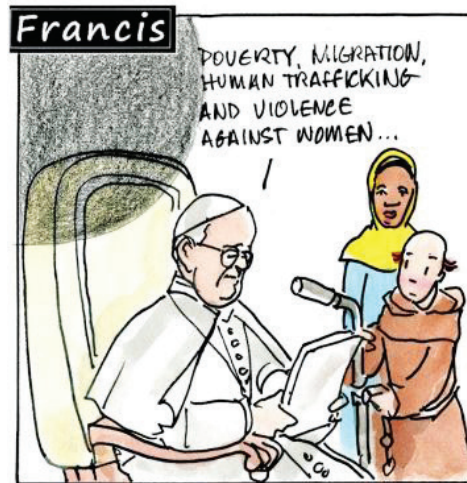
as Catholics. Instead, we are acknowledging the limits of our own knowledge and expertise and recognising the value of seeking out the insights of those who are more knowledgeable or experienced in a particular area.

In a world where sensationalism and click-bait often dominate the media landscape, our commitment to prudence may be misconstrued as a lack of courage or conviction. However, nothing could be further from the truth. True courage lies not in recklessness or brashness but in the steadfast pursuit of truth tempered by wisdom and discernment.

Moreover, our commitment to prudence is rooted in the teachings of our faith. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us of the importance of prudence as one of the cardinal virtues, guiding us in the exercise of sound judgment and moral discernment.

As a Catholic publication, we are committed to fulfilling our mission of informing and educating our readership while upholding the values and teachings of the Catholic Church. In a world hungry for authenticity and understanding, we aim to be a guiding light, radiating courage, compassion, and wisdom in all that we do.

Patricia Pereira



NCRonline.org/cartoons

From mere productivity to wholehearted fruitfulness

Think about what you do in your daily life that just leaves you exhausted. I am talking about the things that leave you emotionally drained and physically worn out. These are not the kind of things for which sleeping late, taking a day off, or going on vacation are the antidote. It's about more than just being tired. The constant physical and emotional striving depletes and empties our spirit. You feel your soul drying out even as your tears get closer and closer to overflowing. You do what you've got to do but it's not really what you want to do. You give your time and your effort but not your heart.

Now think about those things you do that seem effortless. They just flow. You're in the zone. They are the things in which you totally immerse yourself. You bring all that you are and all that you have. You hold nothing back. You give it your all and you wouldn't have it any other way. You feel light as a feather. You feel full and complete. You look at the clock and wonder where the time went. You don't want to stop and when you do you can't wait until you can start again. This is about wholeheartedness and it's the antidote to exhaustion.

We are a people of productivity. It is, for the most part, the standard by how we live and the measure of our success.

It is built into our lives everywhere. Productivity is the basis of our economic system. Those who produce are rewarded and get more. Those who do not produce are thrown out. Within our educational system the students who do well and produce are recognised and supported while those who do not produce get lost in the system. Careers and promotions are based on productivity.

I wonder if we sometimes let our productivity high jack our fruitfulness and wholeheartedness. We get the job done and we pay our way, but at what cost? We have been convinced that productivity is the goal and only the fittest survive. I wonder if that isn't how many of us live our spiritual lives. How many of us have been told, in some form or fashion, or come to believe that pruned branches go to heaven and removed branches go to hell? Pruned branches produced so they are rewarded while non-productive branches are punished.

If we are not careful, we'll get stuck categorising ourselves and one another into fruit bearing or non-fruit bearing branches. There is, however, a deeper issue than the production of fruit. Productivity does not usually create deep abiding and intimate relationships. It creates transactions. Jesus is not talking about

or demanding productivity. He wants and offers connectivity, relationship, and intimacy.

And let's be honest, by conventional standards, Jesus might not seem like the picture of success or productivity. He wasn't employed in the traditional sense and relied on benefactors for sustenance. And there's just not much to go on a resume — born in Bethlehem, briefly unaccounted for at 12, baptised at 30, itinerant preacher for three years, concluding with his death at 33 and resurrection three days later. What did He really do on a daily basis?

For three years He showed up. He was present. He listened. He loved. He connected with people. He prayed. He was faithful and obedient. He told stories about life and finding meaning. He offered mercy and forgiveness. He shared meals. He was compassionate. He touched the hurting and broken places in people's lives. He had a vision for a new life and a different way of being in the world. He offered hope. He pointed to a life beyond his own. He helped people connect with themselves, one another, and God. He didn't do all that much, but he made a huge difference. In short, he was more fruitful than productive.

That's how I want to live, don't you?

Reflecting on our Sunday Readings with the Editor

5th Sunday of Easter (B)

Readings: Acts of the Apostle 9:26-31;

1 John 3:18-24

Gospel: John 15:1-8

I want my life to matter. I want my life to have meaning. I want to give myself to what is worthwhile. I want to make a difference. I want to give priority to people and relationships. I want to be deeply connected. I want to blossom and grow.

"What fruit am I producing?" "How much?" "Is it an acceptable quality?" Those are good questions if we understand and ask them diagnostically, as questions not about the quantity of our lives but the quality of our lives. That's what Jesus is after. That is the deeper question He is asking. It is the invitation to join the conversation, jump into the game, to participate, and to live fully alive. Such fulfilment arises when the life, love, goodness and holiness of Christ flows through us, transforming us into bearers of His essence. This connection is like that of a branch to the vine, deeply unified. Our lives intertwine, not only in our relationship with Jesus but also as the foundation for our relationships with each other.

Cardinal hopes Pope's visit will 'spur a renewal'

SINGAPORE: Following the announcement of Pope Francis' upcoming apostolic journey to the Asia Pacific region, Cardinal William Goh, the Archbishop of Singapore, has expressed his hope that the Holy Father's visit from September 11-13 will invigorate all Catholics in Singapore with renewed fervour.

In a media release, Cardinal William urged the Catholic community in Singapore to come together and pray for the Pope's visit. "Let us, as a community, pray for the continued health and safety of the Holy Father and ask the Lord to grant us a truly meaningful and grace-filled visit," he stated.

This visit marks a decade since Cardinal William announced his 10-year pastoral plan for the



Catholic Church in Singapore. At a 2014 assembly of around 750 parish ministry representatives, the cardinal highlighted that despite the appearance of vibrancy due to numerous Masses, baptisms, and confirmations, the Church faces challenges such as the declining religious practice among locals. "Half of the Catholics attend church. The Church is full thanks to the migrants," he commented.

To spiritually prepare the faithful for "meeting Jesus through Pope Francis' pastoral visit," the Archdiocese of Singapore recently launched a dedicated website. This platform offers prayers, online resources, and updates about the Pope's impending visit in September. The website also introduces the archdiocese's chosen theme of *Unity, Hope, and the Cross* to commemorate the 2024 papal trip.

Singapore's Catholic population, currently around 395,000, comprises individuals from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Masses are primarily conducted in English, but services in Mandarin, Tamil, and other Southeast Asian or European languages cater to both local and ex-



The Singapore prelate with Pope Francis during the 2018 Ad Limina visit in Rome. (Vatican Media)

patriate communities.

Although the Catholic Church in Singapore is relatively young and diverse, and is growing amidst a politically peaceful environment with mandated religious tolerance, Cardinal William hopes that Pope Francis' visit will inspire a renewal and strengthening of faith, conversion of heart, and a missionary

spirit within the Catholic communities in Singapore.

A key event of the Pope's visit will be the papal Mass scheduled for Sept 12. The only previous papal visit to Singapore occurred in 1986 when Pope John Paul II made a five-hour stopover and celebrated Mass with thousands at the national stadium.



KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

May

- 4 Diploma in Theology Graduation
- 10 Book Launch of Archbishop Emeritus Murphy Pakiam
- 15-16 Clergy Recollection
- 16 Meeting – Archdiocesan Finance
- 18 Confirmation – Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Klang



MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

April / May

- 29/4 Meeting – South Johor Vicariate Cemetery Committee at Bishop's House, MAJODI Centre
- 1/5 Groundbreaking Ceremony – Church of the Holy Family, Ulu Tiram
- 4/5 Mass – Centennial (100th) Anniversary, Church of St Philip, Segamat
- 6-9/5 Meeting – ECMI Commission, Sibul
- 15/5 South Johor Vicariate Clergy Meeting – Church of Christ the King, Kulai
- 18/5 Annual General Meeting – Villa Paulos
- 18/5 Confirmation – Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, Johor Bahru



Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #172

F12
NEWS
MJD UPDATES

Greetings to you, dear friends of MJD.

A real Bolehland! Pardon for a big time crook is up again. Firebombs, vandals, airport shooting, prayer mats that became doormats, no arrests till date. Johore is a hotspot — with the RTS, the Singapore Economic Zone, 2025 ETS double tracking from Gemas to JB and a new PM for Singapore.

Cataract Times: Can a state go on without law and order? Even if there are good laws, good enforcement bodies and good courts, when there is a lack of the rule of law, double standards in sentencing, and convicted criminals escaping punishment — people lose faith in the justice system. People whisper, snigger and joke about "bolehnness" here. We have the law but no order. We have to be colour-blind to serve one another without fear or favour. The blind cannot lead the blind nor the one-eyed jack lead the others. Even the blind live a rule of life.

Thought for the Week: My Teammate

In the first seasons with the Brooklyn Dodgers, Jackie Robinson, the first black man to play Major League baseball, faced venom nearly everywhere he travelled — fastballs at his head, getting spiked on the bases, brutal epithets from the opposing dugouts and from the crowds. During one game in Boston, the taunts and racial slurs seemed to reach a peak. In the midst of this, another Dodger, a Southern white named Pee Wee Reese, called time-out. He walked from his position at shortstop towards Robinson at second base, put his arm

around Robinson's shoulder, and stood there with him for what seemed like a long time. The gesture spoke more eloquently than the words: This man was his friend. ~ Willie Morris.

A lesson from a friend: Racism is ugly and repulsive. IT is a poisonous mentality. Today's story is about two professional baseball players. One who had to face the evils of racism everywhere he went...and the other, who decided to show people how he felt about racism and be a friend to his teammate.

Announcements for the Week:

- Join the MJD's Creation Justice Ministry's collaboration with Caritas MJD, the Forestry Department, on the *Mangrove Project*. Contact the Creation Justice Committee of your parish.
- A *Kursus Evangelisasi Peribadi (Personal Evangelisation Course)*, is being organised by the diocesan team, with the theme *Mari, ikutlah AKU, dan kamu akan Ku jadikan penjala manusia. (Mat 4:19)*. from July - Nov. For more information, email: kepmjd@mjdioocese.my
- Mental Health & Stress of Teenagers Today!* organised by the diocesan family life ministry. Target audience: Parents, educators, guardians to teenagers and all those interested. On May 5, from 8.00pm-10.00pm with host, Andrew Chew. (Zoom Meet ID 89453900441; Zoom passcode 669939)
- The *Special Children's Parents Support Group* want to reach out to parents with special children who have, autism, or any mental or physical disabilities. Open to all language groups. Contact Veronica Dass Tel: 016 2095001.

QnQ: The Q asked:

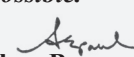
How do you assess Pope Francis?

At the age of 87, and serving his 11th year as pontiff, he has published yet another book entitled *Life, My Story Through History*, on March 19, 2024.

- Announces his visit to Indonesia, Timor Leste, Singapore and Papua New Guinea in September 2024 as a journey to strengthen the message of tolerance, unity and world peace.
- Surprises us by his spontaneity in his visit to 200 catechism children in Rome, warned about the "throwaway culture" as a culture of death; and expressed his concern for the escalating tensions in the Middle East with the Iran missile attacks.
- At the International Conference titled *Women in the Church: Builders of Humanity*, the Pope reminded the conference that the Church herself is a woman, a daughter, a bride, and a mother. He spoke about women's contributions, which he said are characterised by tenderness and compassion, to foster unity and restore humanity's true identity.
- Believes that everything in the Church and everything about the Church is evangelisation, motivated by one's love for God, and a desire to share that love with others.

Listen, learn and be led by the Holy Spirit, the Holy Fire of boldness, power, love and self control.

Something to tickle you: "*To one who has faith, no explanation is necessary. To one without faith, no explanation is possible.*"


Bishop Bernard Paul

A pilgrimage to green parishes

By Dr Maria Lee and Karen-Ann Theseira

JOHOR BAHRU: The Cathedral of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (SHC) organised a pilgrimage to the parishes in north and central Johore from April 10 to 12. Members from the Creation Justice Commission of the Diocese of Malacca Johore, jumped at the opportunity to learn about the best environmentally friendly practices of these churches. A 'green' pilgrimage within a pilgrimage.

Day 1 – Kota Tinggi, Mersing, Yong Peng and Kluang

The first stop was **Church of St Elizabeth**



Well-organised recycling area at the Church of St Elizabeth, Kota Tinggi.

in **Kota Tinggi**, the patroness of Catholic charities and of the Secular Franciscan Order. Pilgrims were given an interesting history of the church which was finally completed, consecrated and opened by Bishop James Chan on August 18, 1991. Helen Wong, Patricia Lee and Rosa Soh from the church committee showed us the well-organised recycling area used to store recyclables. Funds from the sale of recyclables goes towards the maintenance of the church. To preserve the flowers donated to the church by parishioners, fridges are used.

Pilgrims enjoyed a delicious lunch at **Church of St Peter in Mersing**, our second stop. The quaint church serves about 80



Paved with gravel and grass at the Church of St Peter, Mersing.

Catholics, mostly East Malaysian soldiers and their families stationed in the locality. Church coordinator Christopher Lee explained how the church refuses to resort to paving the car park and the surrounding area, choosing gravel and grass instead. Christopher added that the cut grass is placed on top of and in between the gravel and this acts as a sponge to absorb water, thus cooling down the area. The church also uses LED and a light sensor system. To further reduce wastage: plates and cutlery are used at events held at church.

Chapel of St Anthony in Yong Peng was the third stop on the pilgrimage. This chapel which comes under the purview of the Church of St Henry in Batu Pahat,



Airy with just fans at the Chapel of St Anthony, Yong Peng.

felt airy and comfortable without any air-conditioning, just fans.

The final stop on day one — which included dinner, was **Church of St Louis in Kluang**. Msgr Peter Ng the current parish priest, is an advocate of environmentally friendly practices at the parish. Kimbelle Lee from the church committee informed us that parishioners are encouraged to bring their own water bottles which they can fill up at the water cooler. Parishioners are also provided with proper plates and cutlery which they have to wash after use. Kimbelle added that announcements are made and videos shown at Mass to create awareness on environmental issues.



Washing up after a meal at Church of St Louis, Kluang.

Day Two – Cha'ah, Labis, Segamat, Tangkak, Muar and Batu Pahat

On day two, pilgrims visited the **Church of St Anthony in Cha'ah**. In 1968, Fr Bernard Binet, MEP, was assigned as the first parish priest and it was during Fr Bernard's tenure that the church became an independent parish. Solar panels are used to power the spotlights in the compound and even the light of Jesus! Esther Ezra from the church committee mentioned that 30 families make up the congregation. On the grounds of the church, there is a Sacramentum where materials used in sacred rites are deposited or poured away.

The pilgrimage continued on to **Church of St Simon in Labis**. The parish has seen new facilities and upgrades over the last few years. In 2022, the construction of a new road in Labis changed the entrance to the church. This parish also has a recycling program overseen by church committee member Juvy Padilla Candia, with the

help of her husband who drives the lorry of goods to the recycling centre.

Lunch was provided at the **Church of St Philip in Segamat**. This parish turns 100 this year and the feast day falls on May 3. We were indeed glad to see plates and cutlery used at lunch as this results in minimal single use plastic ending up in the landfill. Solar lamps could be seen on the church grounds.

The pilgrimage moved on to the **Church of St Matthew in Tangkak**. Priest in Residence Fr Bartholomew Wong, welcomed the pilgrims and gave a short talk about the parish; the construction of the beautiful parish was completed in 2010. The rain harvesting system found here helps greatly to conserve water and reduce water bills. The church, with her high ceilings and large doors on the sides, is airy and cool, thus reducing the carbon footprint.

In 1908, a MEP priest, Fr Henri Jules Duvelle, baptised 16 local people which led to the growth of the local Catholic faith. Fr Henri would be indeed overjoyed at what the **Church of St Andrew in Muar** has become. The new Parish Pastoral Council chairperson, James Lee, has many exciting plans for the parish; composting, a nursery and vegetable garden. James would like the catechism children to learn to care for and appreciate Creation through an 'adopt a plant' programme. The parish has a recycling centre managed by SSVP. The church is air-conditioned with the fans on in tandem for more effective air circulation.

Church of St Henry in Batu Pahat was the last parish visited on day two and dinner



Recyclables from Church of St Simon, Labis off to the recycling centre.



Church of St Philip, Segamat using plates and cutlery at lunch.

was provided. Amidst the lush greenery, lies the stunning parish which was once selected as the symbol of the Christian church in the civic textbook of primary schools in the country. This parish is an architectural marvel devoid of columns and surrounded by vertical louvres and perforated windows for natural ventilation.



Vertical louvres and perforated windows for natural ventilation at Church of St Henry, Batu Pahat.



Lighting the Light of Jesus with a solar panel at Church of St Anthony, Cha'ah.



Rain harvesting system to conserve water at Church of St Matthew, Tangkak.



Potential composting site at Church of St Andrew, Muar.

Day Three – Pontian and Pekan Nenas



The beauty of nature at Church of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Pontian.

On the third and final day, pilgrims visited the **Church of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in Pontian**. This charming parish serves a small Catholic community of about 50 families. The lush fruit trees found behind the parish add to her charm.



Grotto of Mother Mary amidst flowers and opulent plants at Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Pekan Nenas.

The **Church of Our Lady of Lourdes in Pekan Nenas** concluded the pilgrimage. This parish is similar to the Church of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in size and charm. A lovely surprise found behind the parish delighted many pilgrims; a grotto of Mother Mary surrounded by beautiful flowers and opulent plants. Fr Dr Lawrence Ng is the parish administrator of both of these parishes and graciously welcomed the bus loads of pilgrims at each parish.

It was so heartening to see parishes, big and small taking measures in bigger and smaller ways to be better stewards of Creation.

District Easter celebration

SHAH ALAM: Clergy and parishioners from the six churches in the Petaling District gathered at the Church of the Divine Mercy (CDM), April 15, to celebrate Easter together.

The priests of the Petaling District decided to break from tradition and organise an Easter Mass this year, aiming to offer parishioners a fresh and meaningful experience.

This decision comes after last year's successful Petaling-level Corpus Christi celebration brought together the community in a spirit of unity and devotion.

By choosing to host an Easter Mass, the priests hope to continue fostering a sense of togetherness and spiritual enrichment among the faithful in the district.

The late evening Holy Hour and Mass saw a good turnout of the faithful who braved the weekday rush hour traffic to get to CDM.

Before the evening's Holy Hour and Mass, the district's priests met for a discussion on synodality.

A total of 13 priests and three seminarians were at the Eucharistic celebration and fellowship. Fr George Harrison, the main celebrant, celebrated his first Mass as the parish priest of CDM. Concelebrating were Fr Lawrence Ng CDD (Church of St Ignatius), Msgr Patrick Boudville (Church of St Thomas More), Frs Leonard Lexson and Biju Mathew (Church of the Assumption), Frs Alvin Ng SJ and Richard Anthony SJ (Church of St Francis Xavier), and



Clergy praying over the congregation.

Fr Raymond Pereira (Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe).

Other concelebrants included Fr Michel Dass (former acting PP for CDM) and Fr George Vaithynathan (Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Silibin) and several visiting priests.

In his sermon, Fr Alvin emphasised that after the resurrection,

Jesus was not initially recognised by his disciples, including Mary Magdalene, the two on the road to Emmaus, and Peter and his friends on the boat.

However, what eventually opened their eyes to him were his actions and words. Father explained that this reflects the reality

of the resurrected Christ: he continues to live within each of us and others will recognise Him through our ordinary actions and words in daily life.

The event ended with a fellowship allowing the faithful to connect with friends and family from the district.

Breaking the silence on bullying

By Joseph and Anita Pragasam

PETALING JAYA: To foster a secure environment for children, teenagers, and adults alike, society must unite in discouraging bullying. This was the over arching message delivered at an awareness talk *The Effects of Bullying*, organised by the Archdiocesan Family Life Commission (AFLC) on April 6.

Held at Dewan Volle, Church of the Assumption, the day-long talk was attended by approximately 75 participants and featured four speakers — Emmanuel Dorai, Brian Dorai, Nicholas Chan and Fr Gregory Chan.

The first speaker, Emmanuel Dorai, a retired disciplinary teacher from Penang, defined bullying as the repetitive, intentional hurting of one person by another person or group. He emphasised that bullying can be physical, verbal, or psychological, and can occur face-to-face or online. Emmanuel highlighted an increase in reported bullying cases in 2023 compared to 2022, according to the Education Ministry.

He further explained the procedures taken when a bullying case is reported in school, emphasising that authorities take such incidents seriously. After determining that

bullying has occurred, a minimum of three working days is given for the incident to be investigated and appropriate action to be taken, followed by a full report to the State Education Department.

Brian Dorai, a psychologist and senior lecturer at INTI Education Group in Penang, spoke about bullying at different levels, including in colleges, universities, and workplaces. He explained that victims of bullying, even among "friends," experience profound insecurity, leading to poor self-esteem, constant fear, and vigilance. He stressed the mental and emotional impact on victims, who often feel unaccepted, isolated, angry, and withdrawn.

Brian shared steps victims can take, such as staying calm, not letting hurtful words affect them, telling perpetrators to stop, walking away, and seeking the company of other friends. He underscored the importance of victims seeking help from parents, teachers, or the Human Resource Department at work, rather than suffering in silence.

Nicholas Chan, an International Professional Peak Performance and Management Consultant, discussed the rise of cyberbullying, noting its insidious nature due to anonymity on social media. He highlighted



(Adobe photo/Satjawat)

statistics showing that nearly 42 per cent of kids have been bullied online, with almost one in four experiencing repeated bullying. Nicholas warned of the negative emotional impact on teenagers, including depression, anxiety, and suicidal tendencies, emphasising the need for vigilance.

Fr Gregory Chan, a former lawyer and current parish priest of the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Klang, focused on the legal aspects of bullying. He cited the Laws of Malaysia Act 792 – Sexual Offences Against Children Act of 2017 and a UKM research paper, defining bullying from a legal standpoint and

discussing penalties and charges. Fr Gregory, the priest-delegate for the Professional Standards Office Committee for Child Protection also addressed sexual grooming of children, urging parents and guardians to be vigilant.

Participants, including parents, single adults, and children from the parishes of the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, found the programme highly informative. Francis, Jasmine, and their four children from Our Lady of Guadalupe, Puchong parish, found the programme enriching, gaining useful information and insights. Jasmine praised the speakers,

saying, "Good and motivating speakers gave us useful information and insights on bullying, even for us parents."

Sixteen children from the Ozanam Home who participated, expressed that the presentations heightened their awareness of bullying and equipped them with strategies to prevent or seek help, if necessary.

The over arching message delivered by all speakers in this program underscores the parental responsibility to consistently educate children about the wrongness of bullying. Forms of bullying, such as body shaming, name-calling, and ostracising, were highlighted as detrimental behaviours. Left unaddressed, bullying can escalate and contribute to mental health challenges. Society must unite in discouraging bullying to foster a secure environment for children, teenagers, and adults alike.

Also present at the talk were AFLC's ecclesiastical assistant, Fr Andrew Kooi and the Chair couple of the AFLC, Dato' Dr Robert Basker and Datin Shelah.

Those seeking further information about the talk or wishing to arrange similar sessions may contact: Joseph (012 9696117) or Cornelius (018 228 9818)

Couples invited to discover the gift of family

PETALING JAYA: The *Family is a Gift* programme, initiated by Couples for Christ (CFC), is dedicated to cherishing the essence of family by promoting Christian values and a lifestyle aligned with them.

In collaboration with the Family Life ministry of the Church of St Francis Xavier, the organising team extends a warm invitation to couples to participate in a series of engaging talks and workshops. These sessions delve into growing concerns and challenges that impact the harmony of contemporary marriages and families.

Acknowledging the family as God's unique masterpiece and

truly a gift that allows us to experience God's overflowing love, we are called to steadfastly empower, fortify, and safeguard it at all costs.

The initial two sessions of the Family is a Gift programme, commenced in March, commenced with strategies for cultivating a healthy family dynamic and emphasised the significance of establishing a family vision. Subsequent talks will explore various pertinent subjects such as navigating relationships with in-laws, managing marital finances, fostering effective communication in intimacy, and more.

Presently, the participants consist of 10 couples, among them members of the Family Life Team

of the Catholic Ministry for the Deaf (CMfD). The next sessions are scheduled as follows:

- April 28 — Happy Spouse, Happy House
- May 12 — In Highs and In Lows
- May 26 — 10 Things to Do after I Do
- June 9 — S.O.S Spend or Save
- June 23 — Communication in Intimacy

The programme welcomes all Catholic couples to participate in any or all of the sessions, and there is no admission fee. For further information, please contact the SFX Family Life Ministry team: BG Chin/Wendy Chin at 016-8317287.

— By Mary Anne Alabanza-Asa



Discernment a necessary precaution for exorcism

By Anthony Alan Lukose

PETALING JAYA: The seminar on *Deliverance and Exorcism* held at the Church of St Ignatius, April 10 to 14, opened with a presentation titled *Study on Demonology*, delivered by Fr Jose Francisco C. Syquia (chief exorcist) and Fr Winston F. Cabading (exorcist) from the Archdiocese of Manila, setting the tone for the event.

A total of 250 participants comprising clergy and laity from the various parishes within the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, Kuching and Penang attended the seminar organised by CHARIS KL Service of Communion (CKLSC). The attendance of the laity, endorsed by their respective parish priests, underscored the seriousness of the seminar and the expected outcomes.

Fr Jose started by emphasising the undeniable reality of Satan's existence, countering the prevailing notion that dismisses it as a mere myth. He echoed the sentiments of the Holy Father, who cautioned against the misconception that the devil is merely an abstract concept, stating, "But in this generation, like so many others, people have been led to believe that the devil is a myth, a figure, an idea, the idea of evil. But the devil exists and we must fight against him." Despite attempts to attribute evil solely to human weaknesses and failures, Fr Jose stressed that the reality is far more profound.

According to Fr Jose, the devil's primary adversary is God, and humanity merely finds itself caught in the crossfire. He clarified the distinction between the terms "devil" and "demon," with the former referring specifically to Satan or Lucifer, the leader of the rebellious angels, and the latter encompassing his followers, the fallen angels. Fr Jose reiterated the teachings of the Church on this matter, affirming the existence and significance of spiritual warfare.

Participants discovered various forms of Spiritual Warfare prayers during the seminar. These include Prayers of Liberation, which can be recited by the laity, religious, priests, and exorcists. Minor Exorcism prayers are reserved for priests and exorcists, while Major or Solemn Exorcism is conducted solely by an ordained priest or higher prelate, with the explicit permission of the local bishop, as stipulated by Canon law.

Archbishop Julian Leow, in his brief



Some of the participants at the seminar on *Deliverance and Exorcism*.



Fr Jose Francisco C. Syquia (chief exorcist) and Fr Winston F. Cabading (exorcist) from the Archdiocese of Manila.

address to the participants on the first day of the seminar, emphasised the importance of discernment before engaging in exorcism. Not everyone who claims or is perceived to be in need of exorcism requires such intervention. Frs Jose and Winston corroborated this, highlighting the multiple layers and processes involved in the Ministry of Deliverance. Modelled after the Ministry from the Archdiocese of Manila, it involves the collaboration of psychiatrists, doctors, counsellors, and coordinators — whether from the laity or the clergy — in addition to the chief exorcist. These diverse expertise levels ensure thorough discernment before a case is referred to an exorcist.

Fr Winston dedicated his sessions to explaining the intricate processes involved in exorcism. He utilised several recordings of actual exorcisms to illustrate what participants could expect during such rituals.

Additionally, the significance of sacramentals was explored. Commonly used sacramentals in exorcisms, such as holy water, salt, crucifixes, incense, and bells, were discussed. These elements are chosen for their ability to engage the human senses, enhancing the spiritual experience.

Both presenters dedicated the majority of the third day of the seminar, guiding participants on how to establish an Office of Exorcism modelled after the one in the Archdiocese of Manila.

The seminar concluded with a reminder that we are not alone in the spiritual battle. The importance of understanding angels was emphasised. Angels exist in the supernatural realm while we reside in the natural world. Each person is assigned an angel at birth, and it is up to us to cultivate and nurture this relationship. Angels serve to guide us closer to Our Father, but their assistance requires our consent. Unfortunately, many modern-day Catholics have overlooked or side-lined this spiritual advantage. Those who cultivate familiarity with their angels can truly appreciate the power, goodness, and gentle generosity of these heavenly beings.

Fr Clement Lim, ecclesiastical assistant for CKLSC, said that the seminar marks only the beginning of laying the groundwork for establishing a similar Ministry within the archdiocese (if that decision is made). Many more discussions and procedures must be finalised before implementation. Participants were urged to persevere in prayer.

Feedback from the participants

A group of working adults from the *Achapel of Kristus Aman* found the seminar to be both unique and enlightening. Having encountered manifestations within their prayer group, they enrolled in the seminar in search of answers. Some of their uncertainties were addressed during the sessions. For many, it served as a wake-up call, prompting them to acknowledge the presence and reality of the Devil. When asked if they would be willing to participate in a Ministry of Deliverance, they realised the significant commitment involved and the importance of personal preparation in such a role.

A senior participant expressed the view that the seminar seemed more tailored for the clergy and informative only for the laity. They had anticipated a more biblically-based approach to guide participants in matters of deliverance.

The *Ministry of Deliverance and Exorcism from the Kuching Archdiocese*, led by Friar Don Don Romero Remerez (appointed exorcist by the local bishop), participated in the seminar. For this ministry, the teachings and guidance provided affirmed their practices. One member even referred to the presenters, Frs Jose and Winston, as "sifu" (master, a term of respect in Chinese), impressed by the depth of their insights.

"When asked for advice on starting a similar ministry, the response was clear, 'Work closely with the Church and clergy.' They also noted that working in this ministry has been a path to spiritual growth for them individually.



During one of the praise and worship sessions.



Fr Jose Francisco and Fr Winston Cabading with the organisers.

St Martha's Kitchen fostering community

PLENTONG, Johor: With the blessing of their parish priest, a dedicated group comprising catechists and parents from the Church of St Joseph came together to establish St Martha's Kitchen, with the purpose of hosting regular gatherings after the English sunset Mass.

A gathering was initiated by St Martha's Kitchen on April 13, where after the sunset Mass, the parish community came together to enjoy a buffet-style dinner featuring a variety of delicious foods, including seafood spicy noodles, home-cooked chicken curry, sandwiches, pastries, burgers, fruits, and more.

The parish community embraced this opportunity to celebrate Easter fellowship, symbolising our new life in Christ's Resurrection and the victory over sin and darkness.

During the gathering, Fr Moses

Yap, OFM, addressed the English-speaking community, volunteers, helpers, and sponsors of St Martha's Kitchen. He expressed gratitude for the fellowship, noting that it had been a long time since the parish had such a gathering after the Sunset Mass. Fr Moses hoped that through these gatherings, parishioners could foster closer relationships and build up the community, inviting more people, especially lapsed Catholics, back to the church.

He commended the 11 faithful volunteers who sought St Martha's intercession to form this group for fellowship, which was a success. He also thanked the entire community for their overwhelming participation, bringing the English-speaking community closer together. — *By Benedict J. M. Kwok*



The parish community of St Joseph, Plentong enjoying a fellowship dinner hosted by St Martha's Kitchen after the sunset Mass on April 13, 2024.

Catholic doctors fundraising surpasses RM20k goal

SUBANG: The Catholic Doctors Association of Malaysia (CDAM) marked its 41st anniversary with a charity dinner and dance at Kelab Golf Negara Subang on April 6. The event aimed to generate funds for its diverse outreach programs, extending support to various marginalised groups including the impoverished, the sick, the disabled, the homeless, refugees, migrant workers and orang asli.

CDAM typically operates independently, although occasionally collaborating with the Parish Integral Human Development Ministry (PIHDM) from various local parishes. Since their last fundraising endeavour in August 2017, the association's funds had been dwindling. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic further impeded their ability to conduct



Dr David Kumar with Fr Lawrence Andrew SJ, Archbishop Julian Leow and Dr Freddie Loh.

any fund raising activities until recently.

The recent fundraising event proved to be a resounding success, marked by the sale of 25 dinner tables, over 10 digital advertisements, and significant con-

tributions from generous donors. Consequently, they exceeded expectations by generating more than RM20,000 in profit, surpassing the minimum estimated profit of RM20,000.

Among the distinguished guests

at the dinner and dance were Archbishop Julian Leow, Fr Lawrence Ng, CDD, and Jesuit Frs Alvin Ng and Lawrence Andrew. Also in attendance were Fatima Emmanuel from Samaritan Hope Home and representatives from the Catholic Lawyers Society.

The evening commenced with speeches by Archbishop Julian, Dr Freddie Loh, the organising chairman, and Dr David Kumar, the president of CDAM.

In his address, Archbishop Julian expressed his joy in witnessing the dedication of Catholic doctors, not only to their patients but also to outreach programmes aimed at providing medical assistance to those in need within our community. He acknowledged CDAM's efforts, as showcased in a slide presentation

highlighting their outreach to the underprivileged and sick in and around the Klang Valley, along with their ongoing collaborations with Montfort Boys Town, the Little Sisters of the Poor, and Samaritan Hope Home.

The guests were treated to a diverse programme of music, dance performances, a lucky draw, a best-dressed competition, and an auction of paintings.

"We are grateful to Almighty God for empowering us to orchestrate this successful event. Our organising committee persevered through challenges, leaning on prayer and diligence to surmount them," remarked Dr Freddie Loh. He emphasised that their success ultimately stemmed from their faith in Christ, who strengthens them to accomplish all things.

Sandakan Catholics donating blood to save lives

SANDAKAN: A blood donation campaign was held recently at the Cathedral of St Mary.

It was organised by the Catholic Nurses Guild (CNG) of Sandakan, the parish Pastoral Council and the Duchess of Kent Hospital's blood bank unit. The campaign aimed to help thalassemia patients in the Sandakan district get blood bags for their survival and to raise awareness about blood donation.

The chairman of CNG

Sandakan, Lidwina Giduan, stated that the campaign was a success, with 57 blood bags collected. This was an increase from the campaign in 2017, where they only managed to collect less than 20 bags.

The organisers expressed their thanks to Dr Francis Paul (Labuan Hospital), Dr Jonathan Noel Rayner Molikun (HDOK), the parishioners of St Mary's parish, all Catholic nursing students from ILKKM and Cyberjaya involved,

as well as all the PPC committees of St Mary's Cathedral, Sandakan and the blood bank unit staff for their contributions.

Parish priest, Fr Simon Kontou was very pleased with all the continuous and encouraging participation from the Catholics.

Dr Lim Shueh Wan from the HDOK Blood Bank Unit suggested that this blood donation campaign be an annual event, especially during Ramadan, as there



is usually a shortage during the fasting month.

The Catholic Nurses Guild (CNG) of Sandakan is a service group that follows in the footsteps of Jesus Christ as witnesses of the Gospel. They participate

in the healing ministry and care of Christ to the sick, regardless of religion, ethnicity, language or background. They also provide for pastoral care, professional, social and spiritual needs. — *Catholic Nurses Guild Sandakan*



The Catholic Nurses Guild team.

Building climate-resilient communities

MANILA: More than 30 church workers from various bishops' conferences in Asia gathered in the Philippines for a three-day workshop on building climate-resilient communities, which commenced on April 14.

The workshop, organised by the Office of Human Development – Climate Change Desk (OHD-CCD) of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), was hosted by Caritas Philippines in Tagaytay City.

Participants engaged in thorough discussions on prevailing climate trends and the sustainability issues facing the region. They also shared best practices and action plans in battling the impacts of the climate crisis.

Bishop Allwyn D'Silva of Mumbai, chairperson of the OHD-CCD, said the Catholic Church must get "more involved" in various environmental concerns because "Asia is a

home to many of the countries that are vulnerable to climate change."

The prelate challenged churches in Asia to "build up a network" of advocates and "like-minded actors" to spearhead climate actions, all dedicated to fostering climate-resilient communities.

During the workshop, Dr. Benedict Alo D'Rozario, president of Caritas Asia, discussed how the Catholic Church's social action and humanitarian arms are trying to collectively defend and empower communities against the impacts of the ecological crisis.

In one of the sessions, lawyer and environmental policy expert Antonio La Viña urged Catholic communities to take urgent climate actions because "we are running out of time, not for the world to end, but the end of humankind and other creatures".

Participating bishops' conferences are from the Philippines, Myanmar, Indonesia,



Participants at the ecology conference organised by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. (LiCAS.news photo)

Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, Japan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and India.

Bishop Jose Colin Bagaforo, president of Caritas Philippines, described the "gathering of minds and hearts" from various Catholic Churches in the region as a significant step forward in "developing a more comprehensive and effective response to the ecological crisis".

Bagaforo said that the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines is prepared to share its initiatives, best practices, and plans in response to the 'Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor.'

Conference of the Philippines is prepared to share its initiatives, best practices, and plans in response to the 'Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor.'

"Let us work towards building climate-resilient communities throughout Asia, guided by our faith and our shared responsibility towards God's creation," he told the forum during the opening programme. — *LiCAS News*

Sri Lankan Church seeks sainthood for bombing victims

COLOMBO: In a solemn announcement ahead of the fifth anniversary of the tragic Easter Sunday bombings, Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith of Colombo (*pic*) disclosed ongoing efforts by the Sri Lankan Church to initiate the canonisation process for the victims of the 2019 attacks.

The Church is currently gathering signatures nationwide to petition the Vatican for permission to start a diocesan inquiry, a prerequisite step in the path to sainthood that can only commence five years posthumously.

The coordinated suicide bombings on April 21, 2019, targeted three Christian churches and three luxury hotels, resulting in the death of nearly 270 individuals, including 45 children, and injuring over 500 others. The attacks spanned across different regions, affecting the Church of St Anthony in Kochchikade and Church of St Sebastian in Katuwapitiya — both under the jurisdiction of the Colombo archdiocese — as well as an Evangelical church in Eastern province's Batticaloa.

Cardinal Ranjith, the highest-ranking church official in Sri Lanka, expressed his intent to honour the deceased as "heroes of faith," a recognition he hopes will resonate internationally, emphasising their innocence and the sanctity of their final moments spent in worship.



Criticism towards the government's handling of the investigation into the bombings has been vocal, with Cardinal Ranjith and others expressing frustration over the slow progress and calling for international intervention. The aftermath of the attacks saw political shifts within the country, including the election of then-opposition leader Gotabaya Rajapaksa as president in 2020. Suspicions of political manipulation and inadequate security measures have fuelled ongoing demands for a thorough and unbiased inquiry. — *ucanews.com*

Taiwan diocese joins oldest city in marking 400th anniversary

TAIPEI: As celebrations in Tainan, the oldest city in Taiwan, gained momentum to mark the 400th anniversary of its founding by the Dutch, local Catholics joined festivities with a year-long programme.

The city of some two million people began "the 400 Hakka Fair" on April 15, highlighting the local culture, culinary delights, and agricultural products. The fair, which runs until Nov 30, is part of the city's year-long jubilee celebrations, including arts and cultural festivals.

For its part, Tainan diocese has also begun a year-long evangelical programme — "Tainan 400, Evangelisation 400" — which stresses the mission of the Church that began on the island with the arrival of Europeans in the 16th century.

"The Evangelisation 400 programme is the goal of the Tainan Diocese throughout the year," said Franciscan Bishop John Baptist Huang Min-Cheng of Tainan at a Mass on April 6 at the International Hall of the Formosa Hotel in Anping.

The programme kicked off with 89 baptisms. Among 151 candidates for the Sacrament of Initiation, 89 were baptised during the April 6 Mass, attended by some 1,000 Catholics including nuns and priests.

The programme also includes formation courses for catechists.

More than 30 clergy, including Archbishop Stefano Mazzotti, the Holy See's chargé d'affaires in Taipei, bishops, and priests joined the Mass.

The diocese's year-long Evangelisation 400 programme is scheduled to conclude in

December, marking the opening of a jubilee year for the Catholic Church in 2025.

"The Church is like a boat. With the protection of God, everyone works hard to keep the boat moving forward," Bishop Min-Cheng said, addressing the candidates. Evangelisation requires everyone's efforts, he said.

A yacht ride was arranged for participants to experience the missionary work in the diocese and Tainan's coastal scenery.

Although the Catholic Church's initial history on the island is linked to the Portuguese mission in Asia, Catholics in the city, like others, see themselves as connected to the city's history and culture.

Portuguese sailors were the first Europeans to arrive in Taiwan in 1517, and they called it Beautiful Island (Ilha Formosa) in their language. However, the Portuguese, who had already established their base in India, did not lay claim to the island.

The Dutch landed in Penghu in the Taiwan Strait in 1622, and Chinese authorities pushed them to the unoccupied island. In 1624, they built a fort in the present Tainan area, making it their trading base for the next four decades. Taiwan's first city was born.

Established in 1961, Tainan diocese covers Tainan City, Tainan County, and Penghu County. According to the church directory, the diocese has about 8,300 Catholics in its 47 parishes and stations.

The Church in Taiwan comprises one archdiocese, six dioceses, and one apostolic administration with around 300,000 Catholics. — *ucanews.com*



A worshipper receiving holy communion during a Catholic mass in the Holy Spirit Church in Yanshui, about an hour's drive from the southern city of Tainan. (photo/ucanews.com)

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CCR creates 'Church On Fire' with God's love



The Catholic Church's charismatic renewal is a movement of the Holy Spirit to "bring about a Church that is on fire" with God's love, the new head of the Holy See's official charismatic body told *OSV News*.

"The Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) ... is a deeply personal, life-giving, ongoing, transforming encounter with the Trinity — God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Often it's (a particular encounter) with the person of Jesus," said Auxiliary Bishop Peter L. Smith of Portland, Oregon. "And then from there, the empowering of the Holy Spirit ... in a radically new way transforms (the) life of faith."

In February, Bishop Smith was appointed the new ecclesiastical assistant of CHARIS, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal International Service, inaugurated by the Holy See on Pentecost in 2019 through the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life.

Bishop Smith succeeds papal preacher Cardinal Raniero Cantalamessa, who was named to the post when CHARIS was inaugurated.

CHARIS, which was in development for three years prior to its formal unveiling, is intended to share with all in the Church the baptism in the Holy Spirit, while promoting Christian unity and engaging in service to the poor.

With an international administrative office at the Vatican, CHARIS is supported by voluntary collaborators throughout the world. Among the resources it offers are publications, online courses and in-person training and prayer gatherings.

In particular, CHARIS is intended to

provide a single nexus for the charismatic renewal in the Catholic Church, which began in 1967 at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, and spread to other US college campuses, including the University of Notre Dame.

While "there's no hard and fast data" for the current number of Catholics involved in the charismatic renewal, the Vatican roughly estimates the number to be "at least 120 million Catholics" who are active in it, said Bishop Smith.

"And then there's probably between another 60 and 120 million Catholics who came through the Catholic charismatic renewal and have gone into (religious) life and ministry," he added.

The term "baptism in the Holy Spirit" — familiar to Protestant Christians since the early 20th century — marks a "personal Pentecost," according to CHARIS.

"The bursting forth of the Holy Spirit in the life of a baptised person" following "the experience of the personal encounter with the living Jesus" leads to conversion — which in turn is expressed through "prayer groups, communities, ministries, schools of evangelisation, religious institutions, and all the realities the Holy Spirit might inspire," CHARIS notes on its website.

Bishop Smith admitted the term "baptism in the Holy Spirit" can be a confusing one for many Catholics, given the sacraments of baptism and confirmation, which the experience is not meant to replace but rather to complement.

"It can be just a wonderful moment of additional grace that God pours into your life," said Bishop Smith. "It's a grace of God that can be a release of the grace of the Holy Spirit

it received at baptism, the seed of the life of Christ and of the Holy Spirit. It can be a fuller release of the gift of the Holy Spirit that you receive at confirmation."

The experience "works differently for different people," but results in the deepening of faith and a sense of evangelical mission, he said.

"That's what happened with me," said Bishop Smith, who completed his undergraduate education, law degree and military service before moving to the US from his homeland of South Africa. After arriving in the US, he joined People of Praise, a Christian charismatic community that grew out of the renewal's spread from Duquesne University to the University of Notre Dame. He was ordained a priest in 2001 and a bishop in 2014.

"I was always a good Catholic. My faith had survived the military and college. I knew God existed and was real, but it wasn't personal to me in that way," said Bishop Smith, whose life was changed by his "particular encounter" with the Lord at age 20 — an encounter that has continued "ever since," he said.

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal is not "a strict movement per se" but a "service of communion," said Bishop Smith — one born of what Pope Francis has called "a current of grace."

"A movement has a founder or founders, and they set a particular way of life, whereas for the Catholic charismatic renewal, that wasn't the case," said Bishop Smith. "It was

File photo of the 50th Anniversary of Catholic Charismatic Renewal.

the Holy Spirit who began this current of grace that swept through the church, and ... it's quite broad and has a number of different streams to it."

That "current of grace" often catches Catholics by surprise, leading to unexpected destinations in the journey of faith, said Bishop Smith.

"Many Catholic charismatics will tell you, they were going along as kind of mediocre Catholics," he said. "And then this (baptism of the Holy Spirit) happened, and it was like their faith just switched on and came alive. And then they act on it."

Bishop Smith said that "profound things can happen out of very, very simple moments" of encounter with the divine.

The exchange of wedding vows, for example, "takes just two to three minutes, but something radically new has come into being" in the process, as

"the two become one," he said.

At the same time — and just as in a marriage — the daily living out of that new reality involves hard work, humility and dedication, he said.

"There's the honeymoon period, then the adjustment period, then the rest of our life," said Bishop Smith.

He pointed to the trajectory of the 16-day revival at Asbury University in February 2023 and a similar event the following month at Holy Cross Parish in Bronx, New York, as examples of how powerful moments of grace evolve into enhanced faith and service.

Both revivals were "an outpouring of the Spirit, or at least ... an experience of God's presence and God's grace that was particular to that place, that God gave it as a special gift," said Bishop Smith. "And the people leading it were smart enough to know that this isn't necessarily in perpetuity; God was blessing them for a time ... allow people ... to experience his grace in this way. And it's radical and touches and transforms their lives."

"But the challenge is you don't want to keep going back. ... (If) you've been married 20 years, you can't go back and live your marriage the way you did when you were on your honeymoon," said Bishop Smith. "You've changed, life has changed, but (with) the grace you have of your relationship and marriage, you need to continue to live ... (having) really experienced the power and the presence, the love, the mercy, the forgiveness of God." — **By Gina Christian, OSV**

The bursting forth of the Holy Spirit in the life of a baptised person" following "the experience of the personal encounter with the living Jesus" leads to conversion

"It's a grace of God that can be a release of the grace of the Holy Spirit received at baptism, the seed of the life of Christ and of the Holy Spirit. It can be a fuller release of the gift of the Holy Spirit that you receive at confirmation."

Bishop Peter Smith



The boom in adult baptisms

... is not necessarily the result of “active” evangelisation

More than 7,000 adult catechumens were baptised into the Catholic Church this past Easter in France. Nearly 5,000 middle and high school students in the country also were baptised as Catholics. This phenomenon affected urban areas and, even more surprisingly, rural dioceses. We can also add to this number the significant influx of “reverts,” baptised Catholics who had drifted from the faith, but who, at some point in their lives, desired to reclaim their place in the community that is the Church. In an archdiocese like Tours, the number of new baptisms were twice as many as the year before. Furthermore, since the beginning of January, the movement shows no signs of slowing down – instead, it seems to be continuing.

Faced with this peculiarity, observations and questions arise. Some hasten to point out that this unprecedented influx of catechumens remains relatively modest and does not compensate for the significant decline in infant baptisms over the past thirty years. Others already predict that the movement will not last and that these neophytes are not very persevering. Still others note that, ultimately, we are reaping where we have not sown. Nothing in the pastoral plans of our dioceses here in France predicted this arrival of future baptised individuals knocking at the door of our Church, as highlighted by the president of the French Bishops’ Conference.

Even though the data is scarce, some surprising analyses can be put forward regarding this sudden increase in baptisms. We can observe that these newly baptised individuals do not necessarily come through the paths that are most prominently high-

The paths to lead adults to join the Catholic Church are diverse and varied; sometimes even through an “unconscious” and an “unknowing” type of evangelisation, reflects Archbishop Vincent Jordy of the Archdiocese of Tours.

lighted in the media when observing the Catholic world today. Many newspaper articles echo one side of the “new evangelisation” with the various training courses and events offered, from “Alpha” courses to France’s Mission Congresses. Other articles more generally emphasise the search for the “sacred”, or for beauty, and the place of the more traditional dimension of liturgy. However, it seems that even though some of those who knock on the doors of our parishes come through these two paths, the vast majority of those who approach the Church often have other original and very personal paths.

Diverse pathways to joining the Catholic Church

So what leads a person today to knock on the door of our Church to request baptism, despite the tragedy of its sexual abuse scandals? From listening to the stories of the catechumens’ mentors in our archdiocese, I observed that a certain number of catechumens initially made this choice in connection with their family history, and particularly highlight the role of grandmothers, their fidelity to prayer, and their lived testimony of an upright and good life.

A good portion of the catechumens’ stories also reflect their questioning of life, which is sometimes linked to a tragic event, such as the death of a loved one. Then come

questions about the meaning of existence, the “why” of the drama of death, and more generally, the need for meaning. This type of testimony echoes the stories of many young confirmands, as well.

But how do others come knocking on the door of the Church? Their paths are diverse. Testimonies show that people seek answers on the Internet or in conversation with friends. Some simply testify to having entered a church one Sunday, felt good while at Mass, and continued coming back before deciding to express their desire for baptism.

Evangelising “unconsciously”

This perhaps is surprising – it does feel like we are reaping where we have not sown. But is it really so true? Evagrius Ponticus, a great spiritual figure of the fourth century, said this about prayer: “Truly prays the one who no longer knows he prays.” Truly prays not only the one who is fully turned towards the Lord, but also the one who, being fully present to his Lord, no longer sees himself praying, but is “absorbed” in God. Similarly, isn’t there a form of testimony, a way of evangelising, that the Church operates “unconsciously”?

In an address to catechists on December 12, 2000 concerning the “new evangelisation”, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (the future Pope Benedict XVI) noted that the Church has always evangelised. It has always lived

what he called “permanent evangelisation”, a simple and faithful testimony:

“Before speaking about the fundamental contents of new evangelisation, I would like to say a few words about its structure and on the correct method. The Church always evangelises and has never interrupted the path of evangelisation. She celebrates the eucharistic mystery every day, administers the sacraments, proclaims the word of life — the Word of God, and commits herself to the causes of justice and charity. And this evangelisation bears fruit: It gives light and joy, it gives the path of life to many people; many others live, often unknowingly, of the light and the warmth that radiate from this permanent evangelisation.”

This evangelisation, “unconsciously” and “unknowingly,” takes place in the modesty of everyday life, one of the guarantees of its authenticity. It may also help us discover what Pope Francis illuminates in his apostolic exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate* when he speaks of the “holiness found in our next-door neighbours”. This is a simple holiness, a holiness that escapes the eyes of the powerful and the cameras. A holiness that does not need to shine or dazzle. It’s the holiness of the one who is faithfully there in church each Sunday; the holiness of the visitor of the sick or the sacristan. The holiness that acts through goodness and touches hearts. A holiness that makes one taste the mystery of Jesus and illuminates the path of those who seek and await the light. Perhaps it is through this holiness that the permanent evangelisation quietly bears fruit among the catechumens who knock on the door of our Church. — LCI (<https://international.la-croix.com>)

What influence does Catholicism hold in Asia?

Pope Francis is scheduled to visit Southeast Asia beginning of September, making stops in Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste, and Singapore. According to recent statistics, one in nine Catholics worldwide resides in Asia.

While Catholicism is a significant minority on the densely populated Asian continent, its followers nonetheless play a substantial role in the global Church. Pope Francis is set to meet with Asian Catholics during a regional tour that will last about 10 days and may include visits to Vietnam, in addition to the countries previously mentioned by authorities from the first two.

The Holy See Press Office announced April 12 that Pope Francis will visit four Asian countries — Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste, and Singapore — September 2-13. Pope Francis travels first to Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia, where he will land on Sept 3 and remain until Sept 6. He will then fly to visit Port Moresby, capital of Papua New Guinea, and Vanimo, Sept 6-9. His next stop will be in Dili, capital of Timor-Leste, Sept 9-11. He will then travel to Singapore for a three-day visit before returning to Rome.



Special papal attention to Asia

Having previously visited South Korea in 2014, the Philippines in 2015, Myanmar and Bangladesh in 2017, Thailand and Japan in 2019, Iraq in 2021, Mongolia in 2023, this upcoming trip further underscores the Argentine pope’s focused interest in the world’s most populous continent — home to over 4 billion people — where the expression of Catholicism varies greatly from country to country.

In nations such as China and Japan, Catholics make up less than one per cent of the population, and in India less than 1.5 per cent. However, in the Philippines, Catholics constitute about 80 per cent of its 116 million people.

Indonesian Catholics at a service at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption in Jakarta, Indonesia in this file image. (Vatican News photo)

Vatican statistics from 2020 to 2021 indicate a nearly one per cent increase in the number of Catholics in Asia, who now represent approximately 3.3 per cent of the continent’s total population. This relatively modest figure highlights Catholicism’s minority status in Asia, even though Catholics comprise 17.67 per cent of the global population. With Asia being the most populated continent, Asian Catholics account for nearly 11 per cent of all baptised members of the Universal Church. In contrast, 19.3 per cent of the world’s Catholics reside in Africa, about 48 per cent in the Americas, and 20 per

cent in Europe.

If Pope Francis’ trip proceeds as planned, he will encounter vastly different circumstances of Catholicism. In East Timor, 98 per cent of its 1.5 million residents are Catholic, while in Papua New Guinea, Catholics represent about 26 per cent of its 9.8 million population. In Indonesia, a nation of nearly 280 million people, Catholics make up less than three per cent. Lastly, if the Pope also visits Vietnam, he will engage with a vibrant community that comprises about six per cent of the 105 million Vietnamese. — By Guillaume Daudé, LCI (<https://international.la-croix.com>)

We need to use our social media platforms

Sachin Jose reaches more than 148,000 people with the Catholic faith through his digital apostolate on X (formerly Twitter). Working as a journalist and social media consultant, he has been reporting on Church topics for over five years. *CNA Deutsch*, CNA's German-language news partner, spoke to him recently about faith and media.

In an interview, you said that the most important thing in your life was your Catholic faith. Why is that?

The Catholic Church was commissioned by Jesus to teach the faith — a task it has fulfilled for two millennia. It was through the Church that I came to know Jesus, and it continues to guide me on my earthly path. That's why I declared that the Catholic faith is the most important thing in my life.

I also deeply admire the contributions the Church has made to the world in various areas, including education and health care. The best educational institutions of the Middle Ages in Europe were founded by the Catholic Church. The modern health care system worldwide owes much to the contribution of the Church, including in the United States. For example, the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota, considered one of the best hospitals in the United States, was originally founded with financial contributions from Catholic nuns.

You mentioned that you believe faith should not be hidden in public. Why do you see it that way?

Faith is not something that should be hidden. When we get to know Jesus, we feel the urge to share his love with others. We are called to live this faith openly in public.

You have also said that the book "Pardon, I Am a Christian" by C.S. Lewis was an important turning point for you. What do you mean by that?

As you may know, C.S. Lewis, the author of well-known books such as *The Chronicles of Narnia*, was an atheist before his conversion. In "Mere Christianity" he formulates Christianity on a philosophical and theological level with remarkable clarity. As someone in search of the truth, I found his book fascinating when I first read it, and it gradually led me to the realisation that Christianity is the most rational faith.

Many Western nations are in a state of "self-destruction," some claim. What

are your thoughts?

The German-speaking people reading this can see the self-destruction of their nation if they look around. This also applies to other Western countries. I would like to quote one of my favourite pastors, Cardinal Robert Sarah, who once said: "The West has denied its Christian roots. A tree without roots dies."

Western civilisation began denying its Christian roots several decades ago, which has led to the acceptance of all kinds of immorality and confusion, including the confusion of gender theory. Furthermore, the resulting vacuum appears to be filled by individuals and groups who harbour hatred for the West and its Christian origins.

What can we do to save the Western nations?

The only answer is a return to the Christian faith, which should happen immediately, otherwise there will be no return. Even the well-known atheist Richard Dawkins recently lamented the decline of Christian culture. At the very least, these events should open our eyes. However, I really hope that people start to realise the mistakes they have made.

Immigrant Christians are doing their best to re-evangelise Western nations. During Holy Week their churches were overcrowded. I believe this has inspired the people who have lived there for centuries to reconnect with their Christian faith and heritage. It is worth noting that many churches in the West reported high attendance for this year's Easter Vigil.

On social media, you have tens of thousands of followers on Twitter and Instagram. How is it possible to effectively proclaim and evangelise the Catholic faith in the digital age?

When I started being active on social media, I had no idea that I would reach so many people. Lots of good things are happening around us. During the Easter Vigil, thousands of people became Catholic, including in the United States, where we had the largest number of converts.

We need to use our social media platforms to spread this great news that is happening around us. Furthermore, there are many people out there who truly live the Catholic faith even under difficult circumstances. If we shared their stories, thousands would be inspired. Social media is so powerful at this time that God will work miracles through us if we use it effectively. — **By Alexander Folz/CNA Deutsch**



Journeying together through Lent and Ramadan

This year Ramadan coincided with Lent, offering a beautiful occasion to make of this time a moment of interreligious dialogue and learning.

I relocated to Delhi for work a few months ago. A providential meeting with Fr Joseph Victor Edwin SJ, a teacher of theology and Christian Muslim relations at Delhi's Vidyajyoti College of Theology and Secretary of the Islamic Studies Association, led to my being introduced to a little booklet titled *Journeying with Muslims: Listening, Praying and Working Together* by Cardinal Michael Louis Fitzgerald.

Fr Edwin spoke to me of an initiative that some Christian friends had embarked on: to accompany our Muslim brothers and sisters throughout Ramadan by reading a daily excerpt from this booklet. At the end of Ramadan and after celebrating Easter we were to meet online together to share the experience.

I found the idea very appealing, as I felt a great need to learn more about the beliefs of my new Muslim friends in Delhi. March 10 marked the start of the holy season during which Muslims fast every day from dawn to sunset. That morning, after my customary meditation on sacred Christian texts, I read a chapter from Cardinal Fitzgerald's little book. Day after day I discovered the titles of

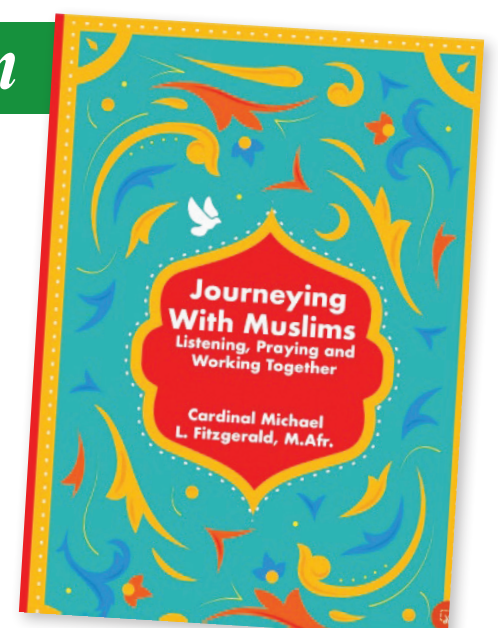
the *Suras* in the Holy Quran, contemplating their spiritual wisdom. I felt I was entering into a heart-to-heart dialogue with Muslims.

It was a discovery for me to learn that Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, is the most joyous month for Muslims around the world, even though it is a month of fasting, as it is also a month of prayer, reflection, and community. In denying themselves the most existential needs like food and water, Muslims are encouraged to be their best selves, so Ramadan becomes a joyous moment of deep self-discovery. Like Lent, Ramadan invites believers to return to their spiritual core. Like Lent, it is a moment to pause, turn the noise down and be more attentive to the life of the Spirit. I felt one with my Muslim friends in this time of deep self-reflection and reassessment of my relationship with God and my fellow human beings.

The day of our online meeting arrived. It was such a joy to connect across continents with friends from the Islamic, Baha'i and Christian faiths hailing from India, Italy, Algeria and Congo. Professor Gaetano Sabetta moderated the session with great professionalism, switching effortlessly from English to Italian to ensure that the sharing of all present was fully and faithfully conveyed. After an initial prayer, each partici-

pant shared the experience of having lived a truly meaningful Ramadan, sharing one's own faith with others of a different belief, in a discovery of shared fraternity.

Professor Nadja Kebour, a lecturer at the Missiology Department of the Pontifical Urbaniana University, Rome related how the atmosphere of Ramadan is hardly felt where she lives now in Italy, differently from her hometown in Algeria where the joy of Ramadan and each day's *Iftar* is felt throughout the community. Yet she felt deep joy when the students and staff greeted her on the feast of *Aidilfitri*, and she sincerely felt the participation and closeness of all. Fr Hemprey from Congo, a student of Prof Nadja, shared his gratitude for the witness she gives to her faith in their university. Silvano and Angela from Salerno in Italy are of the Baha'i faith, a tiny minority in the country. Angela shared how she is learning the Arabic language and is studying the Quran to be able to know better her friends of Muslim faith, recounting several episodes of offering prayers and concrete help to people of other faith. Experiences were shared on the insight gained in accompanying our Muslim friends this Ramadan, rediscovering the attributes given to God of Creator, Forgiveness and Mercy. Fr Edwin shared about the beauty of the symbolism of *Sura*



95 al-tin (The Fig), which vividly expresses the fruitfulness of man's life and destiny when lived in communion with God.

We concluded by reciting together the first Sura of the Koran, the "Al-Fatiha" in English, Arabic and Italian, giving praise to God. The online session was truly an experience of brotherhood and sisterhood, a communion of the celebration of the abundant life in God that we are reminded of through Easter and *Aidilfitri*. My heart was full of gratitude for receiving so much love in this hour. — **By Rose Aloysius**

What attracts converts to the Catholic Church?

Zack Short was kneeling during Adoration last fall, silently struggling with whether the Host in the monstrance was actually Jesus or merely a piece of bread.

To his left was his girlfriend, Katie, a Catholic who had invited him to join the campus ministry's catechism programme for converts.

"I was like, 'Lord, if this is really you, please speak to me. Lord, help my unbelief,'" Short recalled. "I kid you not: I saw light coming out of the Eucharist. It just clicked for me: This is really God."

Later, he asked Katie if she saw the light. She didn't.

Short, 19, a sophomore majoring in mechanical manufacturing engineering technology, who grew up going to a nondenominational church in Colorado, entered the Catholic Church during the Easter vigil Mass at St Mary's Catholic Centre in Texas A&M University.

He is one of thousands of new Catholics in the United States, part of what appears to have been a bountiful harvest for the Church this past Easter.

Nationwide numbers aren't available yet. But certain dioceses are reporting increases of between 30 to 70 per cent.

A non-Catholic can become a Catholic any day of the year. But the Easter vigil is the traditional time to enter the Church, whose adult conversion programme is built around preparing converts for that moment.

The Register contacted every diocese in the United States in early April asking about numbers of converts at Eastertime, which this year was the last weekend in March.

Catechesis for Converts

The Church's conversion programme for adults is widely known as Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, or RCIA, although the US Conference of Catholic Bishops voted in November 2021 to begin a process to change the name to Order of Christian Initiation of Adults, with slight revisions of other terms, as well.

The Diocese of Fort Worth, Texas jumps out: The number of converts there rose from 896 at Easter 2023 to 1,544 at Easter 2024, an increase of 72 per cent.

Part of that eye-popping figure can be attributed to the area's skyrocketing population, said Jason Whitehead, the director of evangelisation and catechesis for the diocese. He also credits young priests in the diocese, who he says are "faithful," "energetic" and "willing to do anything," including helping at catechetical sessions.

But the diocese has also changed the way it prepares catechists to teach the faith. In 2021, the diocese began a three-year catechetical programme that begins with an introduction to the Catechism of the Catholic Church and moves to an intermediate level of theological instruction. It finishes with an area of concentration, such as catechesis for converts.

"The heart and soul of all three levels is the ability to talk to anyone about the Catholic faith," Whitehead said.

The programme offers not just information about what the Church teaches, but how to organise it, beginning with the old Baltimore Catechism question: Why did God make you? ("... to know Him, to love Him, and to serve Him in this world, and to be happy with Him for ever in Heaven.")

It's crucial, he said, to present Catholic doctrine in its fullness.

Whitehead, a former Baptist, came into the Catholic Church at the Easter vigil in 2012. While he was happy to become a Catholic, he wasn't happy with his parish's RCIA sessions.

"I saw one person after another leave the RCIA programme because they were not being given the truth of the Gospel and the teachings of the Catholic Church," Whitehead said.

"If I have any influence over RCIA," he said, "I'll be doggone if anybody goes through an RCIA programme like the one I went through. It is my personal mission that that never happens to another soul, until the Lord comes again."

Hillsdale and the Diocese of Lansing

One perennial powerhouse of conversions is Hillsdale College, a nondenominational Christian school in Hillsdale, Michigan, that has a large population of Catholics. (One recent survey done by students in an applied math class at the school found that 43 per cent of the students are Catholics.)

The Easter vigil Mass at St Anthony's Church in Hillsdale this year began at 9 p.m. and ended at midnight, followed by a

Eucharist, Unity, Clarity



Greek feast for more than 500 people that lasted until 4 in the morning, said Deacon John Crowley, who heads the parish's conversion programme.

Along the way, 28 people joined the Catholic Church, 22 of them current students at Hillsdale College, plus one who is a recent graduate of the school.

The total number of converts in the parish is up from 20 in 2023, to a 40 per cent increase.

As for Hillsdale students: 1.4 per cent of the college's 1,563 undergraduates joined the Catholic Church on Saturday, March 30.

St Anthony's contributed to an approximately 30 per cent increase in converts in the Diocese of Lansing from 2023; about 620 this year, the highest number in more than a decade.

"To each of those new Catholics I say, 'Welcome to the Body of Christ. This is just the beginning of great things,'" said Bishop Earl Boyea in a video produced by the diocese.

The video highlights the Campbell family — dad Cody, mom Kirsten, daughters Ryleigh, Khloe and Cadyn, and son Elijah — who all joined the Catholic Church at St Mary's in Charlotte, Michigan.

Though raised Baptists, Cody and Kirsten were without a church when Cody, on his own, started studying the Protestant Reformation and then the Church Fathers, which made him interested in Catholicism.

"You could say there was a raging storm taking place inside of me — like, I had to know. There was something that was pushing me to know where the truth actually comes from," Cody said.

Kirsten listened. Then a communion service at a Protestant church came up short for her.

"I just sat there and I realised, 'This, it's not it,'" Kirsten said.

They talked afterwards and found they were thinking the same thing. They called the local parish, and the OCIA director let them join the program, "a little late," Kirsten said.

"After we talked, after that day, it's been nothing but peace. Like, I feel at home," said Cody, who took the confirmation name Robert Bellarmine, after the Counter-Reformation Italian Jesuit cardinal and doctor of the Church.

In the Diocese of Knoxville, Tennessee, where the number of converts went from 278 at Easter 2023 to 388 at Easter 2024, a jump of almost 40 per cent, the director of Christian formation, Deacon Jim Bello, credits a more flexible catechesis schedule, a spokesman said.

"Formation is year-round, not just an RCIA 'season,' if you will," said Jim Wogan, the diocese's director of communications, by email. "It seems to have been successful."

That's also a point of emphasis in the Diocese of St Augustine in northeast Florida, which saw an increase from 625 converts in 2023 to 838 in 2024, up 34 per cent.

According to Erin McGeever, the diocese's director of Christian formation, the diocese has been emphasising making the conversion program year-round.

The typical schedule mimics the school year, beginning around September and finishing in June, with the high point being the Easter vigil. Sticking to that schedule can leave out

people who show interest at some other point during the year.

She said that the cathedral parish has begun engaging with would-be converts right away.

"So whenever people call, they put them into some programming, until they can get into the formal formation," McGeever said. "Maybe that's the key: taking people where they're at... and filling in the blanks with them."

In the Diocese of Little Rock, Arkansas, which saw an increase of 33 per cent (from 515 in 2023 to 685 in 2024), the director of faith formation, Jeff Hines, said he's not sure what to attribute it to, but he said it suggests a spiritual hunger in a society sharply divided.

"You look at the state of the world, there's a lot of reasons not to have hope today, particularly for young adults; so people are really looking for meaning and hope, which is exactly what the Church offers," Hines said.

"So it makes sense for this to happen," he added. "We should not be surprised. We should be faithful to being open to people who are searching."

Deep in the Soul of Texas

St Mary's Catholic Centre at Texas A&M University is so busy it offers its conversion program year-round and brings people into the Church twice a year: a September-to-Easter track and a January-to-November track.

The group that entered the programme in January 2024 is among the biggest that program director Kevin Pesek has seen.

This past Easter, St Mary's had 51 students enter the Church (18 baptised, 33 who made a profession of faith). That followed a group of 34 converts in November 2023 (14 baptisms, 20 professions of faith).

"I'm seeing more and more people coming in with nothing — no religious background," Pesek said. "It's very interesting."

Non-Catholic students join the programme because Catholic students invite them, Pesek said, along the lines of Jesus' words in John 1:39: "Come and see."

"I'm not the one bringing them in. It's all through our students. They're the ones bringing them to Mass, doing the evangelisation, bringing them in the door," Pesek said. "I provide pizza the first night. That's about as creative as I get."

In recent times, he has conducted an anonymous survey of new converts asking what drew them to the faith. He shared 57 responses with the Register. They're hard to characterize. Some cite the Eucharist, others the teaching authority of the Church, the papacy, unity, clarity, liturgy, community, the communion of saints, and strength to live a better life.

"The students who aren't Catholic are hungry and are looking for something," said Fr Will Straten, the pastor of St Mary's. "People are just looking for something that's authentic. They're looking for something that's grounded and seems to make sense."

St Mary's Catholic Centre, Texas A&M University, Easter 2024

One of the Easter 2024 converts is Kirsten Ruby, 23, who is finishing a master's degree in accounting at Texas A&M after spending four years there as an undergraduate. She began seriously considering the Catholic faith during the summer of 2023, through the intervention of a friend.

As a kid, she went to Protestant churches (mostly Baptist) sporadically but was never baptised. The main draw of RCIA for her was a chance to learn more about Jesus: "I saw it as a way of making up for never going to Sunday school as a kid," she said.

Once in the programme, she engaged with the Church's history and theology, aided by apologetics books by Catholic authors, including Richard Gaillardetz's *By What Authority?*

She said she found the catechesis programme at St Mary's helpful, and particularly her sponsor, a current senior.

Asking questions helped bring Ruby to the faith, and that continues now that she has joined the Church.

"A big thing that keeps me close to God is questions, forever getting to know Him," Ruby said. "He's an eternal spouse. You wouldn't just marry your husband and run away with the ring. You'd want to stay and get to know him better." — **By Matthew McDonald, Register**



SUNDAY OBSERVER

Anil Netto

At what point does the Israeli assault in Gaza become a genocide? After the first 1,000 deaths? 10,000? 100,000? A million? Is it a game of retaliation?

Do we have to wait until the death toll climbs higher before the world acts to stop the genocide?

The Iranian retaliation against Israel on the night of April 13 for the latter's strike on the Iranian Embassy in Damascus on April 1 was a worrying development. But it diverted global attention from the killing fields of Gaza and the repression in the West Bank.

No one was killed in Israel during the Iranian drone-and-missile retaliation. But the ongoing Israeli onslaught killed even more people in Gaza on that same weekend of April 13-14.

We don't have to wait for even more deaths to call it a genocide. The International Court of Justice ruled on January 26 that there was already a case of plausible genocide in Gaza. The decision by a 15-2 majority was not even close. Even the president of the court, a judge from the US (a close ally of Israel), was one of the 15.

But the ICJ ruling and global protests have not stopped Israel, backed by the US and its Western allies, from pursuing the genocide.

After World War Two, many looked critically at the Church to see what position it took when the Holocaust was ongoing, when millions of Jews were killed.

Similarly, history will again scrutinise the position of the Church and how it is responding to the ongoing genocide in Gaza.

G is for genocide in Gaza

Several modern-day prophetic voices have already spoken up to say enough is enough.

These voices come from the periphery, just as Jesus spoke on the periphery of the Roman Empire or when Francis emerged from the periphery (Argentina) to try and reform the global Church.

Today, one of the loudest voices from the periphery is Munther Isaac, a pastor from the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church in Bethlehem. The town of Jesus' birth lies in Palestinian territory, which is now under suffocating Israeli occupation.

The pastor has highlighted the plight of Palestinian Christians, who are forgotten by the Christian Zionists who unquestioningly support Israel.

At the Easter Vigil for Gaza in Bethlehem, the Munther railed against the genocide in Gaza: "Friends, a genocide has been normalised. As people of faith, if we truly claim to follow a crucified saviour, we can never be OK with this. We should never accept the normalisation of a genocide," he said.

"We should never be OK with children dying from starvation, not because of drought or famine, but because of a man-made catastrophe! Because of the Empire."

Munther said the genocide has been "normalised" just as apartheid was normalised in Palestine and, before that, in South Africa — just as slavery and the caste system were normalised.

"It has been firmly established to us that the leaders of the superpowers, and those who benefit from this modern colonialism, do not look at us as equals. They created a narrative to normalise genocide. They have a theology for it.

"This is racism at its worst," he added.

Munther also took issue with many Church leaders who turned silent, like Peter, who watched from a distance as Jesus was arrested.

He said many in the Church today lack courage: "They know the truth. But they are not speaking the truth, because they fear the consequences. They fear the backlash! Many in the Church want to avoid controversy. Can you imagine if Jesus walked on earth avoiding controversy?"

"All of this while claiming to follow a crucified saviour, who sacrificed everything, endured pain and rejection for the sake of those He loved!"

Sadly, during this time, another prophetic voice in the Church breathed his last. The auxiliary bishop emeritus of Detroit, Thomas Gumbleton, passed away on 4 April. He was 94.

Gumbleton was yet another modern-day prophetic voice on the periphery of the Church who spoke out strongly against the wars of the Empire.

In 2003, he was even arrested along with other protesters for violating a ban on large demonstrations against the illegal US invasion of Iraq that year. The war had been launched on the pretext that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction — which turned out to be a blatant lie.

Steeped in the thinking of the Second Vatican Council, Gumbleton strongly believed in the preferential option of the poor.

Or in the words of the Beatitudes, that the meek would inherit the Earth.

Sometimes we sanitise or neglect Christian teachings to remove the inherent power of the Scriptures.

So, we regard Mary, the mother of Jesus, as a model of Christian piety and obedience. But then, we somehow overlook the power of her

words in the Magnificat:

He has used the power of His arm, He has routed the arrogant of heart.

He has pulled down princes from their thrones and raised high the lowly.

He has filled the starving with good things, sent the rich away empty.

One key reason for the reticence in speaking out against the genocide Gaza is that Christians are usually raised thinking that the people of Israel are the "chosen ones". So, "we should support Israel".

But we forget that the chosen people in Scriptures were called to live up to a higher standard of ethical and moral conduct. God's covenant with Israel was not a one-way street.

Being chosen was not about "race" or ethnicity. Rather, it was a calling to live up to God's standard of justice, compassion, mercy and tender love, even for the strangers in the land. These are the same hallmarks of the kingdom that Jesus proclaimed.

The land belongs to God. And the people are called to justice and compassion. Indeed, the word *shalom* (peace) may be regarded as the experience of (God's) justice and love.

What the modern state of Israel is doing today has strayed so far from what God expects. Oppression, occupation, genocide are not His way. In the days of old, the Lord would send prophets to remind the people to return to His path of Truth and Justice.

Today, let's discern the modern-day prophetic voices on the periphery calling for an end to the ongoing violence.

So let's loudly and unequivocally shout: "Stop the genocide!"

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



MUSTARD SEED JOURNEYS

Joanne Wong

"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."
Romans 8: 28

I am not sure about you but the thought "life isn't fair" and "why me God?" crosses my mind several times a day, even though my life when I think about it, is a pretty good one and I really do have nothing to complain about — but I do unfortunately — and am trying my best to change that and be grateful for all that I have.

I recently had a chance to deep dive into the story of Joseph from the book of Genesis (Genesis 37-50) and this simple story unearthed a lot of points to ponder, especially about God's plans and purpose for us.

So, allow me to share what I learnt from the story of Joseph (besides him having a technicolour coat):

• **Forgiveness:** Joseph forgave his brothers for their betrayal and the pain they caused him. When Jacob, their father died, Joseph's brothers were worried that Joseph will pay them back for all the hateful things they had done to him, but Joseph reassured his brothers that he would take care of them and their families. True forgiveness is possible, and it can bring healing and restoration to relationships. Always choose forgiveness and mercy to those who wrong you even though this can be the hardest thing to do.

• **Faith and trust:** Joseph had faith in God and trusted in Him. Even though his brothers threw Joseph into a pit and left him to die, and

Life lessons from Joseph

the Ishmaelite traders sold him into slavery, and even when he was falsely accused and imprisoned — through every step of his journey, Joseph never lost faith in God.

• **Perseverance and patience:** Joseph persevered and was patient through all his challenges and he kept his faith in God. Despite things not going the way he wanted, Joseph always found a way to bounce back from difficult circumstances without complaining. He was patiently waiting for God's plan and purpose to come true.

• **Being trustworthy:** Joseph was a trustworthy man. From the time Joseph was living at home with his family, to being a slave, to being put into prison, to interpreting dreams, to being put into second in command of all Egypt.

• **Obedience:** Joseph was obedient when his father wanted him to go and see how his brothers were doing while feeding the flock in Shechem. Joseph was also obedient to his master in Egypt, and he refused to engage in sin against God with Potiphar's wife.

• **Compassion:** Joseph showed compassion towards his family and moved them from Canaan to Egypt where he could provide them with food despite all that they had done to him.

• **Hard work and integrity:** Joseph worked hard and had integrity. As a slave in the house of Potiphar, he became the overseer of his entire household. When he was a prisoner, he found favour with the prison keeper and was running the prison even though he was a prisoner himself. He then gets elevated to become Pharaoh's right-hand man. He continued to make the right choices and do the right thing by the grace of God.

• **Leadership and wisdom:** God gave Joseph

wisdom and a heart to lead. Joseph's wisdom and ability to lead and guide others made him an able and influential leader in Egypt. He stored the grains when there were years of plenty.

• **Joseph used his talents and abilities.** God gives us many gifts to serve others and to bring glory to God. Joseph used his gift of interpreting dreams to help others and to bring God's will to life. We should think about the talents, abilities, and blessings that God has given us and find ways to serve others.

Oh, what a drama-filled life Joseph led, with its many twists and turns, and yet, through it all, Joseph was faithful to God and God never abandoned him. No matter the circumstances or actions of others, God accomplished His purpose for Joseph and prepared a path for him, and He will do the same for us even though at times His plans and purpose for us are not revealed ... or perhaps if we are honest with ourselves, we are avoiding His plans for us.

So dear friends, let us cling to God's Word and His promises, and let us keep looking to the future knowing God's promises are real and will never fail. Let us be like Joseph and become an example and an encouragement to others.

Putting our trust and having faith in God is so, so tough, especially in a time of so many uncertainties but let Jesus be in the driver's seat. "For I know the plans I have for you", declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." - Jeremiah 29:11

Seven life lessons to remember from the story of Joseph:

1. **God is with us**, even when our circumstances

suggest otherwise.

2. **Rely on God's guidance** — He will help prepare your future for you.

3. Do what is **right and pleasing to God**, regardless of the consequences (always obey His commandments).

4. **Forgiveness** should be extended even if it's the hardest thing to do.

5. **God uses ordinary people** to achieve extraordinary things.

6. In the storms of life, in your darkest moments, **cling to God's promises** because He is with you.

7. **God has a purpose** for our suffering, so don't give up — you may not recognise it right away. Bad things can work for good in the end.

● **Joanne Wong is on a journey towards having faith the size of a mustard seed. She welcomes thoughts and suggestions on how to have a closer walk with God. Email her at joanne.wpm@gmail.com**





Fr Ron Rolheiser

God's exuberant energy

All things considered, I believe that I grew up with a relatively healthy concept of God. The God of my youth, the God that I was catechised into, was not unduly punishing, arbitrary, or judgmental. Granted, He was omnipresent so that all of our sins were noticed and noted; but, at the end of the day, He was fair, loving, personally concerned for each of us, and wonderfully protective to the point of providing each of us with a personal guardian angel. That God gave me permission to live without too much fear and without any particularly crippling religious neuroses.

But that only gets you so far in life. Not having an unhealthy notion of God doesn't necessarily mean you have a particularly healthy one. The God who I was raised on was not overly stern and judgmental, but neither was He very joyous, playful, witty, or humorous. Especially, He wasn't sexual, and had a particularly vigilant and uncompromising eye in that area. Essentially he was sombre, heavy, and not very joyous to be around. Around Him, you had to be solemn and reverent. I remember the assistant director at our Oblate novitiate telling us that there is no recorded incident, ever, of Jesus having laughed.

Under such a God you had permission to be essentially healthy. However, to the ex-

tent that you took Him seriously, you still walked through life less than fully robust and your relationship with Him could only be solemn and reverent.

Then, beginning more than a generation ago, there was a strong reaction in many churches, and in the culture, to this concept of God. Popular theology and spirituality set out to correct this, sometimes with an undue vigour. What they presented instead was a laughing Jesus and a dancing God, and while this was not without its value, it still left us begging for a deeper literature about the nature of God and what that might mean for us in terms of health and relationships.

That literature won't be easy to write, not just because God is ineffable, but because God's energy is also ineffable. What, indeed, is energy? We rarely ask this question because we take energy as something so primal that it cannot be defined but only taken as a given, as self-evident. We see energy as the primal force that lies at the heart of everything that exists, animate and inanimate. Moreover, we feel energy, powerfully, within ourselves. We know energy, we feel energy, but we rarely recognise its origins, its prodigiousness, its joy, its goodness, its effervescence, and its exuberance. Moreover, we rarely recognise what it tells

us about God. What does it tell us?

The first quality of energy is its prodigiousness. It is prodigal beyond our imagination and this speaks something about God. What kind of creator makes billions of throwaway universes? What kind of creator makes trillions upon trillions of species of life, millions of them never to be seen by the human eye? What kind of father or mother has billions of children?

And what does the exuberance in the energy of young children say about our creator? What does their playfulness suggest about what must also lie inside of sacred energy? What does the energy of a young puppy tell us about what's sacred? What do laughter, wit, and irony tell us about God?

No doubt the energy we see around us and feel irrepressibly within us tells us that, underneath, before and below everything else, there flows a sacred force, both physical and spiritual, which is at its root, joyous, happy, playful, exuberant, effervescent, and deeply personal and loving. God is the ground of that energy. That energy speaks of God and that energy tells us why God made us and what kind of permissions God is giving us for living out our lives.

God is ineffable, that is the first truth that we hold about God. That means that God cannot be imagined or ever circumscribed

in a concept. All images of God are inadequate; but, that being admitted, we might try to imagine things this way. At the very centre of everything there lies an unimaginable energy that is not an impersonal force, but a person, a loving self-conscious mind and heart. From this ground, this person, issues forth all energy, all creativity, all power, all love, all nourishment, and all beauty. Moreover, that energy, at its sacred root, is not just creative, intelligent, personal, and loving, it's also joyous, colourful, witty, playful, humorous, erotic, and exuberant at its very core. To live in it is to feel a constant invitation to gratitude.

The challenge of our lives is to live inside that energy in a way that honours both it and its origins. That means keeping our shoes off before the burning bush as we respect its sacredness, even as we constantly receive permission from it to be robust, free, joyous, humorous, and playful – without feeling we are stealing fire from the gods.

● **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

Christ is risen, but has anything really changed for us?

In the heart of Eastertide, we can ask ourselves: Has Easter changed us? What are the consequences of truly accepting the reality of the Resurrection?

The other day it struck me that we were in the heart of the Easter season and I had to ask myself: Has anything really changed for us – or is life pretty much going on as always?

I sometimes wonder if many of us aren't a little bit like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. They had heard about the empty tomb; in fact, it was the subject of their conversation. Maybe they wanted to believe that Jesus had risen, but they couldn't help but feel sceptical – so much so that they didn't even recognise Jesus when He started walking along beside them. In Luke's Gospel it says that "their eyes prevented them from recognising Him."

We too often have eyes that prevent us from seeing. We keep hurrying along as if Easter never happened and nothing has really changed. In place of faith, we live with a sense of desperate urgency because the clock is ticking, and time is running out. Life is short. We don't want to miss out on experiences or live in regret about the dreams we left unfulfilled.

But the truth of Easter is meant to penetrate and alter the course of our lives.

Accepting the reality of the Resurrection means that death and decay have no power over us. We have been truly set free – and that means we should be freed from the anxieties that so often dominate our lives. How often do we fail to recognise Jesus because we are too occupied with other things? Worrying about our career choices, obsessing over our children's futures, wasting precious hours "doomscrolling" through social media: These are all signs that we have failed to take the message of Easter seriously. It is as if nothing has really changed for us.

On the contrary, the first Easter marked a new course for humanity. As it says in the Book of Revelation (Rev 21:3-5): I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, God's dwelling is with the human race. He



Supper at Emmaus by Caravaggio. (Wikipedia/Public Domain)

will dwell with them and they will be His people and God Himself will always be with them [as their God].

He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, [for] the old order has passed away.

The One who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." Then He said, "Write these words down, for they are trustworthy and true."

The person who takes these words to heart, who allows them to penetrate and change her life, has a completely different relationship with reality than before.

"Behold, I make all things new"

What does it mean that God has made all things new? And how does this change the reality of our daily lives?

In November 1999, just weeks before the arrival of the third millennium, Pope John Paul II spoke to precisely this question. He said: "The new millennium is now at hand: may 'Christ yesterday, today and forever' be the focus and goal of all our aspirations. It is He who makes all things new and marks out for His faithful ones a journey of joyful

hope. Let us pray unceasingly that He will grant the wisdom and strength of His Spirit; let us beseech Him that all Christians may achieve unity as soon as possible. Nothing is impossible for God!"

An amazing discovery

We are now almost 25 years into the third millennium and the mission we are given remains the same. Two weeks ago, on Easter Sunday, Pope Francis reminded us of "the amazing discovery of that Easter morning: the stone, the immense stone, was rolled away."

He continued: "The astonishment of the women is our astonishment as well: the tomb of Jesus is open and it is empty! From this, everything begins anew! A new path leads through that empty tomb: the path that none of us, but God alone, could open: the path of life in the midst of death, the path of peace in the midst of war, the path of reconciliation in the midst of hatred, the path of fraternity in the midst of hostility."

In his Easter message, the Pope went on to urge all of us to remember, in prayer and practical aid, the victims of war in Israel, Palestine, and the Ukraine. In a series of pleas, he begged that the Risen Christ assist

all those places and peoples who are suffering from humanitarian crises, including Haiti, the Sudan, Lebanon, and many others.

He concluded: "May the light of the Resurrection illumine our minds and convert our hearts, and make us aware of the value of every human life, which must be welcomed, protected, and loved."

Entering into the Resurrection

What then is the best way to enter into the reality of the Resurrection? It is enough to follow the indications of the Church.

❖ We are called to enter into the sacramental life of the Church with open eyes and hearts, knowing that Jesus is truly walking beside us.

❖ We are called to be peacemakers, saying no to war and praying for an end to violence both abroad and in our communities. "Peace is never made with arms," Pope Francis said this past Easter, "but with outstretched hands and open hearts."

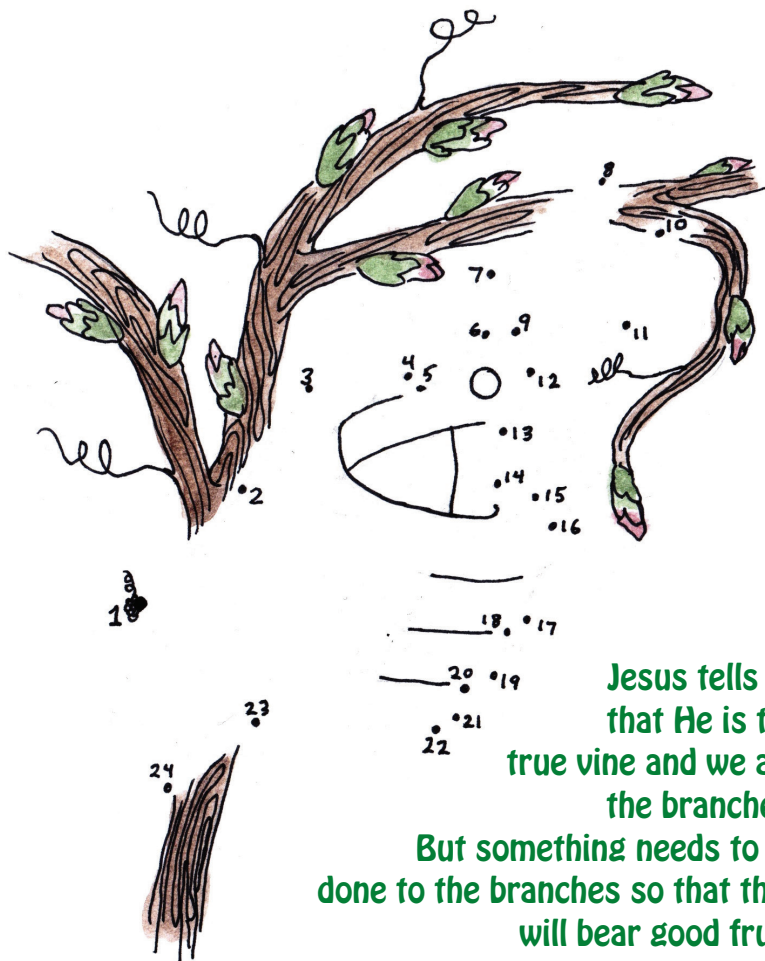
❖ We are called to seek unity with our fellow Christians – and, yes, our brother and sister Catholics!

❖ We are called to serve the poor and forgotten in imitation of the Lord. He is counting on us to bring the joy of Easter "to the peripheries," as the Pope is always reminding us.

❖ We are called to be people of hope, never giving in to fear or despair. Especially in an age as anxious and distracted as this one, it is vital that we continuously announce that God has chosen to dwell among us and truly does "make all things new," and then back up these words with our actions.

These are very practical ways the Church has given us to recognise the Risen Christ, allowing Him to enter our lives and change us. Let's take advantage of this remarkable season so that we can become true instruments of peace and love in a world where they are desperately needed. — **By John Touhey, Aleteia**

Little Catholics' Corner



Jesus tells us
that He is the
true vine and we are
the branches.
But something needs to be
done to the branches so that they
will bear good fruit.
Follow the dots to find out what it is.
(Start at the little grapes!)

Hello children,

Do you like fruits? What is your favourite kind of fruit? I love fruit, and one kind I particularly enjoy is grapes!

In this Sunday's Gospel reading, Jesus said something about the true vine. Jesus said that He was the vine and that we are the branches.

What might that mean? He was explaining how important it is for us to stay connected to Him. Just as the vine provides nutrition that helps fruit grow on a plant, Jesus gives us all that we need to grow in

our faith. The branches on a grapevine must stay connected to the vine so that they can produce delicious fruit.

Otherwise, they'll dry up and wither like sad little raisins. If we walk away and abandon faith, we'll "shrivel up", too!

Children, we need to stay close to Christ so that He can produce "fruit" in us.

Of course, we aren't going to start sprouting grapes or anything. Spiritual fruit refers to things that help others and show that Jesus lives in and through us. Those

are things like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, etc.

How do we make sure we are connected to Jesus? We read God's Word and study the Bible. We pray, talk to God and listen, too.

We trust in God and rely on Him for all things, staying close to Him and thanking Him for giving us life and hope. Most importantly, we recognise that Jesus is doing the work and producing fruit through us.

Aunty Eliz

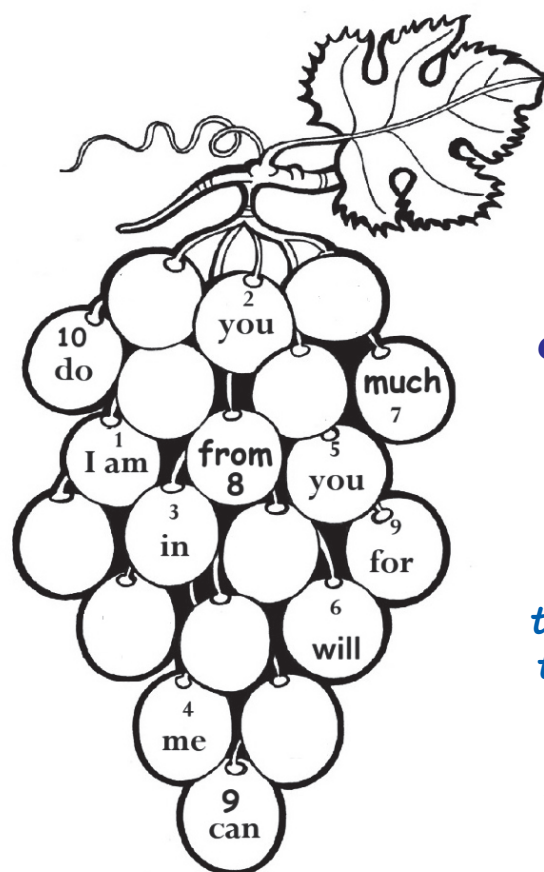
SAINT PAUL: TRUE OR FALSE

How much do you know about Saint Paul when he first became a Christian?

- Before his conversion, Saint Paul hated the Christians. True or false?
- The disciples in Jerusalem were afraid of Paul when he first came. True or false?
- Barnabas told the other Christians that Saint Paul had seen our Lord on the way to Damascus. True or false?
- It took a long time before Saint Paul began to speak about Jesus in public. True or false?
- When Saint Paul told some people about Jesus, they tried to kill him. True or false?
- The other disciples would not let Saint Paul travel around to preach about Jesus. True or false?



Answers: 1 true 2 true 3 true 4 true 5 false 6 true 7 false



**Stay
connected
to the
vine!**

Match the
numbers on
the grapes to
the numbers
in the verse
and write
the word in
the space.

(1) _____ the vine; (2) _____ are
the branches. If you
(3) _____ (4) _____ and
remain _____
I in (5) _____, you (6) _____ bear
(7) _____ fruit; apart (8) _____
(9) _____ me you (10) _____
nothing (John 15:5)

YOUTH

April 28, 2024

CLC youths attend 'Persons are Gifts' programme

By Yuhanes Noel Raj

JOHOR BAHRU: The youth group of the Church of the Immaculate Conception (CIC), organised the Persons are Gifts (PAG) programme at their parish recently.

Originally put together by the late Fr Ignatius Huan while he was based in St Theresa's Church, Melaka in the late 80s, the PAG programme has continued to touch hundreds of lives ever since.

The PAG typically caters for 12 to 15-year-olds. The three-day, two-night live-in programme was an opportunity for young people to discover themselves and others as gifts. Using the analogy of the gift, participants learn that the person is more important than appearances and that people come in different shapes and sizes with their own unique characteristics and gifts.

The whole PAG weekend was packed with sessions facilitated by Jason Joseph and Annabel Loh, which involved learning from small group sharings, scripture reflections, activities that centred on community, fun games, music, prayer, and lots of affirmation and love. Through the sessions, participants recognised their gifts, talents, and the people in their lives who are gifts.

Feedback from the participants

"I learned that I can make other people's lives better by sharing my talents and gifts that God has given me... I will always use my talents to change other people's lives and make them better to keep this experience going..." – *Chastan*

"PAG taught me to appreciate the people that I am surrounded with because we are all gifts and we should be treated equally. Besides this, it also taught me to appreciate my parents. Even though sometimes our parents do tend to approach us in the wrong way, we have to understand that they're also learning." – *Pauline*

"I have discovered my talent that is public speaking ... Although my talent is simple but I still appreciate what God has given to me... my contribution is to my parish to keep this experience going, that is, I hope that every one of them will get to know what is a gift to them." – *Angelica*

"The sessions that touched me greatly was the Parent and Child Relationships and God's Love. It's extremely eye opening for me when I realise how I've always took my parents and God's love for granted. My friends



and I that have participated in the PAG camp decided to get more youths to join us in being servants of God and to build a strong community and spread the good news." – *Trinity*

"Throughout the PAG, I've discovered lots of things about myself, know how much God loves me and also to appreciate and love myself more. I've truly understood the meaning of strong friendship and to appreciate everyone's gift, especially my family." – *Eva*

"PAG did a turning point of my life as it made me remember God's infinite love for us. The best part of the camp was that everyone was showing love to each other through affirmation notes and hugs after the night prayer. It helped everyone turn over a new leaf." – *Catherine*

"It changed the way I saw life. After the camp I learned many things. One of the things that I liked in the camp was *The Outside Wrapping vs The Inside Gift* because it really changed my view of myself. I also got closer with my parents, changed myself a lot." – *Gwen*



ARCHDIOCESE OF ACCRA TO engage GHANA'S YOUNG PEOPLE in Dialogue

GHANA: Ghana's Catholic Archdiocese of Accra has lined-up several activities aimed at fostering dialogue and collaboration between the Church's hierarchy and its vibrant youth community. The initiatives will culminate in a Youth Congress slated for June 2024.

Under the theme *Present & Connected*, the 2024 Accra Archdiocesan Youth Congress promises to be a forum where young people will have the opportunity to engage directly with Archbishop John Bonaventure Kwofie and his two auxiliaries bishops — Anthony Narh Asare, and John Kobina Louis, as well as other members of the clergy.

Take-up your role in the Church

During a discussion session at the launch of the Youth Congress held at the Holy Spirit

Cathedral, Accra recently, auxiliary bishop Anthony Narh Asare emphasised the importance of active participation from the youth. He urged them to move beyond mere criticism and take ownership of their roles within the Church.

"If this is your Church, if you love Christ then you must love His Church. And if you live in the Church, then all hands on deck," Bishop Asare asserted.

Let us dialogue

He continued, "Come, is there anything worrying you in your parish, in your family, wherever you work, in your school, let us dialogue about it. You know it is when you share, then you become more educated," said Bishop Asare.

For his part, the Youth Chaplain of

the Archdiocese of Accra, Fr Alphonse Bulloro, echoed Bishop Asare's sentiments, emphasising the congress as an opportunity for the youth to share their ideas and concerns directly with the archbishop and clergy.

"This year 2024, the youth of the Archdiocese of Accra will go into Congress. The purpose of this congress is for them to talk to our archbishop, chief shepherd, and his auxiliaries and the priests of the archdiocese who are ready to listen to them," stated Fr Bulloro.

Present & Connected

The congress, scheduled to take place from June 26 to 29, will kick off with a three-day intensive dialogue session at St Paul's Major Seminary, Sowutuom, bringing together 150 youth from various youth movements and

deaneries across the Archdiocese of Accra. This session aims to delve into pertinent issues affecting the youth and the Church.

On June 29, the congress will culminate in a grand gathering of approximately 3,000 youth at the El Wak Sports Stadium.

The climax event seeks to not only celebrate the unity and vibrancy of the youth but also to showcase the outcomes of the dialogue sessions and inspire collaborative solutions to challenges faced by the Church and society.

"The young people have this opportunity to journey with our archbishop and his auxiliaries and also the leaders of the archdiocese," emphasised Fr Bulloro.

"We pray that everything will be successful," said the Youth Chaplain. — **By Gabriel Asempta Antwi, Vatican News**

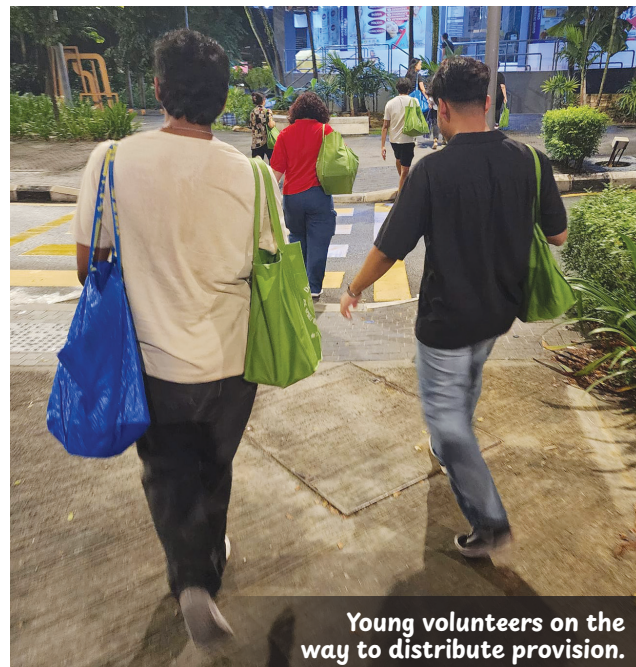
Walking in His FOOTSTEPS



By Hannah Loh

KUALA LUMPUR: Amid this Easter season, the Youth and Parish Integral Human Development ministries of the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist joined hands to organise a street feeding initiative for the homeless in the heart of Central KL, April 6.

A group of 14 young and not-as-young volunteers, including parish priest Fr Gerard Theraviam, began the night by congregating at the parish house after sunset

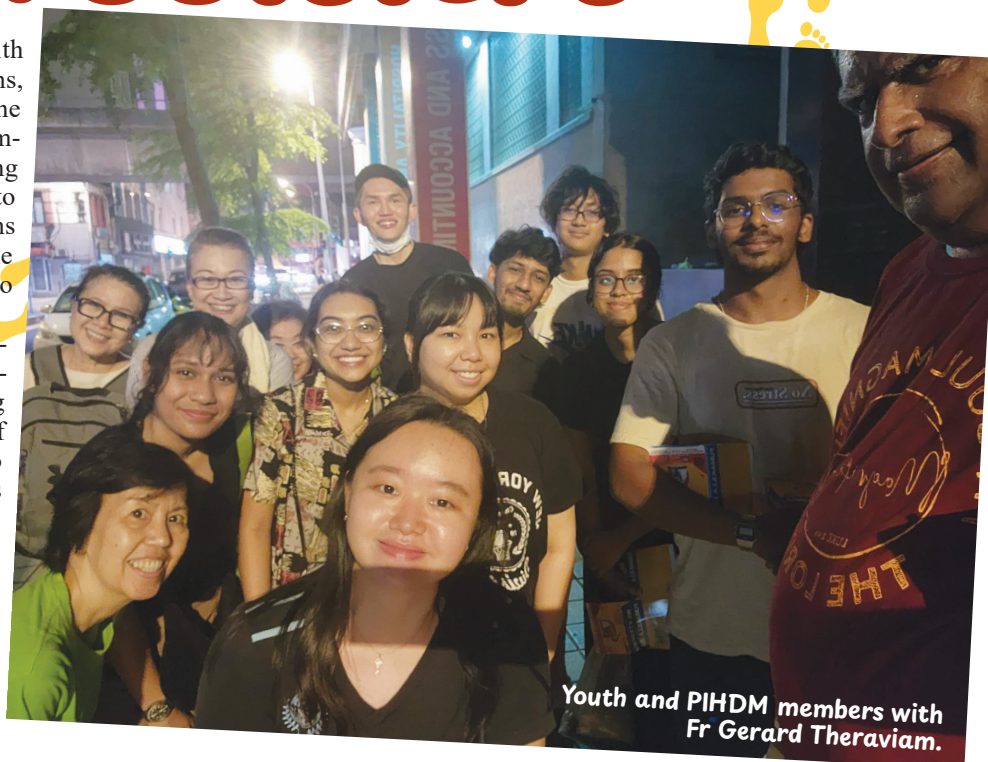


Young volunteers on the way to distribute provision.

Mass. We equipped ourselves with bags of water bottles, Milo cartons, mosquito coils, buns and hygiene products such as body soap, shampoo, combs, toothbrushes, shaving kits etc ready to be distributed to the street friends. Our intentions were clear yet simple from the onset, to extend a helping hand to those in need.

Throughout the night, we encountered individuals from diverse backgrounds, each carrying their own burdens and stories of hardship. Items such as mosquito coils, shampoo and shaving kits were in higher demand than food, especially during this festive Raya season where other groups were seen donating warm food packets to the less fortunate. Despite the abundance of food donations, the less fortunate individuals we encountered were grateful when receiving basic hygiene items. For them, these seemingly mundane and basic items were valuable treasures. Looking back, it is where encounters like this shift our perspectives on things we can easily obtain and often take for granted.

While providing sustenance and temporary companionship may not eradicate the root causes of the homeless crisis, it represents a crucial step towards addressing the immediate needs of our vulnerable neighbours and breathing life into the Gospel message of spreading compassion and



Youth and PIHDM members with Fr Gerard Theraviam.

service within our church community.

As we reflect on the profound significance of Easter, we are reminded of Jesus' teachings to feed the hungry, and to care for the least among us. Through communal initiatives like this, we are rekindled to carry forward the spirit of heeding the call to serve our brothers and sisters with love and humility. May this initiative and many others like it catalyse further acts of kindness and compassion, one small gesture of love at a time

WYD indispensable, even after 40 years

VATICAN: Forty years after the first world-wide gathering of young people in St Peter's Square in 1984, a procession carrying the World Youth Day Cross recalls the many fruits of the initiative set in motion by Pope St John Paul II.

"Today, we thank the Lord for the great inspiration St John Paul II had by convening the first WYD. We also thank how Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis lived those days. They lived WYD as an indispensable moment of the Church," said Cardinal José Tolentino de Mendonça, Prefect of the Dicastery for Culture and Education.

He spoke on the evening of April 13 during Mass in the St Lawrence Centre, 40 years after the first gathering of young people in St Peter's Square, on April 14, 1984.

He stressed that World Youth Days have produced many "fruits of hope, love, fruits of youth, of springtime in the heart of the Church."

The Prefect of the Dicastery for Culture and Education told young people that Jesus invites all by saying, "Come, touch, see, eat."

"Christ is decisive in the human person's life," he said. "The importance of Christ is not an abstract theoretical truth; it is something we have touched."

He pointed out that during World Youth



Procession with the WYD Cross in St Peter's Square.

Days, young people worldwide experience the joy of being believers, realising human fraternity, hugging, praying, worshipping, listening, laughing, crying, and treasuring this experience of the Church.

"This transforms lives, has transformed the story of the great ones, and continues to transform our lives, our story," said the Cardinal Prefect. "Christ does not want us to be spectators. Christ wants us to be witnesses. And the witness is the one who says, 'I have seen with my eyes, I have heard with my ears, I have touched.' This makes us a missionary

Church, an outgoing Church."

Cardinal Tolentino de Mendonça stressed that Pope Francis asks young people not to be "at the balcony watching history pass by, but in the midst of history, making noise, but a noise that is not just noise; it is the good news."

He also quoted St John Paul II saying that young people are the first evangelisers of other days.

"Christ is counting on you to heal wounds, open new horizons, build not a culture of death but a culture of life and build the

civilisation of love. Mary, present in every WYD as the reference point, helps us look at Christ," concluded Cardinal Tolentino de Mendonça.

The Prefect greeted those present, including the Secretary of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life, Gleison De Paula Souza, the Shalom Community, which provides pastoral care in St Lawrence Church, and the people who were present 40 years ago and participated in the Mass. The day concluded with a vigil of prayer and adoration of the Cross, "Rise up."

The next day, on Sunday, April 14, the St Lawrence Center hosted a celebration of Mass presided over by Cardinal Lazarus You Heung-Sik, Prefect of the Dicastery for the Clergy.

After the Mass, several people shared their experience of World Youth Days, as part of a commemoration recalling that first gathering in St Peter's Square.

After the gathering in 1984, St John Paul II invited young people back to Rome in 1986 for the first World Youth Day.

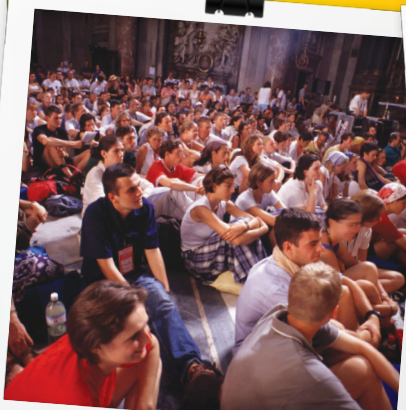
The next World Youth Day will take place in Seoul, South Korea, in 2027. Before that event, there will be a Youth Jubilee in Rome in 2025. — By Fr. Pawel Rytel-Andrianik, Vatican News



1989: Santiago de Compostela, Spain



1991: Czestochowa, Poland



2000: Rome



2008: Sydney



2016: Krakow, Poland

Photo source: Aleteia

Loss of renowned Jesuit educator

PHILADELPHIA :

Jesuit Fr William J. Byron, known for his leadership of Jesuit institutions of higher learning and his many years of lecturing, teaching and writing on the relationship between business practices and Catholic spirituality, died at Manresa Hall, the health centre of the Jesuit community at St Joseph's University in Philadelphia April 9. He was 96.

Fr Byron was a former president of the University of Scranton in Pennsylvania, 1975-1982, and The Catholic University of America in Washington, 1982-1992. He spent a year as acting president of Loyola University New Orleans, 2003-2004, and served as president of his high school alma mater, St Joseph's Preparatory School in Philadelphia, 2006-2008.

His other leadership roles for the Society of Jesus included rector of the Jesuit community at Georgetown University in Washington, 1994-2000.

During his tenure at Scranton, among other things, Fr Byron launched a multimillion-dollar capital campaign for the school. Also, a new undergraduate college, the School of Management, was created, along with new programmes including nursing and physical therapy.

After serving as Scranton's 21st president, he became the first member of a religious order to be named president of The Catholic University of America in Washington. He was the school's 12th president.

"Fr Byron was an exceptional leader in Catholic higher education," Catholic University's current president, Peter Kilpatrick, said in an April 9 message to the university community. "Fr Byron was known for being an inspiring intellectual who had an ability to connect powerfully with people and with ideas. Alumni remember him fondly for his close relationships with students, and for his leadership."

He tripled the university's endowment while fundraising the first \$50 million (RM239 million) that went toward the construction of more undergraduate housing, the Columbus School of Law building and the Pryzbyla Centre, a venue at the heart of the campus for concerts,



live stage performances, public forums and lectures.

After helping the nation's only papally chartered university, he became a professor at Jesuit-run Georgetown University in Washington. At the same time, he was rector of the Jesuit community at Georgetown and director of the university's Centre of Advanced Study of Ethics. He then was pastor for three years at nearby Holy Trinity Church, 2000 to 2003. Next, he was acting president at Loyola University New Orleans, followed by two years as a professor of economics at Loyola Maryland in Baltimore, 2004 to 2006,

the year he became president of St Joseph's Prep.

Before retiring from academia in 2009, Fr Byron taught a graduate course in the Haub School of Business at St Joseph's University. In his later years, he continued writing and publishing. In 2019, he moved to Manresa Hall at St Joseph's University, "where he enjoyed visits with students and never missed an opportunity to sing the St Joseph's prep fight song," said a news release from the Jesuits' USA East Province, based in New York.

Whether he was serving "as an administrator, professor or parish priest," Byron "always made a concerted effort to build up community with his Jesuit brothers in unassuming ways and to promote the apostolates of the Society of Jesus with a discerning, generous, and upbeat spirit," the province said in a statement.

The Jesuit priest was the author of more than 20 books and dozens of articles. In 2001, he became a regular columnist for *Catholic News Service*. The biweekly column, titled "Looking Around," covered current issues. He wrote his last column, which ran April 18, 2017, as a "fond farewell" to "those who have enjoyed my writing over the years."

"Writing a column is like putting a note in a bottle and tossing it into the river so it can float down and across the bay and out into the ocean. You never know whose shore it will wash up on," he said, noting that the latest of his many books, "Growing Old Gratefully," would be published later that year by Paulist Press.

"Old age is a gift," he said. "I can attest to that, so why not welcome it with gratitude?" —NCR

MEMORIAM

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**1st Anniversary
In Loving Memory of
R. Christopher s/o
William George**



Born:
13 February 1983
Departed:
30 April 2023

Missed and
love you dearly.
Wife, Children & Family.

18th Memorial



Emilin Gomez
Born: 25th November 1925
Departed: 29th April 2006

*I have fought the good fight,
I have finished the race,
I have kept the faith...*
2 Tim 4:7

Always remembered and
loved by your children,
daughters-in-law,
grandchildren, relatives
and friends.

**18th Anniversary
In Loving Memory of**



Rev Fr Philip So
Returned to the Lord:
29-04-2006

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

Always remembered by
Chris Loh and family and
all those who loved him.

**8th Anniversary
In Loving Memory of**



Regis Fernandez
Returned to the Lord on
2nd May 2016

*"Your love
is always in our hearts
Your Kindness
is fondly remembered
Your faith has shown us
grace and mercy
Even though you are now
in God's kingdom,
The memory of you is
always beautifully near."*

Dearly missed
and fondly remembered by
husband, children, grandchildren,
family and friends.

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**28th Anniversary
In Loving
Memory of**

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PEREIRA**

4.9.1923 - 16.4.1996

*28 years since you left us, Dad.
We carry your loving gentle spirit within us,
your wisdom remains etched in our hearts,
guiding us always. We dearly miss your hugs, stories,
laughter but your precious memories linger
in our lives forever.... till we meet again!*

Fondly remembered by
**Your loving wife, Florence Loone, the late Thresa,
Malcolm, the late Douglas, Fr Raymond, Ann, Royston,
Lilian, in-laws, grandchildren, relatives and friends.**

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'Be artisans of peace'

VATICAN: In a recent address to approximately 6,000 Italian schoolchildren participating in the National Network of Schools of Peace, Pope Francis emphasised the transformative power of small gestures in sowing the seeds of peace. The pontiff urged the youth to embrace inclusivity by reaching out to those left out, extending empathy towards the struggling, and engaging in acts of environmental care.

Speaking against the backdrop of ongoing global conflicts, Pope Francis implored the young audience to become "artisans of peace" in a world still scarred by the ravages of war. The National Network of Schools of Peace, a civic education initiative, aims to instill values of self-care, friendship, com-

munity responsibility, global awareness, and environmental consciousness among participating children.

During a lively speech in which he repeatedly called for responses from the children, Pope Francis made a special appeal to remember children who afflicted by war and conflict, especially the children of Ukraine "who have forgotten how to smile", and for the children of Gaza, "gunned-down" and suffering from hunger.

"In a society still prisoner of a throwaway culture," he told them, "I ask you to be protagonists of inclusion; in a world torn by global crises, I ask you to be builders of the future, so that our common home may become a place of fraternity."



Students and teachers from The National Network "Schools For Peace". (Vatican Media)

The Pope drew the children's attention to the UN Summit of the Future, which is scheduled for September 22-23 in New York to draft a "Pact for the Future," focused on promoting international cooperation and partnerships to ensure "a world that is safer, more peaceful, more just, more equal, more inclusive, more sustainable, and more prosperous."

While government leaders and experts in a variety of fields obviously must get involved to make that hope a reality, the Pope said, the pact will remain "just words on a page" without a commitment by all people of good will to take concrete steps aimed at changing harmful behaviour and building communities and societies where everyone feels they are cared for and belong.

"This is a dream that requires being awake and not asleep," he told the young people. The world can change for the better only when people are out in the world, "not lying on the couch," using media to create connections and not just waste time, "and then — listen carefully — this kind of dream is realised by praying, that is, together with God, not by our strength alone."

"Peace, in fact, is not only a silence of weapons and absence of war," Francis said. "It is a climate of benevolence, trust and love that can mature in a society based on caring relationships, in which individualism, distraction and indifference give way to the ability to pay attention to others, to listen to their needs, to heal their wounds, to be instruments of compassion and healing." — Agencies



Pope Francis welcomes students. (Vatican Media)

Christians must respond to call of the hungry

MONTREAL: The bishops of Quebec are calling on Christian communities and individual Christians to be attentive to the food crisis in Quebec, inviting them to analyse the situation in light of the Gospel and take appropriate action "to ensure that everyone has enough to eat."

The bishops note that ten per cent of Quebec's population made use of the Quebec food bank network in 2023, representing a 30 per cent increase over 2022 and a 73 per cent increase compared to 2019. They note, too, that the ongoing food crisis adds to the suffering experienced by people who are also contending with crises of housing and inflation.

"Do we perceive this suffering around us?" the bishops ask. "Are we sensitive to it?"

The bishops go on to reiterate their call "to combat food insecurity by respecting the dignity of people, who all need healthy food at an affordable price."

At the same time, the bishops' statement, issued ahead of the May 1 celebration of the feast of St Joseph and of Workers' Day, highlights the fact that in many cases, "having a job is not enough to feed oneself and one's family."

"Faced with the current food crisis," the bishops write, "our Christian communities, which are often already committed to helping the vulnerable, must respond to the call of the hungry... because, in doing so, we will be acting for justice, as Jesus Christ



(CBC News)

taught us, in continuity with the great biblical tradition of commitment to justice."

To ensure that everyone has enough to eat, or at least work toward that goal, the bishops invite Christians to take stock of available resources, and then to organise "a fair redistribution of resources, that is, a sharing inspired and guided by the God of love and mercy, who has given goods a universal destination, and to whom we bring the little we have."

Working alongside other members of society, and "in the name of our faith in Jesus Christ," the bishops say in conclusion, "we will keep alive the hope of a just society."

By Christopher Wells, Vatican News

2024

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