

Status quo on use of Jerusalem Bible Lectionary

KUALA LUMPUR: The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei (CBCMSB) confirmed that the region will continue to use the current Jerusalem Bible translation of the Scripture for the Lectionary.

The decision which was made during conference's assembly in July, comes after careful consideration of various fac-

tors by the CBCMSB. The bishops highlighted that the familiar language and tone of the present Jerusalem Bible Lectionary fostered a deep connection with the local congregation in the region. In light of this, the CBCMSB will not introduce the English Standard Version Catholic Edition (ESVCE) Lectionary, adapted by the Bishops' Conference of England,

Wales and Scotland.

In a press release dated August 18, the CBCMSB said that the New Zealand and Australian Conference of Bishops are drafting a new Lectionary grounded in the New Jerusalem Bible translation. Therefore, until this endeavour is completed, the CBCMSB is appealing to all parishes in the region not to unilaterally switch to the

ESVCE lectionary but to wait patiently for the NZ-Australia version.

The CBCMSB has entrusted the Episcopal Regional Liturgy Commission (ERLC) to source for possibility of obtaining the copyright to print the lectionaries locally as the previous publishers, the Catholic Truth Society, have ceased reprinting the currently used lectionaries.

Pakistani Christians cry out for justice

ISLAMABAD: As a mob burnt down churches and houses of the Christian community over an unverified case of blasphemy in Jaranwala recently, members of the religious minorities cried out for justice and said they were left at the mercy of the angry mob.

On August 16, angry mobs of Muslims attacked more than 80 homes and 20 Christian churches after rumours spread that a Christian man and a friend had ripped pages out of a Quran, the Islamic holy book, and written disparaging comments on them. In response, messages allegedly were broadcast from loudspeakers at a local mosque encouraging Muslims to seek retribution.

Among the targets of the violence was St Paul's Catholic Church in the Jaranwala neighbourhood of Faisalabad, which was set ablaze during the rampage. Though no one was killed, several people suffered injuries and scores of others were forced to flee their homes. There were also complaints that in some instances, police stood by and allowed the violence to unfold, though officials have argued that such restraint was intended to avoid further inflaming the situation.

Muslims living in the predominantly Christian area gave shelter to their neighbours and pinned Koranic verses to the doors of Christian homes to prevent them from being targeted, said residents of both faiths.

Christian groups have held a number of small protests across the country calling for greater protection.

In the wake of the assaults, Archbishop Benny Trivas of Karachi said that such incidents confirm that Christians in Pakistan, who make up just around 1.5 per cent of the population, "are in reality second-class citizens who can be terrorised and frightened at will. We hope that through this protest, the government will realise that this issue must be dealt with sternly and those who committed destruction must be brought to justice," said the archbishop.

Fr Jamil Albert, head of the Franciscan Commission for



Christians in Hyderabad, Pakistan participate in a peaceful protest organised by the Commission for Interfaith Dialogue on August 18, 2023, following mob attacks against Christian homes and churches in Jaranwala, on August 16, 2023. (Crux photo/Catholic Bishops Conference of Pakistan)

Interfaith and Interreligious Dialogue in Pakistan, said Christians in the country are living "in constant fear, uncertainty and a state of shock," and added that right now in the affected area of Faisalabad, many Christians have fled their homes and are sleeping on the streets or in fields, fearing further reprisals.

Rights groups maintain that Christians continue to face discrimination in the country, evidenced by several accusations waged against them without any evidence, using the blasphemy law to accuse minorities arbitrarily.

Blasphemy is an incendiary charge in deeply conservative, Muslim-majority Pakistan, where even unproven allegations of insulting Islam and its Prophet Mohammed can provoke death at the hands of vigilantes.

Virtually all observers who have examined the application of blasphemy and apostasy laws concur that it's an inherently flawed and subjective enterprise — what constitutes "blasphemy" for one individual or group may be wildly different from another, and there's simply no legally objective way to make such determinations.

Granted, the phenomenon of blasphemy and apostasy laws may not be of much direct concern to Catholics in the affluent West, where the most common public reaction to religious utterances isn't usually outrage but, rather, indifference. However, for a broad swath of today's Catholic population, the nature and application of such laws, including their extra-judicial enforcement, is literally a matter of life and death. — Agencies

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

Rom. 11:33-33



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**EDITOR**

Patricia Pereira
editor1@herald.com.my

**ASSISTANT EDITOR**

Social Media Coordinator
Sandra Ann Inbaraj
sandra@herald.com.my

**WRITER**

Children's Section
Gwen Manickam
gwen@herald.com.my

**GRAPHIC DESIGNER**

Youth Section
Amanda Mah
amanda@herald.com.my

**MANDARIN**

Adelina Wong
yin4482@gmail.com

**TAMIL**

RK Samy
rksamy3@hotmail.com

ADMINISTRATOR

Advertisements/Memoriam
advertisement@herald.com.my

LETTERS

letterseditor@herald.com.my

MY VIEW

My hope for Malaysia MADANI

Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim introduced the concept of Malaysia MADANI which aims to transform Malaysia into a more prosperous and developed country based on six MADANI values, a policy of transparency and cooperation.

The values are:

- keMampanan (Sustainability);
- kesejahteraan (Prosperity);
- Daya cipta (Innovation);
- hormat (Respect);
- keyakinan (Trust) and
- Ihsan (Compassion).

Firstly for me, as we celebrate National Day (August 31) and Malaysia Day (September 16), Malaysia MADANI must look to strengthen the political situation. A stable government will augur well for foreign investors and thereby accelerate the economy. The rakyat will then enjoy the benefits in the near future.

Secondly, I hope Malaysia MADANI opens up wider career opportunities for the young people facing increasingly alarming issue of unemployment.

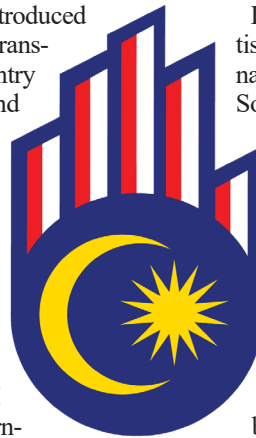
Thirdly, hopefully, the MADANI concept will address the rampant corruption in all areas. There are still many cases of corruption reported by the media every day. We are also familiar with the weakness in dealing with social issues and dealing with the issue of poverty both outside and in the city. Therefore, serious steps must be taken to eradicate poverty. I take the example of the community where I live. Most are government pensioners. For them, the slogan is less important, they care more about the cost of living, the price of goods and internet access.

Although the country has a good policy on environmental protection, the destruction continues. There must be serious attention given to protecting our natural resources and the environment.

We have been presented with various slogans and ideologies before. For example, the concept of '1 Malaysia' and the 'Malaysian Family'. I am sure I am not the only one, all Malaysians hope that this concept of MADANI is not just another empty slogan.

Last year, in conjunction with National Day and Malaysia Day, I interviewed some young people, asking what their hopes are for Malaysia, especially after the pandemic. Their honest answer and I am sure, it is also the hope of all Malaysians, is for:

- A country that rejects racism.
- A political leader who puts the people first.
- Elimination of corruption and embezzlement.



In East Malaysia, the MADANI concept has long been practised. Over here, it is common to see Muslims attending ordinations and weddings in Churches or visiting graves during All Souls Day. The key to this harmony is respect, and respect is one of the values in the MADANI concept.

We cannot escape the fact that some religious figures and politicians have a tendency to come up with controversial statements instead of spreading and instilling goodness.

This is a constant thorn in the flesh for those of other faiths, because those extremists refuse to comprehend that Malaysia is a multi-racial and multi-religious country.

Amid all the chaos, we actually have great potential to become a MADANI society. We saw this during the COVID-19 pandemic where we were united and worked together to combat COVID-19. The white flag campaign, the frontliners sacrifices, the ministers' concern showed many working to ensure safety and peace, regardless faith and race.

Pope Francis, in his 2023 World Peace message said: The COVID-19 experience has made us all the more aware of the need for everyone, including peoples and nations, to restore the word "together" to a central place in our lexicon. Only the peace that comes from a fraternal and disinterested love can help us overcome personal, societal and global crises.

We may have some reservations about the MADANI slogan but let's move forward, let's remain steadfast. While the Unity government is actively promoting the Malaysia MADANI concept through media and events, we Christians, can contribute by following Pope Francis' advice: "What then is being asked of us?" Pope Francis reflects, "First of all, to let our hearts be changed." He asks us to let God transform the usual way we view the world; to no longer think in exclusively personal terms but instead, Francis points us toward the way of God; toward thinking in terms of the common good, a global community, and to "opening our minds and hearts to universal human fraternity."

There is the Malay proverb that goes, *kuat berdiri pohon kerana akarnya, kuat akar kerana tanah* (the tree stands strong because of its roots, the roots are strong because of the soil). What it essentially implies is that the strength of a government is attributable to its great leaders and great leaders come from people who are united. Without unity, we will not be able to enjoy the benefits of National Day and Malaysia Day! — *By Melania Liza Magnus*

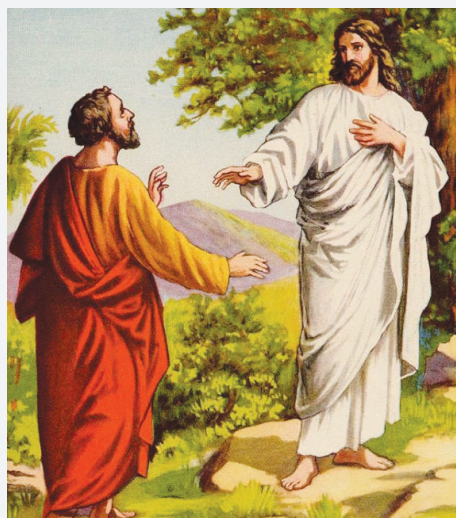
Who do you say I am?

"But who do you say that I am?" I wonder sometimes if we hear this question as Jesus' mid-Gospel exam. We are about half way through Matthew's account of the Gospel. So, it makes sense that Jesus might gather the guys and say, "Ok let's see what you've learned, if you really understand. Who am I?"

Most of us know the right answer. We've read Peter's answer. "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Today's Gospel is not, however, about giving the right answer. This is not a test. This is not about what is in our head but what is in our heart.

I don't think Jesus is asking us to just parrot back the answers we've heard or read. Maybe that's why He pushes the disciples to move from what they are hearing around them — John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets — to what they are hearing within themselves. "But who do you say that I am?"

The culture around Jesus viewed Him as nothing more than a great man, but Peter voiced a different opinion. Speaking for the disciples as a whole, Peter was never more accurate: "You are the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One...the Son of the living God." Peter nailed it! At that point in the discussion, Jesus changed the dialogue to a monologue and commended Peter for his statement: Blessed are you, Simon Bar Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church;



and the gates of Hades will not overpower it" (Matthew 16:17-18).

In commending Simon Peter for his spiritual insight about who Jesus was, the Lord unveiled even more truth about what He would do. In essence, Jesus told Peter, "Your words about Me are true. In fact, they are a foundational statement: like a rock. On this rocklike declaration I will build My church."

So, what does it mean for us today to stand with Peter and say that Jesus is the "Messiah, the Son of the living God?"

What is your answer to the question, "Who do you say I am?"

To be almost right about Jesus is to be totally wrong. Why? Because we are not saved by good opinions about Jesus. We

not saved because we have a good feeling about Jesus. We are not saved because we like His moral teaching. That is not enough.

To come close is not enough. The truth about Jesus Christ must be ...

Personally understood

Personally grasped

Personally experienced

Personally possessed

Close is not enough!!!!

Remember the whole experience of Peter.

Peter said, "You are the Christ." Not "I say You are the Christ" or "People say You are the Christ" or even "We got together and took a vote and we think You are the Christ." It is a declarative statement — "You are the Christ." Nobody can say that except by the work of the Holy Spirit because no man can discover that truth on his own.

That is why Jesus in verse 17 gives Peter a blessing. "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by My Father in heaven." It's almost as if Jesus is saying, "It's a remarkable thing, Peter, that a mere man discovered this." That is, you didn't go to seminary to figure this out. And you didn't get this because you had a Ph.D. This came because God in heaven revealed it to you.

Now, where do you stand? Where do you stand this morning? No, you can't leave until you answer. You don't have to answer out loud, but you've got to answer.

Who is He? A good man? A great teacher?

Reflecting on our Sunday Readings with Fr Andrew Manickam OFM Cap

21st Sunday of Ordinary Time (A)

Readings: Isaiah 22:19-23

Romans 11:33-36;

Gospel: Matthew 16:13-20

One of the finest fellows who ever walked the face of this earth? Or is He the Christ, the Son of the Living God?

Some say ...

We say ...

What do you say?

Who is Jesus Christ?

What is your answer?

You and I can spend our lives speculating about theology. We can study the Bible and spin out all sorts of fine ideas about Jesus. We can even become a master of "the quest for the historical Jesus." But, in the end, each one of us has to answer for ourselves the central question of life: "Who do you say I am?" We need to decide whether Jesus is just a good teacher or just a miracle worker.

The way we answer Jesus has the potential to change our lives. If we acknowledge Jesus to be a divinely inspired teacher, then we will pay close attention to what He says so that we might believe it and live it.

Mahabbah - Fratelli Tutti

By Christopher Kushi

GEORGETOWN: Religious heads of Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) and the Diocese of Penang held a joint luncheon to further the ideals of *Mahabbah - Fratelli Tutti* in fraternal friendship and mutual understanding, August 16.

The delegation was headed by YB Datuk Idris Ahmad, vice-president of PAS and former minister in the Prime Minister's department and Cardinal-elect Sebastian Francis.

Tuan Haji Abdul Rahman, as co-organiser, congratulated the cardinal-elect on being appointed to the College of Cardinals. YB Tuan Hj. Amir Hamzah, who was elected the ADUN of Permatang Pasir, Penang in the recent state elections even acknowledged that Malaysia could have a pope in Cardinal-elect Sebastian. Datuk Idris Ahmad said that the Holy Quran reveals that we are created into nations and tribes and that we may get to know one another. Therefore, the meeting is very important for getting to know and understand each other.

Cardinal-elect Sebastian, in his



Cardinal-elect Sebastian Francis with YB Datuk Idris Ahmad.

opening address, said *Mahabbah* which means love, kindness and friendship, expounds the same ideals of human fraternity with Pope Francis' encyclical letter *Fratelli Tutti*. The cardinal-elect said that faith leads all believers to see in the other a brother or a sister to be supported, loved and protected.

He believes that the PAS leaders are, first and foremost, religious

leaders, followed by their political role. Hence as spiritual leaders they will provide spiritual leadership and moral virtues to inspire harmony among the people.

On Feb 4, 2019, Pope Francis and Sheikh Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, the Grand Imam of University Al-Azhar, signed the *Document on Human Fraternity - For World Peace and Living Together*. The document

invites all persons who have faith in God and faith in human fraternity to unite and work together. Al-Azhar and the Catholic Church ask that this document become the object of reflection and formation to bring goodness and peace to others.

The cardinal-elect informed the delegates that the Diocese of Penang on May 13, 2022, met with Ustaz Nasrudin Hassan, Yang Dipertua Yayasan Dakwah Islamiah Malaysia, YADIM, in Georgetown. Worried about the gap in the relationship of Muslim and Christian youth, there was agreement for joint activities to build friendship and togetherness.

On August 5, 2022, a *Mahabbah* meeting with Mursidul Am Pas Dato' Tuan Guru Haji Hashim was held in Kangar, with the theme *Together we will nourish a Peaceful and Tranquil Life*. All this is aimed at creating a better understanding and cooperation with one another.

On Oct 4, 2020, the feast of St Francis of Assisi, Pope Francis' encyclical letter *Fratelli Tutti* was released. *Fratelli Tutti* means "all brothers and sisters" and is taken from the Admonitions of St Francis

of Assisi. Pope Francis quotes St Francis' counsel in which he calls for a love that transcends the barriers of geography and distance, and declares blessed all those who love their brother as much when he is far away from him as when he is with him. In his simple and direct way, St Francis expressed the essence of fraternal openness that allows us to acknowledge, appreciate and love each person, regardless of physical proximity, regardless of where he or she was born or lives.

The cardinal-elect ended his speech with the Malay saying "*Tak kenal maka tak cinta - Without knowing, you won't love.*" PAS and Church delegates also exchanged gifts. The *Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together* was presented to the attendees.

Also present were the Penang Island Deanery clergy led by Msgr Jude Miranda, Fr Aloysius Tan, Fr Michael Raymond, OFM Cap, Franciscan Friars Frs Oliver Tham, Esmond Chua, Crispus Mosinoh and Cosmas Francis and deacon-to-be Paul Kang. Several invited lay members were also in attendance.



KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

August

- 28 Meeting – AOHD Board of Management
- 29-30 Monthly Clergy Recollection
- 31 Opening Mass – Catholic Charismatic Renewal Peninsular Malaysia



PENANG DIOCESE

Diary of Bishop Sebastian Francis

August/September

- 27 Confirmation — Church of Our Lady of Good Health, Parit Buntar at 8.30am
- 29 Meeting — Malaysian students of Australian Catholic University (ACU) at Stella Maris, Penang at 3.30pm
- 31/8-2/9 Golden Jubilee of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal of Peninsular Malaysia at the Church of the Holy Family, Kajang



MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

August/September

- 31/8-2/9 Deliverance & Healing Programme (Modules 7 & 8) – MAJODI Centre



Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #144

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MJD NEWS
UPDATES

Greetings, dear friends and fellow Catholics:

The Pope told the youth: Dream big. Live life completely. Promote a culture of care. Become champions of fraternity. Malaysians also dreamt big. Are we dreaming the impossible dream? Dreamers and dreams can easily be sacrificed for preserving the status quo and mediocrity. The UN dreams "Green skills for youth", greening the earth and "working for a sustainable world". Do we dare to dream dreams in the midst of so much intolerance, compromise and control?

Dreaming Times: The elections are over. Another four years till the next General Elections. The people have spoken. Be leaders of a multiracial, multicultural Malaysia. Celebrate the nation's history this *Hari Kebangsaan*, not political sloganeering. Focus on what is true, good and beautiful in our midst. See God at work. Be credible leaders with character, integrity and principles. Remembering the words of Jesus: No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. There is no room for a "tamping" mentality in national planning and nation-building, nor a marriage of convenience in national leadership. This applies even to Church organisations, ministries, leadership and clergy. May our governments and churches be courageous in being inclusive and bridge-builders.

A Thought for the Week:

Nick Vujicic

Nick Vujicic was born in Melbourne, Australia with the rare Tetra-amelia disorder: limbless, missing both arms at shoulder level, and having one small foot with two toes protruding from his left thigh. Despite the absence of limbs, he surfs, swims and plays golf and soccer. Nick graduated from college at the age of 21 with a double major in Accounting and Financial Planning. He began his travels as a motivational speaker, focusing on the topics that today's teenagers face. *A lesson from Nick:* "God loves it when we have no plan B. He does His greatest work when we are totally reliant on Him".

"Being on a tightrope is living, everything else is waiting".

Announcements for this Week

1. **Vocation News:** Henry Lim, from Melaka, has joined the Taiwan Seminary for his Initiation Year, Philosophy and Theology studies in Mandarin. The Diocesan Vocation Team has planned vocation camps and College General stay-in experiences for this year. Those interested in vocation discernment, please contact Fr Adrian Francis at St Louis, Kluang. Join the "I Am Mission" Study Day on August 31 at the Church of St Peter, Melaka.

2. The Deliverance Exorcism Office continues with the **Deliverance & Healing programme 6 & 7** on August 31 at MAJODI.

3. Protect Our Earth. Protect Our Children. **Protec Year 4 and Season of Creation** begins again on September 1, 2023, and continues until Au-

gust 31, 2024. The focus this time is *Cut Fuel Consumption*. Waste not, want not!

This Week's Question and Query. The Question asks: Can one find peace in these troubled times?

1. Take **deep breaths**. Breathe through your nose. Practise **forest bathing**, ie, to let your mind and senses soak in the sights, sounds and smells. Healing is in the air.

2. There are many ways to **calm a negative energy** without suppressing or fighting it. You recognise it, you smile at it, and you invite something nicer to come up and replace it; you read some inspiring words, you listen to a piece of beautiful music, you go somewhere in nature, or you do some walking meditation. (Thich Nhat Thanh)

3. The Psalmist says: **Taste and see** that the Lord is good. See. Hear. Smell. Taste. Feel. Touch life.

The Pope says to you, young people: "*There is a fountain of youth: it is your mind, your talents, the creativity you bring to your life and the lives of people you love.*"

"On this special day, pledge to work together in making the world a better place for everyone to live and thrive."

You can make a difference. Step out to give, and you will see the miracle. God bless you all. Have a great weekend.

Bishop Bernard Paul

Archdiocese of Kuching reviews synodal progress

KUCHING: The Archdiocese of Kuching held a forum to review the progress of the implementation of the Parish Pastoral Plans (PPP) presented by the 12 parishes during the Kuching Archdiocesan Pastoral Assembly (KAPA2) on Oct 1 and 2, 2022.

About 350 delegates including priests, religious, parish councillors and lay leaders from parishes and Archdiocesan commissions congregated to listen, discern and dialogue on the way forward in the spirit of synodality as a Missionary Church.

The forum commenced with Holy Mass presided by Kuching Archdiocese Synod Central Working Committee (CWC) chairman Fr Patrick Heng, with all priests present concelebrating.

Fr Patrick urged everyone to have faith in each other. "We must trust each other, journey together as a community so God's work can be done together," he said.

Archbishop Simon Poh in a video message, encouraged delegates to "bring the plans" discussed, in prayer to the Lord during the Year of Prayer 2024.

Fr Patrick gave a recap of the Synodal Journey commencing 2021 to 2024 by re-



A delegate giving her views during the forum.

flecting on its universal launch by Pope Francis in October 2021 and working its way down to the national and local archdiocesan levels.

He further updated delegates on the Synod-KAPA2-MPC2026 Roadmap and encouraged parishes to adopt the 'See-Judge-Act' methodology to track the progress of implementation, mitigate gaps and readjust their plans where necessary to meet the needs of

the community and church.

They are to plan for 2024, 'Review, Reflect, Realign, Renew, Reprioritise' quick fix, medium and long-term strategies. With the launch of the 2024 Ecology Year (*Laudato Si'*), parishes will also incorporate Ecology initiatives into their PPP.

Further deliberation on the implementation status of the PPP and 2024 budget will be carried out to consolidate and endorse

the outcome of the PPP reviews before presenting it to the APC 52nd Executive Board Meeting on Dec 9, 2023.

Creation Justice Committee chairperson Friar David Au, presented the essence of Ecological Protocol and what it means to parishes. This includes a pledge to become an Ecological parish. The announcement will be made in September in conjunction with the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation.

Friar David also launched the *Bunan Resilience Project* with a short video of the pilot project in the parish of St Jude, Bunan. The video showcased fresh food products available for online order, with delivery only at designated collection points of participating local parishes.

The project aims to supply urban consumers with fresh, local produce grown by the farmers of Bunan, hence helping local farmers become more economically resilient in facing mounting uncertainty brought about by climate change and other threats to nature.

The plenary concluded with a Q&A session, closing prayer and fellowship lunch. — **By Ivy Chai, Today's Catholic**

A journey of renewal and Church

PETALING JAYA: The Feast of the Assumption commemorates the Assumption of our Mother Mary into heaven, both body and soul. It is one of the four Marian dogmas of the Catholic Church.

This year the parishioners of the Church of the Assumption, led by parish priest Fr Leonard Lexson, and priest-in-residence Fr Biju Mathew, joyously commemorated their patron's feast with the theme *Journey of Renewal and Church*. Despite the challenges posed by the ongoing major renovations at the current church building, the Assumption community came together to observe their triduum and feast day at the Assumption Family House from August 12 to 15. This bungalow house, located across the road behind the church, currently serves as the venue for all Masses throughout the renovation period.

Fr Michael Chua, Fr Lawrence Andrew SJ and Fr Alberto Irenus David SJ, were the invited preachers for the triduum. Their presence and sharing added to the solemnity of the parish's special feast.



Archbishop Julian Leow (*pic*) was the main celebrant on the feast day with Fr Biju concelebrating.

The main message for the parishioners was that we need to emulate Mary's humbleness in carrying out the will of God in our lives. Just as Mary placed the Almighty first in her exclamation of the *Magnificat*, so too each of us needs to be aware that we are but instruments of the Lord and that ultimately, it is God who is to be exalted. The prelate also reminded the faithful that Jesus ascended to heaven while Mary was assumed into heaven. There is a marked difference between both words, yet there is much grace in both events.

The triduum ended with a dinner fellowship and everyone left feeling blessed, grateful and joyful for the celebrations. — **By Paul Michael Devaraj**

New church built in Kampung Suba Bau

BAU, Kuching: Archbishop Simon Poh blessed the new Church of Mary Immaculate Conception in the presence of the Catholic community of Kampung Suba Bau recently.

The newly completed Church of Mary Immaculate Conception is built on the grounds of the 39-year-old St Mary's Chapel.

Given the growing congregation, the old, dilapidated chapel built in 1984, was demolished to make way for the construction of a new church in November 2011. While construction was ongoing, Masses were celebrated in the Kampung Suba Bau town hall.

Construction work on the new Church commenced Nov 16, 2015 and it was completed Dec 17, 2022. Although estimated to be completed within four years, the project took seven years because of the COVID-19 pandemic when all construction work came to a standstill.

Although the structure was not completed, they started celebrating Masses on Nov 23, 2020.



Archbishop Simon Poh beating the gong at the newly completed Church of Mary Immaculate Conception.

The church, which can accommodate 600 parishioners, has an awning and a bell tower at the front, with the Altar and the rows of pews for the congregation in the centre of the church. At the back of the church, there is a room each for the priest and the altar servers. Lavatories are located in a separate building.

The total cost for the construction is

RM1,246,813.25, made possible through donations from the congregation, fundraising activities such as Dinner, Jogathon, A Dollar a Brick project, UNIFOR's (Unit for Other Religions) contribution (RM400,000.00) and funds from (DUN) the State Legislative Assembly and Members of Parliament (RM370,000.00). — **By Robert Kip & Ivy Chai, Today's Catholic**

Adoration room blessed by cardinal-elect

PENANG: The parishioners of the Church of the Divine Mercy expressed their joy with the formal inauguration and consecration of the St. John Paul II Adoration room.

On August 13, Cardinal-elect Sebastian Francis, Fr John Anandan OFM Cap and

parish priest Fr Michael Raymond OFM Cap, guided the congregation in a dedication prayer service. This occasion beautifully aligned with the parish's 10th anniversary this year. Those present were also able to witness the ceremony through live broad-

casts on screens within the church premises.

The adoration room provides a peaceful sanctuary for prayer and adoration for about 20 persons at a time. It is furnished with chairs, kneelers and throw cushions. Stained glass windows depicting the Holy Spirit and Jesus as well as beautiful images of the Blessed Virgin Mother, the Holy Family, and the Divine Mercy, within the adoration room add to the prayerful ambiance.

Parishioners and visitors alike were excited and happy with the new fixture which allows them to drive into the church grounds and spend time in quiet prayer even when the church proper is closed. As Sept 29 approaches, the parishioners are poised to commemorate a decade since the establishment of their parish with a month-long series of festivities. — **By Shane Michael Nalpon**



St John Paul II Adoration room at the Church of the Divine Mercy, Penang.

The Assumption of Mary inspires humanity and faith

By Aaron Lim

GEORGE TOWN: It was a moment of thanksgiving and joy for parishioners of the historical Church of the Assumption (City Parish) in commemoration of the feast day celebration.

The celebrations marked 237 years of establishment since the year 1786, thus placing the church as the second oldest Catholic Church in Malaysia.

Cardinal-elect Sebastian Francis was the main celebrant of the Eucharistic celebration with Fr Desmond Jansen (assistant priest) and Fr Oliver Tham concelebrating.

In sharing the historical context of the Assumption of Mary, the Cardinal-elect explained that this feast was celebrated as the Dormition of Mary in the fifth century, before Pope Pius XII declared the Assumption of Mary



Cardinal-elect Sebastian Francis flanked by Fr Desmond Jansen and Fr Oliver Tham.

as an official teaching of the Catholic Church.

"Coincidentally, Mary's story of life is also celebrated within

the state of Penang whereby two other churches are dedicated in her honour at Pulau Tikus (Church of the Immaculate

Conception) and Butterworth (Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary)," he said.

In his homily, cardinal-elect

Sebastian said, "Having completed the course of her earthly life, the Virgin Mary was free from corruption and sin; thus she was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory and embodies the holistic celebration of life that is preached by the Church," he said.

He then urged all present to be enthusiastic for this solemnity as Mary continues to inspire mankind. Her presence is a blessing to both humanity and the church.

In concluding the homily, he hoped that having been inspired by the glorious assumption of Mary, all would find meaning and purpose to live their lives fruitfully.

"Mary leads the way for creation and the Church, she has gone ahead of us and now stands in garments of gold as our queen, interceding for us on the right hand of her beloved son," he said.

Strategies and reasons aiding migrants and refugees



Adrian Pereira with Fr Biju Mathew and the participants after the session.

PETALING JAYA: The Migrant Ministry of the Church of the Assumption hosted a talk on the current condition of Migrants and Refugees residing in our vicinity on August 9. Human rights and social justice orientated organisation, North South Initiative (NSI)'s executive director and co-founder, Adrian Pereira, was the invited speaker.

Adrian's comprehensive presentation outlined practical strategies and profound reasons for aiding migrants and refugees. The session covered the "How, Why, and What" aspects of our involvement in supporting this vulnerable demographic.

HOW: Adrian emphasised the value of empowering migrants and refugees by fostering their independence. He suggested forming close-knit support groups that encourage mutual help and communal prayer. He also stressed the importance of having legal support during court cases to achieve positive results. Additionally, he

mentioned using research-backed information about forced labour and health rights to address actual issues effectively. Adrian proposed merging Business and Human Rights Services to fight against human trafficking and remove harmful work environments.

WHY: Adrian used different sources to show that helping migrants and refugees is a moral duty. He mentioned stories from the Bible, like Moses and Jesus' flight to Egypt, which are similar to modern migrants' challenges. He also referred to *Laudato Si'* and the United Nations/International Labour Organisation (ILO)'s Pastoral Orientation on human trafficking. Adrian shared his thoughts and experiences to support the idea of helping migrants and refugees.

WHAT: Adrian suggested practical actions for the Church to create real change. These actions involve setting up capable Migrant Ministries, visibly starting Learn-

ing Centres, offering essential help such as food and skills training, and even getting involved in business ventures with a spiritual aspect. He stressed the need for a comprehensive approach that includes justice and human development. Additionally, he highlighted the significance of providing temporary shelter in our homes and addressing transportation challenges to enhance church attendance.

NSI's mission is to build a society that prioritises social justice via solidarity building, to ensure no one is left behind. Its mobiliser team works with marginalised communities from the Asian region and beyond to create a competent and resilient movement using critical pedagogy and design thinking. The communities NSI works with include migrant workers, refugees, victims of forced labour, small scale farmers, indigenous youths and people living in conflict zones like Patani and West Papua. — By Felicity Tan

Priests and staff embark on a team-bonding trip

MELAKA: The three priests and six staff members of the Church of the Holy Family, Kajang, went on an outing to Melaka on August 16.

This is the second year the priests and staff have gone on a trip together to foster team bonding and reduce work-related stress. The previous year, the group took a one-day trip to Kuala Selangor, which included a pilgrimage to a chapel and some sightseeing. As one could see the benefits of the last trip as a means of increasing motivation and work commitment, the parish decided to make this an annual event.

The highlight of this year's trip was the Melaka River Boat Cruise, a trip to the Maritime Museum in the shape of a Portuguese Man-of-War and a trip to the Upside-Down Gallery.

Parish priest, Fr Michael Chua, explained the reason for mooted this event: "The staff are the frontliners and surrogates for us priests and they often have to bear the brunt of parishioners' ire and complaints. This is a way we priests can show appreciation to our staff and allow them to see us beyond titles

and roles in the parish structure. These trips also allow us to get acquainted with each other in an informal setting and this tremendously helps us strengthen our working relationship." The assistant priest, Fr Philip Chua, added: "Our one day of staff development to Melaka helped bring our team together in a social setting and gave individuals time to interact with each other. It also allowed priests and colleagues time away from the hustle and bustle of work. Hence, stronger relationships were given the chance to develop in a natural way."

Parish office administrator Anne Martin said, "The day away from the daily affairs of the office was well spent bonding with clergy and colleagues."

Sacristan, Caroline Ngawan, who hails from Sarawak, shared her experience: "A very valuable experience with all the staff and all the priests. It's more fun than last year and it's also an opportunity to bond with each other. And I hope that next year we can have the same thing, maybe go to a more interesting place to add to the experience. Thank you all."



Holy Family Kajang priests with their staff members.

Assunta wins award for charitable works

By Gwen Manickam

PETALING JAYA: Assunta Hospital is the proud recipient of the Hospital of the Year – Community at Heart Award by CSR Malaysia and World Sustainability Community in conjunction with Sustainability and CSR Malaysia Awards 2023.

The award is in honour of the extensive work its charity wing ASSISS (Assunta Integrated Social Services) has been carrying out for years. As a not-for-profit entity, the hospital incorporates the social entrepreneurship concept as its business model. Up to half of its earnings are directed towards reinvestment, fuelling the hospital's continued growth, acquiring advanced equipment and technology, revitalising its infrastructure, and meeting operational expenses. The remaining 50 per cent of its surplus is allocated to its social welfare fund, enabling ASSISS to deliver cost-free healthcare to the less fortunate.

This has been the practice since its inception in 1954, when four Franciscan Missionaries of Mary (FMM) nuns started a small clinic called Ave Maria in Petaling Jaya to serve the healthcare needs of the underprivileged. It is believed the nuns used to cycle out to care for those unable to come to the clinic.

When the hospital officially opened in 1961, free clinics were set up once a week in villages and squatter areas around Klang Valley like Puchong and Sg Way, as part of its community service.

ASSISS's head of medical services, Dr Darshinia Ballasingam said the charity arm, established in the 1990s, now provides eight types of specific free healthcare services including mobile clinics, palliative services, wound care services, geriatric enrichment services, and social welfare programmes.

Dr Darshinia, a graduate of the Crimea State Medical University, Ukraine, joined Assunta's palliative care unit in May 2018 after serving at various government and private hospitals, conglomerates, and chain clinics for seven years.

"I was constantly questioning my purpose, and if I was serving it. Joining the palliative



Assunta nurses with an elderly.

care unit at ASSISS was an eye-opener for me — the reality is that this is where we will all be one day. I then understood ASSISS, its services and, with the guidance of Sr Elizabeth Tan, FMM, the current Provincial Superior of FMM Malaysia/Singapore, who sits on the Assunta Foundation Board of Directors, I was given the opportunity to lead the initiative.

"I feel valued and valuable for what I do at ASSISS. In comparison to the size of the hospital, the amount of charitable works we do is astounding," she said.

"I visit patients and mobile clinics almost six days a week, and it is very gratifying. At the height of the pandemic, I was pregnant with my daughter, yet once we obtained permission from the Ministry of Health, my dedicated team and I were out there serving those in the peripherals.

"ASSISS' humble beginnings were more focused on aiding those who sought our assistance and active promotion was not our priority. Our Mobile clinics were then operating in 12 to 24 locations, at times 26 locations monthly. The pandemic made us understand the needs within the community and a priority shift was soon observed. ASSISS began promoting its services to the open public, in hopes to be more accessible to all. ASSISS is now available in the Klang Valley, Sabah, and Sarawak and has recently expanded to Negeri Sembilan. Its Mobile Clinics cover 48 locations in Klang Valley and six in East Malaysia."

"The demand is substantial, with numerous individuals unaware of our services or unable to access them directly. Nevertheless, our resources empower us to extend our reach, and this has been our ongoing endeavour said the enthusiastic doctor.

"We work closely with the state's Department of Social Welfare/Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat (JKM), the Kuala Lumpur City Hall/Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur, and the Petaling Jaya City Council/Majlis Bandaraya Petaling Jaya as they provide us with their detailed database of the communities and individuals that fall within the B40 or below category. This makes ASSISS work much easier to reach out to the right people in need.

"We are currently working on our portfolio to present to the national Department of Social Welfare, so we can expand the programmes to other states," said the 37-year-old doctor.

Before the onset of COVID-19, eligibility was determined by a combined family income of under RM1,500 per month. However, due to the impact of the pandemic, families with a combined income within the range of RM2,500 per month are now eligible to apply.

Between 2017 and 2022, some 38,954 individuals benefitted from the diverse range of ASSISS initiatives. ASSISS affirms its commitment to ensuring that every recipient receives an equivalent standard of care and medication as its paying clientele.

SFA to form a medical team

CHERAS: A one-day CPR, First Aid and AED (automated external defibrillator) course was held at the Church of St Francis of Assisi (SFA) August 5. Twenty-two parishioners and two participants from the Church of the Visitation took part.

Organised by the Security and Safety team of the parish, this training programme was part of the plan to form a medical team for the weekend Masses.

The training provided key information and practical knowledge on First Aid and CPR. The trainers from the St John's Ambulance of Malaysia, led by the dynamic V.S. Maniam and Sgt Peter, showed great patience, commitment and skill in delivering the course content.

(Rtd) Major R S Joseph, the head of the Security and Safety team, was encouraged by the attendance. He explained that the plan was to have at least four persons on duty during each of the Masses. He will be working with the various language groups for their support.

He explained that those who attended received a certificate of participation. For accreditation purposes, they will need to attend a three-day course which is being planned for next year.



Participants performing CPR on the manikins.

Sacred music and the liturgy are intertwined

SETAPAK, Kuala Lumpur: A formation to unite the different language choirs from the Church of the Good Shepherd was organised August 5.

It was also to foster spiritual growth within the ministry and facilitate our journey toward greater spiritual development.

After starting the day with a Praise and Worship session, the first speaker was David Michael from the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist. David's topic was *Appreciating Liturgy through the Lens of Sacred Music*. He said to appreciate sacred music, we have to appreciate the Liturgy first. David briefed the participants on the history and talked about the origins of music becoming a part of the Catholic Church. He said that it is the work of God and through it, we are made holy.

David carried out an exercise for the participants whereby he asked them to "picture yourselves singing in front of the Cross at Calvary, with the crucified Christ before you and all participants of the heavenly liturgy around you. Now if the music doesn't seem right in that situation, it's probably not fit for Holy Mass."

In conclusion, David said music is the medium through which, we as Church musicians, "communicate" a sense of holi-



The choirs from the different languages with the presenters.

ness to the congregation, and so the music we choose must communicate that understanding.

Next was an interactive presentation by Mark Nathaniel from the Church of St Francis of Assisi. He began with a warm-up that required listening to one another to be able to sing it, and also listening for variations and clapping on certain points during the warm-up to train coordination.

Mark emphasised the profound role that music plays in enhancing the Mass and fostering a conducive environment for prayer.

He showed how vital it is to understand each other as choir members. He highlighted the need to practise, and that members must

be committed and consistent in attending practices. He shared tips on how to take care of our voices before singing.

Mark highlighted the significance of communal prayer before singing at Mass. We also learned a Canon with only the word 'Jesus.' Since it was a Canon, the groups started the Canon on different points and eventually harmonised with each other. This could only be accomplished by listening to one another.

He commended the parish for its united community, with all language choirs coming together. He encouraged everyone to always come and sing together as one unity choir, whenever the opportunity arose.

In closing, Mark said that liturgical music

is not about mere notes and melodies but about a seamless unity of voices and instruments that contribute to a deeper sense of worship. In listening to one another, musicians create an atmosphere where the congregation can be fully engaged in prayer and praise. Ultimately, the speaker's words resonate as a call to be instruments of unity, guiding the faithful towards a profound encounter with the divine during Mass.

The choir members expressed gratitude to David and Mark for their insightful sharing. "We believe with God's spirit in us, we can do all things through Him and sing with all our hearts for the Glory of God." — **By Daphne Forbes**

First Retrouvaille Asian gathering

By Francis and Angeline Chang

KUALA LUMPUR: The first gathering of team coordinators of the Retrouvaille Communities of Asia was held in Mumbai, India from July 21 to 23, with the theme *Building Unity in Relationships*. It was about Ephesians 4:1-16 which reminds us that we are all part of the body of Christ and to respond to our calling to serve with humility and gentleness, patience, bearing with one another in love, and making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit.

This meeting was to discuss the prospects and development of Retrouvaille in Asia besides discerning for a Support and Development Asia team to create a regional coordination of the Asian region. During the meeting, Aubrey and Alzira Menezes, with Fr Cajetan Menezes, were discerned as the first Team Support and Development Asia effective Aug 1, 2023 until July 31, 2026.

The Support and Development team will also bring the concerns of the Asian communities to the Retrouvaille International Board and encourage deeper collaboration between the coordinators and the communities of Retrouvaille in Asia, in addition to continuing

efforts of expansion into new areas. The need for Retrouvaille as a lifeline for hurting marriages continues today as divorce still devastates about 50 per cent of marriages. As an international community of disciples committed to the healing of their marriages, empowered by the Holy Spirit, we need to bring to others the good news that a healed couple leads to a healed family, by spreading the healing ministry of Retrouvaille.

Present at the gathering were team coordinators from Mumbai, Bangalore, Goa and Kuala Lumpur. The event was chaired by the International Expansion and Development coordinators from Italy, Gianni and Denise Marucco. Representing Retrouvaille Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia was the coordinating couple, Francis and Angeline Chang and soon-to-be Retrouvaille presenting priest, Fr Edwin Peter. For those unable to attend in person, Retrouvaille International made a Zoom platform available for them to follow the proceedings online.

The Retrouvaille Experience is a Christian programme of Catholic origin that started in 1977 in Quebec, Canada to address the increasing number of married couples in difficulty. It led to a new type of healing ministry



Delegates of the First Retrouvaille Asian Gathering in Mumbai, India.

that has since spread around the world. The Retrouvaille vision states that every marriage “deserves the opportunity to survive, be healed and thrive as a covenant of life and love”.

Couples share their personal stories and how they work to overcome challenges in their relationships. It is a practical approach to improving communication between husbands and wives, and rediscovering their love for each other to strengthen their marriage.

Retrouvaille is a three-phase programme beginning with a weekend experience in which couples are helped to re-establish communication. The second important phase is a series of six follow-up sessions to expand on the

weekend concepts. The final phase is a small-group support meeting held periodically, called CORE (Continuing Our Retrouvaille Experience). It allows for a casual and supportive interaction with other couples who have attended the Retrouvaille programme. This periodic meeting continues to reinforce the communication tools learned on the weekend and it is a positive and welcoming space that allows couples to form strong and lasting bonds as they continue to heal their marriages.

For more information on the next Retrouvaille Weekend in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, kindly email: retrouvaille@archkl.org

PIHD day attracts many new members



Visitation PIHD members discuss their challenges during the group session.

SEREMBAN: This year commemorates the 24th anniversary since the Parish Integral Human Development (PIHD) Ministry began at the Church of the Visitation. The parish held a PIHD Day to create further awareness and recruit new members on August 12 and 13.

Headed by John Davidson, there are seven sub-ministries under PIHD: the Ministry of the Poor, Women's Ministry, the Orang Asli Ministry, the Prison Ministry, the Society of St Vincent De Paul, the Migrant Ministry and the Recycling Ministry.

Each ministry set up booths, and their respective members were present to deliver presentations about their ministries. The members were pleasantly surprised to find many parishioners registering to join the PIHD Ministry. Students

from the catechism classes also visited these booths.

The team from the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur's Office for Human Development (AOHD) also stopped by to support the event.

After lunch, there was a roadshow in the church hall during which AOHD director Dr Gary Liew presented the structure of their organisation. Also present was parish priest, Fr Xavier Andrew.

Following that session, the attendees were subdivided into three groups to discuss and gain insight into the requirements and challenges within the different ministries present in the parish. Undoubtedly, it turned out to be a productive and significant session. — By **Sabrina Smith**

Letters to Editor

Dear Editor,

The Superior General of the Infant Jesus Congregation, Sr Brigitte Flourez, and the Asian representative of the General Council, Sr Jane Sinprayoon, were present at a July 5–7 meeting of IJ Sisters, the second of four held in Sitiawan, Bukit Mertajam, Cheras and Melaka. This report is on the meeting held in Bukit Mertajam for the Sisters in Waterfall, Bukit Mertajam and Convent Light Street.

The agenda focused on the lived reality “... on a new path.” articulated at the last General Chapter held in 2019 against the backdrop of today's realities in the Province, ageing, deepening of IJ spirituality, Governance and national/global challenges. We held up the mirror of these realities to our personal lives, community living and witnessing.

What do we see as baggage weighing us down, blurring our vision and addictions (even in spiritual devotions) leading us down the path of secularism, consumerism, vain glory.

Who or what is driving our life? Social media on our handphone such as X, Instagram, Facebook! In the name of mission, commitment to community living is reduced to minimum communication, paltry sharing/bonding. The community is ‘out there’ and not here where we vowed ‘to live in an apostolic community by the vows of Obedience,

IJs (Sisters of the Infant Jesus) on a new path



The Sisters at the Regional Assembly in Bukit Mertajam.

Poverty and Chastity (BI pg 53 No. 69).

Retirement is society's way of saying ‘your work is over, goodbye.’ As religious, our mission continues even as we move from validation in activity (independence) to physical inactivity (dependence) fidelity continues, calling US to new expressions of love.

Pope Francis, at age 87, still tends to his 1.3 billion flock across the world, now on a wheel chair, canonising young saints, creating new cardinals, especially from non-European countries. So, who are we to retire from our journey with our spouse?

In synodal style, the organisation chart of our Province includes lay partners from the corporate world, NGOs, alumni of our

Convents. Noticeably males are included, walking TOGETHER on the new path of leadership for service; personal gifts/skills are shared. The governance style we inherited and were shaped in, in our personal/community life lead us to question and fear the new.

The small group of Sisters under the age of 70 articulate dreams that confront those in the upper bracket of age. Rebranding from a comfortable past to the birth pangs of a new world order, we look to the Word of God.

At our morning prayer, we revisited Noah who built the ark when it was not the rainy season, Job was a millionaire turned pauper then became a millionaire again, John the Baptist trumpeted a new path to salvation

and the woman who touched the hem of the Saviour's robe and was healed. Faith — Trust — Christ yesterday, Christ today and Christ the abiding presence.

The second Vatican Council, pastoral conventions, the encyclicals of Pope Francis, MRA (Malaysian Religious Assembly) and the ongoing journey towards a synodal Church chart new paths for the people of God. Particularly relevant to our reflection is the quality of our community living. Our works reflect the authenticity of the One who called us to this way of evangelical life and accompanies us from the old to the new.

New paths already taken by us IJ Sisters in Malaysia may be seen in the movement from formal to informal education, convents identified with buildings to now, where Sisters are, lay collaboration not an option but a necessity, not “our property” but the patrimony of the poor, accountability at all levels of governance.

Fast forward today, *quo vadis*, events take us to where we may not want to go (Jn":21:18...) but go we must along “the road less travelled” (M Scott Peck), not to Emmaus but back to Jerusalem where it all began. For us, not to baby Jesus but to Christ on the cross and not to the empty tomb but to the Son seated at the right hand of the Father.

Sr Anne Wong, IJS
Via Email



Send your letters to ► letterseditor@herald.com.my

The Editor, HERALD, 5 Jalan Robertson, 50150 KL. Please include your name and address. Letters without name and address will not be entertained.

Peruvian bishops decry approval of abortion for 11-year-old



The bishops of Peru are urging civil authorities and healthcare personnel to uphold the culture of life and not "open the doors to the culture of death".

LIMA: The Catholic bishops of Peru have raised their voices in defence of life after a medical board approved an abortion for an 11-year-old girl.

In a press release, the Peruvian Bishops Conference upheld the Church's teaching of the right to life for unborn children and the rights of the child's mother.

"Faced with this act of injustice and violation of the right to life of an unborn child, we raise our voices in rejection of this unjust and indolent act," said the bishops.

They add that "the constant teaching of the Church, in these cases, is always to safeguard the right to life of both" mother and child.

A medical board in the Peruvian region of Loreto had ruled that a so-called "thera-

peutic abortion" was not applicable, since it did not meet the necessary conditions, such as the danger of death or permanent damage to the pregnant mother.

However, another medical board in Lima overruled this decision and approved the abortion.

In response, Peru's bishops insisted that life is "an absolute and inalienable right, because it is a divine gift, which God asks us to safeguard, as the fifth Commandment states: 'You shall not kill' (Ex 20:13)."

The bishops pointed out that Peru's Constitution and the Peruvian Code for Children and Adolescents says: "Every human being is considered a child from conception to the age of twelve... The State has the duty to protect the conceived child".

On this basis, the bishops affirm the government's obligation — including the Ministry of Health — to employ modern obstetric resources to protect the life of the pregnant mother and the unborn child.

They lament that "for some years now, there has been a sustained and growing pressure to decriminalise abortion."

The bishops go on to urge civil authorities and healthcare personnel to uphold the culture of life and not "open the doors to the culture of death".

Finally, Peru's bishops appeal that "little 'Mila' be adequately cared for, that she may be helped to heal from the wounds of rape, that she not be subjected to an abortion, and that the rapist be prosecuted to the full extent of the law and new abuses are avoided." — *Vatican News*

Pope Francis merges two dioceses in Japan

VATICAN: Pope Francis has merged the Diocese of Takamatsu with the Metropolitan Archdiocese of Osaka in Japan.

Cardinal Thomas Aquino Manyo Maeda, Archbishop of Osaka since 2014, was named on August 15 as the first archbishop of the new Archdiocese of Osaka-Takamatsu. The last bishop of the Diocese of Takamatsu, John Eijiro Suwa, died in 2022.

The two territories are on different islands: Takamatsu is on Japan's Shikoku Island while Osaka is on Honshu. They are connected by water through the Osaka Bay and the Seto Inland Sea or by land crossing Awaji Island, already part of the territory of the former Archdiocese of Osaka.

The new archdiocese has just 51,413 Catholics, less than a third of one per cent of the area's 19 million inhabitants.

The total population of the Archdiocese of Osaka has remained mostly steady over the past 20 years, while the number of inhabit-

ants of the Diocese of Takamatsu declined nine per cent from 2000 to 2020.

The number of Catholics in the Diocese of Takamatsu declined by four per cent and the number of priests almost halved over the same period.

The Catholic Church in Japan has 15 dioceses. According to the latest available Vatican statistics, Catholics make up just 0.5 per cent of the population in the largely secular country. Approximately half of these Catholics are foreign nationals let into the country as temporary workers in unskilled jobs.

During a visit to Japan in 2019, Pope Francis said the Church's small size "must not diminish your commitment to evangelisation."

"The starting point for every apostolate is the concrete place in which people find themselves, with their daily routines and occupations, not in artificial places," he told the country's bishops. — **By Hannah Brockhaus, CNA**

Christian institutes stress need to highlight religions' positive aspects



Scholars, experts, heads of institutions, authors, thinkers, research scholars and students participate at the Religion and Society in India seminar.

BENGALURU: The first meeting of Christian institutes of higher education — religious and secular — has stressed highlighting the positive aspects of religions to foster communal harmony and peace in India.

This is necessary in a country like India which, though secular in fabric, embraces all religions culturally and traditionally, concluded the August 7-8 seminar on "Religion and Society in India: Contemporary Multidisciplinary Explorations."

About 165 scholars, experts, heads of institutions, authors, thinkers, research scholars and students attended the event at the National Biblical Catechetical and Liturgical Centre (NBCLC) in Bengaluru, southern India.

The programme was jointly organised by 10 different higher educational and research institutions seeking to discover the meaning of religion and society and to explore contemporary relevance, adopting a multi-disciplinary approach, said Nysson Luka, the programme coordinator at NBCLC.

The participating institutes were Christ University, St Joseph's University, Sampurna Montfort College, United Theological College, Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, Kristu Jyoti College, St Peter's Pontifical Institute, Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, and St Joseph's College of Commerce.

"This conglomeration is a first of its kind

that has brought together institutes of higher education, both religious and secular, seminaries, theological colleges and centres," Luka explained.

The seminar aimed to promote religious harmony, study the prospects and challenges from multiple perspectives, and open new vistas of learning in the present context of the nation, he added.

Speakers included noted Asian theologian Fr Felix Wilfred, who addressed the topic, *Relating Cultures and Religions-Some Salient Perspectives*.

Another speaker, Ruby Sain, Emeritus professor in the Department of Sociology at Adamas University, spoke on *Study of Religion and Society in India: Status, Prospects and Challenges*.

Madras University professor V D Swaminathan addressed *Religion and Psychology: Exploring the Interface*, while Y T Vinayraj, director of the Bengaluru-based Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society handled, *Philosophy and Religion — Taking a Cue from Ambedkar*.

Additionally, 17 other research papers were also presented, followed by discussions.

The participants stressed the need to make public the positive aspects of religion in a country like India which, though secular in fabric, embraces all religions culturally and traditionally. "This will help uphold peace in society," they said. — *Matters India*



The Seto Inland Sea is the body of water separating Honshū, Shikoku, and Kyūshū, three of the four main islands of Japan. (Shutterstock)

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Season of Creation

PROTEC 4: Cut Fuel Consumption



The Season of Creation is the annual Christian celebration to pray and respond together to the cry of Creation: the ecumenical family around the world unites to listen and care for our common home.

It begins September 1, the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, and ends on October 4, the Feast of St Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of ecology beloved by many Christian denominations.

This year's theme is *Let Justice and Peace Flow*. The hope of keeping average temperature increases to 1.5 degrees Celsius is fading. The futures of young people are threatened by the cascading impacts of the loss of biodiversity and a changing climate.

Our prayers, sermons and liturgies must call for justice not only for humans but for all Creation. Justice, allied with peace, calls us to repent of our ecological sins and to change our attitudes and actions. Righteousness demands that we live in peace, not conflict with our human neighbours, and building right relationships with all of Creation.

Our individual actions during the Season of Creation are important. We must also recognise that, for a mighty movement of justice, individual actions are not enough.

Justice also includes paying historic debts. At a global level, nations with power and wealth have a duty to deal justly and honestly with communities that suffer most from the climate and ecological crises. Go to: <https://seasonofcreation.org/> for more information.

In Malaysia, besides the Season of Creation, the Episcopal Commission for Creation Justice Commission of Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei (ECCJ-MSB) going one-step further, launched a nationwide Protec Our Earth, Protect Our Children (PROTEC) Campaign in 2020 which carries a new theme each year.

This year's theme, *Cut Fuel Consumption* will be launched on August 31 at the Cathedral of St Joseph in Miri, Sarawak.

During the recent regional conference of bishops' meeting all nine Malaysian bishops signed pledges to make their dioceses ecological dioceses.

Bishop Joseph Hii, President EC-CJ-MSB said that this event was particularly meaningful.

The pledge was signed in the form of a certificate with several appendices listing out the ecological diocese protocols in detail with accompanying Ecological Parish Protocols, self-monitoring forms and other supporting documents to help each diocese and parish make the transition towards becoming fully ecological.

Below are some of the activities and recommendations by the Peninsular Malaysia Arch/Dioceses.



Kuala Lumpur Archdiocese

Parish level activities

1. Parishioners are encouraged to car pool to church/Sunday Mass/BEC gatherings.
2. Adopt e-meetings to replace physical whenever possible.
3. Set air-conditioner temperatures to optimise usage - around 26 degrees with a few fans to aid circulation.
4. Share LRT routes, bus timetables to promote public transport.

Archdiocese level activities

1. Encourage usage of coaches/public transport.
2. Adopt E-meetings/reduce the frequency of physical meetings.
3. Optimise air-conditioning usage and opt for fans when available.
4. Remote work.
5. Fuel efficient vehicle.
6. Reduce idling.
7. Cut down usage of leaf blower.

"PROTECT OUR EARTH, PROTECT OUR CHILDREN" CAMPAIGN

THEME FOR YEAR 4 (1ST SEP, 2023 TO 31ST AUG 2024)

"Cut Fuel Consumption"



By implementing all or most of these steps and by making conscious choices, we can contribute to cutting fuel consumption and reducing the environmental impact. Let's remember that even small changes can make a significant difference when adopted collectively by individuals and communities.

Malacca Johore Diocese

For the whole month, there will be weekly messages in the parish bulletins and social media to encourage people to care for creation.

The Diocesan Creation Justice commis-

sion in collaboration with Caritas MJD will be organising a **Pre-loved good bazaar** on September 3 from 2.00-5.00pm at Dewan Serbaguna Jalan Sungai Pengkalan Nelayan, Kampung Pasir Gudang Baru.



Two-part webinar series with the objective to Building Resilient, Low-Carbon Communities

Come and learn how we can build resilience and pursue low-carbon pathways to safeguard our Earth, our communities and our children from the threats of climate change.

Session 1: Introduction to Community Resilience to Climate Change

September 20 at 8.00pm
bit.ly/45dYSOC

Session 2: Energy Conservation, Renewable Energy, Energy Efficiency – Catholic response

October 11 at 8.00pm
bit.ly/3qzeuNK

Building Low-Carbon Communities Seminar

The effects of climate change are already impacting Malaysia, with hot days above 32°C becoming the 'new normal' along with more frequent and intense rain and floods.. Pope Francis asks us to consider "What kind of world do you want to leave to those who come after us?" (LS 160).

Creation Justice Commission of MJD is organising a seminar on
Date: September 30
Time: 12.15pm – 4.30pm
Venue: Good Shepherd Seminary

Come and learn how we can pursue low-carbon pathways to safeguard our Earth, our communities and our children from the threats of climate change.

Go to bit.ly/3qzeuNK to register for the workshop or WhatsApp Maria Lee: 012-7092163.

Penang State

The Creation Justice Commission of Penang State is elated to commemorate this special time through a series of events slated for September. The theme, *Let Justice and Peace Flow*, resonates deeply as we strive to unite people of various faiths in a collective effort to care for our shared home. Beyond the bounds of the Catholic community, this season aims to embrace our Christian brethren and sisters, as well as individuals from diverse faith backgrounds.

September 1

Church of the Risen Christ in Ayer Itam, in collaboration with Caritas Penang, initiates the season with a Prayer and Contemplation session.

September 1 – October 4

Cathedral of the Holy Spirit launches both the Season of Creation and the fourth year of the PROTEC "Cut Fuel Consumption", underscores the urgent need for decarbonisation to mitigate the planet's rising temperatures.

The **Minor Basilica of St Anne** promotes the "Bring Your Own Container" initiative throughout the season, culminating in a lucky draw at the season's close.

September 3 – Interfaith and Ecology

This event brings together representatives from various faiths, including Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, and Taoism. Each faith will offer their perspective on the crucial importance to care for the environment within their belief systems. Additionally, a representative from the Penang Green Council will present a logical perspective on the significance of environmental care for a sustainable tomorrow. You can find more details about this event on the Penang Diocese Website and the Harmonico website (www.harmonico.my/celebration-23#).

September 5

The **Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary** in Butterworth focuses on the

theme of *Laudato Si'* during their Feast Day Novena.

September 23 – Ecumenical Solidarity

Embracing the spirit of ecumenism, an ecological event is planned for September 23rd at the Methodist College Penang, joined by Methodist, Baptist, and Anglican congregations. This event features a forum on "The Importance of Ecological Living from a Christian Perspective", alongside worship sessions, an ecology exhibition, and workshops that celebrate God's gift of the Earth.

September 30 – Ecology Retreat

This journey culminates with a retreat of silence and reflection under the guidance of Sr. Mercie Lai, FMDM, at the serene Garden of Bethlehem within the Minor Basilica of St Anne. It is in silence that we often encounter God's presence, much like the account in 1 Kings 19:11-12, where God is found not in the cacophony of natural elements but in the stillness.





Young men praying. (The Catholic Weekly/Giovanni Portelli Photography)

Sydney's a Church of millennials

As hundreds of Sydney pilgrims concluded their World Youth Day adventure, a new analysis has shown the Archdiocese of Sydney is unique among Australia's metropolitan sees for having retained Millennial and Gen Z adults.

The National Centre for Pastoral Research's Sydney Diocesan Profile, an analysis of the 2021 census data released recently, has shown that despite an overall ageing of

the Church in Australia, Sydney's share of young adults is several percentage points higher than the national average.

Sydney's 30-39-year-old cohort — the bulk of the Millennial generation — sits at 14 per cent of the total Catholic population of the archdiocese, two percentage points higher than the national average and only half a percent lower than the previous census, five years earlier.

The archdiocese's share of 20-29-year olds also sits higher than the national average, at 12.5 compared to 10.5 per cent.

The Sydney figures buck the national trend that has seen a collapse in affiliation between ages 19 and 50, leading to a median age of 40 compared to the national median of 43.

The Diocese of Parramatta is likewise tracking younger, at a median age of 39, with above-average numbers of children and teenagers under age 19, but fewer young adults.

According to the diocesan profile, Sydney's 590,175 Catholics make up 22.9 per cent of our city's population of 2.58 million, higher than the national average of 20 per cent.

We are also increasingly a Church of migrants, with 36 per cent of Sydney Catholics born overseas — 229,474, and the lion's share of those from non-English speaking countries. The top five countries for overseas-born Catholics are the Philippines, Italy,

Iraq, Vietnam and Lebanon; recent arrivals are most likely to come from Latin America, especially Colombia and Brazil.

Daniel Ang, the director of the Sydney Centre for Evangelisation, was encouraged by the strong presence of young adults in the Sydney diocesan profile. "It is heartening to see a slightly stronger affiliation with the Catholic faith in Sydney among this cohort (19-40-year olds) compared to the national average," he said.

"It's a period of life in which many people are discerning vocation and making life commitments, having families and when faith can be introduced to the next generation. The challenge of evangelisation is to enable this religious affiliation to be nourished by — and express — living, personal and sacramental faith, an invitation which our universities, parishes and local communities can extend to these critical generations," said Ang.

By Adam Wesselinoff, *The Catholic Weekly*

If the synod isn't a parliament, voting should be dropped

Pope Francis keeps repeating that the upcoming synod is not a parliament. For him, the synod is not a forum for competing positions to debate each other with a goal of developing new policies or effecting structural changes in the Church.

Similarly, when Pope John XXIII convoked the Second Vatican Council in 1962, he did not envision that the council would deal with doctrinal matters or revamp church structures. Both popes centred their attention on identity and mission.

The question of identity means that we reclaim who we are as a people walking together with the Lord on the road of history. Then, drawing from that identity, we reclaim our mission or holy purpose, in the words of John XXIII, "of bringing the modern world into contact with the vivifying and perennial energies of the Gospel."

Both the Second Vatican Council and the synod on synodality are about learning to be the Church that God wants us to be, for the sake of the world that desperately needs healing and transformation.

The direction that Francis has set for the synod makes sense. It is a right direction and an exciting one as well. And it is definitely not a parliamentary process, as we would ordinarily understand that. But there is a problem, a big one in my estimation.

When the participants for the synod were announced recently, they were identified as voting or nonvoting, based on whether they will be part of the group that votes on the final document at the end of the process in October 2024. So, it appears that voting will be a part of the synod process and perhaps — even as many people anticipate the synod — an important one.

But be aware of what voting suggests. It almost inevitably means moving into a default mode of a parliamentary-like process. Different points of view will be represented and then debated and voted upon. Not everyone will get their way, but in democratic fashion the majority will hold sway.

All this leads us back to the nature of the synod process. If voting is an essential part of the synod gathering, it will shape that gathering as a parliamentary process.

The synod need not inevitably move to a parliamentary model. There is another way that I would suggest. First, however, let me explain why I think the parliamentary model with voting is such a bad idea.

We ought to take a cue from our ecumenical sisters and brothers. Recently, when other Christian churches and communities have come together to discuss and debate issues, especially hot-button ones like gender and sexuality, they have found themselves dramatically divided. These gatherings meant to foster unity and bridge divisions have led to even greater fissures.

I would suggest that this happened because these communities had missed a previous and essential step — learning how to be a synodal church, precisely the point of Francis' call for synods on synodality.

Once we have a deep sense of ourselves as the body of Christ prompted by the Spirit to carry on the Lord's mission in the world, then we can take up the issues that bedevil us. Our dialogue at that point is not about promoting our point of view — hoping to persuade and prevail — but rather, creating an environment that is favourable to detecting what God wants of us in this moment. In other words, we ought to be on track not to debate but to discern.

Permit me to illustrate another possible way — beyond the parliamentary model — for us to come together in the synod. I am drawing from a recent experience I had of social dialogue, as envisioned in "Laudato Si", on *Care for Our Common Home* and *Fratelli Tutti*, but in a predominantly secular context: a gathering with the theme, *The Future of Work in Chicago's Hospitality Industry*.

A press release for the event was titled *Unlikely Allies Talk Future of Work in Chicago's Hospitality Industry*. The first paragraph gives a good sense of the gathering as well as the diversity of the participants:

Local and international leaders from the faith community, labour, the hospitality and

tourism industry, community-based organisations, academia, the hospitality workforce, and government gathered at Mercy Home for Boys and Girls to discuss the challenges facing Chicago's hospitality industry and develop a shared vision for the future on June 13.

It was an extraordinary assembly. As you read the list of participating groups and individuals, you can easily imagine them fiercely debating issues, especially surrounding questions of labour and management, compensation and safety, and the need for profits and value for stockholders.

In fact, there was no debate. It was a much different process. The dialogue and conversation centred on establishing basic and shared values. Participants drew on their experience to identify what they held as precious.

Of course, there were different values in play, but common elements also emerged that linked the humanity of the participants across their diverse situations. And those common elements could be a binding force as participants might step into a next dialogue around issues that involve policies and structures.

The tangible result of this daylong dialogue will be a statement of values that is under construction now and that can serve as a reference point for the future dialogue.

Let me be clear. There was no voting in this social dialogue. If anything, there was an evolving sense of common values. And this experience of social dialogue prompts me to think that a similar, although obviously somewhat different, path for the synod would be beneficial.

Could there be a final document after the two-year process that reflects a consensus statement (what everyone can "live with") of values and convictions? These values and convictions would then be brought back to the local Churches to be lived out in deliberate and intentional ways.

With time and continuing prayerful reflection,



An electronic voting device is used by a participant during the Synod of Bishops for the Middle East at the Vatican in 2010. (CNS/Catholic Press Photo/Alessia Giuliani)

tion, this process could lead to serene discernment and greater clarity and perhaps even to some specific structural and organisational directions.

If voting had been a part of the hospitality industry social dialogue, the results would have been much different. There would have been winners and losers. This idea or policy might hold sway, but there would have also been degrees of alienation and a felt lack of ownership. Finally, we would have lost a foundation for grappling positively and productively with the complex issues that remain and will need to be addressed.

Yes, the synod is not a parliament. And if that is true, then voting should be dropped from the process. When and if that happens, participants will sense a great freedom.

They will pay attention to their identity and mission and so learn how to be a synodal Church. They will have a firm foundation for the future for dealing with the issues and concerns that matter to the Church, not through the lens of their own positions but with spirits open to what the Lord has in mind for us.

By Louis J. Cameli, NCR

Fr Louis Cameli is Cardinal Blase Cupich's delegate for formation and mission. He has authored a number of books on theology and spirituality.

We ought to be on track not to debate but to discern.

Could there be a final document after the two-year process that reflects a consensus statement (what everyone can 'live with') of values and convictions?



REMINISCING CHURCH

Richard Chia

I remember a speech delivered by Fr Michael Chua at the Third Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Convention III (PMPC III) in 2006 at the Federal Hotel, Kuala Lumpur. In his speech, after three days of dialogue participated by 515 people comprising clergy, religious and laity, he summed up by asking the participants if anyone would step forward to volunteer to take up any of the items on the wish-list they had prepared to see the Catholic Church do. Silence. He then said, “The Church needs not just people who are able, but also people who are available.”

Today, 17 years on, at the many parish synodal processes and at the many parish pastoral assemblies (PPAs), the number of wish-lists has not reduced. Perhaps today, in the context of the digital age and social media communication, the issues are amplified. More people are aware and more are putting forward their requirements for the Church.

At the heart of all these remains the same issue — who will be tasked, or willing, to carry out or implement any of these actions? Fr Michael’s words remain true today. The Church needs people who are able and available to volunteer to serve and to commit to its fulfilment. What more, as Church, we are asked to serve with love, care and compassion.

Looking at the current realities, there are an estimated 1.17 million Catholics in Malaysia, according to *UCANews* estimates.

According to the pre-COVID-19 pandemic Catholic Directory and Ordo 2019, the estimated total number of Catholic clergy in Malaysia stood at 323 and total number of religious at 585 for the three archdioceses and six dioceses in Malaysia. Given that many changes occurred in the past four years — those who are deceased, retired or newly ordained — we can loosely say the ratio of clergy to laity is 1: 3,441. In simple terms, it means one priest serves 3,440 Catholics in Malaysia. This would be the corporate world equivalent of a CEO managing a mid to large corporation spread geographically. It is no surprise our Holy Father Pope Francis in his speech in Latin America last year said “Seminaries don’t form supermen” (*HERALD*, Nov 20, 2022).

In the Gospel of Matthew 9:37-38, Jesus said to His disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His harvest”. The same is said today, except that we cannot simply pray and hope that God will send down workers from Heaven. It is not as if the bishops have a closet full of priests whom they can despatch whenever required to do so.

Each year on Vocation Sunday, and during novena prayers, we invoke the prayer for vocations. We ask God to touch the hearts and minds of young people to respond to the call of vocation to the priesthood or religious life. In my younger days, when I was part of Fr Joseph Fung SJ’s vocation promotions team, we created catchy music, lyrics and flyers distributed to all the churches, aimed at attracting the

young people to consider the vocations to priesthood and religious life. I also remember telling my then parish priest, the late Fr John Hsiong, that it is time we do away with prayers and start distributing application forms to join the vocations to the priesthood or religious life.

Is this really the solution? Hoping that God miraculously increase the number of clergy and religious to His harvest on earth? In my opinion, No.

Let’s re-look another current reality. The Church in Malaysia already has many able and available people serving at various levels of the Church — in small groups or basic ecclesial communities, parish ministries, and even at diocese levels. These dedicated Catholics — volunteers, elected or appointed — are our real unsung heroes, serving with no fanfare or rewards. They are our catechists, our extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist, the hospitality ministers, the liturgical groups (choir, lectors, altar servers), those serving in the ministry of the poor, the sick, in prison, the homebound, and many more.

Coming back to Fr Michael Chua’s message, “the Church needs people who are able and available”. The Church does have a large pool of talented, skilled and experienced people, and they are mostly sitting in the church pews every Sunday. The many talents and skills in our churches contribute towards our diverse congregation. Whenever the church has one-off projects — church building projects, Lenten campaign, family day event, fund-raising, etc. — we are never short of volunteers.

However, the Church as a large struc-

tured organisation, experiences the same “pains” like most large corporations. It has its protocols, bureaucracy, rules and regulations to comply with. It has positions to fill, meetings to attend and documentations to complete. All these require people who are available to give their time. People who are able (the first category) aren’t usually the type who have spare time to give pro-bono and long-term services. This is where the Church turns to people who have time availability (the second category) — the retirees, students, homemakers, those in-between jobs, self-employed, etc.

Hence, the gap exists. People who are able do not have time to give long-term, hold positions and attend numerous church meetings regularly. People who are available, are glad to hold positions and attend meetings but lack the experience, skills and knowledge to plan and execute in accordance to expectations. Today’s consumer world treats the Church as a provider, while the congregation are its customers. Customers need to be satisfied and need to feel they are given quality services.

Perhaps if everyone takes responsibility for a small-bite of the task at hand, collectively the many issues may reduce, if not be resolved. In the process of doing so, the spirit of community, spirituality and love will grow, and the Church will be more vibrant.

Richard Chia has been actively involved in Church since young. He held full-time corporate jobs while serving in ministries and groups at various church levels for the past four decades.

Basic ecclesial communities in Brazil show signs of revival

Once a powerful force in the Brazilian Church (and in Latin America as a whole), the basic ecclesial communities — known as CEBs in Portuguese and Spanish — saw a continuous decline in the country since the 1990s. Now, with Pope Francis’ support and a fresh interest from the younger generation, their members want to grow again.

Recently, some 1,000 CEBs leaders from all parts of Brazil gathered in Rondonópolis, Mato Grosso state, for a national encounter, in which they discussed the most pressing issues in the nation — from deforestation in the Amazon to unemployment — and set up a strategy for the next few years. The need to bring more young Catholics to join them was a central element in the debates.

CEBs and Liberation Theology

The first CEBs began to grow strong in Brazil in the 1970s, when a military junta ruled the country and suppressed the people’s basic rights. In rural and urban communities, peasants and poor workers would form small groups to read the Bible together and discuss their problems.

Those little clusters were frequently accompanied by priests and nuns driven by the reformist spirit of the Second Vatican Council. The CEBs would play a central role in numerous communities all over Brazil, not only inspiring a direct participation of Catholics in Church life but also encouraging them to organise and act to improve their living conditions.

Liberation Theology was the theoretical counterpart of the CEBs from the start. With the fierce persecution that many liberation theologians suffered in the 1980s — including Leonardo Boff, the most notorious of such thinkers, who was silenced for a whole year by then Cardinal Joseph

Ratzinger and ended up leaving the priesthood in 1992 — the CEBs ended up losing their vigour as well.

“Attacks on Liberation theology were attacks on the CEBs. That process was very strong during the papacies of John Paul II and Benedict XVI,” affirmed Celso Carias, a professor of theology at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro and a long-time CEBs leader.

Clericalism and lack of democracy

At the same time, the Church became more and more centralised in Brazil, with the clergy taking control of most of the parish life, Carias said.

“The community, which used to be central when the CEBs were strong, was gradually driven away from the decision-making spaces of the parishes,” he said. The separation between faith and concrete life was motivated, and the kind of spirituality directly connected to social causes stimulated by the CEBs was combated.

At the peak of the CEBs’ presence in the Brazilian Church, they numbered at least 50,000, Carias said. Now, he estimates there are around 20,000 of them.

He does not consider that the CEBs will recover their relevance in the Brazilian Church in the next few years. “We have to make a daily effort in our dioceses to rebuild the CEBs, despite the resistance we will face. But we have a great ally in Pope Francis,” Carias said.

Pope Francis and the outgoing Church

Indeed, the Pope is frequently mentioned by the CEBs leaders as an important supporter. During the recent encounter, he sent

a video to motivate the CEBs members in which he urged them to keep working for an outgoing Church.

“The Church is like water. If the water in the river does not flow, it stagnates and becomes unhealthy. When the Church goes out [to meet the world], it walks and it feels stronger,” Pope Francis told the CEBs activists in his message.

Bishop Luiz Fernando Lisboa of Cachoeiro do Itapemirim, in Espírito Santo state, was one of the 50 members of the Brazilian episcopate who attended the gathering in Rondonópolis. He celebrated the fact that so many bishops and priests took part in the meeting, but emphasised that “there is a huge resistance among many in the Church to accept the CEBs model.”

“Many people continue to prefer a closed Church, a Church that only looks to itself. We have many barriers to overcome,” he told *La Croix International*. One of the ways to do so, he argued, is to keep working side by side with popular movements and community organisations. “Pope Francis already had four meetings with popular movements. After learning about their needs, he created the slogan land, housing, and shelter. We need to follow his way,” Lisboa added.

A new beginning

In the meeting, there were members of Indigenous groups from different parts of Brazil. Some of them led the liturgy for one day.

“A person who was seeing the celebration by my side and was not an enthusiast of the CEBs was very moved with the Indigenous rite and told me that ‘only in a Church like that the Indigenous and other traditional peoples had a place’. It was a moment of conversion,” Lisboa said.

Marilza Schuina, one of the coordinators of the meeting, said that members of the Youth Pastoral Ministry from different regions were invited to plan the encounter, side by side with veteran CEBs leaders. “Our goal was to make an assembly that could be a milestone in the rebuilding of the CEBs. We brought community leaders and young Catholics that will work to reorganise them throughout the country,” Schuina said.

Young Catholics

One of them was Marcos Abraão, a 28-year-old Catholic activist from Santarém, in the Amazonian state of Pará. He was a member of the archdiocese’s Youth Pastoral Ministry for several years and, at the same time, played a role in his local CEB. “Since childhood I have been part of a CEB because my mother has always been a member too,” he told *La Croix International*.

His neighbourhood, called Esperança (hope), was formed in the 1970s after a seminary was built in the region. Families from the countryside and nearby cities that moved to Santarém would settle there. They soon realised that they would have to struggle for their right to sanitation and electricity. “A priest helped the families to organise and the CEB was created. It played a fundamental role in improving the living conditions in our neighbourhood,” he said.

Nowadays, Abraão leads the CEBs coordination in the Archdiocese of Santarém. He said that the participation of young Catholics in those communities has been “natural” in the city. “The younger generations will continue the work of the founders of the CEBs,” Abraão said. — **By Eduardo Campos Lima, LCI, (<https://international.la-croix.com/>)**

The late Tan Sri Clifford Francis Herbert

Awards and titles a responsibility, not a privilege



By Gwen Manickam

Our faith is part of who we are. It informs our values, which in turn underpins everything that we do, at home and at work. This does not mean that without our faith we would have no values, but it's not separable from the rest of us.

The late Tan Sri Clifford Francis Herbert is one individual who quietly embodied his Catholic faith at his diversified workplace through his words, thoughts, actions and ethical practices. Though it's been slightly more than three months since his passing, the distinguished civil servant and visionary leader — is still remembered for his legacy of service and dedication.

Rising above the challenges of a parentless childhood at the tender age of 10, Clifford relied on the support of his devoted sisters, who nurtured him and his late brother Llewelyn, through the hardships they faced together.

These early trials fuelled his willpower to

excel, a determination that shone brightly during his time at Victoria Institution Kuala Lumpur and eventually earned him a life-changing opportunity to pursue higher education at Universiti Malaya, thanks to the generosity of an individual whose kindness altered the trajectory of his life.

With a Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Economics, he embarked on a dedicated journey of public service, joining the Administrative and Diplomatic Service of the Civil Service in 1964. This initial step marked the beginning of a career that would see him ascend the ranks to reach the coveted position of Secretary General of the Treasury in the Ministry of Finance (MOF), a post he held from 1975 to 1997. Despite his impressive rise, he remained true to his humble origins, embodying humility, respect, and an unwavering commitment to public service. Tan Sri later obtained a Master's in Public Administration from the University of Pittsburgh, USA.

Dedicated to doing what is right

Colleagues who worked alongside him in the MOF described him as someone who always made time for everyone, no matter their ranking, treating them with dignity and respect.

His only daughter, Cherilyn Noelle said, "I was told anyone who knocked on his door, seeking favours, was seeking it from the wrong person. Our Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim remembers him as a 'good public officer' dedicated to serving his country and doing the right thing, even

when no one was looking. My father's strong principles deeply resonate with me. He often told me, "No matter the choices you make, you should always be able to sleep well on them". I remain ever so proud of my father for his accomplishments and many life lessons."

In a posting on Istana Negara's Facebook page, Their Majesties also expressed their sadness over Clifford's death and hoped that the family would be patient and persevere in facing this moment of grief.

"Their Majesties appreciate the service, deeds and contribution he made to the country," the posting read.

Significant contributions

Among his most significant contributions was his instrumental role as the Chairman of Kuala Lumpur International Airport Berhad, overseeing the construction of Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) from 1994 to 2000. This ambitious project, delivered on time and within budget, on June 27, 1998, showcased his dedication to serving Malaysia and its citizens. This achievement, however, was only one of many in a career marked by selflessness and impact.

"My mother, Puan Sri Coleen, fondly remembers how my father would finish work by 5.00pm, set off to KLIA while it was under construction, to check on the airport entirely till 9.00pm," shared Cherilyn.

During Tan Sri's tenure in the civil service, he was appointed as Alternate Gover-

nor to the World Bank, was instrumental in establishing the Securities Commission, and chaired the Kumpulan Wang Amanah Pencen.

In an article by *The Star* a few years ago, Tan Sri said, "I believe I served the Ministry to the best of my ability and earned the respect of the government and society. It took me 33 years to achieve success based on good, hard, and honest work and a firm commitment and dedication to serving the nation. This journey to success was not easy, as it depended not only on myself but also on the cooperation and goodwill of others. The road to success is often a slippery slope and requires all the qualities of an endurance race. There may be many pitfalls some of which may be beyond one's control.

"I consider my awards and titles a responsibility, not a privilege. My wife shares this view and we have been careful not to misuse our titles. As my wife and I do not come from families with business interests, it has been easier for us to have impressed our family members to exercise due care and responsibility."

After retiring from the civil service, he remained a force to be reckoned with in the private sector, assuming pivotal roles such as Executive Chairman of Percetakan Nasional Malaysia Berhad (PNMB), Vice-President of the FIDE Forum and the National Economic Association, various boards of RHB, AmBank, Chairman of Moët Hennessy, and Genting.

Involvement in charities, associations

Despite being kept busy with his commitments, he remained dedicated to supporting various charities and organisations including being the Chairman of the Board of Governors of Montfort Boys Town for 19 years (1995 – 2014), and a Trustee of the National Kidney Foundation (NKF). He was also involved in the Malaysian Economic Association, the La Salle Foundation, and the Yayasan Nanyang Press. He was a loyal Rotarian, forming many friendships and he was the dedicated Santa Claus of the Rotary Club of Damansara.

Montfort Boys Town director, Bro Robin Devasagayam said, "Tan Sri, as he was fondly called, was an expert advisor in the overall running of the institution. He supported all of Montfort's activities and made it a point to attend our functions. His presence was always affectionately felt.

"Tan Sri was also very influential in Montfort's correspondences with the Gov-



Tan Sri Clifford Francis Herbert presents a souvenir to Nerine Tan of the Berjaya Cares Foundation during the Sewing Room Project at Montfort Girls Centre.

ernment departments and ministries as he always had our students at heart. He prioritised the needs of the socially and economically disadvantaged youth in our care,

as well as the well-being of the Brothers, Sisters, and staff.

"He will always be remembered for his kind and humble nature, and his memory will live forever in our hearts."

On his Alma Mater's (Victoria Institution) 125th Anniversary Celebration Page on Facebook, Tan Sri was quoted as saying, when asked why he was involved in so many companies and associations, "According to my calculations, I am occupied for about 120 days in a year. I find this manageable and it keeps me occupied physically and intellectually. This is important to me as it would not be healthy to be idle.

"I subscribe to the principle that if I am invited to sit on a board or committee, I must have the time to perform and make a contribution. So far, I have been able to do this. As a company director, I am assessed for performance every year and so far, the assessments have been positive."

Devoted family man

Reflecting on his legacy, Cherilyn shared that his dedication to his work was only surpassed by his devotion to his family. Despite the demands of his commitments, he always put his loved ones first.

"Whilst my dad led an illustrious career admired by many, it was a hard life for him, growing up parentless. As such, he often taught me about life by sharing values he upheld very strongly. Growing up, he always impressed upon me the importance of maintaining his reputation. I only fully comprehended and realised much later in life, that my father worked tirelessly to serve his government, the Prime Minister, the King, and the nation, Malaysia. As such, in the civil service, many knew him as a man of integrity and dignity. He earned the respect of his government through his diligence and commitment, executing his duties with finesse and dedication," said Cherilyn.

As the memory of Tan Sri Clifford Francis Herbert lives on in the corridors of KLIA (pic below) and in the hearts of those he touched, the legacy of this distinguished civil servant continues to inspire generations to come. His life, marked by resilience, compassion, and an unwavering commitment to duty, serves as a guiding light for all who aspire to make a meaningful impact in their communities.



A group picture with some of the Montfort girls who will benefit from the Sewing Room project.

Fear not the 'green wave': Build a nation where everyone has a place



**SUNDAY
OBSERVER**

Anil Netto

Many voters in urban and semi-urban areas are worried about Perikatan Nasional's (PN) inroads in the recent elections in six states.

PN's rhetoric about the "three Rs" — race, religion and royalty — did not help.

The election outcome unnerved many among the minorities. They are now even more anxious about the tide of conservative Islamisation, apparently now at their doorstep.

After the elections, a viral WhatsApp message stoked more fear. The message said that changing demographic trends will marginalise the minorities even more.

Many among the minorities then wondered if there would be a place for them under the Malaysian sun in the next decade or two.

Such fear is not limited to Pakatan Harapan supporters.

On the flip side, some PN supporters are also worried. They worry that the ethnic minorities will one day take over not just the economy but the entire country as well. Some have been conditioned to believe they must vote in a certain way to safeguard their future.

This alarmist thinking on both sides of the political divide is unhelpful and counterproductive. It promotes fear and prompts us to view "the other" with suspicion.

Some analysts wonder if the PN gains were driven more by economic disenchantment, especially among young people who see little hope in the future. Many of them have to work long hours as lowly paid delivery personnel, ride-hailing drivers and factory workers to earn enough for basic needs.

This sense of discontent provides fertile ground for those who want to plant the seeds of divisiveness and fear.

But in reality, all this fear and suspicion is unnecessary.

Our nation is a blessed land. It has abundant fertile soil and conducive weather to grow food. It has plenty of sunshine, which can be turned into renewable energy, instead of relying on fossil fuels. Its waters are teeming with fish, which provides a source of natural protein.

The land is not overcrowded. Most people work hard for a living.

There are plenty of resources for everyone to share, if public funds — raised through progressive taxation — are fairly distributed and rampant corruption eliminated.

If people work hard — and if they are given the right opportunities — there is no reason why anyone should be left out.

Not enough university places for desired courses? Expand the number of seats available, build more universities and colleges!

The school system producing too many dropouts and unemployed youths? Revamp the education system, improve teacher training and provide more opportunities for vocational training!

The federal government can learn from how the Monfort Brothers have provided



skills training to countless youth from poor and broken homes.

Not only that, the Brothers have instilled values and morals among these youth as part of character formation and growth. They nurture the youth in self-awareness, leadership skills, self-esteem and relevant life skills.

The youth are trained to become machinists, hospitality industry workers, bakery and pastry chefs, electrical technicians, automobile mechanics and workshop supervisors, and facilities maintenance workers.

This is a land of enormous human potential. The "unity government" must tap into the potential in each one of us — irrespective of age, ethnicity, religion and geographical location.

While we are at it, consider too the foreign nationals, stateless people, refugees and asylum seekers living among us. For many of them, this is their home too. Allow them to live decent lives, receive a proper education and earn a decent living. If their full potential is tapped, they too can contribute enormously to the nation. They can provide vital trade and export links to their original countries.

Like them, many of our ancestors were in

their position at one time.

Our challenge is to reach out to "the other" and break down the walls of fear, prejudice and suspicion.

Malaysia is a land of milk and honey, it can be a beacon in a troubled world if we can harness the potential of each one of us to build a genuine "Madani" (Civil) society — based on care and compassion for everyone.

After all, aren't compassion, justice and care for the vulnerable attributes of God (or the divine) in all the major faiths?

For us Christians, Jesus exhorts us, "Do not be afraid." He urges us to love our neighbour as ourselves.

We are called to build a kingdom of love, compassion and justice and to take care of the vulnerable so that no one will be excluded from holistic development. There is no place for fear or anxiety or divisive thinking.

Instead, we live in hope that a more inclusive society is not only possible but essential for our collective future as a nation.

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



**WORD MADE
FRESH**

Nicholas Lye

Have you ever felt so out of place that you were pressured to conform, fit in, and become more like what others would accept or approve of?

As someone in his 40s who is not married, is not a priest, is not working for the Church, and who does not have a regular job, the pressure for me to 'fit in' is real and uncomfortable. Living life as a lay single missionary who tries to respond to God and go wherever He sends makes me somewhat of an oddball and an exception. It does not help when people get uncomfortable around me and try to put me back in a box by asking if I have considered joining a religious order, or if I am open to marriage, or if I belong to an organisation.

The truth is, I have spent almost my whole life trying to 'fit in', to change my appearance or behaviour so that I would be more included and accepted, or to live up to the expectations and standards of others. At the same time, I have also been guilty of trying to put others in a box whenever others act in ways that do not fit my worldview and accepted values, and appear to be exceptions to the 'rule' that I was brought up with.

It was not until I became an exception myself, under God's divine sense of humour

and purpose, that I began to step outside the box and discover a whole new world beyond what I was familiar with and exposed to.

Richard Rohr, a Franciscan priest, wrote in his book *Falling Upward* that "in the spiritual life, and now in science, we learn much more by honouring and learning from the exceptions than by just imposing our previous certain rules to make everything fit... humans who are on the edge of what we have defined as normal, proper, or good, often have the most to teach us... Such constant exceptions make us revisit the so-called rule and what we call normal — and recalibrate!"

Indeed, it was only after God had invited me to leave the path towards the priesthood did I start to take time to explore and discover more of my God-given uniqueness and gifts, and eventually bless others with unique workshops, safe spaces, and creative ways to encounter God or discover more about themselves. While my ways do not fit the conventional mould or the expectations of others, and have at times caused frowns or raised eyebrows, it has certainly blessed many others in surprising and unexpected ways, and at the same time has allowed me to live life with so much more freedom, joy and meaning as my true and unique self.

Through my missions, I have also had the privilege to meet many other 'exceptions' who may not be so readily accepted by

the society, or even within the Church, but through my interactions with them, I have learnt so much more about how God meets them in the margins and in their uniqueness, and even breaks the mould to offer His love to them in ways that can sometimes look scandalous to those stuck in the mould.

Richard Rohr further points out that "Jesus had no trouble with the exceptions, whether they were prostitutes, drunkards, Samaritans, lepers, Gentiles, tax collectors, or wayward sheep. He ate with outsiders regularly, to the chagrin of the Church stalwarts, who always love their version of order over any compassion toward the exceptions."

At a half-day workshop for students which I was co-facilitating with a fellow 'exception' who herself has been misunderstood and rejected by others, one of the participants was a boy that was always caught sleeping in class, and labelled as 'lazy.' Yet what eventually surprised the mother was how he was able to sit through our entire half-day of workshop without sleeping, and even responded to our questions when certain things interested him. Another boy who was so shy to even say his name at the start of the workshop eventually starting sharing his thoughts and even made friends with the 'lazy' boy above.

What my friend basically did to bring about such responses was to tell the entire

group of participants that each of them was the most important person in this class. She gave them permission to be themselves, even if it meant looking at their phones if they wished, or choosing not to participate if they did not want to. Yet somehow, given this freedom, acceptance and unconditional love that not many would have extended to them, many of these students who had been labelled and rejected actually responded to us in ways that simply blew our minds and surpassed our expectations.

This perhaps taught me the most important lesson I have learnt from all these amazing experiences: that we are all meant to be EXCEPTIONAL in the unique way in which we were created. Being the exception is the norm as how God meant for us to be. We were all made to stand out and shine, and not be put into a box. We were not made to conform but be transformed to our true and amazing selves. The sooner we discover how exceptional we are, the sooner perhaps we learn to accept and celebrate the exceptions around us, the way Jesus did.

● **Nicholas Lye** is a lay missionary and creative evangelist who loves to help people encounter God and discover His truths through sights, sounds, taste and touch. Check out tinyurl.com/prayerthroughart for the various prayer workshops he offers both physically and through online platforms.

Being the exception



What will heaven be like?

Fr Ron Rolheiser

Andrew Greeley once suggested that we might profitably meditate on the following vision of heaven: The condition of physical ecstasy and emotional satisfaction which results from sexual intercourse between two people who are deeply in love is the best anticipation currently available to us of our permanent condition in the resurrected state. “The powerful, inspirational value of sexual electricity and the awesome splendours of the human body will not be inhibited in the resurrected state as they are by the weaknesses of this world. The resurrection joys, then, will be interpersonal, physical, sexual, and corporate because we will enjoy them with each other.”

More than a few people are shocked by this kind of imagery when applied to heaven. However, it is precisely this kind of image which is prominent in the way a number of great Christian mystics, including John of the Cross and Theresa of Avila, describe heaven. For them, death is your wedding night.

Moreover, when one looks at how some of the prophets, notably Isaiah, fantasize about “the end times,” one sees a remarkable similarity between their vision of what constitutes salvation and the sexual imagery of the mystics. In both cases, in the end, the vision is one of wholeness, of consummation, of love without limit, of normal life turned upside-down, of a final peace that is ecstatic. For ex-

ample, when Isaiah suggests that in the last times, the wolf will lie down with the lamb, the panther with the kid, and the cow and the bear will make friends, even as the lion eats straw like the ox, and when he fantasizes the end times as a great banquet of all the best foods and the choicest wines, his fantasy is different only in image, not in substance, from what Greeley suggests. In both cases, a delicious and deeply sensual image is used to describe what things can be like, and will be like, if we are open to the gift of salvation.

I highlight these fantasies because, too seldom are we ever taught that our fantasies, indeed even our sexual ones, can be the place where we intuit salvation. We are the privileged exception if we have been taught that our earthy fantasies can, potentially at least, be a rich source for spiritual insight and growth. How so?

In our favourite daydreams, we often picture some of the essential components of salvation, that is, our best fantasies are inevitably images of consummation and wholeness. In them, we are consummated and consummating, made whole and making whole, knowing fully even as we are known fully, face-to-face (as Paul describes this in 1 Corinthians 13: 12-13). In our daydreams, we never lack a life-giving embrace. In our dreams, we can unreservedly and truly make love.

Our best fantasies turn reality delightfully upside-down, wherein, as in Isaiah, lions eat straw like the oxen. In our daydreams, the normal rules of the world are suspended and we are able to perform great and noble things, irrespective of our own athletic, artistic, educational, or practical limitations. In our fantasies we are never limited by our body, race, education, background, situation, or intelligence. Nothing is impossible in our daydreams. In our fantasies we can fly — and be that one-in-a-million artist, novelist, athlete, movie star — and saint.

Moreover, in our fantasies there is justice and vindication. Just as the prophets imagined a great day of reckoning, when the arrogant will be brought down, the cruel will have to answer for their meanness, and the hidden virtue of those suffering silently will be revealed, so too in our daydreams. A good fantasy, in its own delicious way, always brings about justice. In our fantasies, we intuit a new heaven and a new earth.

Finally, in our healthy fantasies we are also always at our best and noblest. We are never petty, narrow, or small in our daydreams. There we are always paragons of virtue and nobility — generous, kind, deeply loving, and gracious.

Thomas Aquinas distinguished between two kinds of union. For him, you can be in union with something either through pos-

session or through desire. In our fantasies, indeed even in those that are so sensual and private as to make us ashamed of them, we are given the privileged opportunity to intuit what salvation looks and feels like.

Sadly, the concept of heaven that comes to us through Church preaching, catechesis, and Sunday school is often so bland, antiseptic, dualistic, asexual, and platonic, that we do not want to trade this earthy life for it. Life here, for all its pains and frustrations, still appears richer and more exciting than the heaven that’s promised us after death. Fellowship with angels, perfect light, and the prospect of sitting in silence for all eternity worshipping God, while wonderfully correct and pregnant with meaning if understood, is too abstract to tempt us beyond the pleasures of this life.

Thus, we have something to learn from the biblical prophets, the mystics — and from the seemingly irreverent imagination of Andrew Greeley.

● **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**

What a paediatric hospital chaplain learned about our idea of ‘God’s plan’

More than a year ago, I worked as a paediatric hospital chaplain, though perhaps a subpar one, given that I didn’t connect well with most of the children. I always seemed to either underestimate or overestimate their ages, and I often felt like many parents expected me to be Mr Rogers rather than myself.

The nurses and doctors probably thought I meddled too much, or perhaps wrote me off as simply earnest and sweet. But the children had a remarkable capacity to see through it all and ask the bigger questions.

“Where do new ideas come from?”

“What’s the ‘last’ number?”

“How can you tell ‘good guys’ from ‘bad guys?’”

“What do I say to my mom and dad?”

One time, after a three-year-old stabilised following a heart attack in the ICU, the attending physician asked me to speak to the parents. The dad was there, his face burrowed in his palms; the mom multitasking on her laptop between phone calls, holding her

world together in her own way.

We began discussing what they loved about their son. His curiosity. His energy. His laughter.

Then the dad expressed that his son didn’t deserve this, even though he knew “God had a plan.”

I hesitated. The mom urged him to stay positive. He broke down in tears. I said something benign like, “there, there.” Everything fell silent, and it became awkward.

The truth is, I don’t know if the three-year-old’s heart attack or recovery was a part of God’s plan. I don’t know if any of the infants connected to feeding tubes in the neonatal intensive care unit or the chemotherapy patients waiting for news of remission are part of God’s plan. All the theology and philosophy degrees in the world couldn’t answer that question.

Yet many of us, myself included, often wonder at God’s plan with a menagerie of metaphors whenever we find ourselves in

moments of deep pain: blueprints, book chapters, compass-charting, paths to abide by, even tests. Each approach contains poetry and pitfalls. It’s not my place to justify the pain people feel, nor refute the ways people make sense of a crisis. However, we tell our stories, many of us find ways to incorporate these painful experiences into our lives, and often things do improve over time.

But sometimes they don’t. And here is where I always had to admire the patients who rejected the premise of a divine reason. I still think about a 14-year-old boy with a terminal diagnosis whose mother sought prayers from all over the world. She often asked me to come by and pray, and we’d hold hands before procedures, or in the middle of video games or his lunchtime. He loved to read and I learned he was gifted in science class.

Many of us wanted to tell him everything was going to be OK. That God works in mysterious ways. And, of course, that it will get better.

But he knew it wouldn’t. More important, he knew it with an acceptance that still valued anger and disappointment. He did not think much of religion and declined my greetings at his door if his mother wasn’t present. I was proud that he could make that choice and respected his scepticism. His anger was painful to see, but righteous, even beautiful.

Many days, I wish I had told him that before he died.

Of course, this all brings to mind the biblical *Book of Job*. But the questions I most want to explore aren’t about theodicy or what God is actually considering — or not considering. This is not mostly about what I believe; it’s about who I am in these moments and how I can be present for someone who is in agony. It is about remaining present.



(Unsplash/Paolo Nicoletto)

This is what a mentor told me when I was too scared to return to the room of that strong-hearted three-year-old and his parents after his father wept in front of me. I kept glancing at his door the next day, and the next, until I trusted in my courage to knock again. Dishevelled blankets nested on the loveseat where his parents slept. “Get Well” cards littered the floor. And the boy giggled playfully, mischievously. His medical team was nearly ready to discharge him.

We had a good conversation, his parents and me. We talked about their son, their support system, what they planned to do when they settled back at home. We talked about their fear of coming back. None of us felt the need to talk about God’s plans or what their son deserved; remaining present didn’t demand it. But since then, I have learned to say and embody, imperfectly and slowly, much else with many others. Things like:

“I don’t know why this is happening, but I’m thankful I can witness this part of your story.”

“I am here (instead of “there, there”).”

“May you know love amid your loneliness, amid your pain, amid your hopes, amid your questions, and amid your doubts.”

And of course, “Your anger is painful to see, but righteous; even beautiful.” — **By Steven Salido Fisher, NCR**



(Unsplash/Martha Dominguez de Gouveia)

Little Catholics' Corner

Across

5. "...the gates of the _____ will not prevail..."
 7. "... _____ this rock I will build my Church..."
 9. "Whatever you bind on earth shall _____ bound in Heaven."
 10. "I will _____ you the keys of the kingdom..."
 11. "On this _____ I will build my Church."
 13. Jesus made Peter the _____ of the Church on earth.
 14. "Whatever you loose on earth will be loosed _____ Heaven."
 17. "_____ and blood have not revealed this to you..."
 19. _____ asked them, "Who do you say that I am?"
 21. God _____ Peter in charge of His Church on earth.
 22. Jesus changes Simon's _____ to Peter.
 23. "Flesh and blood _____ not revealed this to you..."
 24. "...You are the Christ, the _____ of the living God!"

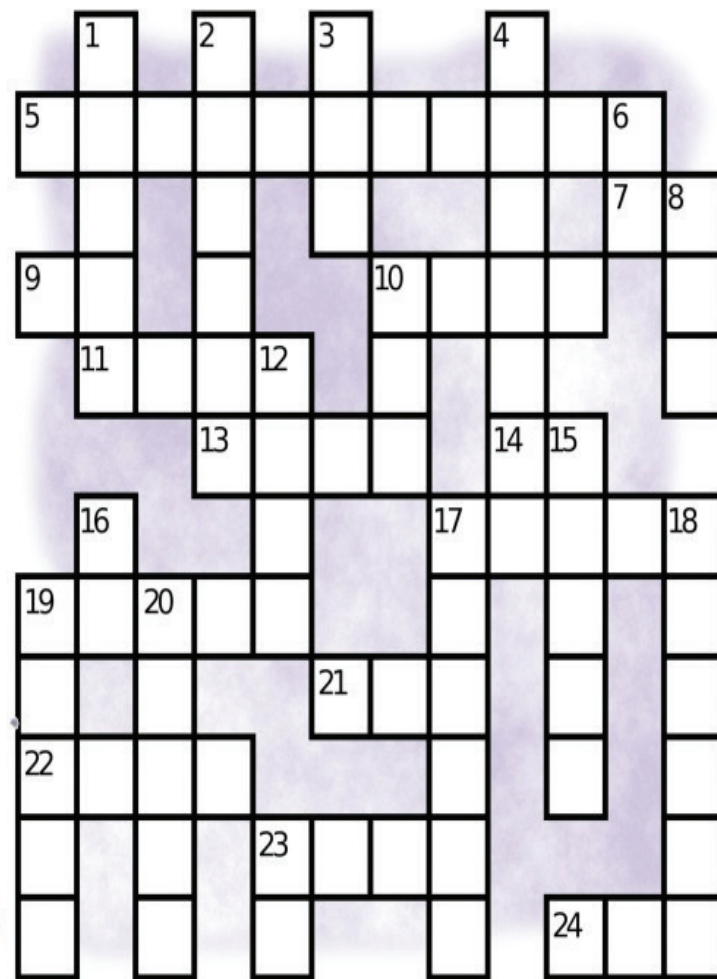
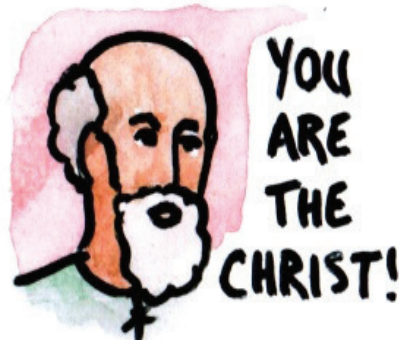
Down

1. _____ said, "You are the Christ..."
 2. "On this rock I will build my _____"
 3. "Blessed _____ you, Simon..."
 4. "... the gates of the netherworld shall not _____..."
 6. "Who _____ people say that the Son of Man is?"
 8. "Flesh and blood have _____ revealed this..."
 10. "You are the Christ, the Son of the living _____!"
 12. "I will give you the _____ to the kingdom of Heaven."
 15. When will the gates of the netherworld prevail against the Church?
 16. _____ belong to the Church Jesus started.
 17. The Heavenly _____ revealed to Simon who Jesus was.
 18. "...the keys to the kingdom of _____..."
 19. "Blessed are you, Simon, son of a _____..."
 20. Peter's name before Jesus changed it. _____
 23. Jesus ordered the disciples to tell no one that _____ was the Christ.

"Who do you say that I am?" CROSSWORD

See how well you know what happened in today's Gospel story!

taken from Matthew 16:13-20



Hello children of God,

In today's Gospel, Jesus asked an important question: "Who do you think I am?"

If we talk about Jesus, can we explain who He is? This makes us think about how we see Jesus and how we feel about Him.

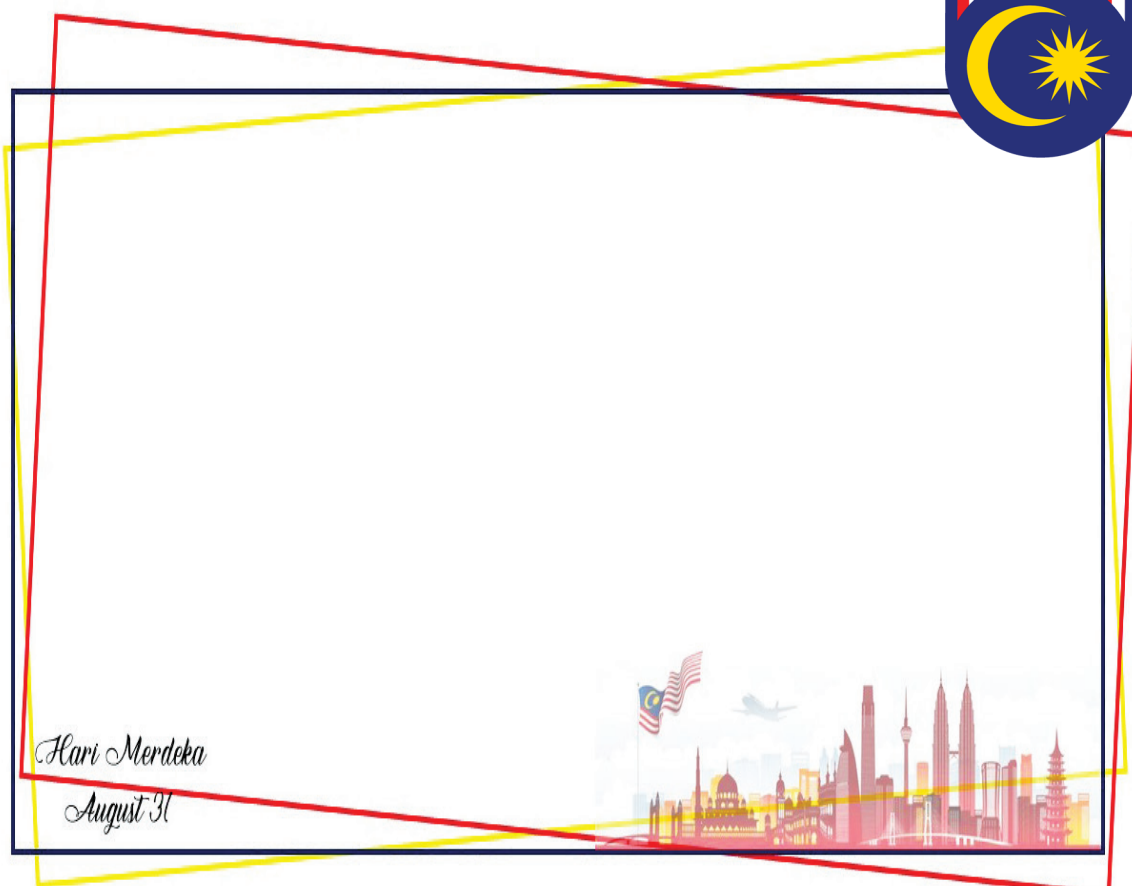
We might see Jesus as a special friend who teaches us to be kind and caring. We can also think about our connection with Jesus and how important He is to us. This

thinking helps us know more about our beliefs and brings us closer to Jesus, making our faith stronger and our journey more meaningful.

Love, Auntie Gwen

A Reminder:
August 31 is our National Day.
 How are you going to celebrate it?
Selamat Hari Merdeka!

DRAW AN IMAGE OF WHAT MALAYSIA MEANS TO YOU



A quiz to test your knowledge on Malaysia

Malaysia's national flag is ...



Malaysia is situated in which continent?



The state capital of Malaysia is ...



Malaysia's national animal is ...



Malaysia's currency is ...



Malaysia's national flower is ...



YOUTH

AUGUST 27, 2023

Spiritual preparation for diocesan youth festival

SANDAKAN: The Second Diocesan Youth Festival (TBK2), scheduled to take place from August 28 to September 1, marks a highly anticipated event for the youth within the Sandakan diocese. This event has been meticulously crafted to help young people in their faith development and empowerment. The organising com-

mittee has diligently undertaken various preparatory phases, including the logistics like programme venue, lodging, meals, security, and more importantly, spiritual groundwork.

Before the main event, two spiritual preparation programmes were organised: one for the organisers and another for the participants. The organisers' session was held on June 9 and 10 at the Church of Our Lady of Fatima, Beluran, to ensure



they were well-prepared and ready for the main gathering with the participants. The teams involved in this session included the Main Organising Team (MOT), Sub Main Organising Team (subMOT), Local Organising Team (LOT), Sub Local Organising Team (subLOT), as well as the contingent and assistant contingent leaders.

The themes for the sessions were *Into the deep – Information without Wisdom* and *Mary rose and went with haste*. These sessions were designed to facilitate reflection on the organisers and participants' objectives for participating in the TBK2. During the organisers' session, the TBK2 spiritual preparation took place at the parish level across the Diocese of Sandakan on dates set by the contingent leader, supported by MOT and subMOT.

This spiritual preparation received further reinforcement



through the TBK2 triduum, which took place virtually from Aug 1 to 3. This triduum, was to guide the organisers and participants in contemplating their faith. The TBK2 triduum facilitated on the Telegram channel, was led by the Liturgy team. These teams provided prayer resources and reflections to aid the organisers and participants in strengthening their faith.

On the first day, the organisers and participants were invited to delve into self-awareness and introspection to help them imitate Mother Mary's attitude in responding to God's call.

The following day, the focus was on contemplation and meditation on the Eucharist — the source of Christian existence. The reflection centred on each person's self-preparation and readiness to receive the Body of Christ. This exercise helped nurture and revitalise the

participants' faith.

On the final day, the participants were invited to appreciate their respective roles, gestures and approach during Holy Mass. This prayer was strengthened by the question "What can I do as a shared appreciation during Mass".

The online triduum that engaged both organisers and participants proved to be enlightening, even in the face of challenges such as internet accessibility and work obligations. Fortunately, their enthusiasm overcame these obstacles. The strong turnout demonstrated everyone's dedication to the success of the TBK2 event. The diocese TBK2 triduum concluded with a briefing by TBK2 coordinator Elisha Edward. She urged participants to stay open and prepared for TBK2, inviting all involved to unite in achieving the event's goals.

— *Dospo*



SYMBOL OF FIRE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

PENANG: In a groundbreaking move, the Church of the Divine Mercy's 21 confirmands wore vibrant hues of red and orange for their Sacrament of Confirmation. This striking choice of colours symbolising the fervent flames of the Holy Spirit, created an awe-inspiring spectacle on August 13. During the Mass celebrated by Cardinal-elect, Sebastian Francis, with Fr John Anandan OFM Cap, and parish priest, Fr Michael Raymond, OFM Cap concelebrating, the confirmands received a crucial Holy Sacrament and have since become adults in the eyes of the church.

Their confirmation journey began in January 2023, with catechists Roland and Melinda spending their Sundays teaching the

learners about the significance of the sacrament, such as the gifts of the Holy Spirit and what they entail, as well as the Fruits of the Spirit. The catechists did their best to answer questions the confirmands raised.

July 28-30, the learners attended a confirmation camp where they journeyed with their youth leaders, headed by Brandon Lo and Adrian Oyog. During the camp, they engaged in sessions of Praise and Worship, in-depth discussions about their faith, as well as sitting in Adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, to spend quiet, quality time with the Lord. During this session, many said they were touched by the Holy Spirit. Throughout the camp there were moments of laughter, some tears

shed and memories that the confirmands will hopefully keep for life. None of this would have been possible without the unwavering support of their parents who played an integral part in helping the confirmands keep their faith.

Now it is time for them to relish the joys of this wonderful sacrament and appreciate the journey they are about to embark on with the Lord. Our hope and future are in God's hands, we just need faith as confirmand, Zachary Chow, quoted Jeremiah 29:11 in his speech, "For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future". Confirmand Johnathan Arul, in his speech said, "The 2023 CDM confirmands are on fire for the Lord".

— *By Shane Michael Nalpon*



JOM, KE MOUNT TABOR!

DON'T SHARE ALL YOUR EXPERIENCES WITH EVERYONE

By Carmel Dominic

PENANG: Cardinal-elect Sebastian Francis presided over the Eucharistic Celebration at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit August 6, his first since being elevated. On this auspicious day, 26 young people had the privilege of being confirmed by him.

Cardinal-elect Sebastian reminded the congregation, and especially the new confirmands, of a few things. First, to encounter God, we need to spend time with Him in silence. Just like Jesus went up Mount Tabor where the Transfiguration took place.

Secondly, there is no need to share all your experiences with everyone. Share with those whom you trust and who will understand what you experienced, especially if it is a spiritual experience. Some experiences are personal and it should be kept that way. Just like Jesus shared His Transfiguration with three out of the 12 disciples.

Third, there is a time for everything. In the



Cardinal-elect Sebastian Francis with the clergy, catechists and newly confirmed of the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, August 6, 2023.

Gospel, Jesus instructed the three disciples not to say anything about what they saw until after His Resurrection. In the same way, we too need to be aware of timing and place when sharing our experiences with others. Discernment is part of discipleship.

Fourthly, joy and suffering go hand in hand. We cannot have one without the other. Jesus'

Transfiguration was a joyous event as it gave the three disciples a glimpse of His glory and the promise of what awaits those in the eternal kingdom if we follow Him faithfully. In the same vein, it was the same trio who were with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane where He sweated blood the night before His crucifixion. Jesus endured suffering before He was

glorified and as His followers, we must follow His example. It is just the Christian way of life.

Lastly, he encouraged all those present not to journey alone, be it in joy or sorrow. The benefits of having companions are that we would be encouraged and that we can learn from one another just like Jesus and the disciples.

After the sermon, the confirmands renewed their baptismal vows along with the congregation and then received the Sacrament of Confirmation as the cardinal-elect anointed each one of them with the Oil of Chrism.

Later, after Communion, two Confirmants, one representing the English-speaking class and the other the Mandarin-speaking class, gave short speeches to thank those who were part of their Confirmation journey.

Just before Mass ended, parish priest Fr Joachim Robert expressed his appreciation to everyone who helped prepare the confirmands and make the celebration a memorable occasion.

Confirmands urged to walk closely every day with Jesus

KUALA LUMPUR: Jesus is calling each person to follow Him. "Are we courageous enough to heed His invitation?" Archbishop Julian Leow asked the 32 confirmands during the Mass at the Church of St Anthony.

The Mass, held on August 12, was celebrated by Archbishop Julian Leow, and concelebrated by parish priest, Fr Dr Clarence Devadass.

In his homily, Archbishop Julian invited everyone to lay down their fears, whatever they may be, at the feet of Jesus. He said that each person has a choice to follow Je-

sus that will lead to eternal life, or to follow passing pleasures that are temporary.

The Holy Spirit will accompany us and tell us everything that we need to know about the faith, he added.

"Let us keep close to Jesus and transfigure our lives to that of Christ, so that our lives will conform and be configured to Him.

"Walk closely every day with Jesus until we truly know His will for us. When His will and our will become one, that's when we truly become a reflection of Christ," said Archbishop Julian.

At the end of Mass, Fr Clarence thanked the catechists, parents and godparents/sponsors for supporting the candidates' faith formation and faith journey.

He also urged the candidates to participate in the life and service of the church after receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation. "You will need to find your place in the church," he said.

After Mass, a pot luck fellowship was held at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre for everyone who attended the celebration.

— By Julie Lim



Archbishop Julian Leow anoints a confirmand.

Triumph of Knowledge and Unity: 27th SPM BK Quiz

KUCHING: In a celebration of faith, knowledge, and unity, the 27th SPM Bible Knowledge (BK) Quiz was held on August 12. Organised by the Federation of Christian Mission Schools in Malaysia, it is an exceptional platform for students to showcase their understanding of the Bible and its significance across various aspects of life.

This year's quiz witnessed record-breaking participation of 138 teams in the quarter-finals, with a large showing from East Malaysia. This is a testament to the growing interest in delving deeper into the spiritual and historical wisdom enshrined in the Bible. From this pool, the top 10 teams from across Malaysia progressed to the semi-finals, where the online competition reached its apex.

Among the standout achievers were the three teams from St Joseph's Private Secondary School, Kuching (SJPS). The school accomplished an extraordinary achievement, clinching the positions of Champion, First-Runner-Up, and Third Runner-Up in a display of excellence. This triumph further enriches SJPS's legacy, extending their championship run since 2021.

The Federation of Christian Mission Schools Malaysia chairman, Thomas Huo Kok Sen, emphasised the significance of the Bible not only in Theology but also in Philosophy, History, and Literature. He highlighted that familiarity with the Bible can enrich academic studies and intellectual pursuits. In the Malaysian context, it provides students with an opportunity to engage with another subject



of study, examined at the SPM level. Moreover, understanding the Bible is crucial for interfaith dialogue and promoting religious tolerance. It allows individuals to engage in meaningful conversations and discussions with people from different religious backgrounds. This has been proven by many leaders in our country who have been educated in a Christian mission school environment, he added.

Deputy Minister of Education, Lim Hui Ying, took the opportunity to commend the Federation of Christian Mission Schools Malaysia for their unwavering commitment to upholding the ethos, character, and tradition of mission schools. These institutions, she noted, play a pivotal role in ensuring the continuity

of the SPM Bible Knowledge paper and associated quizzes, providing a holistic education for Christian students. The contributions of Mission schools extend beyond knowledge acquisition; they foster a shared commitment to learning, personal growth, and peaceful co-existence in Malaysia's multicultural society.

Testimonies from the students echo the impact of the quiz on their spiritual growth and academic journey. Andrea Wong, a participant from the third runner-up team, emphasised the teamwork-based nature of the competition, appreciating the camaraderie and moral support from her partner.

Elina Chua, a member of the champion team, highlighted the profound significance of understanding the Bible's words and con-

necting with its messages.

Filicia Wong, a member of the first runner-up team, conveyed the rollercoaster of emotions experienced during the competition, underscoring the significance of delving into the Bible's intricate details.

Daphne Chen, another first runner-up participant, found the preparation process challenging yet rewarding, culminating in a fulfilling experience.

Jeslyn Tiong, a member of the third runner-up team, underlined the competition's role in fostering growth, both spiritually and intellectually.

SJPSS's acting principal, Fr Stanley Goh, SJ, congratulated the teams on their outstanding performance while also paying tribute to the Bible Knowledge and Religious Education teachers of the school. "The love of Scripture does not happen automatically and it's the inspiration and encouragement of our dedicated teachers that nurtured this love and allowed it to blossom. The students' achievements are a testament to their hard work and talents, and the fruits of the school's commitment to the Gospel values and faith formation."

The 27th SPM BK Quiz stands as a beacon of unity, promoting interfaith dialogue, and acknowledging the profound impact of the Bible across various disciplines. With the dedication of both students and educators, this event continues to shape minds and hearts, fostering a harmonious coexistence in Malaysia's diverse cultural tapestry. — SJPS

New church honours martyrs of the mafia

ROME: In the heart of Italy's mob country, a new Catholic parish is being launched which is dedicated to the country's premier patron saints of the anti-mafia effort, one a Catholic priest and the other a lay judge, both assassinated in the 1990s.

Bishop Giuseppe Marciante of Cefalù, located on the island of Sicily near Palermo, announced the plan for the parish in a recent interview with his diocesan news outlet. It will be constructed, he said, on land seized from the mob by Italian authorities in a neighbourhood called Campofelice di Roccella.

The twin patrons of the new church will be Fr Giuseppe "Pino" Puglisi, a priest of Palermo gunned down by mafia assassins in 1993, and Rosario Livatino, a magistrate who prosecuted mob members and who was shot to death on a Sicilian highway in 1990.

Puglisi (*pic left*) was beatified in 2013, becoming the first mafia victim to be recognised officially by the Catholic Church as a martyr. Livatino became the second when he was likewise beatified in 2021.

Puglisi had served as pastor of San Gaetano parish in the rough-and-tumble Palermo neighbourhood of Brancaccio. He became famous for his strong anti-mafia stance, refusing to take their money for feast day celebrations and not allowing dons to march at the head of processions.

Puglisi strove to keep youth out of their reach, discouraging them from dropping out of school, robbing, drug-dealing and selling contraband cigarettes. He also declined to award a contract to a construction firm backed by the mafia for the restoration of his church.

Puglisi received multiple death threats and, according to the testimony of one of his hit men (who later confessed), his last words were: "I've been expecting you."

Today, visitors to Brancaccio can find his favourite saying scrawled all over its walls: "And what if somebody did something?"

For his part, Livatino (*pic below*) lived and worked in the Sicilian community of Agrigento, where he was a daily Mass-goer at the local parish of San Giuseppe ad Agrigento. As a college student, he was involved in Catholic Action, the largest lay movement in Italy. He began his career as a magistrate in 1978, and took a series of increasingly high-profile prosecutions of local mafia figures.

During the late 1980s, a violent conflict broke out between the traditional Sicilian branch of the mafia, Cosa Nostra, and a rival upstart group called the *Stiddari* (a Corsican term for "stars"). Ironically, the local leader of the Cosa Nostra lived in the same building in Agrigento as Livatino, and disparagingly referred to him as *santocchio*, a slang term for a pious person.

In a mocking tribute to that piety, Livatino's assassins would later reveal that they had originally planned to kill him outside the church where he would go every day to pray before the Blessed Sacrament.

Livatino's best-known saying was, "When we die, no one will ask how much we believed, but how believable we were."

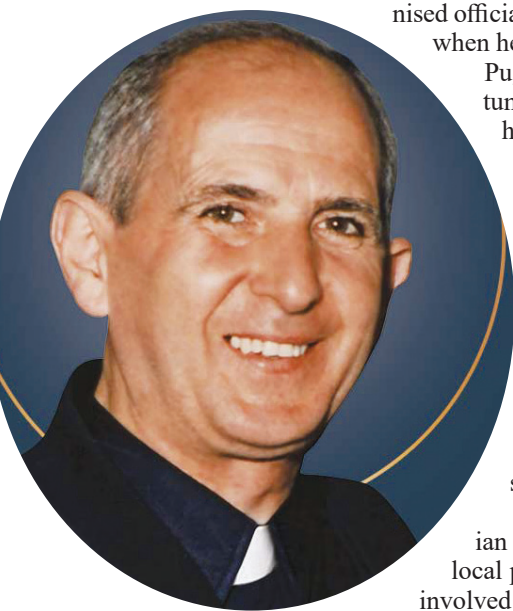
It was after meeting Livatino's parents during a visit to Agrigento in 1993 that Pope John Paul II issued a celebrated extemporaneous denunciation of the mafia, which is considered to have helped launch a new era of anti-mafia activism in the Church.

"In the name of Christ crucified and risen, Christ who is the Way, the Truth and the Life, I say to those responsible: Convert! God's judgment eventually will come!" the Pope said that day.

Both Puglisi and Livatino are considered examples of an expanded concept of martyrdom in the Catholic Church. Traditionally, to be designated a martyr an individual had to have been killed *in odium fidei*, "in hatred of the faith," meaning explicitly because of their Christian beliefs.

More recently, however, martyrdom has also been recognised for individuals who were killed because of moral stands taken on the basis of their religious beliefs. During that 1993 visit to Agrigento, John Paul II said that Livatino was "one of the martyrs of justice, and indirectly, of the faith."

Pope Francis formalised this new standard in 2017 by creating a category of martyrs based on the "heroic offering of life." — **By John L. Allen Jr, *Crux***



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Son: Fabian

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REST IN PEACE

Pope blesses 150th national Assumption pilgrimage to Lourdes

VATICAN: "Let us turn resolutely to the Blessed Mother, since she is our Mother and we are her children!"

Pope Francis gave this exhortation as he expressed his closeness to some 20,000 faithful gathered from all over France and around the world, at the Marian Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes for the Feast of the Assumption, as he recalled that August 15, 2023 marked the 150th anniversary of the national pilgrimage to the site.

"I join you in your fervent prayer of supplication and gratitude to our beloved Mother, especially on this feast day of 15 August."

The Pope expressed his joy to see the faithful maintain this long tradition of worship and devotion, noting that many of the faithful, in Lourdes, and in the cathedrals and parishes of France, "are praying to Our Lady with the greatest filial confidence, a confidence that never disappoints."

The Holy Father encouraged pastors "to constantly nurture and strengthen the love and tenderness that the faithful feel towards their beloved patroness, particularly through using or rediscovering popular acts of devotion."

For example, he commended the "beautiful processions on August 15, a tradition in



150th anniversary of French national pilgrimage in Lourdes. (ANSA)

your country for nearly 400 years."

"More than ever, the world, and in particular France, which has been solemnly consecrated to her — a consecration that cannot be abolished — needs Mary's protection in the face of the difficulties, concerns and challenges of the present day," he said.

The Pope prayed that Mary, the Queen of Peace, intercede with her Son so that

"much-desired peace may be established wherever the noise of arms is heard."

He called upon her "to awaken" in everyone's hearts "genuine sentiments of fraternal love, so that societies grow harmoniously in respect for others, safeguarding their dignity and rights, and so that no one is left by the wayside."

Pope Francis also prayed that Jesus' Mother protect families "in a special way."

He specifically recalled "parents who bear the daily burden of a heavy responsibility," and young people, "so rich in potential, but often worried about their future, or unfortunately already hindered by many constraints."

The Pope then turned his thoughts to the elderly, whom he said are "rich in their experience and wisdom" but are "too often, abandoned and neglected."

In this context, Pope Francis asked the Virgin Mary to comfort all who suffer, are ill, alone, marginalised or exiled.

In a special way, the Pope offered his closeness to all the sick and disabled people present, recalling the great numbers who travel to Lourdes to seek Mary's consolation.

He said that they, together with those who accompany them, "give the world an eloquent witness of faith and charity."

Pope Francis concluded by urging pilgrims to let their faith produce in them "unshakeable hope," on which they must build their lives and societies, and by imparting, "with great joy," his blessing upon everyone gathered at Lourdes, and to all the faithful of France and its pastors. — **By Deborah Castellano Lubov, Vatican News**

Papal delegate: "Are you with the Pope or against him?"

KOCHI, India: Jesuit Archbishop Cyril Vasil, papal delegate to the Archdiocese of Ernakulam-Angamaly, urged the faithful to obey Pope Francis and avoid troublemakers who oppose the uniform mode of celebrating Mass.

"Are you with the Holy Father, do you wish to remain priests and members of the Catholic Church and of your Syro-Malabar Church, or do you wish to give preference to the voice of troublemakers who lead you towards disobedience to the Holy Father, to the legitimate pastors of your Syro-Malabar Church and to the Catholic Church?" asked the archbishop during a Mass for the Feast of the Assumption.

Vasil, a former number two official in the Vatican's Dicastery for Eastern Churches, was appointed by Pope Francis on July 31 as his delegate to the Archeparchy of Ernakulam-Angamaly, the largest jurisdiction in the Syro-Malabar Church, where a swath of priests and laity have been in open rebellion for months over a new mode of celebrating the Mass.

In effect, that new method requires the priest to face the altar during the Eucharistic prayers, while the custom in Ernakulam-Angamaly is for the priest to do so facing the congregation.

That liturgical dispute reflects larger tensions over leadership under Cardinal George Alencherry, head of the Syro-Malabar Church, and the other bishops who make up the church's governing synod.

In his Aug 15 homily, Vasil issued a similar challenge to laity.

"Are you ready to follow the Holy Father and the Catholic Church; or do you prefer to

put your trust in some of your priests, who want to cover their personal disobedience to the Holy Father under your name?" he asked.

The remarks came after Vasil had attempted to enter St. Mary's Basilica, the primatial see of the Syro-Malabar Church, the evening before to lead a prayer service but was stopped at the gate by a large crowd of priests and parishioners.

A phalanx of roughly 100 police officers escorting Vasil led him into the basilica through a side entrance, reportedly using force to move protestors out of the way.

In his homily, Vasil warned the dissenting clergy and laity that their protests will not cause the Pope or the bishops to back down.

"The only fruit of continued protest and rejection will be the great harm to the Church, great scandal before those who observe us, and the spiritual damage that is the fruit of disobedience to God's will," he said.

"Do you really want to be responsible for the grave sin of such a disobedience?" Vasil asked.

"There can never be God's blessing on disobedience to His will — no matter how much you try to cover it up with pious phrases and even prayers," he said. "There will never be God's blessing on illegal protests and rebellion."

"On my knees I ask you to no longer participate in this sin against our Lord and the Catholic Church, namely, in refusing to celebrate Holy Qurbana in the only legitimate way, the way approved by the Holy Father," Vasil said, using the term for the Mass in the Syro-Malabar tradition. — **Crux/Matters India**

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