

RPA2024

Charting the way forward

By Patricia Pereira

KUALA LUMPUR: As the **Regional Pastoral Assembly 2024 (RPA2024)** for Peninsular Malaysia unfolds from August 25 to 27 at the MAJODI Centre in Plentong, Johor, it signifies more than just a gathering of clergy, religious, and lay leaders. It marks the continuation of a journey that began with the *Aggiornamento* in 1976 — a journey where the Church in Peninsular Malaysia has persistently sought to “journey together” as a **united community of faith**.

Set against the backdrop of a rich pastoral history spanning nearly five decades, RPA2024 is part of the Church’s ongoing mission of renewal and transformation. From the initial *Aggiornamento*, which aimed to align the Church with the modern world, to the preparations for the Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026 (MPC2026), the Church has consistently sought to listen, discern, and walk together in faith.

The theme for RPA2024, *Celebrating, Listening, and Walking Together in a Spirit of Communion, Participation, and Mission*, beautifully captures the essence of this ongoing journey. It calls on the faithful to reflect on the past, engage deeply with the present, and walk confidently into the future, guided by the Holy Spirit.

Central to RPA2024 is the “Conversation in the Spirit” (CS) process, a method of discernment integral to the synodal process initiated by Pope Francis. This method emphasises active listening and speaking from the heart, encouraging participants to engage deeply with one another and with the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Msgr Jude Miranda, chairperson of the Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Team, emphasised that the RPA is intended to be a grassroots-driven process, not a “top-down” approach, ensuring that every voice is heard and valued. Cardinal Sebastian Francis of Penang affirmed, “Fidelity to the process is fidelity to the Holy Spirit, and this faithfulness will direct the Church’s path forward.”

The Church, through the CS process, seeks to follow the Spirit’s guidance, allowing the pastoral directions from the assembly to be divinely inspired rather than merely human plans. These spiritually guided insights, or “counsels,” are meant to shape the Church’s journey with thoughtful discernment. By embracing these counsels, the Malaysian Church commits to ongoing discernment and a faithful response to the evolving signs of the times.

The focus of RPA2024 on **Church, Family, Society, and Ecology**, reflects the Church’s holistic approach to addressing the pressing challenges and opportunities of our time. These four key areas are not isolated topics but interconnected facets central to the life and mission of the Church. As we celebrate our past, we are reminded of the importance of these pillars in shaping the future of our local Church.

As the assembly convenes, there is a strong sense of hope and anticipation. Archbishop Julian Leow has emphasised the crucial role of youth in shaping the Church’s future, calling for their active engagement and empowerment. Cardinal Sebastian Francis described RPA2024 as an important milestone on the journey to MPC2026, urging openness to the Holy Spirit’s guidance rather than presuming specific outcomes. Bishop Bernard Paul likened the Church to “small fireplaces of comfort, consolation, and communion,” stressing its role as a source of hope and light in a world often overshadowed by despair.

As RPA2024 progresses, we are reminded of the importance of prayer. The success of the assembly hinges not only on human efforts but also on the grace of the Holy Spirit. We invite all the faithful to pray for the assembly, asking the Holy Spirit to guide its deliberations and inspire participants with wisdom and courage. May this assembly be a true celebration of our shared faith, a moment of deep listening to the Spirit, and a step forward in our journey together as the Malaysian Church.

Let us pray that the RPA2024 will bear fruit not only for those who gather in MAJODI, but for the entire Malaysian Church as we continue to walk together towards MPC2026 and beyond. May the Holy Spirit, who has guided us thus far, continue to lead us with love and light on this journey of faith.



ESTABLISHED 1994

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Tel / Whatsapp: 03-20268291

Website : www.heraldmalaysia.com

Facebook : www.facebook.com/
heraldmalaysiaJointly published by the
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Diocese of Penang and
Diocese of Keningau**EDITOR**Patricia Pereira
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OPINION

Pope Francis wants us to read more books

Every summer, my family would make a highly anticipated weekly trip to the local public library to check in on our progress for the summer reading programme. The librarians would open a treasure box of prizes to reward us for the hours we spent reading the previous week, always leading up to end-of-summer prizes like free ice cream or tickets to the local minor league baseball team.

Whether you have fond memories of achieving reading goals in order to earn a personal-sized pizza or are working with your children now to read 1,000 books before kindergarten, initiatives to foster a love of reading in children have long been a part of the lives of Americans. Especially in our current age of shortened attention spans, the sheer discipline to be able to sit down and read a book is virtuous in itself.

In a letter released on Sunday, August 4, Pope Francis addressed those involved in priestly formation in a particular way, but

also more widely all Christians, to encourage us to read more literature and poetry and to include them in formation programmes (see *HERALD*, August 18 – Front Page).

Pope Francis writes that based on his own experience as a literature teacher, it is natural to think that Christians need to primarily read the classics in order to have a refined sense of what is true and beautiful. And while these are important, he says, we need not read only Homer or “Hamlet” in our Christian formation.

The Holy Father encourages us to engage with contemporary literature as a way of being a church that is in dialogue with our culture. He repeats his message that we need to be Christians who understand our brothers and sisters who may not hold the same moral values as us, but who are Christ’s beloved just the same.

As I read Pope Francis’ short letter, it resonated deeply with me. As a reader and a writer, I have enjoyed writing reviews of secular books from a Catholic perspective, not just to provide content warnings or to glean Christian messages from new releases, but also to see where authors are vulnerable enough to reveal the cry of the human heart.

Reading books by authors that hold different values or perspectives from our own is a relatively spiritually safe way of learning the workings of a secular culture. Unlike entering a crowded night club on a Saturday night or even following people we disagree with on social media, there is no immediate need to act. We don’t have to worry about saying the wrong thing to someone or be concerned that our silence might be interpreted as assent.

When we read, we can be a listening Church without the need to immediately respond. As we hear the cry of humanity found

in literature, we can allow our hearts to be moved, just like Jesus’ heart when he saw that the crowds “were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Mt 9:36).

Literature gives us the freedom to discern how we will respond, not in mere words or posts, but with the way we live our lives and how we love our brothers and sisters. In ways that may never be possible otherwise, books give us insight into complex situations and suffering, the places where God’s presence can often be seen most clearly.

Of course, we always need to be prudent with any media usage, and books are no exception. There is no need to read books that are pornographic or may be near occasions of sin for us, a boundary that each individual needs to honestly discern for himself. For example, I enjoy reading thrillers, but personally try to stay away from books that involve supernatural elements because I’ve discerned that they disturb my inner peace. Another person may be disturbed by the violence in some of the books that I read, but which are merely elements in a story for me. Asking the Holy Spirit to guide us is always a good idea, and choosing what media we consume is no exception.

I am grateful for the Holy Father’s recent letter encouraging us to incorporate literature into our Christian formation, which includes a reminder that books have a defined beginning and end, unlike social media which can consume our time endlessly. Whether it’s a hardback, an e-book, or an audiobook, pick up a book today. You might be surprised at what you find. — **By Cecilia Cicone, OSV**

● **Cecilia Cicone is an author and communicator who works in diocesan ministry in Northwest Indiana, USA.**



Lord, to whom shall we go?

In the words attributed to St Ignatius of Antioch, resonates a profound truth: “Wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church.” This sentiment speaks to a universal yearning within humanity, amidst the turmoil and tribulations of the world, to discover a centre — a sanctuary where souls may find solace and purpose. Yet, is this centre a physical abode or a profound journey into the depths of our own existence? Echoing the wisdom of St Ignatius, it is where Jesus resides that the essence of the Church manifests. So long as we are tethered to Him, our anchor in the tumultuous seas of life, our existence finds harmony and meaning.

Recent encounters with young adolescents have unveiled the complexity

of their nonlinear struggles. Adrift in a world of constant flux, their lives seem devoid of direction, enveloped in a haze of fleeting pleasures and transient norms. Amidst this societal backdrop, a disconcerting trend emerges — the rise of the “NONEs,” individuals who eschew the embrace of Jesus and the sanctity of the Eucharist. Their pilgrimage no longer leads to the Church but to a transient realm promising temporary happiness.

While some may perceive the younger generation as privileged, the reality paints a starkly different picture. Inheriting a world scarred by pandemic-induced chaos and uncertainty, they stand at the precipice of a fragile reality, grappling with existential dilemmas beyond their years.

How then do we navigate this terrain of spiritual dissonance?

Jesus, in His unwavering resolve, extends to us the gift of the Eucharist — His very essence, His body, and blood — to partake in communion. Though met with scepticism and unrest among his followers, Jesus persists, offering us life through this sacred sacrament. We must rekindle the flame of devotion to Jesus in the Eucharist, for it is no longer a matter of choice but a beacon of salvation.

Throughout biblical history, countless souls have answered the divine call to follow God. Yet, as exemplified in Joshua’s exhortation to the Israelites, the allure of alternative allegiances perpetually beckons. In the face of such temptations, we are impelled not to withdraw from the world but to instill in the next generation the wisdom to discern and choose faithfully.

The decision encapsulated by the Israelites at Shechem resounds through the corridors of time — a testament to the perennial struggle against “alternative loyalties.” Indeed, distractions and temptations abound, but steadfastness in our devotion to Jesus ensures our salvation.

The journey of faith demands unwavering commitment, extending from our initial “yes” to God to the very culmination of our existence. Despite the trials and tribulations that beset us, our steadfast gaze fixed upon Jesus promises

Reflecting on our
Sunday Readings

with Sr Shanti Mariadass FdCC

**21st Sunday in
Ordinary Time (B)****Readings: Joshua 24:1-2a, 15-17, 18b;
Ephesians 5:21-32;
Gospel: John 6:60-69**

salvation and eternal life. For it is through Him that we find the sustenance to persevere, confident in the knowledge that the divine presence walks alongside us, guiding us through the tempests of life.

The decision to follow Jesus, to renounce allegiance to anything that would draw us away from God, to see that only our Lord has “the words of eternal life” is not an easy one and does not promise a carefree life; but it does promise us that the one who calls us will empower us and abide with us so that we may have confidence that “the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.” (Philippians 1:6)

May we continue to follow Peter and those faithful disciples in recognising Jesus Christ as the Holy One of God and following Him so that the light of Christ might shine before others that they may see Christ’s presence in us and give glory to our Lord who abides with us always with the light that shines in the darkness, the light no darkness can overcome.



No to preaching Islam in non-Muslim places of worship

KUALA LUMPUR: The Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Taoism (MCCBCHST) has expressed concern over recent remarks by Terengganu Mufti Datuk Dr. Mohamad Sabri Haron, who stated that Muslims are permitted to enter non-Muslim places of worship to spread Islam. According to a report in FOCUS Malaysia dated August 4, 2024, Dr Haron indicated that Muslims could visit these places with the intent to preach and introduce Islamic teachings.

In its statement dated August 10, MCCBCHST emphasised that places of worship for non-Muslims, like mosques for Muslims, serve as sacred spaces for followers to practice their faith. Article 11 of the Federal Constitution grants individuals the right to profess and practice their religion. However, Clause 4 of this article allows for restrictions on the propagation of religious doctrines among Muslims, which does not extend to the unrestricted preaching of Islam



Places of worship in Malaysia. (Wikimedia Commons)

in non-Muslim places of worship.

The Council warned that the Mufti's sug-

gestion could undermine the sanctity of non-Muslim places of worship and potentially

create tension between different religious communities. Such actions could also lead to legal repercussions under several Malaysian Penal Code sections, including:

- Section 298: Wounding religious feelings.
- Section 298A: Causing disharmony or ill-will on religious grounds.
- Section 505(c): Statements likely to incite offenses.

MCCBCHST urged the Terengganu Mufti to respect the rights of all religious groups and adhere to a proper understanding of the Federal Constitution and Malaysian laws. They stressed that while fostering unity and interfaith dialogue is encouraged, any attempt to propagate one's faith within another religion's place of worship without consent is inappropriate and can disrupt communal harmony. The Council called for mutual respect among religions and adherence to protocols that maintain the sanctity of all places of worship.



KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

August / September

- 25-27/8 Peninsular Malaysia Regional Pastoral Assembly – MAJODI
- 1/9 World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation Mass — Cathedral of St John, KL
- 1/9 Parish Pastoral Assembly – Church of Our Lady of Fatima, Brickfields
- 3-6/9 His Holiness Pope Francis' Visit to Jakarta



PENANG DIOCESE

Diary of Cardinal Sebastian Francis

August

- 25-27 Peninsular Malaysia Regional Pastoral Assembly – MAJODI



MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

August / September

- 25-27/8 Peninsular Malaysia Regional Pastoral Assembly – MAJODI
- 1/9 El-Shaddai Anniversary – MAJODI Centre
- 1-6/9 Clergy Annual Retreat – Cameron Highlands



Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #186

F12
MJD NEWS
UPDATES

Greetings dear friends of MJD

Blood, sweat and tears. The agony and the ecstasy. The thrill of winning and the pain of losing. Close finishes and disastrous finishes. It is beyond the chase for gold, silver or bronze. It is a four-year preparation that's over with the whistle or the starter's gun. It's standing on the podium to one's national anthem. It's a dream come true. It is a lifetime of sacrifice. The USA and China tied in the gold tally, but China was out matched by the US in the silver and bronze totals. There were many surprising first-time gold medallists. The Paris Olympics ended well, with no terrorists' attacks, no political interference, no unsporting controversies. The next summer Olympics will be staged in Los Angeles. Sports unites. Sports bring out the best in us.

'Not good enough' Times: Not winning and congratulating challengers became issues for some netizens. Even winning was not everything. Following is an extract sent by a regular WhatsApp:

*"Have you noticed that a *bronze* medallist is generally *happier* than a *silver medallist* at the end of the game."*

It's not an incidental finding but a proven fact in many research studies after studying reactions of silver medallists vs bronze medallists!

Ideally, a silver medallist should be happier than the bronze. but the human mind doesn't work like mathematics.

*This happens because of a phenomenon called the *counterfactual thinking*.*

The silver medallist thinks, "oh I couldn't win the gold medal." the bronze medallist thinks, "at least I

got a medal."

A silver medal is won after losing, but a bronze medal is won after winning.

This happens even in our life; we don't appreciate what we have but feel sad with what we don't have. Let's be grateful for our blessings, they far outweigh our problems if we start counting.

Life is after all full of choices, do always count your blessings to stay positive and motivated".

A Thought For The Week: Robert Louis Stevenson

Robert Louis Stevenson, a famous Scottish poet, was afflicted with tuberculosis. Weakened, he couldn't move his right hand, and was unable to write. Without giving up, he learned to write with his left hand. He was able to do it for several days until his left hand could no longer move. But without despairing, he dictated to a friend to write his literary works. The malignant disease reached his tongue, crippling his speech. He learned sign language and began to use his fingers to write his works. He may have lost speech and movement, but he continued to achieve great success with his literary works.

A lesson from the afflicted: Never lose hope. Finding alternatives, overcoming obstacles and never giving up are the marks of the finishers. Life is hope. If you lose hope, you lose life.

Announcements For The Week:

1. The Peninsular Malaysian Church prepares for the **Regional Pastoral Assembly, August 25-27**. There are 550 participants. Please pray for a Spirit-led outcome.

2. The September month is dedicated as the **Season of Creation**, with

the World Day of the Poor and the Migrant Sunday slotted in.

3. The Clergy will be away for their **Annual Retreat** during the month of September. Pray for them.

4. Coming next: The Novenas and the Feast of the **Santa Cruz Chapel Malim**, the **Padre Pio Centre, Ulu Tiram** and the **Catholic Nurses' National Conference in Melaka**.

QnQ? Q ask: Is love missing among church people?

1. Religious people easily neglect the obvious and this is the most obvious and the most necessary to remember: the unloving know nothing of God.

2. This is not metaphysical reasoning but the reason of the heart, [and] our most universal human experience teaches it.

Love is transcendence, the re-centering of consciousness by the act of patient attention to the other.

3. Parents do it, lovers do it and religious people must do it too if they are to be genuine.

See the Holy Spirit @ work: The work of the Spirit is to impart life, to implant hope, to give liberty, to testify of Christ, to guide us into all truth, to teach us all things, to comfort the believer, and to convict the world of sin. — Dwight L. Moody

Something to tickle you: Faith sees the invisible, believes the unbelievable and receives the impossible. — Corrie Ten Boom

Bernard Paul

Bishop Bernard Paul

ECMI annual conference focuses on migrants and collaboration

By Peter Zeter

GENTING HIGHLAND: The Episcopal Commission for Migrant and Itinerant (ECMI) held its annual conference from August 5 to 7. It was hosted by the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur at Villa Dominic. The event brought together 32 members from dioceses across Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei to discuss and enhance their support for migrant and itinerant communities.

The conference commenced with a webinar organised by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), focusing on reflections and planning for the 2024 World Day of Migrants and Refugees. Approximately 50 participants from countries including Japan, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, the Philippines, Hong Kong, and India joined the online discussion, which featured insights from Fr Fabio Baggio C.S., Undersecretary of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development in Rome.

The second day began with a spiritual input session by Fr Alvin Ng SJ, who spoke on *Synodal Spirituality in Ministry Work*. Fr Alvin emphasised the importance of creating space for others in ministry, advocating for active



listening, finding common ground, and facilitating mediation. He drew parallels from the Trinity, illustrating how the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit collaborate in unity and mission. He urged attendees to recognise and address the needs of migrants, stressing that the Church must not turn away from them.

Following Fr Alvin's session, participants engaged in personal reflection amidst the tranquil surroundings of the villa.

The afternoon session featured Fr Fabian Dicom, Caritas National Office Director, who discussed potential areas for improved collaboration between ECMI and Caritas.

Fr. Fabian highlighted the need for a more integrated approach to human development, shifting from case-based to cause-based strategies. He underscored the importance of addressing interconnected aspects such as human rights, common good, and solidarity.

On the final day, participants visited Kuala Lumpur city centre for an excursion that included interactions with various NGOs and refugee groups. They explored refugee communities, a refugee earning centre, the Refugee Women Entrepreneur Centre, and the Refugee Medical Centre. These visits provided valuable insights into the realities faced by

refugees and the ongoing efforts to support them.

Participants gathered at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre in KL to share their observations and reflections from the excursion. The conference concluded with Mass celebrated by ECMI president, Bishop Bernard Paul, marking a successful and insightful gathering aimed at enhancing the Church's response to migrant and itinerant communities.

The ECMI conference highlighted the importance of collaborative efforts and the Church's ongoing commitment to inclusivity and support for those on the margins.

Retreat unites seminarians from the region

KUCHING: St Peter's College (SPC) Major Seminary in Kuching and St Francis Xavier (SFX) Major Seminary in Singapore recently held their first joint retreat, a significant event for the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei. This retreat brought together 33 seminarians from nine Malaysian dioceses, 17 from the Archdiocese of Singapore, and two from Brunei, along with formators from both seminaries.

The retreat, inspired by John 6:68 — *Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life* — was led by Archbishop Emeritus John Ha of Kuching, with support from SFX formators including Frs Valerian Cheong, Terence Kesavan, and Edward Seah. Archbishop John's talks covered key topics such as Church scandals, discipleship, and the transformative power of the Word of God.

Daily activities included a Holy Hour and a "desert experience" on Friday at Gethsemane Pilgrimage Centre and the Church of St Stephen. This period of silence allowed for deep reflection and personal spiritual growth.

The retreat ended with a thanksgiving dinner on the Solemnity of Sts Peter and Paul, celebrating both the patrons of SPC.

Fr Patrick Heng, Rector of SPC, praised the retreat's smooth execution and unity, noting the cultural exchange with Singaporean attendees. Fr Valerian, Rector of SFX, reflected on the potential for future collaborative support among priests, recalling positive past experiences and hoping for deeper connections. Archbishop Simon Poh of Kuching highlighted the importance of unity and spreading Christ's message.

This historic retreat set a precedent for future regional collaborations, enhancing unity and mutual support among seminarians.

A community's joy at Franciscan friar's ordination

MEMBAKUT: It truly takes a village to raise a child, and indeed, it took the entire community of Membakut to nurture not just a child, but a Franciscan friar, recently ordained as a priest to serve God's people.

This marks the second priestly ordination from the Church of St Patrick Membakut in 44 years, with the first ordination taking place in 1980. Although Fr Saimon William is the second priest from Membakut, he was ordained in Kota Kinabalu.

On August 11, 2024, Bishop Cornelius Piong ordained Friar Nelson Evarinus Sipalan OFM as the first Franciscan friar from Membakut. The ceremony was participated by Friar Derrick Yap OFM, Custos and Regional Superior of the Franciscans in Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei, as well as OFM friars from Malaysia and Singapore, several Jesuit priests, diocesan priests, and approximately 1,500 faithful.

In his homily, Bishop Cornelius called on Deacon Nelson to embrace his sacred duty to teach in the name of Christ the Teacher, to unify the faithful into one family, and to guide them to God the Father through Christ in the Holy Spirit. He urged him to follow Christ's example of service, emphasising Christ's mission to seek out and save what was lost.

Friar Nelson expressed his heartfelt thanks and appreciation to everyone pre-

sent, especially to his parents. He also conveyed deep gratitude to Bishop Cornelius for the ordination, Friar Derrick, the OFM Custos, and all his mentors who have journeyed with him in his priestly vocation.

The following day, August 12, Friar Nelson celebrated his first Mass at the Church of St Philip, Kg Sinoko, Membakut. He is currently serving as an assistant priest at the Church of St Ann, Kota Padawan, Kuching, Sarawak.

His journey of faith

"I was born and raised in Membakut. My father is from Kampung Remayah, Penampang, and my mother is from Kg Sinoko, Membakut. I am the fourth of nine siblings.

"Before joining the Franciscan Order, I worked in the hospitality industry for 12 years at a five-star international resort. My inspiration to join the Order of Friars Minor (OFM) stemmed from the spiritual works of St Francis of Assisi, which led me to enter the Order as a postulant on January 5, 2015, at St James the Marches in Johor Bahru.

"During my formation, I began pastoral work at Church of St Ann in 2017, and the experience deeply resonated with me. It has since held a special place in my heart. After much prayer and discernment, I made my



Solemn Profession as a Franciscan friar on July 9, 2022, at the Church of St Aloysius in Limbanak, Penampang.

"Choosing to become a friar required me to relinquish my own will and embrace the leadership of the community as a manifestation of God's desire for me. The Franciscan vow of obedience represents a public commitment to listening to and responding to God's call, regardless of how or where it comes from. In a society that often emphasises individual autonomy, this vow is counter-cultural. It embodies the Christian conviction that our lives are not solely about us, but about living for God and following the example of Jesus and St Francis of Assisi.

"As a friar, my focus is on making Christ the centre of my life, not myself. I am moving beyond fear and the comfort of the known, and venturing into the profound reality that the joy of the Gospel calls me to embrace."



Mt Miriam disburses RM1.26 million in six months



PENANG: Mount Miriam Cancer Hospital's (MMCH) Welfare Fund has recently allocated RM1.26 million to assist 78 cancer patients with their treatment expenses. CEO Deacon Paul Kang, *pic*, announced this significant achievement during their annual dinner recently.

This disbursement amounts to 80 percent of the total funds distributed last year, highlighting the increasing financial support required to help a growing number of patients in need.

The Welfare Fund was estab-

lished to offer crucial financial assistance to cancer patients and their families struggling with health care costs.

As a Catholic mission hospital, MMCH distinguishes itself through its Mission and Pastoral care teams and dedicated volunteers, who play a vital role in the holistic care and healing process. In addition to primary treatment, imaging, and nursing care, MMCH provides daily Masses and prayers for patients and staff, further enriching its unique approach to care.



Some of the staff who served for 25 years with their awards.

Church's ongoing support of cancer care

IPOH: The Raja Permaisuri of Perak, Tuanku Zara Salim, officiated the launch of NCSM-Caritas's 'Homes of Hope,' a temporary accommodation facility designed to support underprivileged cancer patients.

The event, held on August 8 at the National Cancer Society Malaysia's (NCSM) Perak branch, was attended by Cardinal Sebastian Francis, Bishop of Penang; Dr Feisul Idzwan Mustapha, Director of the Perak State Health Department (JKN); and Datin Seri Aezer Zubin, wife of the Perak Menteri Besar.

Tuanku Zara also inaugurated the Jelajah Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Programme across Perak. This programme is part of NCSM's nationwide "Leaving No One Behind" campaign, which

aims to eliminate cervical cancer in Malaysia by offering free HPV immunisations.

Cardinal Sebastian in his speech, highlighted that the Catholic Diocese of Penang, which covers the states of Penang, Perak, Kedah, Perlis, and Kelantan, has partnered with NCSM to support the 'Homes of Hope' initiative. The Church has committed to providing a three-storey building for the next 30 years to cater to the needs of low-income cancer patients and their caregivers while they receive outpatient treatment at the Oncology Department of Hospital Raja Permaisuri Bainun Ipoh. The facility offers 30 beds along with accommodation, counselling, transport services, food, and nutrition support, all free of charge.

Additionally, the Church has donated a property in Ipoh, formerly known as Asrama Bintang, located behind the Main Convent Ipoh, for NCSM to establish a cancer diagnostic centre. This centre will assist lower-income groups who cannot afford private healthcare services in Perak.

In Penang, the Mount Miriam Cancer Hospital, a mission hospital, provides services primarily for the lower-income community. It collaborates with Hospital Besar Pulau Pinang to offer radiotherapy treatment for patients referred by government hospitals in Northern Peninsula Malaysia.

Cardinal Sebastian concluded by expressing the Church's openness to building more bridges and tents of hope with all people of goodwill for the com-



Cardinal Sebastian Francis receiving an appreciation plaque from Raja Permaisuri of Perak, Tuanku Zara Salim.

mon good of Malaysians.

Associate Professor Dr Murallitharan Munisamy, Managing Director of NCSM, noted in his welcoming speech that since its inception in 2023, the NCSM Perak Homes of Hope has operated with 30 beds as a 'feeder' transit home for cancer patients at Raja Permaisuri Bainun Hospital. This facility offers free accommodation to patients and their families from across the state while they receive treatment.

He also praised the success of the "Leaving No One Behind" programme, stating, "To date,

NCSM has successfully helped over 70,000 Malaysians receive HPV protection, thanks to the efforts of our staff, volunteers, state government, and partner organisations."

Dr Feisul emphasised the importance of the Homes of Hope, stating, "The treatment and care of cancer patients is not easy and can be very expensive. The availability of temporary accommodation helps ease the burden on cancer patients receiving treatment at Raja Permaisuri Bainun Hospital by providing free accommodation and transportation."



Raja Permaisuri of Perak, Tuanku Zara Salim with the cancer patients and their families.

Medical camp and blood donation at St Jude, Rawang



RAWANG: A blood donation drive and medical camp was held at the Church of St Jude on August 12.

It was organised by the Parish Integral Human Development (PIHDM) in collaboration with the National Blood Bank, SP Care Group, MySejahtera, World Vision Optic and the National Cancer Society Malaysia (NCSM).

Parish priest Fr Vincent Thomas encouraged the parishioners to help save lives by donating their blood and by pledging their organs.

Medical personnel from SP Care, led by Dr Harry Dinesh Mahalingam and Madam Mala Rajaratnam, assisted with the registration of individuals under the

PEKA B40 scheme. They conducted random blood tests and assessed BMI for those interested in their services.

The National Cancer Society of Malaysia (NCSM) was also on hand to administer HPV vaccines to women under 45. Additionally, an SP Care officer taught children about the importance of practicing good hygiene.

SP Care also provided CPR training to the Hospitality Ministers, led by Vincent John, to equip them with essential emergency response skills.

The World Vision Optic was there to give aid to those who need their eyes checked and they gave exceptional good discounts for all who patronised their booth.

Gabriel, as he wishes to be called, is the manager of the welfare department of this unit who works in collaboration with the Lions club of Selangor Miracle. He said going around doing charity work was part of their mission and vision. They also provided free spectacles for ten B40 parishioners.

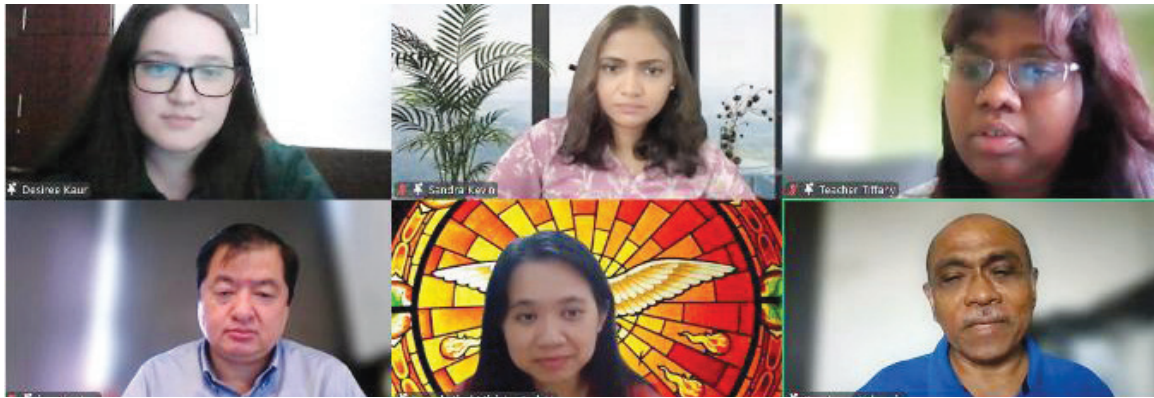
Gloria Shereena Kumar was there to help register parishioners who wish to pledge their organs for donation through the MySejahtera app.

At the end of a tiring but satisfying day, it brought to mind the wise saying of Mahatma Gandhi, "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others". — *By Mercy Almeida Stellus*

Supporting parents and catechists of neurodivergent learners

KUALA LUMPUR: Differently-abled persons “have a place as all of us have a place,” remarked Archbishop Julian Leow Beng Kim during an online event organised by the Catechesis for Learners with Special Needs Ministry (CLSN), a sub-ministry of the KL Archdiocesan Catechetical Ministry (KLACM), on August 10. This marks the second consecutive year that the CLSN has hosted an online event aimed at fostering acceptance of the neurodivergent community within the Church.

In his speech, Archbishop Julian cited Pope Francis, highlighting the dual “rocks” of inclusion and participation as essential in supporting differently-abled persons. He stressed that while understanding and inclusivity are crucial, it is equally important for neurodivergent individuals to actively participate in Church life. He also acknowledged the challenges faced by families with differently-abled members, offering words of encouragement: “It brings out the worst in us many a time, but if we can include and accept, this is the



way God speaks to us, then it brings out the best in us also.”

Dr Steven Selvaraju, Director of the Archdiocesan Catechetical Centre, spoke on *The Role of Parents in Catechesis*. He emphasised that his presentation applies to all parents, regardless of the abilities of the child as catechesis can even begin in the womb of the mother when she is carrying her child. He quoted Church documents to remind parents that their responsibility as catechists to their children is part of the promises they make in the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony. He also made a note that the rights

of baptised persons, including those with Special Needs, to participate in the liturgy and to receive the sacraments have to be respected.

Psychologist Ignatius Lee provided practical insights on *Practical Approaches to Catechesis*, offering valuable tips and resources to help parents of neurodivergent children engage more effectively in Mass and catechesis.

The event concluded with a forum moderated by Desiree Kaur, a parent advocate and founder of Project Haans, who is also the mother of a nine-year-old autistic child with dyspraxia and dysgraphia. The forum featured two panellists, Sandra Kevin, mother to Emmanuel, age 10, who is on the autism spectrum, and Tiffany Seetha Kannapathy, a Special Educator and catechist for Children with Special Needs.

Sandra shared her initial struggles in catechising her son and her eventual move to a parish that better supported Emmanuel’s learning needs. Despite ongoing challenges, she remains hopeful and eager to share her experiences with others. Tiffany discussed the need for more inclusive catechesis and called for increased engagement with Special Needs catechism at

the Church of the Holy Family in Kajang, Selangor. The forum highlighted the critical need for mutual support between parents, catechists, and the broader community. It underscored the collective responsibility to meet the catechetical needs of differently-abled children and to make reasonable accommodations that allow families to participate fully in Mass together. Reinforcing the spirit of inclusivity, the event affirmed that everyone has a place in the Church and that we are all children of God, regardless of our abilities.

The KLACM and the CLSN Team are committed to advancing support for the Special Needs community. To receive updates on future events or to connect with fellow parents and catechists, join the WhatsApp group here: <https://bit.ly/3M6GjEb>

Resources mentioned by Ignatius Lee are available on the KLACM website: <https://www.archklacm.org/resources>, and further materials are accessible via a Google Classroom: <https://bit.ly/3M7sdSY>.

Applying transactional analysis in leadership

IPOH: A leadership training programme for all core team members of ministries and BECs and interested parishioners was held on August 11 at the Church of St Michael (SMC).

The training session, titled *Transactional Analysis for Leaders*, was organised by SMC’s Faith Formation Team (English) and led by Vernon Fernandez.

Vernon provided a layperson’s perspective on applying Transactional Analysis in leadership to enhance communication, strengthen relationships, resolve conflicts constructively, and lead with empathy. He emphasised emulating Jesus’ behavioural traits — such as compassion, humility, and genuine concern — to inspire others in the parish and at home. Vernon encouraged flexibility and mindfulness in interac-

tions, like Jesus’ adaptability in different situations.

Transactional analysis is a method of therapy wherein social interactions are analysed to determine the ego state of the communicator (whether parent-like, childlike, or adult-like) as a basis for understanding behaviour. Vernon highlighted that there is no inherent problem with being in any of these ego states; the key is to recognise and adjust our behaviour when necessary.

The training was well-received by over 55 participants, who found Vernon’s insights and presentation highly beneficial. One attendee remarked, “By becoming more aware of our own and others’ behavioural traits, we are now better equipped to work effectively within our groups.” — **By Jennifer Duarte**



Vernon Fernandez giving a layperson’s understanding on transactional analysis.

The role of parents as first evangelisers



PENANG: An inspiring online session titled *Parents as The First Evangelisers* was hosted by the Institute for New Evangelisation (INE) recently. The session, held via Zoom was moderated by Michael Xavier, Chairman of INE, and featured heartfelt sharing from Clement Jeremiah Raj, his wife Pamela, and their four children: Jadon (age 13), Faith (12), Grace (9), and Isaac (8). The event saw an impressive increase in participation, emceed by Jennifer Tan from the Church of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam.

The session opened with a prayer inviting the Holy Spirit to inspire all participants. Clement and Pamela emphasised the significance of being rooted in Christ through personal prayer, spending time with Jesus, and knowing and living the Word of God. They shared how they model respect and love in their marriage, with Pamela honouring Clement’s role as the head of the family. They demonstrated effective communication, humility, forgiveness, and prayer,

striving to lead by example for their children.

Despite busy schedules, the couple ensures they dedicate quality time to their children, whether through conversations during car rides or at the dinner table. They stressed the importance of treating each child uniquely based on their individual needs and character. Discipline was approached with love and explanation, maintaining a balance of correction and affection.

The family’s spiritual life includes praying together, saying the Rosary, Bible sharing, role plays, reflections, and fun quizzes. They make it a point to eat meals together, giving thanks joyfully, and engage in lively Praise and Worship sessions. Attending Mass together is a cornerstone of their faith life, where Clement underscores the importance of the Holy Eucharist, ensuring the children show reverence and avoid distractions.

Clement also involves his family in BEC gatherings and chooses wholesome entertainment like

Christian or family movies when watching TV together. The children, Jadon, Faith, Grace, and Isaac, expressed that building a relationship with Jesus can be both fun and meaningful.

Clement and Pamela reminded parents not to lose heart despite challenges, encouraging them to seek Jesus’ guidance. They affirmed that each family is a work in progress, growing in God’s love and mercy.

Suggestions was to set loving boundaries and teach the children about Christ’s teachings. The session concluded with a recap, prayers of gratitude, and blessings for Clement’s family, the participants, and families worldwide. INE announced that future sessions on leading Christ-centred family lives would be forthcoming, aiming to strengthen the family as the “domestic church.”

The video is available on YouTube by scanning this QR Code. — **By Jennifer Tan**



Embracing W.A.L.A.I.

A spiritual journey in Sabah

TAMBUNAN, Sabah: The serene landscape of Pertapaan Putri Karmel, Kaingaran, was the backdrop for a spirit-filled retreat organised by the Kuala Lumpur Archdiocesan Office for Human Development (AOHD).

From August 9 to 12, 66 participants from different parishes, with some coming from abroad embarked on a journey of inner healing, community outreach, and cultural immersion, all of which left an indelible mark on our hearts.

This year's retreat was centred around the theme W.A.L.A.I. (We Are Loved And Inseparable), a phrase that holds a deep significance. In the local Dusun language, "Walai" means "home", symbolising a place of love, belonging, and unity. This theme resonated throughout our time together, reminding us of the unbreakable

bond we share as a faith community and the comforting presence of God's love in our lives.

The retreat sessions were led by the Daughters of Carmel Sisters and Brothers CSE, who guided us through profound moments of reflection and healing by the Holy Spirit. These sessions explored our inner wounds, encouraging us to confront pain and seek healing through forgiveness. It was both challenging and liberating, reminding us that true healing begins within and forgiveness is the key.

One of the highlights of the retreat was the outreach programme to Kg Minodung, a village nestled in the lush hills of Sabah. Upon arrival, the villagers welcomed us with lively music and smiles, reflecting the vibrant Sabahan culture. Their infectious



AOHD Retreatants sharing the love during Praise and Worship.

joy reminded us of the connections that bind communities together.

The outreach was more than just an opportunity to connect with the local community; it was a moment of mutual exchange. The villagers shared their traditions, stories, and way of life, enriching our understanding of the Sabahan culture. In return, we helped to clean their ancestral graveyard and plant fruits and vegetables.

On the final night of the retreat, we gathered for a special community night — a joyful celebration of our shared experiences. Everyone participated in the evening's festivities, which included dancing, skits, and singing. The atmosphere was filled with laughter, music, and a sense of togetherness that perfectly encapsulated the retreat's theme. It was a beautiful way to close our time together, as we celebrated the bonds we had formed and the growth we had experienced.

The theme of W.A.L.A.I. will remain a guiding light for us, a reminder that in God's

love, we are always at home, inseparable from one another and from the divine presence that surrounds us.

The retreat was the culmination of a pre-retreat spiritual preparation, guided by Fr Frederick Joseph, the Ecclesiastical Assistant to the Society of St Vincent de Paul (SSVP). During our pre-retreat session, Fr Frederick helped attendees of various ages and backgrounds connect with their spirits, emphasising the importance of the corporal works of mercy.

We would like to extend our deepest gratitude to the Putri Karmel Sisters and Brothers CSE for hosting us and for their unwavering support throughout this retreat. We are grateful for their unwavering commitment to our spiritual well-being and their insightful guidance throughout our journey of inner healing. Their expert care and direction made this retreat a deeply profound success. We are deeply thankful for their exceptional hospitality and steadfast commitment. —

AOHD Team



Participants planting seeds during their outreach to Kg. Minodung, Tambunan, Sabah.

Understanding non-heterosexuality

KUALA LUMPUR: Bryan Shen, a renowned and much sought-after professional counsellor cum lay missionary, gave a day-long formation titled *Behind & Beyond LGBTQ* to nearly 200 participants at Jesus Caritas Church recently on how psycho-social-familial development of non-heterosexuality can be better understood.

Bryan said people has likened same sex attraction to be the same as non-heterosexuality which is not the case. Because they are attractions, they are not necessarily permanent nor are they identities. Just like opposite-sex attractions, same sex attractions are not chosen.

Bryan shared that studies have shown that the development of non-heterosexuality is not a gene issue. Our brains store

memories some of which are declarative or conscious memories while some are conditioned emotional memories just like a one-year-old child can be conditioned to prefer or fear something without conscious reasoning which can last a lifetime.

Also, various family and social factors can negatively impact unconscious emotional conditioning. For boys, issues like bullying by other boys and a strong maternal presence are common. For girls, factors include toxic male influences, poor relationships with female figures and witnessing male favouritism. Subsequent choices are shaped by exposure to societal influences or LGBTQ narratives.

During the formation, the participants were told that many people with non-

heterosexuality do not identify as LGBTQ and often remain hidden with a very high percentage of them in Asia. His experiences from counselling those in religious communities had yielded a landscape of people who strive to live in holiness as called by God while contending with these personal challenges. They harbour fear of ostracisation and denigration while suffering mental distress and anguish.

Bryan gave a formation that integrated psychological insights with faith that effectively served as a guide to parents and the church community to seek an understanding of the challenges faced by these individuals focusing on the dignity of every person.

His approach emphasised the impor-



Bryan Shen

tance of creating an environment where individuals feel loved regardless of their situation and struggles. By combining psychological knowledge with faith-based principles, the formation helped parents and the church community to recognise the complex emotional and spiritual needs of those with same-sex attraction. It also provided practical tools for offering support that aligned with psychological well-being and spiritual growth.

The formation drew participation not just from the parish of Jesus Caritas but also parishes in Kuala Lumpur, Selangor and Perak.

The next day, Bryan had a special sharing session with the youth in Jesus Caritas Church. — **By Alison Wong**



The participants.

Pope's visit will inspire renewed zeal for the faith

VATICAN: In an interview with Vatican Media, Cardinal Charles Maung Bo, *pic*, Archbishop of Yangon and President of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), reflected on the significance of Pope Francis' upcoming Apostolic Journey to Asia and Oceania. The Pope's visit, which will take place from September 2 to 13, marks his 45th international journey and his return to Asia after his last travels abroad in September 2023.

Cardinal Bo emphasised the deep impact the Pope's visit will have on the people of Asia. "For many in Asia, the Pope has often seemed distant, only known through stories or digital media," he said. "The Pope's presence in Asia not only stirs excitement but also rekindles a renewed zeal for the faith. It shows that the Asian people are close to the Pope's heart and mind." Cardinal Bo also noted the significance of the Pope's deci-



sion to visit smaller, lesser-known countries like Papua New Guinea and Timor-Leste, which presents a unique opportunity for the world to learn more about the vibrant Churches in these nations.

Discussing the diversity of the Asian continent, Cardinal Bo highlighted the unique mix of cultures, religions, and traditions. Despite Christians being a minority in most Asian countries, the Church remains vibrant and growing. "The Holy Father will witness the dynamic diversity of the Churches in Asia and the unwavering faith of its people, regardless of their economic status or religious majority," he explained.

Cardinal Bo also reflected on the lessons the Universal Church can learn from Asia. "Three words come to mind: peace, harmony, and dialogue," he said. "Despite the challenges faced by the Churches in Asia, our goal is to seek peace and harmony. In Asia, we learn to collaborate, dialogue, and respect each other. The pathways of peace and harmony through dialogue are what Asia can offer to the Universal Church."

The Cardinal went on to describe the wit-

ness of the Church in Asia, noting its vibrancy and resilience. "Many of our churches are full during Sunday Masses, and Asian migrants often bring their faith with them, revitalising ancient Churches in their new homes," he said. "Despite political, economic, social, and cultural challenges, the faith in Asia remains alive and dynamic."

As for what the Churches in Asia need from the Universal Church, Cardinal Bo expressed hope that the Pope's visit would inspire a renewed zeal for the faith and greater openness to living in peace and mutual care. He also addressed the issue of climate change, noting its severe impact on Asia. "Given the Pope's deep concern for the environment, I am certain he will address this issue. The Church in Asia must play a leading role in promoting climate care for the common good," he concluded. — *Vatican News*

Korean bishop urges Catholic parents to be 'prayerful'

SEOUL: A Catholic bishop in South Korea has urged parents gathered for the 20th anniversary of a diocesan prayer group to help their children grow up to become the "right children of the Lord," says a report.

Auxiliary Bishop John Moon Hee Jong of Suwon made his remarks during a Holy Mass at the closing of the 20th-anniversary celebrations of the *Lux Mea* (My Light) prayer group at Suwon Catholic University.

Parents must "cultivate 'empathy' in dialogue with their children as they pursue a life of contemplation, sacrifice, and consecration," Bishop John said at the anniversary celebration organised by the group.

The basic purpose of the group is to help parents go beyond their role of providing for the material needs of their children and "establish the image of a 'prayerful parent' in the [Catholic] faith," the bishop added.

Around 260 people including Sylvia Seo Jin-sook, president of the prayer group, and Fr Kyu-sung Lee, its spiritual director, participated in the event.

The other participants included 200 par-

ents and grandparents, and 58 children ranging from kindergarten to youth.

Founded on Dec. 15, 2005, the prayer group is aimed at serving the parents of teenagers. In March 2019, the group was approved as an organisation under the Diocesan Youth Office.

The prayer group has 78 units with more than 700 members in 62 parishes of the Suwon diocese.

The anniversary event consisted of praying with the children, and a lecture by Fr Hong Sung-nam, director of the Catholic Spirituality and Psychology Counselling Centre of Seoul archdiocese, among other events.

The two-hour-long lecture from Hong Sung-nam, themed *Wise Faith Life*, discussed the theories of psychologists Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and Carl Jung (1875-1961).

Hong discussed "consciousness and unconsciousness, ideal self and realistic self, and adult self and baby self."

A performance by the praise group 'Seventeen,' a photo exhibition, and a



Bishop Moon Hee-jong (centre) and participants take a commemorative photo after the dispatch Mass during the 'Lux Mea Day' event held at Suwon Catholic University on July 27. (*ucanews photo/Catholictimes.org*)

question-and-answer session with Bishop John were also organised as part of the anniversary celebrations.

Seo pointed out that the anniversary celebrations were organised for "the unity and harmony of our team members."

"It was a precious time to reflect on the journey that has not been easy since the establishment of Luxméa, and to feel once again that we are a community working together for the glory of God in Christ," Seo added. — *ucanews.com*

Church leaders slam 'false campaign' against missionaries

NEW DELHI: Church leaders have criticised fringe elements in India's ruling pro-Hindu party for giving a "communal colour" to the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples celebrations in the country, which has the second-largest tribal

population in the world.

The day was celebrated in different parts of the country on August 9.

However, the Akhil Bharatiya Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram (all India tribal welfare body), alleged that "external forces and

Christian missionaries in India are hatching up a large-scale conspiracy to divide society in the name of the celebration."

The organisation is affiliated with the ultranationalist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which is considered the mother organisation of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Its president Satyendra Singh said that the celebration was meant for "other countries like America, Australia, New Zealand and Canada" and had no relevance for India.

"All people of our country are indigenous to this land, and we are now free from the clutches of colonial forces," Singh said.

Observing the international day whose theme this year is 'Protecting the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Voluntary Isolation and Initial Contact' has nothing to do with any religion, said Fr Vincent Ekka.

"Blaming Christian missionaries of a conspiracy is misleading," the Jesuit priest told *UCA News*.

Fr Ekka, who heads the tribal studies department in the Church-run Indian Social Institute in the national capital New Delhi, said Hindu groups are afraid that the tribal

people may become aware of their rights "and may revolt."

The RSS has been campaigning against Christian missionary activities among tribal people and their conversion to Christianity.

Its affiliate organisations run a nationwide campaign called Ghar Wapsi (homecoming) to convert tribal people and Dalits or former untouchables and bring them into the Hindu religion.

"Blaming Christian missionaries is purely a political agenda [for them], said Fr Ekka who belongs to the Oraon tribal community in the central state of Chhattisgarh.

The Jesuit appealed to fellow tribal people not to fall prey to the "false campaign."

The RSS and its fringe elements always come up with "new ideas to attack Christian missionaries," said Ratan Tirkey, a former member of the tribal advisory committee in eastern Jharkhand state, which has a large tribal population.

"Will they recognise the contributions made by Christian missionaries" for the welfare of the tribal people, the Catholic lay leader asked. — *By Bijay Kumar Minj, ucanews.com*



Tribal people attend International Day of the World Indigenous Peoples in Jharkhand state capital Ranchi on August 9, 2022. (*ucanews photo*)

5 Holy Doors: What every Catholic should know ahead of Jubilee 2025

What the popes have said

Pope Francis and St John Paul II have explained the tradition in official documents.

"In Catholic tradition, the Holy Door represents the passage to salvation — the path to a new and eternal life, which was opened to humanity by Jesus," explained Pope Francis in *Spes Non Confundit* (Hope Does Not Disappoint), the papal bull officially proclaiming the Holy Year of 2025.

A quarter of a century earlier, St John Paul II wrote of the Holy Door in *Incarnationis Mysterium*, his bull of indiction of the Great Jubilee, explaining how it "evokes the passage from sin to grace which every Christian is called to accomplish. Jesus said: 'I am the door' (John 10:7), in order to make it clear that no one can come to the Father except through him. This designation which Jesus applies to himself testifies to the fact that he alone is the Saviour sent by the Father. There is only one way that opens wide the

entrance into the life of communion with God: this is Jesus, the one and absolute way to salvation. To him alone can the words of the Psalmist be applied in full truth: 'This is the door of the Lord where the just may enter' (Psalm 118:20)."

John Paul II adds that it is the responsibility of every believer to cross the threshold of this "door." Why? "To pass through that door means to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord; it is to strengthen faith in him in order to live the new life which he has given us. It is a decision which presumes freedom to choose and also the courage to leave something behind, in the knowledge that what is gained is divine life (Matthew 13:44-46)."

He also acknowledged that this was the spirit he was going to have as he, the Holy Father, was to be the first to pass through the Holy Door. "Through the holy door ... Christ will lead us more deeply into the Church, his Body and his Bride."



Panels proclaim meaning

The guide to St Peter's Basilica from the Vatican explains the Holy Door's 16 rectangular panels symmetrically lined in four rows of four panels each. They are divided by the coat of arms of 36 popes who have celebrated the ordinary Holy Years. The bronze bas-relief panels depict the following scenes from the Bible: *The Angel at the Gates of Paradise, the Fall, Mary at the Annunciation, the Angel of the Annunciation, Christ's Baptism in the Jordan, the Lost Sheep, the Merciful Father, the Cure of a Paralytic, the Woman Washing Jesus' Feet, the Need for Forgiveness (seven times 77), Peter's Denial, the Good Thief, Jesus' Appearance to Thomas, Christ's Appearance to the Disciples, the Conversion of Saul, and Opening the Holy Door.*

"The message the Holy Door gives to those who, after reflecting before it, cross the threshold and enter the Basilica, is part of the essence of the Gospel: it is the message of God's mercy bending over man's misery," wrote the late Italian Cardinal Virgilio Noè, archpriest emeritus of the Vatican basilica, in his book *The Holy Door in St Peter's*. The "sixteen panels of the door are like the verses of a hymn, which sing of God's infinite mercy," the cardinal explained. "They start from the reality of sin, which degrades man, and move to penance, which rehabilitates him. They enlighten every moment of any situation with the certainty of divine forgiveness."

In addition, the master of papal liturgical celebrations has explained how the prayer before opening the door comes from Luke's Gospel when Jesus proclaims in the Nazareth synagogue: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has sent me ... to proclaim a year of favor from the Lord." It "clearly links the Jubilee year to the mystery of Christ made present in the time of the Church."

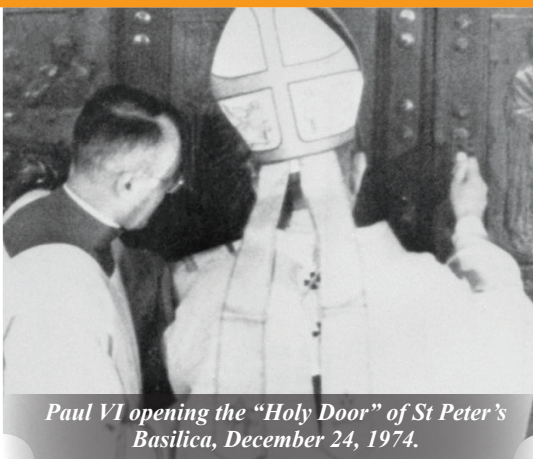
For this year, Pope Francis also explained, "For everyone, may the Jubilee be a moment of genuine, personal encounter with the Lord Jesus, the 'door' (cf. John 10:7-9) of our salvation, whom the Church is charged to proclaim always, everywhere and to all as 'our hope' (1 Timothy 1:1)." — **By Joseph Pronechen, Register**

Holy Door history

The Holy Door is sometimes extended to Rome's other three major basilicas, as it will be for the 2025 Jubilee when there will be Holy Doors opened at the papal basilicas of St John Lateran, St Mary Major and St Paul Outside the Walls. Pope Francis will open all of them.

At first, all four doors were not opened. For the Great Jubilee in 2000, the Vatican shared some history.

Although Pope Boniface VIII inaugurated the "Holy Year" tradition, called a "Jubilee," in 1300, it was not until over a century later that the Holy Door played an integral role. According to 15th-century documents, in 1423, at the Basilica of St John Lateran,



Paul VI opening the "Holy Door" of St Peter's Basilica, December 24, 1974.

Pope Martin V opened the Holy Door for the first time in the history of the Jubilee. Holy Years were celebrated every 33 years at that time, in commemoration of the years Jesus lived on earth.

It was not until Christmas 1499 that Pope Alexander VI

requested the Holy Door be opened not only at St John Lateran but also in St Peter's, St Mary Major and St Paul's Outside the Walls.

Jubilee Years when the Holy Door is opened now occur every 25 years. The Pope can proclaim a Holy or Jubilee Year at another time also, such as happened in 1933 on the anniversary of Jesus' death on the cross and in 2000 at the turn of the millennium.

history of the Church; it thus becomes one of the most powerful signs of the Jubilee, as the Pope [John Paul II] pointed out."

These new elements "better express the biblical and liturgical significance of the Holy Door." Thus, the panels on the front of the door are visible; but, inside, the back of the door is bricked up until the next Holy Year, when the bricks will be removed, the door pushed open by the Holy Father, and pilgrims again walk through it.

Rituals

door and not the wall. By this time, the Holy Door at St Peter's had been completed with sculpted bronze panels. Later, for the 2000 Jubilee, the Vatican master of papal liturgical celebrations explained these were of "profound biblical, theological, liturgical and pastoral significance attached to the door in salvation history and in the

In Scripture

Over the years, other official references point to scriptural explanations outlining the importance of the Holy Door via Jesus' messages and titles.

"So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you" (Luke 11:9).

"I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come into you and eat with you, and you with me" (Revelation 3:20).

"I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved" (John 10:9).

An explanation from St. Peter's Basilica affirms that the Holy Door represents "Jesus, the Good Shepherd and the gate of the sheep pen: 'I am the gate. Whoever enters through me, will be safe. He will go in and out, and find pasture' (John 10:9)." Consequently, "The message imparted by the Holy Door is that God's mercy reaches out to mankind's frailty."

The ritual for opening the Holy Door was nearly unchanged between 1525 and 1950. Then slight changes began to appear post-1950: In the early centuries, the Holy Father would strike the brick wall enclosing the Holy Door with a silver hammer; then masons would continue to uncover the door that, at the end of each Holy Year, was sealed again in by a brick wall as the pope closed the year. Then the 1975 Holy Year refocused attention on the



Asian delegates prepare for Synod with spiritual discernment

BANGKOK, Thailand: Thirty-eight synod members from across Asia gathered at the Baan Phu Waan Pastoral Centre from August 6 to 9, for a preparatory meeting ahead of the upcoming Synod assembly in Rome this October. The event, which drew participants from 17 Asian countries, was a crucial step in preparing for the second session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly scheduled for October 2-27, 2024.

The meeting was inaugurated by Cardinal Charles Maung Bo, SDB, President of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences and Archbishop of Yangon, Myanmar. During the inaugural Mass, Cardinal Bo reminded the delegates that the concept of synodality is central to the Church's mission, calling for a renewed commitment to being a missionary Church that reaches out to the peripheries. He emphasised the importance of the entire people of God journeying together, listening to one another, and discerning the way of the Holy Spirit. He urged delegates to consider how the Church in Asia, in its diverse contexts, can remain relevant and continue its dialogue with the region's various religions and cultures.



Thirty-eight delegates from across Asia convened at the Baan Phu Waan Pastoral Centre in Bangkok, Thailand from August 6 to 9, to discuss the working document for the second session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly, scheduled to be held from October 2 to 27, 2024. (FABC OSC pic)

Over the three days, participants engaged in spiritual conversations, a method widely used in synod assemblies for group discussions and study. The focus of these discussions was the working document titled How to be a Missionary Synodal Church, which has been developed over two years as part of the synodal process. The document invites further discernment to identify concrete steps towards becoming a more synodal Church.

The sessions were facilitated by key

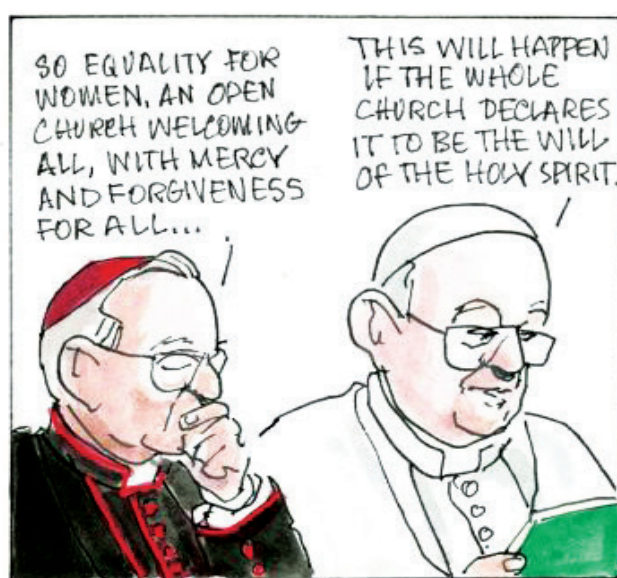
resource persons, including Cardinal Oswald Gracias, Archbishop of Bombay; Cardinal Jose F. Advincula, Archbishop of Manila; Bishop Pablo Virgilio Siongco David, Bishop of Kalookan; Fr William LaRousse, MM, Assistant Secretary General of the FABC; Rev Dr Vimal Tirimanna, CSSR from Sri Lanka; Dr Christina Kheng from Singapore; and Rev Dr Clarence Devadass from Malaysia.

The participants were divided into six groups for their spiritual conversations, the

outcomes of which will be presented at the Synod in Rome. This preparatory gathering in Bangkok was marked by a sense of joy and hope as the delegates journeyed together on synodal pathways, aiming to transform the Church in Asia into a more synodal Church.

As the October Synod approaches, the Asian delegates are committed to continuing their journey of synodality, ensuring that the Church in Asia remains a beacon of missionary zeal and spiritual renewal. — *Agencies*

Francis



NCRonline.org/cartoons

Synod assembly to focus on concrete proposals, Latin Americans say

BOGOTÁ, Colombia: Just two months before the Synod of Bishops gathers again in Rome, its Latin American members met to discuss how synodality can be implemented in the Catholic Church after the close of the assembly in October.

At the headquarters of the Latin American bishops' council, known as CELAM, in Bogotá, Colombia, 42 Latin American members of the synodal assembly — 19 bishops, five priests, seven religious sisters and 11 laypeople — discussed how the assembly can push the Church to incorporate synodality into its practices and culture after the current synod ends.

Bishop Luis Marín de San Martín, undersecretary of the synod, opened the August 12-14 meeting by explaining that the aim of the current synod is to "strengthen, develop and concretise synodality in the Church." The bishop affirmed the need to think of the post-synodal phase of the process, which includes the need to strengthen Church unity and casting aside fears about plurality in the church.

Jesuit Fr Giacomo Costa, special secretary of the synod, said that while the synod's first assembly consisted of finding areas of convergence and establishing dialogue between

members, the upcoming assembly should focus on thinking of concrete "directions or steps for growing as a missionary Church."

"All ideological, theological and even structural development must be made concrete in the life of the Church," he said, adding that the second session should "suggest something concrete to the Pope on different subjects, directions and steps."

"Synodality, just as theology or the church, has faces and is made concrete in people, which is why we insist on concreteness," Costa said.

Bishop Lizardo Estrada, secretary-general of CELAM, urged meeting participants not to fall into formalities or intellectualism but to encounter one another "with the freedom of the sons and daughters of God, to converse in the Spirit and allow ourselves to be led by him, courageously assuming the challenges given to us."

Archbishop Jaime Spengler of Porto Alegre, Brazil, CELAM president, opened the meeting by presenting guiding questions to the participants, including: "How can we walk together when individualism, clericalism and self-referentiality are worryingly on the rise?" and "How can we transmit the faith to new



Synod assembly members from Latin America participate in a meeting at the headquarters of the Latin American bishops' council in Bogotá, Colombia, Aug 12, 2024. (CNS/ADN CELAM)

generations?"

On the meeting's second day, Argentine theologian Fr Carlos María Galli spoke about the synod's method of "conversation in the Spirit," but also outlined steps the church still needed to make.

"Conversation in the Spirit" is a dialogue method promoted by the General Secretariat of the Synod rooted in alternating periods of silence, prayer and sharing, which are intended to help people to exchange ideas and work together despite encountering differences.

"Every day we must make every effort to

walk together, not only with those who think the same way, but with all believers in Jesus," Galli said.

He added that the working document for the synod's second assembly is not a magisterial document nor a catechesis, but rather the compilation of topics raised by the people of God that seeks to make concrete how the church can "realise missionary synodality in practice."

"To be Church is to be a community that walks together," he said. "It is not enough to have a synod, it is necessary to become a synod." — **By Justin McLellan, CNS**



DANCING WITH DEMENTIA

Dr Cecilia Chan

I suspect we've all been there, bad dates where we can't bear to make it through dinner and have to think of creative excuses to get out. I certainly had my share of dates gone really wrong and could not wait to escape. I was fortunate because I did manage to escape. I am sure none of you bat an eyelid.

Many did bat more than just eyelids when my friend wanted to escape from a similar uncomfortable experience. He felt that he was in prison as he had no friends and no meaningful activities. He did not have the freedom to live his life as he please. He was uncomfortable in his surroundings and the people there. He, like me, wanted to escape. The difference was he could not. He is living with dementia.

What are you to make of a place where people expect you to join in bizarre activities as it is not your usual occupation? How many of us will be okay with strangers being involved with the most personal of acts with us, like being stark naked with them and being touched in the most intimate areas and then getting into bed at night and sleeping without disturbance? While this is unthinkable to us yet why do we expect it to be okay for them, just because they have dementia?

I cringe each time I hear the term BPSB (Behavioral and Psychological Symptoms in Dementia) being used so freely and openly. It is as though it is expected that people living with dementia (NOT DEMENTED PEOPLE!) are expected to behave in such an "unacceptable" manner. This view automatically causes us to medicalise and pathologise the expressions of people living with dementia; in fact, we hold them to a

higher emotional standard than we would ourselves. There is an immediate separateness between the US and THEM. The obvious double standard becomes blurred. Think for a moment.

We get angry, sad, frustrated, or anxious, but those living with dementia have "behavioural problems." We go for a walk and do our "steps". When we get bored or upset we can leave the place. However, people with dementia "wander", "escape" or "elope". We get annoyed when forced to follow routines and schedules not suitable to us, but people with dementia "sundown." We scroll through Shopee and buy non-stop, but people with dementia "hoard." We will absolutely resist being locked up, bossed around, or touched by strangers. Yet, we accuse people with dementia of getting "agitated", "aggressive" and "resist care"! If people are upset because they are being undressed by strangers, are locked inside a living area, have no meaningful engagement in their days, or are simply expressing the range of emotions that we all display at times, how is that BPSD?

If we lose the ability to vocalise our emotions and needs, how can we communicate them?

Very few people with dementia can manage entirely on their own; but to be brutally honest though, none of us can. We, human beings are all part of couples, families, and friendship groups, which are interdependent. It will require us, collectively, to reevaluate what makes us human.

Dementia forces us to make a choice. Con-



fronted with someone who perceives the world differently than us, who cannot conceptualise a range of options or contribute to the productivity of material society, we are forced to decide whether we will accept them as a person or not.

If the answer is yes, then perhaps it is time to admit that we have been working with a narrow, impoverished view of personhood. A view that privileges the rights and interests of thinking, and choosing consumers while marginalising those living with dementia. A view that reflects that those living with dementia do not fit into our understanding of what a human should be.

Perhaps it is from this narrow view that

a person with dementia can only be understood as a "burden" on society. Worldwide, it has been estimated that there will be over 80 million people living with dementia by 2040 (Prince and Jackson 2013). Will these 80 million human beings be merely burdens?

I believe dementia is the greatest shame of modern medicine; not because there have been no significant advances in treatment, but because — from restraints to perpetual stigmas and stereotyping, to antipsychotics, to labelling — we have lost our recognition of the humanity of those living with the diagnosis.

I adore Dr Allen Power's definition of dementia simply as "a shift in the way a person experiences the world around her/him".

This provides us with the ability to change the mindset of blaming everything on brain disease.

By understanding that persons living with dementia experience the world differently, we can begin to uncover the root causes and work on solutions that lie within supporting our shared humanity.

We all need to look closely at ourselves—our words and our practices, to question if we are sincerely honouring a person's dignity, value, and human rights in everything we do.

● Dr Cecilia Chan is a Gerontologist and Dementia Advocate and Activist. She can be contacted via WhatsApp (013-4384388).

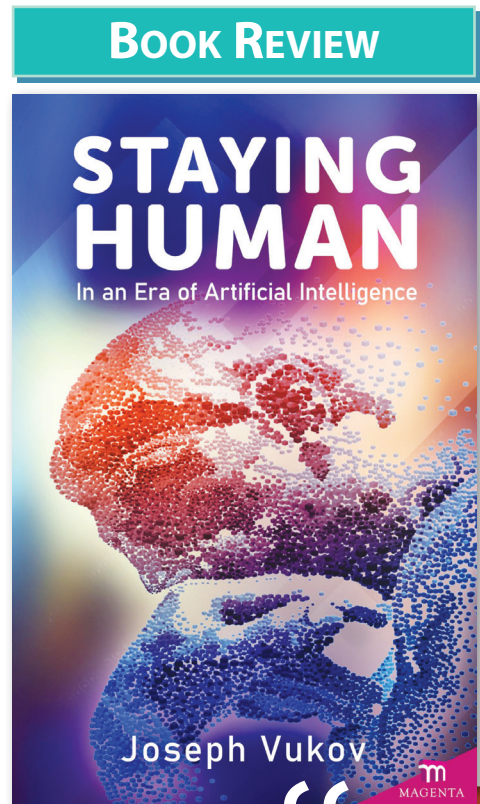
Expert calls rise of AI an 'evangelical moment' for Catholicism

Joseph Vukov's *Staying Human in an Era of Artificial Intelligence* offers a timely exploration of the moral and spiritual challenges posed by the rapid advancement of AI technology. Vukov, Associate Director of the Hank Center for Catholic Intellectual Heritage at Loyola University Chicago, draws from his Catholic upbringing to address the profound questions that arise at the intersection of technology and faith.

Raised with a deep appreciation for human dignity, relationships, and love for God, Vukov credits his parents with providing the foundation that now informs his approach to understanding humanity in an increasingly automated world. This foundation is so central to his work that he dedicates his book to his parents, acknowledging the lessons they imparted that continue to shape his vision for a human-centred future.

Vukov's primary concern is the potential for AI to blur the lines between human and machine, a concern that has become more urgent as AI becomes ubiquitous in daily life. From wearable fitness trackers to chatbots and personalised recommendations, AI technology is integrated into various aspects of our existence, often without us even realising it. Vukov argues that this pervasive presence of AI raises new and significant questions about what it means to be human — questions that were not posed with previous technological advancements.

The book serves both as a guide for those who are anxious about the future of AI and as an explainer on how AI intersects with Catholic faith tradition. Vukov emphasises that AI, while it may mimic certain human



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characteristics, fundamentally lacks the essence of what makes us human according to Catholic teaching. He points out that the Catholic tradition views humans as embodied beings — a composite of body

and soul — where the body is not merely a vessel for the soul but an integral part of our identity. This embodied intelligence is something AI cannot replicate, as it lacks a physical body and the accompanying spiritual dimension.

Moreover, Vukov highlights the Catholic teaching that human dignity is not measured by intelligence or capability but by the inherent worth bestowed upon us by God. This understanding is crucial in distinguishing humans from AI, as it affirms that our value is not tied to our cognitive abilities, a point that has significant implications for ethical discussions surrounding AI.

In discussing the future role of AI within the Church, Vukov is cautious. He does not foresee the Church fully embracing AI in ways that could undermine its teachings or mission. Instead, he advocates for a thoughtful and measured approach, ensuring that AI is used in ways that enhance rather than diminish our humanity. Vukov draws parallels with the rise of social media, which has proven to be both beneficial and harmful, depending on how it is used.

He suggests that AI will follow a similar trajectory, offering both opportunities and challenges.

Vukov also acknowledges that the Church, like society at large, will inevitably have to engage with AI. He stresses, however, that the fo-

cus should not be on whether to embrace or reject AI outright but on discerning acceptable and unacceptable uses of the technology. The key, according to Vukov, is to ensure that AI is employed in ways that align with Catholic moral teachings and preserve the core of what it means to be human.

One of the book's central themes is the importance of making "quiet personal acts of resistance" against the encroachment of AI into our daily lives. Vukov encourages readers to resist the temptation to delegate personal decisions or tasks to AI, emphasising the value of human agency and authenticity in our actions. He argues that staying human in the AI age requires a conscious effort to maintain the qualities that define us as human beings, such as empathy, creativity, and spiritual depth.

Vukov also praises Pope Francis for his proactive stance on AI, noting that the pontiff has set an important precedent for the Church by engaging with the ethical implications of emerging technologies. By doing so, Pope Francis has demonstrated that the Catholic tradition has valuable insights to offer not only to Catholics but to the broader global community grappling with the challenges of AI.

In *Staying Human in an Era of Artificial Intelligence*, Vukov offers a compelling reflection on the need to uphold our humanity in the face of technological change. His book is a call to vigilance, urging readers to navigate the complexities of AI with a firm grounding in faith and an unwavering commitment to the principles that make us truly human. — *Crux*

Catholic teaching that human dignity is not measured by intelligence or capability but by the inherent worth bestowed upon us by God.

A trailblazer for the Catholic deaf community

By Elvina Fernandez

Born in 1968, Fr Min Seo Park lost his hearing at the age of two after being prescribed the wrong medicine. As the only Deaf member of his family, his early years were fraught with challenges. His father, serving in the army and frequently travelling, and his mother, were at a loss on how to communicate with him. Enrolled in a regular hearing school due to a lack of suitable schools for the Deaf, the young Park faced significant communication barriers.

“Basic lip reading was insufficient, and I had to often resort to drawing to communicate with my parents, peers, and teachers,” he recalled.

At the age of 16, Fr Park was transferred to a school for the Deaf, marking a significant turning point in his life. Although he initially struggled with reading and writing, his determination led him to master these skills by the age of 17. It was at this school that he met Fr Michael Cheong-Soon-o, to whom he revealed his desire to become a priest. Due to the lack of courses for the Deaf in Korean seminaries, he was sent to the United States to pursue his calling.

In 1994, Fr Park entered Gallaudet University, the only liberal arts college specifically for the Deaf, where he studied philosophy and mathematics. There, he met Fr Thomas Coughlin, the first Deaf priest in the US, who became his spiritual director. After graduating in 1999, he continued his theological studies at St Joseph’s Seminary in New York and earned a Master of Divinity degree from St John’s University in 2004. He then returned to Seoul to continue his seminary studies, culminating in his ordination as a deacon in July 2006.

“My journey to priesthood was strongly supported by Fr Thomas Coughlin, who guided me through my theological studies at St. John’s Seminary in New York,” Fr Park shared.

On July 6, 2007, Fr Park made history as the first Deaf priest ordained in Asia, joining the ranks of approximately 15 Deaf Catholic priests worldwide at the time. His ministry has since been transformative for the Deaf

Fr Min Seo Park is not only Korea’s first Deaf priest but also one of the few Deaf Catholic priests worldwide. His journey from a young boy grappling with his identity to becoming a respected priest reflects his remarkable resilience and steadfast faith.

His introduction to Catholicism came through an inspiring art teacher, which led to his baptism and a profound sense of spiritual connection and vocation.

Despite the absence of Deaf priests to look up to, Fr Park remained steadfast in his calling. During a recent visit to the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, he shared his inspiring story with HERALD.

community, enabling him to connect with Deaf individuals across the globe through his proficiency in Korean Sign Language, American Sign Language, and English.

“I have asked God in prayer, why me? It wouldn’t be easy as I am Deaf. And I felt in my prayer that Jesus said to me, ‘Why not you?’” he signed, explaining how he was sure that the priesthood was his calling.

As the chaplain of the Deaf Catholic Center in Seoul, Fr Park travelled across South Korean dioceses to sign Mass and administer the sacrament of reconciliation. His efforts to build a new church for the Deaf, despite initial scepticism, culminated in the opening of the Ephatha Parish in Seoul in 2019. The church, which holds 350 people and includes spaces for community gatherings, was officiated by Seoul Archbishop Cardinal Andrew Yeom Soo-jung in a Mass attended by over 1,000 participants.

“There were a lot of people who thought that it was impossible for me to build a new church building because I am Deaf and could not communicate with professional architects and

hearing priests,” Fr Park said. “I prayed and meditated on the passage in Luke about nothing being impossible with the will of God.”

Fr Park continues to advocate for the Deaf community, emphasising the need for more priests who can sign and celebrate Mass in sign language. He hopes that seminaries in Asia will offer more opportunities to learn sign language, enabling seminarians to serve the needs of the Deaf community.

“What we need today is for the community to study signing and bring the Deaf community closer to the church,” he emphasised.

Reflecting on how young Catholics can silence the loud distractions in their lives, Fr Park encouraged them to follow the example of Blessed Carlo Acutis, a tech-savvy teenager who will soon be canonised as a saint. “When social media is used like Carlo Acutis in promoting a relationship and encounter with God, it is a good thing. Carlo Acutis is a good role model for the younger generations to better listen to the voice of the Lord and be steadfast in their faith.”

In 2021, at the request of the auxiliary



Fr Min Seo Park earned a Doctorate of Practical Theology from the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago.

bishop of Washington, Fr Park served as a missionary chaplain at St Francis of Assisi Deaf Catholic Church and Gallaudet University. In January 2024, he returned to Korea, continuing to advocate for the Deaf community and emphasising the importance of inclusivity and understanding.

Fr Park’s journey is a powerful reminder of the importance of perseverance, faith, and community. His message to the Deaf community is one of hope and encouragement: “God is with all of us; know that God is with all of you.”

● **Fr Min Seo Park’s interview with the HERALD was voice interpreted by Fr Michael Chua.**



Beatrice Anne (Deaf) receiving First Holy Communion from Fr Park during the sunset Mass at SFX Church, PJ on July 27, 2024, after completing her 9 months RCIA course for the Deaf.

Understanding terminology in the Deaf Community

“**D**eaf” with a capitalised D refers to those Deaf who take great pride in their Deaf identity and are part of the Deaf Community. They are actively involved in the Deaf Community and prefer to use sign language as their main mode of communication. Sign language is their first language. They identify themselves as a cultural and linguistic minority rather than a disabled community.

“Deaf” with a small d refers to those who do not wish to associate themselves as part of the Deaf community and do not learn sign language.

It is wrong to use terms like “Deaf & Mute”, “Deaf & Dumb”, and “Hearing Impaired” for Deaf persons as these terms are offensive. These terms imply that Deaf people are incapable of being taught, ought to be fixed, or do not have a voice for speech. They mainly focus on what Deaf people can’t do. It is important to use the correct term

“Deaf” because Deaf people can do anything except hear.

“Deaf Community” refers not only to the Deaf but also to hearing families with Deaf members, catechists or teachers for the Deaf, sign language students, BIM interpreters, and hearing priests who use sign language. All are accepted as part of the Deaf Community.

Those interested can learn the Malaysian Sign Language (BIM – Bahasa Isyarat Malaysia), the official language of the Deaf in Malaysia through the Persons with Disability Act 2008.

The Catholic Ministry for the Deaf (CMfD) offers a range of BIM courses conducted by Deaf Tutors from Basic Level 1 to Advanced Level 3 for anyone keen to learn sign language and serve the needs of the Deaf. Many other NGOs and organisations serving the Deaf Community also offer sign language courses to the public.

For the Deaf interested in joining the RCIA, visit catholicministryfordeaf.my or email deaf@archkl.com.



A sign language class at the Church of the Divine Mercy Shah Alam.



SUNDAY OBSERVER

Anil Netto

Many of us do all kinds of things based on our religious motivations.

When we were young, we attended catechism. Now that we are older, we try and fulfil our religious obligations faithfully.

Sometimes, we may get worked up over perceived religious or personal slights. But then we fall short in responding to what is happening around us, no matter where we are in the world. This happens no matter what our religious faith.

We neglect the poor and the marginalised. When hospitals and schools are underfunded and neglected, we remain silent. We fail to call for greater food security. Some children even go to school without breakfast.

We allow bulldozers to flatten forests, driving out native communities without a squeak. We look the other way when migrants and refugees are bullied and exploited while others grow rich on the back of their toil.

I use the word we because we are complicit if we remain silent in the face of injustice, oppression and ecological destruction.

We fail to see the connection between these injustices and God — who in all the major faiths — is described as filled with compassion and mercy.

Compassion for whom? For those who are suffering or treated unjustly. And for Creation, which is groaning under the weight of “development” (for whom?).



MUSTARD SEED JOURNEYS

Joanne Wong

Yes — I am living on borrowed time. Aren't we all?

As morbid as it sounds, I've picked out my outfit for when I go. Told my friends I wanted colourful blooms instead of plain white ones. I have not however got around to listing down my preferred songs for my wake nor picked out my casket yet, but I am leaning towards a rich brown, akin to my dining table (that now doubles up as my office).

My husband also kindly secured my final resting place — a couple's niche, a very practical (though uncommon) gift he gifted me for our 10th year wedding anniversary. The niche is in a columbarium in Shah Alam with piped-in Christian music, air conditioning, and floor-to-ceiling glass windows looking out at calming greenery.

Some niches in the columbarium are plain while some are decorated with fabric or plastic flowers, children's drawings, and other cute gifts. I wondered what ours would be like. Would it be plain and meh, or decorated like a neighbouring niche — a reflection of a person well loved? Would people visit the niche and pray for us? What would people say at my wake? How would they remember me?

So many things to do, so little time

As I write this rather morbid intro, I realise that I am still not ready to die. There is so much left to do. But time is passing so very quickly now. I blink and a week has gone by, two blinks and it's a month.

And gosh, I still have so many dreams unfilled, places I have not visited, piles of books I have not read, half-finished craft projects discarded, the scented candles I have been keeping, the creative projects I

In the name of God?

Some even lead their nations to wars and occupy other nations. Others in distant lands profit from such wars and stoked-up tensions through the production of arms and weapons of mass destruction.

The devout may even use the scriptures to justify such wars. Or they twist religion to justify the mistreatment of minorities or anyone different from them.

Many of the imperialists and oppressors believe in the moral superiority of their beliefs. They may even think of the 'other' as lesser humans or subhumans. This makes it easier to victimise the latter and could lead to genocide. This was what happened in Hitler's Germany and is now happening in places like Gaza and Myanmar.

The perpetrators may even think that God is pleased with their actions or that they are doing these lesser beings a favour by bringing 'civilisation' and 'development' to them.

This was the prevailing attitude during the dark days of colonialism, when colonial powers held the Bible in one hand and the sword in the other.

Perhaps the worst thing that happened under Emperor Constantine in the Fourth Century was that he marked the Christian symbol of the cross on his soldiers' shields. This paved the way for centuries of war in God's name.

Contrast this with Jesus telling Peter to put his sword away when the temple authorities came to arrest Jesus!

The manipulation of religion by worldly powers says much about their understanding of God or the divine. Theirs is a wrathful God who takes sides. God is on their side, solely

based on religious affiliation or even ethnic considerations or because of their positions in power.

So they presume to act “in the name of God”, no matter how sinful their actions are. After all, in their eyes, they are the chosen ones of God. Think of how those who upheld the apartheid system in South Africa would attend church services faithfully while remaining blind to the gross injustice and discrimination against their fellow human beings. Did they really think that God condoned such blatant injustice?

If we stop to ponder, God is described in many religions as a God of justice, compassion, love, benevolence and mercy. He has deep love and compassion for those who are poor, suffering and oppressed. These attributes take precedence over all else.

Jesus was constantly reaching out to the 'other' — the Roman centurion, the Samaritan woman by the well. He even exhorted a rich young man to sell all his possessions and give to the poor.

Jesus probably knew how the young man had grown rich so fast. In those times (and ours too!), you are not likely to get fabulously wealthy unless others lose their land, fishing waters and farms (where they earn a living) or are exploited through low wages and long working hours.

At least, the young man realised his accumulation of wealth (and probably the way he had accumulated that wealth) was incompatible with the demands of the kingdom that Jesus heralded. And he walked away, the Gospel demands too hard for him to fulfil.

Perhaps the problem lies in the way we have

personalised or “privatised” our respective faiths. We talk of personal salvation and of being saved, of fulfilling our personal religious obligations. We focus on our personal sins and overlook the social sins plaguing the world — often because of our indifference. But our indifference to the plight of Creation is also a personal sin!

We forget the stakes are higher than our own personal needs. That there is a higher demand to build the kingdom in a world darkened by oppression and greed.

God so loved the world that he sent Jesus to redeem it. He loved the world — everyone, everything in it.

How it must hurt Him to see any part of that Creation being desecrated by greed or destroyed by blind hatred and oppression of another group. Perhaps that wound is infinitely more grievous than anything we can fathom.

Perhaps that was the pain of rejection that Jesus felt most on the cross. Not the Father's rejection of Jesus' plea to let this cup pass, not the multiple wounds on his body, though that must have been excruciating.

That excruciating pain had come from the world's rejection of the love and compassion of the One who had sent him — and for Jesus, that must have been the deepest cut of all.

So let us not destroy or defile his Creation. Not in His name. Instead, let's work to rebuild our broken world in the kingdom that Jesus set in motion.

● **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.

Living on borrowed time

was exploring, the book I daydreamed about writing, the thought I had entertained about going back to school, work stuff I wanted to accomplish... too many things left undone. All left for another day... that one day.

Then there are my loved ones. I had wanted to write them letters for key milestones in their lives (in case I wasn't around to share those movements with them — it was a lovely idea I read from a book).

How would my girls turnout? Are they going to have kids of their own one day? Will they remember the stories I shared, the advice I gave them? Would they remember my fluffy hugs? My silly laughter? My constant happy weeping during America's Got Talent performances? How will my husband handle my two girls? Will he marry again if I die first — would this lady be a good mother figure to my girls?

I know I am getting ahead of myself — really thinking too far ahead and if I am honest, I'm getting nervous and sad listing down these thoughts. I am not yet ready for death. I am ready to give up this borrowed time.

Discerning my purpose

But how many of us can say that we are ready to go? That we have all our affairs in order. That we have truly “fought the good fight and run the race”.

While I think about death and all the preparation I want to do before I leave this earth, it would be remiss of me to not think about my eternal life... my purpose. The reason why I am alive. The reason God created me, wrote my name in the palm of His hand.

As shared in my last article, upon welcoming the Holy Spirit into my life again and gaining a fresh perspective on things, my priorities have changed. I am now a catechist and parent lead for the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. I guide Year 1's in their religious education. I have been for a few workshops and formations to know more about God

and the Holy Spirit. I have attended a few beautiful charismatic praise and worship sessions and been more involved in church activities. I have a much healthier prayer life.

Please don't think I am Miss Holy Moly suddenly, I am only human... falling so many times but knowing that He lifts me up, forgiving me time again and setting me down the right paths I should take.

And I still have a long way to go to fulfil my purpose to love Him and to serve Him. The rest of the “nice to have's”, my accomplishments at work, my hobbies, experiences in life, etc. should be a springboard for me to bring people closer to Him but alas it is only over the past one to two years that I have truly started to really think about my purpose on earth, my “why” — but better late than never right?

We need to be less Martha, more Mary

What has been key for me of late is the beauty in discerning His will for me. It is the joy of learning new things about Him daily, of quenching this thirst for Him which was always there but which I had pushed aside and filled with other seemingly “more important things” and material possessions.

It's about listening to people share their experiences about God and learning more about Him and His word. It's about being curious about topics I never knew (spoiler: apologetics are not about people apologising) but which I am keen to know now. And it's also about saying “yes” wherever He leads me, allowing Him to uncover things for me step by step.

I may be generalising but as we pursue more wealth, a better title at work, a fancier car, a more prestigious address, and more material possessions, most of us have forgotten our purpose of being alive, the reason we are here on earth. We have forgotten to acknowledge that everything we own comes from His goodness, grace and providence but instead have praised ourselves and all the hard work and good

luck that's come our way.

For those of us who are Catholic parents, we load our children with numerous tuition and enrichment classes: music, language, arts, drama, dance, and sports to ensure they are equipped to get a head start in life. But we sadly have neglected to enrich them with religious education, the understanding of His Word, the need for prayer and most importantly the mystery of faith and love of the Holy Eucharist.

We forget to strengthen their faith or leave it to one-hour classes conducted each week by our faith educators at church. We don't teach them to pray the rosary and we sometimes don't even attend Mass together as a family. Being Catholic seems almost like an afterthought throughout the year though we bring out our faith during Easter and Christmas. But we must do better for our children.

Some days I am also one of the parents described above and some days I role model well. Yet it is about acknowledging that we need to do more for ourselves and our children, that we are more Martha than Mary at times. Martha, always scurrying around doing so many inconsequential things yet missing out on what was most important... being in His presence, listening to His voice, guiding others to Him, serving others in need and loving when it was difficult or inconvenient.

So, this is me, living on borrowed time... trying to be more Mary, hoping to have made a difference in someone's life, hoping to share God's love with my girls and family, hoping my words have successfully planted a mustard seed in your life, and ultimately, someone trying her best to love and serve the Lord.

● **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

Loving your own church and your neighbour's church as well

I teach Spirituality at the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, Texas. Fifteen years ago, we began offering a PhD in Spirituality. In the fifteen years since we have had doctoral students from many different Christian denominations – Mainline Protestants, Evangelicals, Episcopalians/Anglicans, and Roman Catholics. During those fifteen years we have not had a single conversion of someone from one denomination to another. Rather, every student has left here with a deeper commitment to his or her own denomination and a deeper understanding of every other Christian denomination. We take a healthy pride in that. That's one of the aims of our program.

Since the Protestant Reformation, Christians have lived through five hundred years of misunderstanding and mutual suspicion. Each of us tended to work from the assumption that we belonged to the one true (or at least the purest) expression of Christianity and we looked for conversions, namely, having someone leave his or her denomination and join ours. Happily, things are changing, even while the old claims of being the one true expression of Christianity and the old defensiveness regarding denominational boundaries are still being clung to by many. A new vision is taking hold and we are beginning to see each other in a different light.

We are beginning to realize that the path

to unity does not lie in saying, 'You are wrong, and we are right', even as we remain conscious of the issues that separate us. Rather we are looking at what we share in common as Christians and human beings and are seeing that what we share in common dwarfs what separates us.

What do we share in common that dwarfs any dogma, ecclesiology, authority structure, or historical misunderstanding that separates us?

We share this in common: one beginning, one nature, one earth, one sky, one law of gravity, one fragility, one earthly mortality, one desire, one aim, one destiny, one road, one God, one Jesus, one Christ, one Holy Spirit. And that brings with it both an invitation and an imperative: love your own church and love your neighbour's church as well.

But, one might protest, what about all that's wrong in my neighbour's church? Admittedly that's an issue. However, admittedly, there are also things wrong in our own church, no matter our denomination. Moreover, as the renowned scholar of religion Huston Smith, affirms, we are to judge another religion or another Christian denomination not by its aberrations or its worst expressions, but by its best expressions, by its saints.

If this is true, then all of us can look to other churches, their saints, and their particular riches to enrich our own dis-

cipleship in Christ. In an insightful new book *To Love Your Neighbour's Church as Your Own*, Peter Halldorf, a Swedish/Evangelical/Orthodox Christian, asks the question: "What does it mean to love my neighbour's church as well as my own? Can a Pentecostal see a Roman Catholic as someone who may enrich his or her own faith experience? Can the Roman Catholic see a Pentecostal in this same light?"

If we are honest, we need to admit that we have much to learn from each other. Thus, we should no longer distance ourselves from each other and more and more begin to speak of "convergence" rather than "converting". The Spirit is inviting us to come together in respect and in a shared humility, without attitudes of suspicion or triumphalism. In that place, mistrust can be overcome.

How can we come together in that way? Already a generation ago, the renowned theologian, Avery Dulles suggested that the path to ecumenism is not by way of conversion. Unity among Christian churches is not going to happen by all the various denominations converting and joining one existing Christian denomination. That, Dulles submits, is not just unrealistic, it is not the ideal because no one Christian denomination possesses the full truth. Rather we are all still journeying, hopefully in all sincerity of heart, toward the full truth, toward a fuller discipleship,

and toward giving a fuller expression to the Body of Christ on this earth. All of us are still journeying toward that.

Hence, the path to ecumenism, to oneness as a Christian church, to oneness at a Eucharistic table, lies in each of us, each denomination, converting more from within, in growing more faithful within our own discipleship, in giving a truer expression to the Body of Christ, so that as each of us grows more faithful to Christ we will find ourselves progressively coming together, converging, growing more and more together into one family.

Kenneth Cragg once suggested something similar vis-à-vis the question of interfaith among world religions. After working as a Christian missionary among the Muslims, he suggested that it will take all religions of the world to give full expression to the whole Christ.

It's time to move beyond five hundred years of misunderstanding and embrace each other again as fellow pilgrims, struggling together on a common journey.

● **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

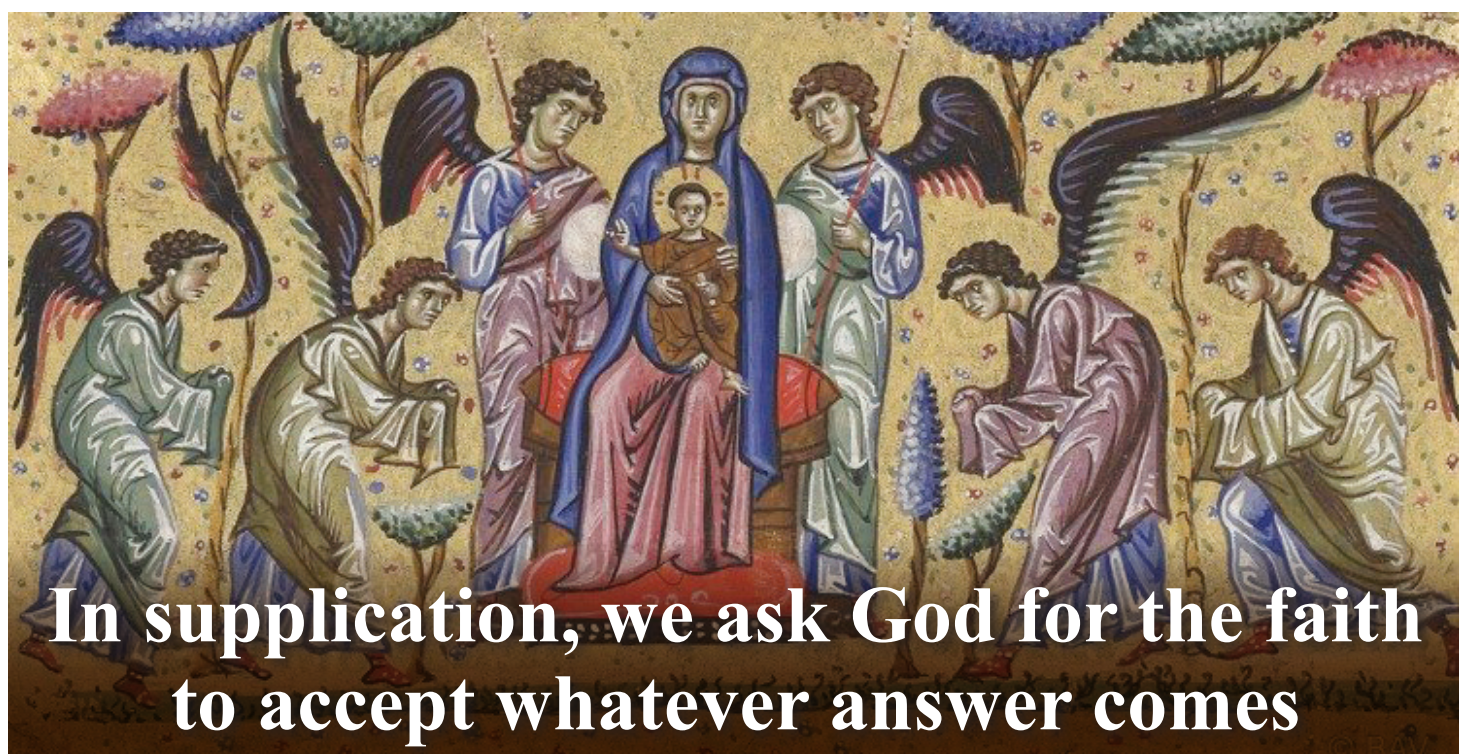
There are many ways we can approach God in prayer. The reality of prayer is an umbrella and the highest and most basic of these ways is blessing and adoration. After blessing and adoration, as we acknowledge the sovereignty and majesty of God and realise that He calls us to Himself, we are then able to approach Him and offer the prayer of supplication.

The prayer of supplication is diverse and wide-ranging. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us: "The vocabulary of supplication in the New Testament is rich in shades of meaning: ask, beseech, plead, invoke, entreat, cry out, even 'struggle in prayer.'"

Many verbs are used to describe supplication since it involves an act of trust and an outpouring of the soul to God. Supplication is accepting our need before God, voicing it, and admitting the fact that we cannot fulfil the need ourselves. Supplication is wrestling with problems and confessing before God that we cannot fix them. Supplication is the bedrock of humility. It touches the core of our being, which is why so many numerous verbs are needed to describe its complex reality.

Of the many ways of portraying supplication, the *Catechism* summarises them and teaches us: "Its most usual form, because the most spontaneous, is petition: by prayer of petition we express awareness of our relationship with God. We are creatures who are not our own beginning, not the masters of adversity, not our own last end."

The acceptance of our reliance on God and the realisation of our need for him and his desire to help us is the birth of sincere and on-going petition. As we begin to have confidence in God and his providence over our lives, we are comfortable placing our petitions before him. By making our petitions, we understand the goodness of God in a more profound way and embrace that goodness in our prayer life.



In supplication, we ask God for the faith to accept whatever answer comes

The prayer of petition is not a wish list. It is not a series of demands imposed upon God that He somehow needs to fulfil in order for us to believe in Him or have trust in Him. Our petitions are made within the context of our confidence in Him and with the firm conviction of our heart: "Your will be done, O Lord."

As we place our petitions before God, we surrender our own ambitions and plans. We recognise and accept that we cannot do anything by ourselves and we beseech God to enter into our fray and bring peace and resolution to our difficulties. We accept our vulnerability and weaknesses and present them to God with open hearts.

As we confess our sins and disclose our brokenness, we begin the path back to God. The path is marked by our blessing and

adoration and by our supplication. We are sinners who know we are loved and care for. We are children who have strayed from our heavenly Father and are being called back to closeness with Him. As a part of our return to Him, we lift up our heart in supplication. We place our needs and petitions before God knowing with confidence that they will be answered according to His goodness.

The *Catechism* teaches us: "'We are sinners who as Christians know that we have turned away from our Father. Our petition is already a turning back to Him.'"

We do not give our petitions to someone who scorns us. We do not disclose our vulnerability to someone who will hurt us. We do not offer our petitions to someone who will manipulate or take advantage of us. As such, the placing of our petitions before God

is a return to Him. It is an act of trust and love in God. Our petitions are a sign of our desire for union with him and a declaration of our love and trust in Him.

Our petitions will not always be answered according to our wants, needs, and hopes. Our petitions are placed before the providence of God. We ask for the faith to accept whatever answer God gives us. We ask for the humility to listen and show docility before God. We pray for a trusting spirit as God answers our prayers and petitions. We pray with sincerity of heart that God's will be done.

We begin a life of prayer by blessing and adoring God. As we confess his sovereignty, and recognise our place before Him, we can then accept His invitation and offer our supplication before Him. — **By Fr Jeffrey F. Kirby, *Cruz***

Little Catholics' Corner

Dear children,

In Jesus' time, many people were having difficulties to understand His teaching.

For example, one day Jesus was teaching in the synagogue and He said to the people, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven.

Anyone who feeds on me will live forever." When the people heard it, they said, "This is a hard teaching. How can anyone accept it?" Some of them quit following Jesus after that day.

Jesus knew that many people were grumbling and complaining, so He turned to His disciples and said, "You

don't want to leave too, do you?"

Peter answered Him. "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life!"

The disciples had answered the call to follow Jesus. They were not about to turn back now.

Children, it may not always be easy to follow Jesus, but to whom can we

go? Who else offers eternal life?

On August 31, let us commemorate Malaysia's Independence Day.

Let us take a moment to pray and thank God for His abundant blessings on our beautiful Malaysia.

Love
Aunty Elis

The Apostles stay with Jesus Word Puzzle

Unscramble the letters to fill in the blanks. Use the letters in circles to fill in the blanks at the end.



Jesus said to the

_____ ³ [EVL TWE],

"Do _____ ⁵ [UOY] also wish to go away?"

_____ ¹¹ [NM IOS] Peter

_____ ¹² [WSNAREED]

_____ ¹ [MIH], "Lord, to whom shall we

_____ ¹⁰ [OG]? _____ ⁴ [OUY] have the

_____ ⁸ [DRWOS] of

_____ ⁶ [TEENRLA]

_____ ⁹ [FLIE]; and we have

_____ ⁷ [VEEBILDE] and

have _____ ² [MCOE] to know that you are the

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
8 9 10 11 12



Answer: Twelve, you, Simon, answered, him, go, you, words, eternal life, believed, come, HOLY ONE OF GOD.

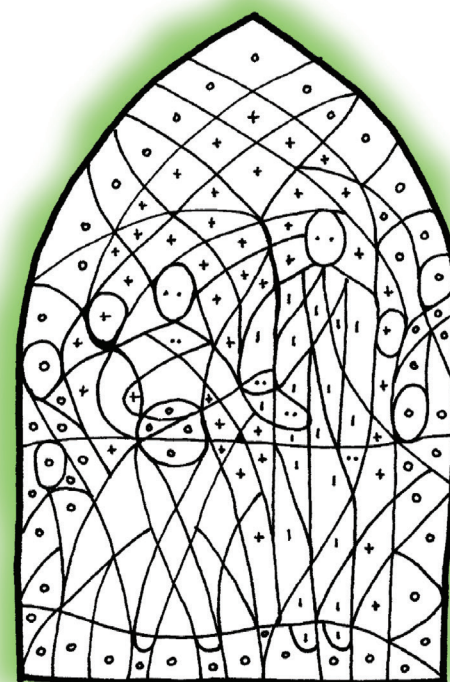
The children's faces in this picture are incomplete. Can you finish the drawing and colour it?



HAPPY INDEPENDENCE DAY MALAYSIA

Malaysia MADANI: Jiwa Merdeka

Colour the picture



Saint Paul tells us how much Jesus loves the Church. What does he say that Jesus and the Church are like? Use the colour code to colour the picture and find out!

- Red
- Blue
- Black
- Skin colour

Ephesians 5:21-32

YOUTH

August 25, 2024

A Night with the Orang Asli

SEREMBAN: The Church of the Visitation hosted an immersive event *A Night with the Orang Asli*, designed to offer participants a deeper insight into the Orang Asli lifestyle.

This unique experience held in conjunction with the celebration of “Hari Orang Asal Sedunia” on August 18 in the Negeri District, attracted 40 enthusiastic participants eager to learn about and engage with the indigenous community.

Our journey began on Saturday afternoon as we arrived at the base of Kg Sebir. The adventure commenced with a hike to the village, which took approximately an hour. The trail was both challenging and rewarding as we navigated through dense jungle terrain. We made several stops along the way, allowing participants to rest and appreciate the surrounding natural beauty.

During these breaks, our guide offered insightful explanations about the significance of various locations on the trail, deepening our understanding of the environment and the Orang Asli's connection to the land. The hike, while demanding, fostered a sense of accomplishment and camaraderie. The return trip down the hill was slightly quicker as we

became more familiar with the path.

Upon reaching the base again, we took some time to refresh ourselves in preparation for the evening's activities. As the sun set, we gathered around a campfire for a night of cultural exchange. The evening commenced with a feast featuring traditional Orang Asli delicacies, complemented by a BBQ session. This meal was a delightful introduction to the unique flavours and culinary traditions of the Orang Asli people.

After the meal, we heard from Albert Ezuli, the leader of Kg Sebir, who presented on *Who are the Orang Asli?* He provided a comprehensive overview of the Orang Asli's history, culture, and way of life, and he candidly shared the challenges the community faces, including the struggle to maintain their traditional lifestyle amidst modernization and environmental threats. The session was particularly engaging, sparking a lively discussion among participants. Many had questions, and Albert's responses offered deeper insights into the struggles and resilience of the Orang Asli people. Meanwhile, the children enjoyed games around the campfire, adding to the joyful atmosphere and showcasing the warmth and hospitality of the Orang Asli community.

One of the memorable aspects of the experience was the challenge of showering with



water sourced directly from the hills. The water was icy cold, made even more intense by the rain that fell that evening. For many of us, accustomed to the comfort of heated showers, this was a stark and humbling reminder of the simplicity and resilience of the Orang Asli lifestyle. Despite the discomfort, the experience was invigorating and added to the authenticity of our stay.

As night fell, we settled into our accommodations, enveloped by the soothing sounds of nature. The night was peaceful, offering many a moment to reflect on the simplicity and serenity of life in the village.

The following morning, we enjoyed a simple yet hearty breakfast prepared by the Orang Asli community. After breakfast, we came together for a feedback and sharing session. Participants were encouraged to share their thoughts and suggest improvements for future programs. The session proved constructive, with many expressing their appreciation

for the opportunity to connect with and learn from the Orang Asli.

After the feedback session, we shifted our focus to preparing for the Sunday Mass. The Mass was celebrated at Kg Sebir by Fr Philip Tay, OCD, the assistant parish priest. The setting was intimate and meaningful, as we gathered in the heart of the village to worship alongside the Orang Asli community. It was a powerful moment of unity and spiritual connection, made even more special by the natural surroundings.

Following the Mass, we shared a final meal with the Orang Asli community. Lunch was a communal affair, filled with laughter, stories, and a deep sense of camaraderie. It was a fitting conclusion to an enriching and eye-opening experience. After lunch, we bid farewell to our gracious hosts and began our journey back home, carrying with us the memories and lessons learned during our time with the Orang Asli. — *By Sabrina Smith*

CHOICEE VOLUNTEERS UNITE FOR BEACH CLEAN-UP

SEKINCHAN: Over 20 Choicee volunteers came together to clean up Pantai Redang, Sekinchan in a collaborative effort to protect the coastal environment. Organised by CEKL 106 and supported by the Sabak Bernam District Council, the beach clean-up initiative brought together individuals

from diverse backgrounds. Armed with gloves, bags, and a shared commitment to the environment, volunteers worked tirelessly to remove over 100 kilogrammes of trash from the beach.

Encik Faisol, an officer from the Sabak Bernam District Council, commended the

volunteers' dedication and expressed the council's support for future clean-up initiatives. He highlighted the importance of public awareness in combating beach pollution and protecting marine life. Following the successful clean-up, participants were rewarded with refreshments and tokens of appreciation. The event inspired a sense of community and environmental stewardship among the volunteers, with many expressing a desire for more such initiatives to engage the youth in preserving our coastal treasures.

CHOICE is a single working adults' ministry under the Archdiocesan Single Adults and Youth Office (ASAYO). The content of the CHOICE weekend programme is universal in nature, emphasising on the importance of relationships with family, friends, church, community, and God, through a personal commitment, in acts of love and service to others, encapsulating its motto: *To Know, To Love and To Serve*, such as the initiative to clean Pantai Redang. — *By Nicholas Kuan & Gabriela Natasha*



Confirmation *in Klang and Mentakab*



Church of the Holy Redeemer, Klang

Two parishes in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur celebrated significant milestones in their spiritual calendars with Confirmation Masses that brought joy and reinforced community bonds.

On August 10, the **Church of the Holy Redeemer, Klang**, marked a pivotal moment with its Confirmation Mass, presided over by Archbishop Julian Leow and concelebrated by parish priest Fr Andrew Kooi. This joyous occasion celebrated the culmination of a long-

awaited sacramental journey for 18 confirmands from various language groups. The ceremony, attended by sponsors, families, friends, catechism teachers, and church community members, was a poignant reminder of the confirmands' commitment as soldiers of Christ. The parish also looked forward to welcoming new catechism teachers and volunteers to support its mission and ensure a fruitful spiritual journey for future generations.

Earlier, on August 3, the **Church of Our Lady of Perpetual Help** in



Church of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Mentakab

Mentakab hosted a Confirmation Mass for seven candidates from Mentakab, Triang, and Jerantut. Led by Archbishop Julian Leow and concelebrated by parish priest Fr Terrance Thomas, the Mass showcased the community's strong faith and devotion. The solemn rites marked a significant milestone in the candidates' spiritual lives.

Following the Mass, a warm fellowship allowed families and friends to share in the joy and blessings of the day. The atmosphere was filled with heartfelt con-

versations, laughter, and a sense of unity, reflecting on shared faith and support for the newly confirmed members. The day served as a reaffirmation of faith and a testament to the strength found in community. As the day concluded, the spirit of the Eucharist and the bonds of fellowship left a lasting impression on all attendees.

Both events underscored the importance of community and faith, highlighting the ongoing commitment of the Church to nurture spiritual growth and unity among its members.

Discovering the marvels of the Mass

PETALING JAYA: Catechists and youth from the Church of the Assumption are reengaging catechism students by deepening their understanding of the Mass and its many significant and meaningful aspects.

This idea was conceived during the Leaders' Weekend Away retreat in March 2024 and is in line with the parish's pastoral assembly objectives.

Currently in its pilot phase, the programme was first introduced to students from the Form 3 to Form 5 classes, with sessions held throughout June and July 2024.

The programme was designed as a mini field trip away from their usual classrooms, held within our church building. Led by the youth leaders Leonard Soyza and Alex Fulton, the students were guided through various features of the church that connect with the basic aspects of the Mass — elements they may have seen before but not fully understood.

The features covered included the Sign of the Cross with Holy Water, postures and gestures such as genuflecting, bowing, and sitting, the significance of Communion, and the Altar area, including the Altar table, Crucifix, Ambo, and holy items. Students also learned about liturgical colours and holy icons, such as the Christ Pantocrator and the *Reredos* on the Glorious Mysteries.

The programme concluded with an emphasis on the importance of solemn silence in participating fully in any aspect of the Mass.

The student turnout and the overall outcome were positive, with most classes showing attentiveness. The Form 3 and Form 4 students, in particular, displayed a strong interest in the programme, with



A youth leader explaining about Mass to the students.

some asking insightful questions about the significance of the cruets containing water and wine, as well as the prayer recited during the consecration of the Body and Blood of Christ.

The youth ministry plans to continue

pioneering and collaborating with the catechists on similar projects in the future, ensuring that this essential initiative remains available for students to deepen their understanding of the many marvels of the Mass.

— *By Rufina Lazarus and James Soyza*

Bangladesh students on traffic duty as police strike

DHAKA: Bangladeshi students battled police for control of the streets and won, but if their country is to embark on a new journey, someone has to clear the road ahead.

Gridlock is a fact of life in the capital Dhaka, a megacity of 20 million which relies on a corps of police wardens to clear long snarls of cars and pedal rickshaws through intersections.

With officers on strike after the resignation of ex-premier Sheikh Hasina, the students who forced her ouster have stepped up to do the job themselves.

"Our country can't remain in a standstill," Nasrin Akter Koly, 21, told *AFP*.

"We clashed with the police, that's why the police are not on duty," she added. "So instead of the police, our people must do the work."

Traffic control is a humdrum job at the best of times and many of Dhaka's usual wardens are known for a casual indifference to aggressive drivers zooming by out of turn.

But Koly and her classmates have brought a new enthusiasm to the vocation as they wave through cars at one of the downtown business district's busiest crossroads.

Drivers are in turn treating the volunteers with respect.

Nearly all are stopping on command and heeding polite but firm directions to fasten their seatbelts — the kind of minor traffic infraction that would have previously been ignored.

"After a revolution, every country faces some difficulties," said Nahid Kalam Nabil, 22, while directing traffic alongside Koly.

"The students are handling the situation now, and they will keep the country safe," he added. — *ucanews.com*

Accompanying Indonesian migrants on their "final journey" home

The perilous journey of Indonesian migrant workers attempting to return home from Malaysia continues to claim lives, with yet another tragedy unfolding in the waters of the Malacca Straits.

This time, 10 Indonesian migrant workers found themselves in a life-or-death situation as their boat capsized while attempting to cross the treacherous sea.

Only seven were rescued; the rest remain unaccounted for, including one confirmed fatality.

The tragic story of one victim, Anastasia Seo, highlights the ongoing plight of Indonesian migrant workers forced into dangerous circumstances by a lack of legal documentation, as well as the spiritual toll taken on priests and religious who work to reunite her body with her family.

Fr Paulus "Polce" Halek, a priest from East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), was alerted to the situation on August 3 by a Catholic family from Malaka District, Indonesia.

"The family asked me to check the report and find further details about potential fatalities," the priest said. The family reported that a group of migrant workers had died when their boat capsized in the Malacca Straits.

Arriving at Pelindo Hospital in Medan, North Sumatra, Fr Halek learned that an unidentified woman from NTT had died. The woman was later identified as Anastasia Seo from Webora in Malaka District. Fr Halek then helped arrange for her body to be sent back to her family, a tragic conclusion to her journey home.

"We have coordinated with the local authority in the capital city of Medan of North Sumatera Province that the dead body will be likely flown to NTT to reach the family," he said.

The incident is a grim reminder of the dangers faced by migrant workers who seek better opportunities abroad but lack the necessary legal protections.

Fr Halek questioned how long these tragedies would continue.

"Until when do my NTT fellow Indonesian migrant workers

still brace this fatal tragedy?" he lamented, criticising the Indonesian government's slow response to addressing the legal and humanitarian needs of migrant workers.

His concerns are echoed by the grim statistics coming out of NTT Province. At the end of 2023, Kupang's El Tari International Airport had received 151 coffins of repatriated Indonesian migrant workers.

This marked the highest number of fatalities since 2018, with a significant number of the deceased lacking legal travel documents.

The numbers are staggering. Since 2018, 657 coffins have been sent to NTT's El Tari Airport alone. The repatriations highlight the vulnerability of Indonesia's migrant workers, many of whom are trafficked across Southeast Asia.

An estimated 85 per cent of human trafficking in ASEAN countries involves labour exploitation, with traffickers profiting from the desperation of workers seeking employment abroad.

The Indonesian Migrant Workers Protection Agency reported that 2023 saw the highest fatality rate among Indonesian migrant workers, with many of the deaths occurring in Malaysia. — *LiCAS News*



Fr Paulus "Polce" Halek, a priest from East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), at Tanjung Balai Seaharbour to monitor the case of Indonesian migrant workers in this undated photo. (LiCas News photo)

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In Loving Memory of Our Dear Mom and Dad

17th Anniversary

7th Anniversary



Selvaraj Packiam @ Selvam
19 May 1938 - 3 Feb 2007



Anthony Jangle Joseph @ Julie
25 Aug 1949 - 29 Aug 2017

I Know Heaven
Is a Beautiful Place
Because they've got both of you...
Forever loved and dearly missed by
Son, Daughters, Sons in law, Daughter in law,
Grandchildren, Relatives and Friends.

In memory of a life so beautifully lived,
and a heart so deeply loved.

1st Year Memorial

In Loving Memory of

RAJENDRA @ SAMANASAN

9 September 1939 – 31 August 2023



"I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die."
John 11:25-26

Deeply missed but
forever cherished by beloved
family and loved ones.

Those we love don't go away,
they walk beside us every day.
Unseen, unheard, but always
near, so loved, so missed,
so very dear.

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45th Year Anniversary In Loving Memory of



J. D. Gilbert
Returned to the Lord on
23rd August 1979

"I am the resurrection
and the life," says the Lord.
'Those who believe in me, even
though they die, will live, and
everyone who lives and
believes in me will never die.'
— John 11:25-26

Sadly missed by
children, Jerome and Kenneth,
Patrick and Lulu.

3rd Anniversary 7th Anniversary In Loving Memory of Our Beloved



Noel Ernest Dicom
To the Lord:
1st August 2021

Josephine Dicom
nee Jeganathan
To the Lord:
23rd August 2017

Our thoughts are forever with you
Though you have passed away
But those who loved you dearly
Are thinking of you today

Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord
And let perpetual light shine upon them
May their souls rest in peace. Amen

Dearly missed, & fondly remembered by
Loving children, grandchild
and all your loved ones.

25th Anniversary In Loving Memory of



Stella Fernandez
Departed: 19-08-1999

"No length of time can take away,
Our thoughts of you from day to
day, Though absent for 25 years,
Mummy you are always near,
still loved and missed,
We shall meet again on that
beautiful shore" ...

Husband : Ferry Fernandez (deceased)
Son : Fabian
Daughters : Sharren & Shirley Anne
Dearly missed and forever lovingly
remembered by:
Sons in-laws, daughter in law,
7 grandchildren and loved ones.

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REST IN PEACE

Pope Francis offers message of hope to the people of China

VATICAN: In a recent interview with Fr Pedro Chia, director of the press office for the Chinese Province of the Society of Jesus, Pope Francis lauded the people of China as “great” and emphasised the importance of preserving their rich heritage. The Pope expressed a strong desire to visit China, particularly the Shrine of Sheshan in the Songjiang District, which is dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Help of Christians. He mentioned his wish to meet with local bishops and the “faithful people of God” in the region.

During the interview, Pope Francis addressed young Chinese Catholics, urging them to hold onto hope — a virtue he considers intrinsic to their culture. “It seems tautological to me to give a message of hope to a people who are masters of hope,” he said, noting their patience and resilience.

Reflecting on his pontificate, the Pope highlighted the importance of collaboration, listening, and consultation within the Church. He acknowledged that criticism, even when not constructive, has its value as it encourages reflection. The Pope spoke candidly about the challenges of facing resistance within the Church, emphasising the need for patience and the enduring strength that comes from the Lord’s consolation.

Pope Francis also discussed the major challenges of his pontificate, particularly the global pandemic and ongoing conflicts in



Pope Francis sits down for an interview with Jesuit Father Pedro Chia, director of communications for the Jesuit’s Chinese Province, in the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican May 24, 2024. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

Ukraine, Myanmar, and the Middle East. He underscored his preference for resolving issues through dialogue, but when dialogue fails, he turns to patience and humour, inspired by the teachings of St Thomas More.

On a personal note, the Pope opened up about experiencing crises during his time as a Jesuit, describing them as a natural part of life. He emphasised the importance of working through these crises with help and guidance, highlighting the significance of seeking forgiveness and divine patience.

The Pope also reflected on the four “universal apostolic preferences” outlined by the Jesuits in

2019, which include promoting spiritual exercises, supporting the poor and excluded, accompanying young people, and caring for the environment. These principles, he stated, are deeply interconnected and serve as the foundation for the Society of Jesus.

Looking ahead, Pope Francis addressed concerns about the future of the Church, warning against the dangers of clericalism and spiritual worldliness, which he described as the “worst evil” that could afflict the Church. He concluded by advising his successor to prioritise prayer, as it is through prayer that “the Lord speaks.” — *Vatican News*

This book is being sold at RM30.00. To purchase, please contact AOHD at 03-20785888 (WhatsApp only).

Ukraine bishop thanks Pope, Vatican for aid materials

VATICAN: Bishop Vasyl Tuchapets, a Greek-Catholic prelate from the war-torn Ukrainian city of Kharkiv, has expressed deep gratitude to Pope Francis and the Vatican for their continued support through the delivery of much-needed humanitarian aid to those sheltering with the diocese.

“Praised be Jesus Christ. Humanitarian aid from Rome has arrived at our cathedral,” Bishop Tuchapets announced in a video message, as reported by Vatican News on August 14. Standing in front of Kharkiv’s St Nicholas Cathedral, he added, “We have received items that people are always asking for, as well as other things they need.”

The Dicastery for Charity, under the leadership of Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, sent multiple trucks loaded with essential supplies, including food (especially non-perishables), baby food, personal hygiene products, clothing, medicines, and other vital goods. The aid trucks departed from Rome on August 8 and arrived in Kharkiv on August 12.

The ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, which began in 2014 and escalated with Russia’s invasion on February 24, 2022, has caused immense suffering. By June 24, the war had reached its 850th day, leaving thousands dead and millions displaced, many of whom have sought refuge both inside and outside Ukraine.

Bishop Tuchapets highlighted the dire situation near the Russian border, particularly in areas like Vovchansk and Lyptsi, where

intense fighting continues. “Many people have been evacuated from these regions and have come to Kharkiv, arriving daily to seek food and other essentials, such as bed linens and dishes, as they often fled with only their documents in hand to save their lives,” he explained.

The bishop emphasised the critical importance of the humanitarian aid received, extending heartfelt thanks to all benefactors who responded to the Church’s appeal.

Cardinal Krajewski, who oversaw the entire operation, expressed his satisfaction with the safe arrival of the aid in Kharkiv. “Earlier, we couldn’t reveal the location for security reasons. These are some of the most heavily bombed areas, where people are suffering greatly,” Cardinal Krajewski noted.

He also acknowledged the efforts of the Swiss Guards, who spent “many, many hours” manually loading the trucks at the Roman Basilica of Santa Sofia, “filling them with boxes up to the roof.”

“Naturally, thanks also go to the Pope, who once again showed his concrete closeness to the martyred Ukraine, which he mentions in every public appeal, urging the faithful not to forget it,” Cardinal Krajewski added.

Pope Francis has been steadfast in his support for Ukraine, consistently sending aid, including gifts and ambulances, since the war began. Cardinal Krajewski has personally undertaken nearly a dozen trips to Ukraine to deliver this aid. — *ucanews.com*

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