

HERALD

The Catholic Weekly

Mission Statement

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

TERHAD

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Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds.

Eph. 4: 17



Word of God unites us all

■ P4



Pray for our politicians

■ P11



Katholikos 2024

■ P16

Entrapped in modern-day slavery

ISLAMABAD: A tragic case in Pakistan has highlighted the severe conditions faced by families trapped in bonded labour. A man has reportedly entered his son into 20 years of servitude at a brick kiln in exchange for funds to bury another son who died due to inadequate medical care. This incident is part of a broader, troubling pattern affecting many in Pakistan's marginalised Christian community.

The situation is particularly dire for Pakistan's Christian minority, who are subjected to severe persecution and economic exploitation. Christians, constituting less than two per cent of Pakistan's population, face daily threats and violence, exacerbated by the country's oppressive bonded labour system. According to Global Christian Relief (GCR), an advocacy group focused on persecuted Christians, approximately 3.5 million people are ensnared in this form of modern-day slavery.

Bonded labour in Pakistan is fuelled by predatory loans with exorbitant interest

rates. Families often take out loans between \$800 and \$1,000 from brick kiln owners, only to find themselves trapped in decades of labour due to meagre wages and systemic discrimination. A recent Global Christian Relief video highlighted the plight of the Iqbal family, who were bound to 15 years of labour at a kiln to repay an \$898 debt incurred from a medical procedure.

The plight of Christians is compounded by their marginalised status in Pakistani society. The US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has designated Pakistan as a "country of particular concern," citing deteriorating religious freedom conditions. The USCIRF's 2024 report details increased targeting of religious minorities for their beliefs, including violence, blasphemy accusations, and forced conversions.

Peter Bhatti, founder of International Christian Voice and brother of Catholic martyr Shahbaz Bhatti, highlighted the intersection of religious oppression and extreme poverty. "Most Christians and other religious minorities come from poor backgrounds and lack the resources to seek redress," Bhatti said. "They end up living as slaves for generations due to their economic conditions."

Maria Lozano from Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) emphasised that bonded labour

is often accompanied by severe abuses, including sexual exploitation. She noted that agricultural workers also suffer from similar debt slavery imposed by landlords. "It's akin to ownership," Lozano remarked.

According to Andrew Crane of the Modern Slavery Engagement Forum at the UK Home Office, debt in these situations is intentionally inflated by lenders through additional fees for basic necessities, trapping families in a cycle of debt with no escape.

The problem is deeply rooted in Pakistan's socio-economic fabric. Although the Bonded Labour System Abolition Act of 1992 outlawed bonded labour, enforcement has been lax, allowing the practice to persist. David Curry, president and CEO of Global Christian Relief, criticised the lack of governmental action, noting that the brick kiln industry benefits from this exploitative system.

Despite the grim circumstances, there are efforts to combat bonded labour. GCR's liberation campaign aims to free 50 Pakistani families, providing them with training and resources to build independent livelihoods. Curry described how one family, after receiving aid, transitioned from brick-making to running their own business, which offers a glimmer of hope for self-sufficiency.

Education and systemic change are crucial to breaking the cycle of debt slavery. Lozano and Crane both emphasised the need for educational opportunities and addressing the root causes of exploitation, such as poverty and discrimination. "Education is the key," said Lozano. "It is the only way to get out from this vicious cycle. Many of the people that we are speaking of ... they cannot read and write. ... It is a system that is going deeper and deeper and breaking many families."

Lozano also stressed the importance of family values, noting that children left behind in harsh working conditions are particularly vulnerable.

Improving the situation for Pakistani Christians and other marginalised groups requires comprehensive reform, beginning with empowering families and communities to escape the bonds of economic exploitation. As Curry put it, "We need to rebuild their lives step by step. It's about giving people the power to change their circumstances."

The ongoing struggle against bonded labour highlights the urgent need for systemic change and greater international support for those ensnared in modern-day slavery. — Register

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COMMENTARY

Catholic Christian nationalism is having a moment in the US

Christian nationalism has long been associated with white evangelicals. Now Catholics are emerging as some of Christian nationalism's most muscular champions. This shift marks a significant evolution in American religious and political landscapes, characterised by prominent figures and movements that blend conservative Catholicism with nationalist fervour.

One notable figure in this emerging narrative is J.D. Vance, a recent convert to Catholicism and a prominent Republican politician. Linked to Catholic integralism, an ideology advocating for Christian principles to heavily influence societal governance, Vance exemplifies a trend where Catholicism intersects with Christian nationalist objectives. Despite some doctrinal differences, integralism shares key policy goals with Christian nationalism, particularly in advocating for a government shaped by Christian values. Vance's elevation as a Republican vice-presidential nominee amplifies the platform of this distinctive Catholic strain within the broader Christian nationalist movement.

Another significant influence is the Heritage Foundation's Kevin D. Roberts, described as a "cowboy Catholic" and a proponent of what he calls a "second American Revolution." Roberts, aligned with figures like Stephen K. Bannon, promotes Christian nationalist views through media platforms such as "The War Room," positioning himself at the forefront of this ideological wave.

Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito, himself a conservative Catholic, also plays a pivotal role. His involvement in decisions like the 2022 case overturning Roe v. Wade, coupled with controversies such as his wife's display of flags associated with Christian nationalism, underscores the influence of Catholic perspectives within pivotal institutions of American governance.

Beyond political elites, cultural and religious movements like Trad Cath (Traditionalist Catholicism) have gained attention for their socially conservative views. Trad Cath adherents, drawing on Catholic tradition and imagery, propagate a narrative of a threatened Western civilisation, aligning closely with broader Christian nationalist sentiments.

The emergence of Catholic Christian nationalism challenges the conventional association of Christian nationalism with white evangelical Protestantism. While a significant majority of white evangelical Protestants endorse Christian nationalist ideas, only a minority of white Catholics do so. Nonetheless, within this minority, there exists a potent strain of Christian nationalist fervour, underscoring

the polarisation within American Catholicism on issues of national identity and governance.

The historical trajectory of Catholicism in America has been marked by shifts from exclusion to inclusion within the broader Christian identity. Formerly viewed with suspicion and hostility by Protestant-dominated American society, Catholics gradually integrated into the mainstream Christian narrative, particularly during the Cold War era when shared Judeo-Christian values were emphasised in contrast to atheist Communism.

The alignment of conservative Catholics with white evangelical Protestants during the 1970s solidified a coalition advocating for socially conservative policies, notably on issues like abortion. This collaboration not only blurred denominational lines but also facilitated the integration of Catholics into the broader Christian nationalist movement, where they now play influential roles in shaping American political discourse and policy.

Looking ahead, the influence of Catholic Christian nationalism reflects a complex interplay of theology, history, and contemporary political aspirations. As conservative Catholics continue to assert their influence across various spheres of American life, their distinct religious identity and institutions will undoubtedly shape debates on the role of religion in public policy and governance.

While American Catholicism remains politically diverse, the rise of Catholic Christian nationalism highlights a potent and evolving force within the broader landscape of American religious and political identities. This phenomenon not only challenges traditional narratives of religious influence but also underscores the dynamic nature of religious engagement in shaping contemporary American society. As these dynamics unfold, understanding the nuances and motivations behind Catholic Christian nationalism becomes essential in grasping its impact on American politics and culture. — **By Ruth Braunstein, NCR**

Ruth Braunstein is an associate professor of sociology at the University of Connecticut and the director of the Meanings of Democracy Lab.

This is an abridged version. To read the full article, go to: <https://rb.gy/y70b1m>

Seeking eternal nourishment in Christ

If we are familiar with the temptation of Christ in the desert, the first temptation has something to do with today's Gospel. Christ was tempted to turn stone into bread. He would have been very hungry by then and if He were a mere human, He would have given in to satisfy His hunger. This temptation represents one of the ways which Christ could use to achieve His mission. However, He rejected the temptation because His mission is not about ending hunger. His mission was very clear – the liberation from sin and not merely satisfying physical hunger.

In today's Gospel, we see Christ telling the people who were looking for Him that they did not look for Him because they have understood that He was the Messiah. Since He was able to satisfy their physical hunger and alleviate their misery, they only saw Him as a holy person who could give them a better life. If we were in their place, would we have behaved otherwise? In all honesty, we would likely behave exactly like them. This is the reality of our human nature; our thoughts and actions never go beyond what is physical.

When the people mention the feeding of the Israelites in the desert with manna, they are again thinking of physical sustenance. But they forget who is the one who gave them that food in the first place. In their minds, they could only see that it was Moses who provided food for them, Jesus reminded them that it was God who gave their ancestors food. Without God's



help, they would have had nothing to eat. Everything the people said in the Gospel points to the human need of satisfying the physical aspects of their life. However, Jesus taught them that they needed to go beyond themselves.

There are two aspects in the Gospel today that we need to take note of. The first is that we need to always keep in mind that whatever we have in life, whatever we have received comes from God. Very often, we forget the giver and only concentrate on the gifts. We take and take but how often do we call to mind that it is God who is the giver. When we focus too much on the gifts, we end up becoming self-centred. When we are able to focus on the giver, who is God, we learn to go beyond ourselves and focus our thoughts on what is eternal.

The second aspect is the temporal nature

of our life. Whatever we have in this world, however we satisfy ourselves, our bodies will deteriorate and return to the dust from which we came. We need to focus our attention on what is eternal – the salvation of our souls. In the first temptation of Christ, Jesus refutes the devil and says that we cannot live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God. In telling the people that He is the bread of life, Jesus is telling the people, and us, that He is giving us what is eternal. John's Gospel tells us very clearly that Jesus is the Word and it is this Word that will keep our souls alive for eternity. This is why, when we go for Mass, we receive both food for the soul and food for the body. The Liturgy of the Word nourishes us intellectually and spiritually, the Liturgy of the Eucharist nourishes us physically and spiritually. We

Reflecting on our Sunday Readings

with Fr Philip Tay, OCD

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)

Readings: Exodus 16: 2-4, 12-15;

Ephesians 4: 17, 20-24;

Gospel: John 6: 24-35

need both elements to make us whole.

The final point that I would like to make concerns working for God. Many of us are serving in ministry and we all say that we are doing God's work. If we are honest with ourselves, this will seem very hollow. Jesus tells us today that to work for God is to believe in the one that God has sent. Yes, we all profess our faith in Christ but is it merely lip service or do we really mean what we profess? If we are truly working for God, we won't give in to pettiness and allow our human nature to influence our service.

Let us strive to work for the food that will last instead of what is temporal. The Bread of Life and the Word of God can truly nourish us both spiritually and physically but it is up to us to decide for ourselves what is important for us in this life. What we do and consume in this life will affect how we are in the next. Let us allow God to quench our thirst and satisfy our hunger because, ultimately, God is the only one who can give us the fulfilment that we are looking for.



KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

August

- 5-9 Meeting – FABC Synod Members
- 10 Confirmation – Church of the Holy Redeemer, Klang
- 10 Confirmation – Church of the Good Shepherd, Setapak
- 11 Confirmation – Church of the Immaculate Conception BVM, Port Dickson



MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

August

- 5-8 ECMI Conference – Genting Highlands
- 10 Confirmation – Church of St Theresa, Masai
- 12 South Johor Vicariate Cemetery Committee Meeting – MAJODI Centre

Spiritual conversation method

For the upcoming Regional Pastoral Assembly (RPA), participants have prepared themselves remotely before they arrive and may have started their discernment process weeks before arriving at the RPA. There are three rounds to the “Conversation in the Spirit” (CS) process used during the RPA. They are as follows:

Group sharing and discussion is only on one question provided.

All prepare themselves in silence and prayer
[After ten minutes, all come together. An animator and note-taker have been assigned for each group.]

The First Round: Taking the Floor

Everyone comes with their sharing prepared and written. They take turns equally for about two minutes to share their experiences, feelings, or what happened during their discernment period based on the question given. After one has shared, the group may briefly pause to absorb what was said.

During this round, participants have no discussions or interactions except to ask for clarification about a word or phrase, if necessary.

All participants simply listen deeply to each person.

SILENCE: After everyone has shared, the animator may propose a time of silence to absorb what was shared. The time of silence is also helpful for one to be aware of what is happening within oneself, the other person, and the group.

The Second Round: Making Room for the Other

In the second round, participants share what emerges within them during the silence. No one is obliged to speak, and participants can share spontaneously, without any particular order.



This is not a time for discussing or refuting what someone else says, nor for bringing up what participants forgot to mention in the first round. Rather, it is an opportunity to respond to questions like:

- What struck me about what others said?
- How was I affected by what I heard?
- Is there a common thread in what was shared? Is there something missing that I had expected would be said?
- Was I especially touched by a particular sharing or input?
- Have I received any particular insight or revelation? What is it?
- Where did I experience a sense of harmony with others as we shared with one another?

Therefore, one speaks (exclusively) reflecting on what has been shared by others. This second round enables the group to realise what unites them. It is here that signs of the action of the Holy Spirit in the group begin to manifest themselves, and the conversation becomes an experience of shared discernment.

SILENCE: Another time of silence is observed for participants to note how they were

moved during the second round, particularly what key points seem to be emerging in the group.

The Third Round: Building together (from an “I” to a “We”)

Participants share what emerged from the preceding time of silence. This is a time of “WE” and coming to a consensus.

They ask themselves, “What do WE feel is important to say to ourselves and the whole Church as a ‘contribution’ with respect to the topic?”

This time, no more going around. The animator helps participants bring out the key points that have emerged, seeking consensus on what to choose as fruits of the meeting (“synthesis”) while also being alert to “marginal and prophetic voices.”

This is a process, and participants are here not to solve problems. There will always be unresolved issues. The point is not to produce more documents and data but to offer a response based on how the Holy Spirit is leading us.

[The facilitator collects the materials and hands them to the secretariat. The note-taker types the group findings on the Google form provided]



Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #183



Greetings dear friends of MJD, New King for Malaysia. *Bulan Kebangsaan* and flying the *Jalur Gemilang* has begun. Singapore and Malaysia are hopeful of flourishing. Trump hopes to return. IT chaos disrupted airports and KTMB systems. There are many malls here but fewer shoppers. Foreign cooks are taking over food courts. We are now living longer but dying alone. Some new things are good, yet some new shifts are upsetting.

“New Life” Times: We see death, decay, decomposition and decadence. What does it mean to you? There’s so much anxiety about what’s dying around us, yet time and time again, nature has baffled us.

“When you walk through a forest that has not been tamed and interfered with by man, you will see not only abundant life all around you, but you will also encounter fallen trees and decaying trees, rotting leaves and decomposing matter at every step. Wherever you look, you will find death as well as life. Upon closer scrutiny, however, you will discover that the decomposing tree trunk and rotting leaves not only give birth to new life, but are full of life themselves. Microorganisms are at work. Molecules are rearranging themselves. So, death isn’t to be found anywhere. There is only the metamorphosis of life forms. What can you learn from this? Death is not the opposite of life. “Life has no opposite. The opposite of death is birth. Life is eternal.” — *Eckhart Tolle*

In the midst of death, persecution and rot-

tenness, Anne Frank wrote in her diaries: “I don’t think of all the misery, but of the beauty that remains.”

A Thought For The Week: Cheeky God.

A man walked to the top of a hill to talk to God. The man asked, “God, what’s a million years to you?” and God said, “A minute.”

Then the man asked, “Well, what’s a million dollars to you?” and God said, “A penny.”

Then the man asked, “God...can I have a penny?” and God said, “Sure...in a minute.”

Lesson from the hilltop: We can’t try to out-smart God. God’s ways are not our ways. We can try to be funny with God, but God can be funnier than us.

Announcements For The Week:

1. The Pamol Estate Catholics in Kluang celebrated the Feast of Sts Anne and Joachim on Saturday, July 27 at 6.30pm.
2. The Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu Social Communication via YouTube addresses cyberbullying and rising suicides among the young. Join in to know and understand. <https://youtu.be/hg8C86drCfQ>.
3. The Malaysian Association of Social Workers and Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat are organising an *Introduction of Social Work Training* on August 10, 11, 17 and 18 from 8.30am to 6.00pm at Universiti Malaya. Registration fee is RM100. Closing date is August 5.
4. Beyond Borders is an experiential service learning mission exposure for volunteers

to serve the poor beyond the borders of Malacca Johore Diocese. The programme is organised and partly sponsored by Caritas MJD. The eight-day service mission from October 10-17, will assist in providing educational learning opportunities to children from a residential home in Tambunan, Sabah. Contact Albert Tan at 016-849 2346 or alberttan@mjdioocese.my for any queries.

QnQ? Q ask: Do you know that July 26 is International Day for the Conservation of Mangrove Ecosystem and July 28 is World Nature Conservation Day!

1. To celebrate the mangrove in a most meaningful way, CJC and Caritas MJD organised Mangrove Restoration in collaboration with Malaysian Nature Society supporting the Jabatan Perhutanan to replant 450 mangrove saplings at Sg Pulai, Pontian.

2. Mangroves make up less than two per cent of marine environments but account for 10 to 15 per cent of carbon burial, up to four times more carbon dioxide than terrestrial mountain forests. One acre of mangrove forest can store about 1,450 pounds of carbon per year (163 g carbon per square meter per year) — roughly the same amount emitted by a car.

3. Other benefits from the mangrove ecosystem:

- Oxygen generation: Like all forests, mangroves convert carbon dioxide and water into oxygen through photosynthesis.

• Carbon capture: Mangroves are able to store and stock pile carbon from the atmosphere.

+ Source of income: Communities can profit from eco-tourism, as well as from cultural and recreational service development.

+ Source of goods: Community members can fish and harvest raw materials like lumber and medicinal roots.

+ Erosion reduction: Mangroves filter inland sediment and maintain land integrity.

• Water cycle regulation: Mangroves contribute to healthy aquifer filtration.

• Biodiversity conservation: Many species feed and seek refuge in mangroves.

• Reef protection: By filtering sediment, mangroves protect coral reefs from damage.

Ref: www.solidaridadnetwork.org

See the Holy Spirit @ work: Using “God’s senses” does not mean simply turning inward but becoming free for a different way of living life: See what God sees! Hear what God hears! Laugh where God laughs! Cry where God cries! — *Dorothee Sölle*

Something to tickle you: WORRY does not empty TOMORROW of its sorrows; it empties TODAY of its strength. — *Corrie Ten Boom*

Bernard Paul
Bishop Bernard Paul

Jonathan Rao ordained deacon

RAWANG: After 27 years, the parish community of the Church of St Jude was elated to host an ordination ceremony once again, as seminarian Jonathan Andrew Rao, *pic*, was ordained a deacon on July 20 by Most Rev Julian Leow, Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur.

Present were clergy, religious and parishioners from near and far who had come to witness the diaconal ordination of the 52-year-old seminarian from the Church of St Francis of Assisi, Cheras.

It was a communal celebration as preparations began a month in advance, with parish priest, Fr Vincent Thomas, and his committee working diligently to organise the event.

At the end of the celebration, organising committee chairperson, Dr Grace Gnana Piragasam thanked all the different committees for their dedication and hard work. She thanked all those people who came together to prepare for the celebration. She thanked Fr Michel Dass for playing a crucial role in ensuring the smooth flow of the liturgy and the ordination rites.

In his speech, the newly ordained deacon expressed his gratitude to his mother, Madam Jeya Mary, who was his prayer warrior. He thanked his family mem-



bers, his peers, the clergy and religious whom he had worked and journeyed with, not forgetting the parishioners of the various churches he had worked in.

Deacon Jonathan also expressed his gratitude to Fr Vincent, the parishioners of the Church of St Jude and the Chapel of St Michael in Batu Arang for their support, guidance, love and prayers. He also thanked his rectors and the seminarians whom he had journeyed with.

As Deacon Jonathan embarks on a new chapter of his life, may his ministry be a source of inspiration and blessing to all who encounter him as he continues to embody the spirit of service that lies at the heart of his diaconal vocation.

A sumptuous lunch was prepared for everyone at the end of the celebration. — *By Mercy Almeida Stellus*



The Word of God unites us all



By Christopher Kushi

PENANG: The Asia Pacific Catholic Affinity (APCA) held a significant meeting from July 17-19, bringing together representatives from Bible Societies and the Federation of the Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC).

The primary focus was the "Come Follow Me" campaign and the discussion of translating, adapting, and implementing the modern adaptation of the Good News New Testament book, *Identity: Identified – Navigating the Challenges of Life*, launched on January 9, 2023, at the Minor Basilica of St Anne in Bukit Mertajam. This initiative aims to engage young people with the Bible and reinforce key mission priorities.

Delegates from the Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia, China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Mongolia, Myanmar, New Zealand, Sri Lanka, Singapore, and Malaysia attended the recent meeting.

On July 19, coinciding with the first day of the Feast of St Anne, an Ecumenical Prayer Service was held by the United Bible Societies (UBS) and the Diocese of Penang at the Minor Basilica of St Anne. Rev Mathew K. Punnoose, General Secretary of UBS, highlighted the theme *Gift of Diversity and Harmony* in his homily, reflecting the unity among diverse church de-

nominations. He cited 1 Corinthians 1:12-20, emphasising that "the parts are many, but the Body is One."

Rev Punnoose underscored that despite national, cultural, and linguistic differences, unity through the Bible remains paramount. He shared a hopeful message from a recent visit to China, where people affirmed that the Bible unites them, symbolising that while diversity is a creative expression of God, unity is a divine gift.

Cardinal Sebastian Francis echoed this sentiment, stating that both UBS and APCA are united in their passion for the Word of God. He referenced John 6:63, where Jesus says, "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you – they are full of the Spirit and life." Cardinal Sebastian elaborated that the combination of the Word of God, the Spirit, and Life is the essence of evangelisation. He also mentioned an invitation from Cardinal Giorgio Marengo of Mongolia to share the Gospel in a whisper, highlighting the global spread of this expression.

The cardinal announced ongoing discussions with Protestant and Orthodox Churches to potentially celebrate Easter on the same day in the Jubilee Year of Hope 2025, a move aimed at fostering greater Christian unity. He also related

the theme of the Feast of St Anne, *Enlarge the Space of Your Tent* from Isaiah 54:2, to the collaborative efforts of APCA and UBS, showing the Church's response to the Holy Spirit's guidance.

Rev Arun Sok Nhep, Global Mission Team Director, presented the meeting's statement, outlining key mission priorities for 2024-2025. These priorities include collaboration, translation, and promotion of 'Identity: Identified' in various languages, developing resources to engage youths, diaspora outreach, and enhanced accessibility. Networking and support with Bishops' Conferences and the Catholic Biblical Federation were also emphasised. Lee Li Mei, Head of the Bible Apostolate of Penang, committed to promoting *Identity: Identified* within the Diocese of Penang.

Msr Joseph Jayanathan, Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Bangalore, India, honoured Cardinal Sebastian with a garland, and Rev Dr Kavito Zhimo, General Secretary of the Bible Society of India, honoured Rev Punnoose. Gratitude was extended to the Diocese of Penang and the Bible Society of Malaysia for their exceptional hospitality.

The meeting concluded with Cardinal Sebastian offering the final blessings.

Caritas MJD launches hospital patient care initiatives

JOHOR BAHRU: Caritas MJD launched its inaugural Hospital Patient Care Programme on July 21, marking a significant milestone in its mission to provide compassionate support to those in need. This initiative saw the active involvement and generous contributions of the community, bringing together resources and volunteers to make a meaningful difference in the lives of hospital patients.

A notable highlight of the launch was the donation of two vital ECG machines to Hospital Sultan Aminah. The handover ceremony was graced by Bishop Bernard Paul, who presented the machines to the hospital management. This essential equipment will boost the hospital's capacity to monitor and care for patients with heart conditions, ensuring timely and accurate diagnoses.

The programme also extended to the Paediatrics ward, where Caritas volunteers distributed over 80 hygiene goodie fun packs to young patients. The sight of the children's joyful faces



Bishop Bernard Paul, Caritas MJD team and staff of Hospital Sultan Aminah.

as they received their packs underscored the initiative's positive impact. These fun packs, containing hygiene essentials and play items, were designed to lift the spirits of children undergoing treatment, offering them moments of happiness and comfort during their hospital stay.

The inception of this programme was driven by the reflections and concerns of Caritas members, many of whom have firsthand experience with hospital stays, either as patients or caregivers. These experiences highlighted the need for a supportive presence and a touch of cheer for patients who may lack such support. Recognis-

ing this gap, Caritas MJD initiated the planning of a structured programme to offer meaningful support to hospital patients.

The success of this programme was achieved through a well-coordinated effort among various stakeholders. Caritas MJD participated in a volunteer orientation programme organised by the hospital, which revealed an urgent shortage of specific medical equipment. With the support of Pertubuhan Kebajikan Sulaman Kaseh Negeri Johor and generous donations from Caritas supporters, the necessary equipment was procured to meet the hospital's specifications.

The launch of the Hospital Patient Care Programme marks just the beginning of Caritas MJD's commitment to serving patients in need. The collaborative efforts of Caritas volunteers and Pertubuhan Kebajikan Sulaman Kaseh Negeri Johor are expected to lay the groundwork for future initia-

tives aimed at enhancing patient care and well-being.

Caritas MJD extends heartfelt gratitude to all volunteers and donors who contributed to the success of this programme. Together, we can continue to make a positive impact, bringing hope and support to those who need it most.



Bishop Bernard Paul at the paediatric ward.

Women's ministry aims to champion gender equality

KUANTAN: A group of women from the Church of St Thomas have boldly taken the lead in establishing a new Women's Ministry within the parish. Their mission is to promote gender equality and human rights, while inspiring proactive efforts towards achieving these goals. This initiative addresses the ongoing challenges faced by women working towards a more just and harmonious society.

The inaugural event held on July 18 at the parish's St Giles' Room, drew 16 participants, including two FMM Sisters, who gathered for a day of learning, sharing, and networking. The gathering marked the official start of the Women's Ministry, setting a hopeful and dynamic tone for future endeavours. Before this formal launch, the group had engaged in informal meetings to brainstorm and outline the ministry's objectives.



The ladies from the Church of St Thomas, Kuantan who have come together to form the Women's Ministry in the parish.

The formation of the ministry was announced in the parish bulletin, inviting more women from the parish to join the initiative. Following these discussions, Georgina Lim Geok Ai was appointed as the coordinator of the Women's Ministry.

Parish priest, Fr George Packiasamy, expressed his

enthusiasm for the new ministry: "We are thrilled by their dedication and generosity of time, talent and resources in establishing this ministry. Empowering women to advocate for equality and human rights is vital to our Church's mission. This ministry is a significant step towards fostering gender equality and protecting

human rights."

Fr George also acknowledged the invaluable contributions of women in the Church's various activities: "We deeply value the active involvement of women in our parish. Their dedication strengthens our community's faith and we are immensely grateful for their service."

He emphasised the importance of unity and warmth within the ministry, encouraging members to support each other and integrate newcomers. "It is crucial for the ministry to build a solid foundation through prayer and Scripture, nurturing faith and spreading Christ's love and compassion to all women in our community. This focus on disciple-making and servant leadership will guide the ministry toward its goals."

Fr George highlighted the challenges women face today, underscoring the need to support the ministry to overcome these obstacles and contribute meaningfully to the community. "We extend our heartfelt congratulations to everyone involved in this new ministry. Your dedication and vision are greatly appreciated, and we are grateful for your efforts to enhance the welfare of women in our parish."

Healing seminar ignites faith and joy



The participants who attended the two-day healing seminar at the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Johor Bahru.

JOHOR BAHRU: The Charismatic Prayer Group of the Church of the Immaculate Conception organised a healing seminar on July 20 and 21. Parish priest, Fr Edward Rayappan, warmly welcomed the participants, expressing his hope that the healing they experience would extend to their families, BECs and parish community. He encouraged everyone to enhance the good they encounter and transform the bad into good.

Speaker Jude Antoine, a full-time lay missionary with 41 years of experience proclaiming the healing Word of God and evangelising in more than 40 countries, was the perfect presenter. His straightforward delivery, combined with humour and energy, opened many minds and hearts to new possibilities. Numerous lessons were imparted through role-playing and real-life examples.

Right from the start, Jude stated that the participants were not at the seminar by accident. He asserted that the process of healing what was dead in their lives began the moment they walked in. Jude

explained that the quest for healing is inseparable from the quest for Jesus, the most compassionate Healer (Luke 7:11-15). He referenced Matthew 11:28, where Jesus invites all who are weary and burdened to come to Him.

In one exercise, a participant played the role of the devil, standing outside the hall and persistently knocking on the closed door. This effectively demonstrated how we, by our own free will, often open the door to the devil's promptings, suggestions, and nudges. Participants were cautioned against blaming God for the consequences of personal choices or for their sicknesses, as God "does not delight in the death of the living" (Wisdom 1:13). Nothing evil or bad ever comes from God (John 10:10, Jeremiah 29:11).

Jude addressed the dangers of self-pity, explaining how wounded individuals often cause hurt to others. He highlighted the consequences of sin, including powerlessness, ignorance of God, suffering, death, and concupiscence. He also discussed societal struggles

such as depression, anxiety, stress, and irrational fear, referencing Job 3:25-26: "Truly the thing I fear comes upon me, and what I dread befalls me." He emphasised the healing power of Confession, citing Romans 10:10: "And one confesses with the mouth and so is saved."

The Charismatic Prayer Group energised everyone with songs of praise and worship, with the love for the Lord resonating in every beat and word. Many participants remarked on feeling lighter after being prayed over.

In Proverbs 17:22, we read, "A cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a downcast spirit dries up the bones." Jude emphasised that choosing to be happy and joyful is a personal decision. He encouraged participants to worship the Lord with raised voices and hands, to focus on Him, pursue Him, and call upon Him. He urged them to be active, bold Catholics and to ignite a fire that will draw people to Church. The healing seminar proved to be the fiery spark they needed. — **By Karen Ann Theseira**

Children take centre stage at Cathedral of St John

KUALA LUMPUR: The Cathedral of St John the Evangelist hosted a belated celebration of World Children's Day, having postponed the event due to scheduling conflicts with other parish activities.

The delay did not diminish the enthusiasm of the parishioners, as both young and old gathered in high spirits to mark the occasion, filling the cathedral with a vibrant sense of joy and community.

The youngsters were dressed in purple T-shirts specially designed and printed for the day. They trooped into the church after catechism, quickly filling the pews allocated for them at the front. It was heart-warming to see a sea of purple as the children knelt facing the altar and began to pray the Rosary before Mass. Five children from various classes led the Rosary.

Parish priest, Fr Gerard Theraviam, celebrated the 11.00am Mass, which was led by the children of the parish. The roles of lectors and the commentator for the Prayer of the Faithful were all filled by children who had dedicated time and effort to practise for this important role. Kudos to their parents and the Liturgical team for instilling in them the importance of participating reverently in the Eucharistic celebration. The choir was the Cathedral's Young Person's Choir, led by choirmaster Jillian Thomas, who had diligently practised each week. Their beautiful performance added life and meaning to the hymns, with everyone particularly touched by the sweet voice of cantor Aubry.

It was especially touching to see that for every child with a role in the Mass, there was an adult nearby to



A child getting an ice cream treat after the Mass.

offer encouragement and support.

The sermon was tailored for the children, with Fr Gerard inviting them to answer questions, leading to much laughter. Fr Gerard also highlighted the words imprinted on the children's T-shirts — "I am a beautiful, marvellous, unique Child of God" — reminding everyone that they are beloved by God and precious in His sight.

Afterwards, there was ice cream and twisted balloons for everyone! The treats were a big hit, with the congregation staying to enjoy them despite the heat. Merriment and joy filled the air as people savoured their ice cream, chatted with one another, and children played with their balloons. It was a wonderful time of fellowship. A special thank you to St David Party Castle for generously sponsoring 200 balloons.

Looking ahead, the parents and catechists of the Cathedral plan to collaborate on creating more special and meaningful activities for the children and teenagers of the parish. Their goal is to help the youth grow in their faith and deepen their relationship with Jesus. — **By Melissa Pereira**

Living in faith

By Caroline David

KUALA LUMPUR: 'What is faith'? This profound question was explored by parishioners of the Church of Christ the Light and visiting participants, from the Church of Jesus Caritas and Church of the Risen Christ, during a three-day formation retreat attended by over 50 people. The talks were presented by Frs Nicholas Hoh, OCD and Philip Tay, OCD, and were divided into three parts.

The first day focused on defining faith, differentiating its types, and examining whether reason can determine faith's existence. Fr Nicholas explained that faith is a strong belief, highlighting two types: everyday faith in the abilities of others, and spiritual faith. While the former is common and understood by all, the talks delved into the latter — spiritual faith.

Fr Nicholas discussed St Thomas

Aquinas's reconciliation of faith and reason through five principal logical statements — *the First Mover; Universal Causation; Contingency, Degree, and Final Cause*. These statements logically lead to the existence of a Creator, showing that faith in this Creator is supported by reason. Despite the heavy intellectual content, participants left with a deeper understanding and eagerness for more.

The second day addressed the origins of faith, starting with God's covenant with Abraham. Fr Nicholas explained that, while reason guides us to a point, faith surpasses it. He took participants back to Abraham's story, highlighting his journey from one man to a nation. Despite not seeing the fulfilment of God's promises, Abraham remained confident in God's faithfulness.

In the New Testament, faith culminates in Jesus Christ, who recruited 12 disciples to witness His Passion, Death, and

Resurrection. Fr Nicholas emphasised that Jesus chose both illiterate and literate men to ensure the preservation of faith through Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. Participants gained a new appreciation for these two sources of faith, recognising the sacrifices made to preserve them.

On the final day, Fr Philip focused on practical application. He explained that faith works hand in hand with hope and love, forming the core of Christian living. Using the Israelites' wilderness experience, he illustrated how God moulds His people through trials and worship. Fr Philip encouraged attendees to deepen their prayer life, stating that faith and hope sustain believers beyond mere emotions.

He concluded by reflecting on love, explaining that faith, infused with love, transforms believers into God's children, fostering spiritual growth and likeness to Him. The retreat ended with a renewed under-



Fr Nicholas Hoh, OCD, at one of the sessions.

standing of faith and its practical implications for daily life.

The three-day formation retreat left participants inspired and spiritually nourished. Guided by the Holy Spirit, the sessions provided invaluable insights and practical tools for living out their faith. Attendees looked forward to integrating these lessons into their spiritual journeys, strengthened and enriched by the experience.

Honouring Our Lady of Mount Carmel

CAMERON HIGHLANDS: The Church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel celebrated its feast day triduum from July 12 to 14 with rosary, novena, Mass, and a 1.1km procession on the second night around Tanah Rata town.

Many onlookers came out from the surrounding shops to witness the faith of the community, who took turns carrying the statue of Our Lady of Mount Carmel and the Child Jesus. The rosary was recited in multilingual languages throughout the procession route. Established by the MEP Fathers, this hill station church also marked its 89th anniversary.

Fr George Ho, OCD, a Carmelite priest, celebrated the triduum Masses with parish priest, Fr Augustine Lee concelebrating. On the first day of the triduum, Fr George delivered a sermon touching on how the hill station church got its name. "The weather in Cameron Highlands and in particular, Tanah Rata, reminded the founding MEP Fathers of Carmel, which in Hebrew means garden, orchard, God's vineyard where flowers bloomed and fruit trees flourished. The two facades of Mount Carmel, with one side remaining evergreen and the other side dry and barren, is an image of our spiritual lives; that of a life filled with God's grace and also a life of dryness". He further elaborated that, as the Book of Hosea in the first reading pointed out, God is calling us to return to Him so that He can nourish us.

"Today's Gospel also asks us to bear witness, as true Christians, to Christ. It is also the feast day of Sts Louis and Zelig Martin, parents of St Thérèse of the Child



Fr George Ho, OCD, blessing the statue of Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

Jesus. And so, we pray for married couples who suffer dryness in their married lives," summed up Fr George.

On the second day, Fr George focused on the ancient title for Mary. The title, Our Lady Star of the Sea, originated from St Jerome's mistranslation of her name from Hebrew, Miryam, meaning drop of the sea, into the Latin *Stilla Maris* or *Stella Maris*, Star of the Sea. St Bernard of Clairvaux wrote, "If temptation, storms, or you fall upon the rocks of tribulation, look to the star: Call upon Mary!" Fr George then broke into a moving rendition of the hymn 'Hail Queen of Heaven, the Ocean Star' to showcase the title — Mother of Christ, Star of the Sea and Virgin most pure, Star of the Sea, a title which reflects the role of the Blessed Virgin

Mary as a mother who will guide and protect us in the tempests of our lives.

Fr George explained that in the First Book of Kings, the biblical text relates to the origin of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. The first reading for the Solemnity Mass of Our Lady of Mount Carmel mentioned the prophet Elijah interceding for rain. According to biblical interpretation, the cloud which rose from the sea symbolised the Virgin Mary, who arose from sinful humanity (sea) and gave birth to a Saviour (symbolised by the rain). "In this sea of bitterness and sinfulness, Mary was born immaculate. Let us walk in this pilgrimage of life with faith, fidelity and love and let us get closer to Mary, for she will lead us to her Son", challenged Fr George.

A sumptuous supper was provided after the procession to approximately 150 people, and fire crackers, as well as fireworks, were let off to mark the happy occasion.

On the final day of the triduum, Fr George preached on Our Lady's mission to make her Son known, to make Him loved and most of all, to save souls. "Just as Jesus commanded His disciples to take nothing for their evangelisation journey, Our Mother will take a piece of her apron and put it in our pocket, asking us to wear the little apron as a sign of protection. This apron called the Scapular, is a sacramental and a silent witnessing to the world that we are Christians. Those wearing the scapular will have to lead good Christian lives, not to be negligent in their spiritual lives and to be chaste according to their states of life. We are also called to practise occasions of mortification of the senses through fasting and abstinence. We thus remember the struggles of our brothers and sisters. Frequent the sacraments to be nearer to God and He will give us strength. Nothing is impossible with God. I pray that you remain in His presence and be faithful," summed up Fr George.

Before the final blessing, the Rite for the Blessing and Investiture of the Scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel was performed by Fr Augustine and Fr George on the faithful who entrusted themselves totally to Our Lady's protection.

Fr Augustine thanked all those who had helped to make the celebration a success. Breakfast was served after Mass and parishioners and visitors mingled during the fellowship. — **By Cynthia Baring-Gould**

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Catholic lawyers' bowling fellowship

KUALA LUMPUR: Members of the Catholic Lawyers' Society (CLS) of Kuala Lumpur took some time off for a bowling event on July 13 at the Bukit Kiara Equestrian & Country Resort.

The event, graced by Archbishop Julian Leow, was a success and attended primarily by young Catholic lawyers, along with a few senior lawyers and their family members.

There was a spirited competitiveness among the lawyers as they aimed to knock down their bowling pins. Archbishop Julian amazed everyone with his bowling skills, securing high scores. He also graciously offered guidance to some of the young lawyers, sharing tips on the proper bowling techniques.

There was no age discrimination between the players as both senior and junior lawyers were put together to make up the different teams.

A cordial moment was also shared between the archbishop and the lawyers as they gathered for fellowship during breaks between their bowling matches.

The president of CLS, Stan Cross played a key role in organising the event with assistance from a few committee members.

Overall, the event was a great success. The society hopes to organise more events like this in the future, in addition to their usual annual activities, to provide a platform for both senior and junior lawyers to interact in a more relaxed setting.

St Anthony's parish launches mini mobile children's library

By Elvina Fernandez

KUALA LUMPUR: The Church of St Anthony marked a significant milestone with the launch of a mini mobile children's library on July 21. The initiative, a joint effort by the Parish Integral Human Development Ministry's (PIHDM) Ecology and Environment team and the Catechetical ministry, aims to cultivate a love for reading among catechism students, while instilling a sense of responsibility and community.

The mini mobile library is a treasure trove of books catering to all levels, from kindergarten to form five and all language classes including Tamil, English and Bahasa Malaysia. From picture books for the youngest readers to more advanced texts for older children, the library ensures that every child can find something engaging and educational.

The collection includes a variety of genres, with a special emphasis on Bible stories, allowing children to explore their faith in a fun and interactive way. The books were generously donated by various donors within the community, reflecting the collective effort to support the children's education and spiritual growth.

Parish priest, Fr Dr Clarence Devadass, in his address during the launch, emphasised on the importance of reading in a child's development. He highlighted how the library would provide educational resources and teach catechism students the value of responsibility.

"By borrowing and returning books, children learn to take care of shared resources, a lesson that extends beyond the classroom," he said.

Fr Clarence also encouraged students of all levels to read at least two to three books this year



Fr Clarence Devadass with the children at the mini mobile library.

and ensure that they return the books in good condition, so other students can benefit from them as well.

"By providing access to a diverse range of books and promoting responsible borrowing, the church is nurturing a generation of readers who will carry these values into the future," he added.

Students, parents, and parishioners attended the launch, all eager to explore the new mini mobile library. The atmosphere was filled with excitement as children browsed through the books, picking out their favourites to read and learn.

A parent, Monica Sonia expressed her gratitude for the initia-

tive, noting how it provides young students access to a wide range of religious books they might not have at home.

"We appreciate the effort to make faith learning enjoyable and accessible, especially in a world where digital reading is gaining popularity. This is also a great opportunity to have students experience how we read religious books back then," she said.

The Ecology & Environment team volunteers played a crucial role in organising the event and will continue to manage the library, ensuring that it remains a valuable resource for the students. Looking ahead, the Church of St Anthony plans to expand the library's collection and introduce reading programmes and storytelling sessions. These activities aim to further engage children and foster a lifelong love for reading and learning in faith.

Retreat strengthens AMNEC members for mission work



Fr Edwin Peter with the members of the Archdiocesan Mission of New Evangelisation for Christ (AMNEC).

PORT DICKSON: The Kuala Lumpur Archdiocesan Mission of New Evangelisation for Christ (AMNEC) held a retreat for its twelve team members from July 19 to 21 at the Champagnat Youth Centre (Marist Brothers). Themed *An Empowered AMNEC*, the retreat aimed to strengthen and empower the team in their mission.

The retreat sought to unite all AMNEC members, providing an opportunity to encounter God, rejuvenate their spirits for the journey of evangelisation, and discuss future mission plans. Praise and worship, led by Cornerstone Disciples, enriched the retreat, fostering an even deeper and stronger evangelisation experience for the team.

Retreat master, Vincent Nathan, emphasised the importance of three pillars for successful evangelisation: spending time in prayer, immersing oneself in the Word of God, and continually depending on the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Norman Bismar and Michelle Anthony of ABLAZE reiterated the significance of prayer and having a personal relationship with

Jesus and the Holy Spirit. "This is paramount to the success of any work of evangelisation," they said. Their sessions culminated in the "Infilling of the Holy Spirit," which empowered the team and enabled them to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit for their mission.

On the final day of the retreat, Fr Edwin Peter, the ecclesiastical assistant for AMNEC, celebrated Mass. During the service, the members consecrated their desire to evangelise with a Commitment Prayer, asking God to use their talents, resources, time, experience, spiritual growth, and everything else He has given them, to fulfil His will, in response to Jesus' Great Commission (Mt 28:18-20).

The retreat was a time of bonding, transforming the team into a true family in Christ. It was filled with moments of genuine love, laughter, and tears of joy.

For the upcoming October Mission Month, in collaboration with the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS), the plan is to bring the mission to all churches in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur through weekly events at five

different parishes, emphasising the theme *I Am a Mission*.

In line with Pope Francis' message for World Mission Day, *Go and Invite Everyone to the Banquet*, the Mission Month will be launched on October 1, 2024, at the Church of St Theresa in Nilai. The following week, the mission will continue at the Church of St Thomas the Apostle in Kuantan. Week three will see the mission at the Church of Sts Peter and Paul in Banting, followed by the Church of the Risen Christ in Kuala Lumpur in week four, concluding at the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Puchong. More details on the Mission Month programme will be shared at the upcoming Clergy Recollection in August.

The retreat concluded with the team setting its goal to create Parish Evangelisation Teams (PET) and evangelisers in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur by 2033. This year marks the 2000th anniversary of the paramount events of human history: Jesus' Death, Resurrection, Ascension, and Pentecost, making it the greatest of all Jubilees.

First World Marriage Day celebration at Mantin parish

MANTIN, Negeri Sembilan: On July 20, the Church of St Aloysius, in collaboration with parishioners of the Church of St Theresa, Nilai, celebrated its inaugural World Marriage Day with the theme *Love Beyond Borders*.

The event featured 42 couples, ranging from those married for six months to those celebrating 52 years, who renewed their wedding vows in all four respective languages. Many couples wore their wedding *sarees* and gowns, while the men were dressed in traditional attire and suits with rose corsages.

During the sermon, parish priest, Fr Christopher Soosaipillai, urged the couples to remember three key principles: being shepherds, remaining steadfast, and making sacrifices.

A photo booth was available for couples to capture memories of the special day. After Mass, there was a fellowship which included the cutting of a wedding cake, a slide presentation of the wedding and current photos of the couples,



and a lively session of singing and dancing. The impromptu participation from the crowd added to the evening's merriment, with Fr Christopher leading a few songs, including a rousing rendition of *Country Roads*.

The celebration concluded with a communal cleanup effort, marking a joyful and memorable evening for all involved. — **By Selva Manogary**



The married couples getting ready to cut the wedding cake after Mass.

Pope appeals for Olympic Truce for war-torn nations

VATICAN: Pope Francis on July 21 expressed his hope that the Paris Olympic and Paralympic Games provide the opportunity for warring nations to respect an ancient Greek tradition and establish a truce for the duration of the Games.

"According to ancient tradition, may the Olympics be an opportunity to establish a truce in wars, demonstrating a sincere will for peace," he said.

Pope Francis spoke after the *Angelus* prayer recitation in St Peter's Square.

Touching on the commencement of the Paris Olympic Games, followed by the Paralympic Games, the Pope noted that "Sports also has a great social power, capable of peacefully uniting people from different cultures."



Mass on July 19, 2024, in the iconic La Madeleine church in the heart of Paris to launch the Olympic truce in the presence of over a hundred diplomatic delegations, including one from the International Olympic Committee, led by IOC President Thomas Bach, and Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo leading a delegation from City Hall. (OSV News photo/courtesy IOC)

"I hope that this event can be a sign of the inclusive world we want to build and that the athletes, with their sporting testimony, may be messengers of peace and valuable models for the young," he said.

The tradition of the "Olympic Truce" originally aimed to allow safe participation in the ancient Olympic Games for all athletes and spectators from Greek city-states who were constantly engaged in conflict with each other.

In the 1990s, the International Olympic Committee decided to revive the concept of the Olympic Truce with a view to protecting the interests of the athletes and sports, in general, and to harness the power of sports to promote peace, dialogue and reconciliation more broadly. — **By Linda Bordon, Vatican News**

Call for repeal of India's anti-conversion laws

NEW DELHI: A delegation of Christian leaders has urged India's federal government to ask 11 states to repeal the sweeping anti-conversion laws, which they say target Christians.

"The anti-conversion law has been weaponised to target religious minorities," an eight-member delegation from the United Christian Forum (UCF) told federal minority affairs minister, Kiren Rijju.

The delegation met the minister in his office on July 20 and asked him to "issue an advisory to the state governments to repeal the anti-conversion law."

Stringent laws that criminalise conversion have been enacted in 11 states, most of them ruled by the Hindu right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The Christian forum monitors anti-Christian violence in the country and its delegation presented a memorandum to the minister highlighting the rising persecution against Christians.

"The minister agreed to look into our grievances," said A C Michael, a delegation member.

Michael said on July 22 that they would discuss the issue further with the federal government and the provincial states concerned.

The memorandum has the details of persecution, including murder, false cases, social boycotts, and denial of burial grounds.

There were 727 incidents of violence against Christians in 2023, the memorandum said, and termed them "as a disturbing trend."

In the current year till June-end, "a staggering 361 incidents of targeted attacks" against Christians were reported, it said.

The central Indian state of Chhattisgarh tops the list with 96 incidents, followed by northern Uttar Pradesh, which has 92 cases. Both the states are ruled by the BJP and have the anti-conversion law in force, which bans religious conversion by using force or allurement.

"The primary reason for these attacks "was the false allegations of fraudulent [religious] conversions," the memorandum noted.

The memorandum said that "police collude with the right-wing groups" to target Christians, who make up a mere 2.3 per cent of India's 1.4 billion people.

The delegation also told the minister that Christians were mercilessly beaten to death for their faith, even when the Indian constitution guarantees religious freedom.

On July 12, a four-member delegation led by Archbishop Andrews Thazhath of Trichur, president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference



Activists and members representing the Christian community take part in a protest against what they claim as an increase in hostility, hate, and violence against Christians in various parts of India, in New Delhi, February 19, 2023.

of India, called on Modi and expressed concerns over the increasing hostility Christians face.

It was the Church leaders' first meeting with Modi, a month after he was elected to power for the third consecutive term. The leaders wanted Modi's intervention to stop the atrocities against Christians.

Cases filed by Archbishop Peter Machado

of Bangalore and others are pending in the Supreme Court of India, which complained of a link between the anti-conversion law and the increasing attacks against Christians.

During a hearing on May 16 over the anti-conversion law in Uttar Pradesh, the Supreme Court noted that "some parts [of the law] may seem to be violative of the fundamental right to religion. — **ucanews.com**

Church hails Pakistan lifting ban on asylum seekers' passports

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has lifted a month-old ban on issuing passports to its citizens seeking asylum, which Church leaders said was a welcome step that ended a policy that violated human rights.

The Government decided on July 22 to issue passports to asylum-seeking Pakistani citizens who live abroad but whose passports were either cancelled or expired, according to a government declaration.

The declaration said the passports would be issued within 60 days of application. The Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Mohammad Ishaq Dar, decided to reverse the June 5 ban during a meeting focused on the welfare of overseas Pakistanis.

The ban asked Pakistan missions abroad to stop issuing passports to those seeking asylum or already living on asylum "in the best national interest."

Bishop Samson Shukardin of Hyderabad, president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Pakistan, welcomed it "as a good decision."

Shukardin said that the decision against issuing passports would have pushed citizens in limbo... without having the nationality of Pakistan or any other country."

The decision to reverse the ban would "benefit the country in the long run with foreign remittances and stabilise the economic malaise. It would benefit asylum seekers of all faiths, including Christians," the bishop said.

Hundreds of people from Pakistan, mostly Christians and Ahmadiyya Muslims, flee their Islamic country to escape religious per-

secution and threats to their lives. They move to Asian nations such as Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Malaysia and seek asylum in Europe and elsewhere.

According to the UNHCR office in Sri Lanka, the country hosts 311 Pakistani refugees and 180 asylum seekers, including 30 Christians.

About 400 Christian families are in Thailand seeking asylum, with a similar number in Malaysia, according to church sources.

Fr Inayat Bernard, the chaplain of the Catholic charity Caritas Pakistan, presently based in Bangkok, said lifting the ban has caused "a sigh of relief".

"It has lessened the tension of refugees and asylum seekers working to move to the next country. The people in authority have to ensure the security of all citizens, especially vulnerable minorities of Pakistan," he said via text message.

The priest said that "discriminatory laws and unexplained and senseless taxes force people to flee the country and seek asylum for the security of their lives and a better future." — **By Kamran Chaudhry, ucanews.com**



Papal visit enthuses Indonesian Muslim leaders

JAKARTA: Top leaders of Indonesia's two major Islamic organisations have expressed their enthusiasm for the upcoming visit of Pope Francis to their nation, calling it a special occasion to embolden trust and harmony between religious communities.

The visit can be a catalyst for peace-building in a world plagued by conflicts, said the leaders representing Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah during a webinar on July 23.

"We welcome the visit with joy," said Ulil Abshar Abdalla, a leader of Nahdlatul Ulama which has an estimated 80 million members, making it one of the largest Islamic organisations in the world.

Abdalla made the remarks during the webinar organised by the Indonesian embassy at the Vatican and the Association of Indonesian Priests and Sisters in Rome.

He said the papal visit was special because it comes two months after the Grand Imam of Al Azhar University in Cairo, Muhammad Ahmad Al Thayyib, visited Jakarta on July 9-11.

"The visit of the Grand Sheikh and the visit of the Pope occurring at almost the same time is impor-

tant considering that both figures have a great influence on their respective religions," he said.

"How come these visits happened consecutively? Is this divine providence?" he asked.

In 2018, Francis and Al-Thayeb signed *The Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*, also known as the Abu Dhabi Declaration, which stresses "a culture of mutual respect" that can allow different faiths to live peacefully.

Abdalla said the Abu Dhabi document highlights the importance of openness in building relations between religious communities.

The Pope's visit, he said, "is a breath of fresh air for all religious communities in Indonesia, not just Muslims and Catholics."

Syafiq A Mughni from the International Relations and Cooperation Division of Muhammadiyah — which has 50 million members — said this visit is expected to strengthen Islamic and Catholic relations in "building mutual trust between us."

"Because we do not deny that this often happens in various regions of the world and in our country there is distrust or mutual

suspicion between one group and another," he said.

He said a common understanding between faiths is important not only in religious affairs but also in other aspects such as politics, economics, and culture.

"I think we should interpret the arrival of the Pope as a momentum to create a common understanding, how we see this situation as a challenge that we must solve together," he said.

Religious communities need to find common ground in overcoming the gap between the rich and the poor, and to tackle injustices everywhere.

Looking at other faiths with a positive mindset can yield good fruits, he said.

"Islam says something positive about Catholics, likewise Catholics say positive things about Muslims. It can be a powerful force in building a life together," he added.

He stressed implementing the Abu Dhabi Declaration with concrete action.

Indonesian ambassador to the Vatican, Michael Trias Kuncahyono, said the Pope's visit was not only important for



Dewi Praswida, a student from Indonesia shakes hands with Pope Francis at St Peter's Square in a file photo. (Facebook/Dewi Praswida)

Indonesian Catholics, but also for the whole nation.

He said, "There was no economic diplomacy or even political interest in the visit. There are only humanitarian interests, morality and ethics. That is what Pope Francis always campaigns for," he said.

According to the official itinerary, Francis will meet Muslim leaders at the Istiqlal Mosque,

close to the Cathedral Church in Jakarta during his Sept 2-6 visit.

The two places of worship are now connected by a tunnel which is scheduled to be inaugurated next month. It is expected to be used during the Pope's visit.

Francis will be the third Pope to visit Indonesia after visits by Pope Paul VI in December 1970 and Pope John Paul II in October 1989. — ucanews.com

PNG Church meet, reflect and prepare spiritually for Pope's visit

PORT MORESBY: Prayers, reflections and moments of discussion. This is how the priests of Papua New Guinea are preparing to live Pope Francis' apostolic journey.

The Pontiff, on what has been defined as "the papal trip of records", will remain in the country for just over 48 hours. However, despite the little time at his disposal, his agenda is full of appointments and, although the vast majority of the population is Protestant (Catholics barely represent 26 per cent of the population, which is close to 10 million), there is great expectation regarding this historic event. The last Pope to visit Papua New Guinea was John Paul II in 1995. Pope Francis should have gone there four years ago, but the outbreak of the pandemic blocked everything.

Since the announcement of the trip, parishes and communities have strived to offer the faithful, moments of prayer and catechetical and formation meetings to help Christians and not only them — understand why the greatest exponent of the Catholic Church, who is not only a spiritual leader but also a Head of State, will visit not only the capital, Port Moresby, but also Vanimo, a small town of just under 10,000 inhabitants where there is a thriving Catholic community, rich in missionaries, several of them Argentines.



Pope Francis receives Mundiya Kepanga, a Papuan activist advocating for the rights of Indigenous peoples and leader from Papua New Guinea, at the Vatican May 8, 2024. (IPA Agency/Maxppp)

"People are curious and want to know more," Fr Victor Roche, Indian missionary of the Society of the Divine Word and currently National Director of the Pontifical Mission Societies in Papua New Guinea, told Fides. But to prepare the faithful, priests also need to meet, reflect and prepare spiritually. And so the traditional spiritual retreat of the clergy in Port Moresby, led by Cardinal John Ribat, M.S.C., Archbishop of Port Moresby,

and preached by Dariusz Kaluza MSF, Bishop of Bougainville, has become an occasion to discuss and pray about the many initiatives that will take place between now and the Pope's visit.

Because if it is true that "people want to know more", it is necessary to know how to convey the beauty of a papal trip well in a particular context, taking into account that a large part of the population is illiterate. — *Fides*

Quebec cardinal resumes duties

QUEBEC: Cardinal Gerald C. Lacroix, *pic* is resuming his duties as Quebec's archbishop, six months after stepping aside when he was accused of sexual misconduct for which a Vatican-mandated investigation found no evidence to support.

Cardinal Lacroix announced he would step back into his role as archbishop of Quebec and primate of Canada in a July 22 news release posted to the Archdiocese of Quebec's website. He is to preside over Mass July 26 at the Sanctuary of Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré for the feast of St Anne.

The cardinal's voluntary absence began in late January when abuse allegations surfaced as part of a class action lawsuit against the Archdiocese of Quebec surrounding alleged historical abuse cases. Cardinal Lacroix has denied any wrongdoing, but the Vatican hired retired Quebec judge André Denis to investigate the claims made against Cardinal Lacroix.

Denis' investigation concluded when in May he said he failed to find any evidence to justify a canonical trial.

"It has been a difficult journey, but the conclusions of Judge Denis' investigation, the support of those around me and the possibility of making myself heard that could



result from the request for intervention lead me to calmly resume my ministry," Cardinal Lacroix said. "The community knows to what extent the church of Quebec condemns reprehensible acts and knows the measures we have taken to prevent them."

While resuming his duties, Cardinal Lacroix has entrusted Auxiliary Bishop Marc Pelchat with the management of the class action against the archdiocese and handling allegations of abuse.

Cardinal Lacroix was among a list of 15 accused persons added to a list in the class action lawsuit in January that alleges sexual abuse by clergy and church staff dating back to 1940. An unnamed female plaintiff, who claims she was 17 at the time, alleges sexual touching involving Cardinal Lacroix between 1987 and 1988.

Denis, a retired Quebec superior court justice, said his investigation — ordered by Pope Francis in February — was incomplete because the complainant refused to take part. Through his other steps in his investigation, Denis said he found nothing to substantiate the allegations and described Cardinal Lacroix's record as "impeccable." — *The Catholic Register*

We need to experience synodality to truly understand it

I confess I fell asleep several times reading the new working document for the synod on synodality, which will have its second session this October. The working document, or *instrumentum laboris* as it is officially known, sets the agenda for the next iteration of the synod. The first convening occurred last October after a worldwide consultation with listening sessions aimed at surfacing concerns people have about the Catholic Church.

Much of the document presents a theological justification for synodality. Whether it will convince people who oppose the process remains to be seen.

The working paper insists, “Synodality is not simply a goal, but a journey of all the faithful.” The goal is for the whole people of God to become an agent of the proclamation of the Gospel. “Through His Church, guided by His Spirit, the Lord wants to rekindle hope in the hearts of humanity, restore joy and save all, especially those whose faces are stained with tears and who cry out to Him in anguish.”

The synodal process began with a listening phase, which was followed last October by discernment in prayer and dialogue to discover what steps the Spirit is asking us to take.

This was followed by further consultations to discover “how to be a synodal Church in mission.” The objective of the consultation was “to identify the paths we can follow and the tools we might adopt in our different contexts and circumstances in order to enhance the unique contribution of each baptised person and of each Church in the one mission of proclaiming the Risen Lord and His Gospel to the world today.”

Time for a cup of coffee. Just kidding.

The vision of a synodal Church presented in the *instrumentum laboris* is beautiful, but it is terribly abstract. We need to experience synodality to truly understand it, just as we need to experience love to understand it. A philosophical dissertation on love does not cut it. Talking about synodality does not cut it; we need to experience it.

Those who have experienced synodality speak highly of it, especially “conversations in the Spirit,” where small groups (around 10 people) listen and share their experiences,



Members of the assembly of the Synod of Bishops gather for morning prayer October 27, 2023, in the Paul VI Audience Hall at the Vatican. (CNS/Vatican Media)

views and hopes for the Church.

In preparation for the second session of the synod, the focus was: “How can the identity of the synodal People of God in mission take concrete form in the relationships, paths and places where the everyday life of the Church takes place?”

Under the direction of Pope Francis, all the hot-button issues which surfaced at the first session of the synod have been sent to committees for further study. He wants the second session to focus on “how to be a synodal Church in mission.”

As a result, the *instrumentum laboris* presents the theological foundations of the vision of a missionary synodal Church promoted by Pope Francis.

“In Christ, light of all the nations, we are one People of God, called to be a sign and instrument of union with God and of the unity of all humanity,” explains the document. “We do this by walking together in history, living the communion that is a partaking in the life of the Trinity, and promoting the participation

of all in view of our common mission.”

Synodality involves a style of being Church that includes “listening to the Word of God, listening to the Holy Spirit, listening to one another, listening to the living tradition of the Church and its Magisterium.”

Such a vision requires rethinking how we present the Gospel in today’s context. Old theological arguments are unintelligible to contemporary people.

A synodal Church also calls for a renewal of liturgical and sacramental life “starting with liturgical celebrations that are beautiful, dignified, accessible, fully participative, well-inculturated and capable of nourishing the impulse towards mission.”

This would include “the use of language that is more inclusive and to a range of images from Scripture and Tradition in preaching, teaching, catechesis and the drafting of official Church documents.”

The Eucharist needs to be “a sign of the unceasing gift of grace that conforms us to Christ and makes us members of His Body

and nourishment that sustains us on the path of conversion and mission” so “that the Eucharistic assembly manifests and nourishes the missionary synodal life of the Church.” Take note, those running the Eucharistic Revival in the United States.

The foundational section is followed by “three closely interwoven sections, which illuminate the missionary synodal life of the Church from different perspectives”:

- i. from the perspective of Relationships — with the Lord, between brothers and sisters and between Churches — which sustain the vitality of the Church in ways more profound than the merely structural;
- ii. from the perspective of the pathways that support the dynamism of our ecclesial relationships;
- iii. from the perspective of the places that are the tangible contexts for our embodied relationships, marked by their variety, plurality and interconnection, and rooted in the foundation of the profession of faith, resisting human temptations to abstract universalism.

Time for another cup of coffee.

What the document is trying to say is that the Church is more about relationships than structures, which are only there to support relationships. What is desired is a “Church less focused on bureaucracy and more capable of nurturing relationships with the Lord, between men and women, in the family, in the community, and between social groups.”

The synod has been asked to encourage the full participation of women, young people and the marginalised in parishes, dioceses and other ecclesial realities, including positions of responsibility.

Although the synod will not consider the possibility of married priests or women deacons and priests, it is open to greater involvement of laity in church ministries, such as “the ministry of coordinating a small church community, the ministry of leading moments of prayer (at funerals or otherwise), the extraordinary ministry of communion, or other services not necessarily liturgical.”

Listening, Discernment, Accompaniment

The *instrumentum laboris* notes that in the Latin Church, laypeople can be delegated to do baptisms and weddings. Church rules could also be changed to allow laypeople to preach at Mass.

In other words, lay men and women could be allowed to do everything that deacons can do without worrying about ordination.

The document encourages formalising the ministry of catechists, which has been so successful in Africa, where there are few deacons. It also proposes a new “ministry of listening and accompaniment.”

These ministries would not include ordination, but they could be officially recognised and empowered by the Church. Quoting Vatican II, the working paper says, the task of pastors is “to acknowledge their [the faithful’s] ministries and their charisms, so that all may cooperate unanimously, each in her or his own way, in the common task.”

Such a vision of the Church moves “from a pyramidal way of exercising authority to a synodal way.”

This “path will entail a new way of thinking about and organising pastoral action, which takes into account the participation of

all baptised men and women in the mission of the Church, aiming, in particular, to bring out, recognise and animate the different baptismal charisms and ministries.”

These positive relationships and ministries require “a deeper formation in the knowledge of how the Spirit acts in the Church and guides it through history,” including “formation in listening” and discernment. The purpose of this formation is to form “men and women capable of assuming the mission of the Church in co-responsibility and cooperation with the power of the Spirit (Acts 1:8).” The document calls for “the participation of women in formation programmes alongside seminarians, priests, religious, and lay people.”

While emphasising the role of consultation and discernment, the *instrumentum laboris* also affirms “ultimately, the responsibility of the competent authority” for decisions. “The authority remains free from a juridical point of view since the consultative opinion is not binding.” However, “if a general agreement emerges, the authority will not depart from it without a convincing reason.”

The document sees the exercise of authority as “a moderating force in the common search

for what the Spirit requires, as a ministry at the service of the unity of the People of God.” But this also requires transparency, accountability and even a process for evaluating the use of authority in the Church. The working paper acknowledges that “the lack of transparency and accountability fuels clericalism.”

All of this happens in unique communities rooted in a place and a culture. “The variety of liturgical, theological, spiritual, and disciplinary traditions demonstrate how much this plurality enriches the Church and makes it beautiful.” The Church must avoid the temptation of “an abstract and homogenising universalism.”

Today, a place cannot be understood in purely geographical and spatial terms. “Rather, it points to our belonging to a web of relations and a culture that is more dynamic and mobile than in the past.”

The document concludes by noting the existence of parish, deanery and diocesan councils, as well as episcopal conferences, which act as instruments for the consultation, planning and decision-making as envisaged by existing canon law. With the appropriate adaptations, they could prove to be even more suitable for



giving the synodal approach a concrete form.

“These councils can become subjects of ecclesial discernment and synodal decision-making and places for the practice of accountability and the evaluation of those in positions of authority.” Episcopal conferences could also be given more authority, even “doctrinal authority,” to respond to the sociocultural diversity of the Church with “liturgical, disciplinary, theological, and spiritual expressions appropriate to different socio-cultural contexts.”

In short, the October synod is being asked to reflect on “how to be a synodal Church in mission; how to engage in deep listening and dialogue; how to be co-responsible in the light of the dynamism of our personal and communal baptismal vocation; how to transform structures and processes so that all may participate and share the charisms that the Spirit pours out on each for the common good; how to exercise power and authority as service.”

The challenge will be to answer these questions by pointing to paths and tools that help foster relationships and discernment in churches in different places while avoiding abstractions that will put people to sleep. —

By Fr Thomas Reese, SJ, NCR

Praying for Political Leaders

Pope's prayer intention for August



PRAYER PRISM

Fr Fabian Dicom

Some time ago, I preached in my homilies about the need to address issues such as injustice, racism, and corruption. I emphasised that, reflecting on the Word of God and the Social Teachings of the Church in our socio-political context, calls us to take action. This message, highlighting the political realm of our country, led to criticism from some individuals. They urged me to focus on what they considered appropriate material for homilies, such as catechesis, personal spirituality, and morality. They expressed disapproval of my inclusion of “politics in the Church”, arguing that it was irrelevant to their faith life. These homilies, nevertheless, addressed the injustices in our society, emphasising the importance of putting our faith into action, especially in the realm of social justice and advocacy.

However, our faith does not exist in a vacuum but has mandatory implications for our engagement in public life. This month, Pope Francis’ prayer intention invites us to reflect deeply on the role of political leaders and to pray that they may truly serve their people, promoting integral human development and the common good, with a special focus on caring for the poor and the unemployed.

Misunderstanding the Separation of Faith and Politics

Many cite “Give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar – and to God what belongs to God” (Matthew 22:21) to argue that faith should be kept separate from politics. However, Jesus’ response was not about creating a strict separation but emphasising that our ultimate allegiance is to God. Our faith should guide our political actions, ensuring they align with justice, compassion, and the common good. This holistic view is supported by the broader Christian tradition, which calls for the integration of faith into all aspects of life.

The True Meaning of Politics

The word “politics” originates from the Greek “polis,” meaning city-state, and refers to the affairs of the community and governance. Politics is about organising society to promote the common good, a noble vocation that seeks to create conditions where all members of society can thrive. Political engagement is not only a right but also a duty for Christians, who are called to be salt and light in the world.

The Expectations of Political Leaders

Political leaders are expected to uphold justice, equity, and the common good. They should prioritise the needs of the poor and marginalised, ensuring that everyone has access to essential resources and opportunities. The Church’s social teachings urge political leaders to address issues such as poverty, inequality, and unemployment with compassion and commitment. By promoting policies that protect human dignity and foster social justice, politicians can contribute to a more equitable and flourishing society.

Pope Paul VI, in his encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, states, “The development we speak of here cannot be restricted to



economic growth alone. To be authentic, it must be well-rounded; it must foster the development of each man and of the whole man” (*Populorum Progressio*, 14). This highlights the need for integral human development, which political leaders must prioritise.

The Necessity of Praying for Politicians

In Malaysia, there is widespread dissatisfaction with politicians’ failure to fulfil electoral promises, particularly in areas like institutional, economic, social, legal, education, and environmental reforms. Notable issues include:

1. *Anti-Corruption Measures*: Despite some steps, substantial and systemic reforms are still needed.
2. *Cost of Living*: Limited success in reducing living costs and improving conditions for lower-income populations remains a challenge.
3. *Abolition of Draconian Laws*: Progress in amending repressive laws like the Sedition Act and Security Offences (Special Measures) Act (SOSMA) has been slow.
4. *Sustainable Development*: Insufficient efforts in promoting sustainable development and addressing environmental issues, with ongoing concern about deforestation, pollution, and climate change policies.
5. *Equal Opportunities*: While there have been efforts to promote equal opportunities for all Malaysians, significant gaps remain in addressing systemic inequalities, particularly for marginalised communities.

While some progress has been made, the implementation of promised reforms has been slower and less comprehensive than anticipated. Politicians face immense pressures and challenges, requiring wisdom, courage, and integrity to make decisions that promote justice and the common good. Amid these challenges, there are leaders who remain steadfast and committed to the welfare and rights of the people, tirelessly upholding the principles of justice and equity. These leaders serve as beacons of hope and integrity, reminding us of the potential for positive change and the importance of supporting those who strive to serve the common good. However, we have also witnessed some political leaders deviating from their

responsibilities, succumbing to corruption and self-interest. This situation underscores the urgent need for our prayers and active involvement, to sustain and fortify the efforts of those working for positive change and for the conversion of the others.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that it is our moral obligation to participate in political life. “Submission to authority and co-responsibility for the common good make it morally obligatory to pay taxes, to exercise the right to vote, and to defend one’s country” (CCC 2240). This implies that we must also be responsible for the performance of the leaders we elect. Having voted them into their roles, we must not hesitate to monitor and insist that our political leaders serve the people effectively. We must also actively support their efforts that promote the common good. However, there seems to be a level of diffidence, fear, and apathy among the electorate, which needs to be addressed.

A Global Perspective on Political Responsibility

The need for responsible political leadership extends beyond national borders. Globally, we witness the devastating impacts of irresponsible political actions, including wars and systemic injustices. Politicians worldwide are failing to address the people’s agenda and prioritise the common good. Instead, they often focus on the interests of big business, establishment powers, and superpower agendas. This negligence has led to public distrust and an increasing support for movements and leaders that often promote divisive and exclusionary policies.

Political leaders across the globe must be held accountable for their actions, especially when they contribute to conflict and suffering. In many war-torn countries, political leaders prioritise power over the welfare of their people, resulting in widespread human rights abuses and suffering. It is imperative that we demand accountability and prioritise leadership that serves the common good and upholds human dignity.

The Second Vatican Council’s document, *Gaudium et Spes*, reminds us, “Peace is not merely the absence of war. Nor can it be reduced solely to the maintenance of a balance of power between enemies. Rather, it is founded on a correct understanding of the human person and requires the establishment of a proper relationship of justice and char-

Our elected politicians in parliament (file pic). ity” (Gaudium et Spes, 78). This underlines the Church’s call for political leaders to promote peace and justice on a global scale.

The Church’s Role in Promoting Social Justice

The Catholic Church has always advocated for social justice and the common good. In Malaysia, the Church can play a pivotal role by educating and mobilising the faithful to engage in political life. Through initiatives such as voter education, social justice advocacy, and community organising, the Church can empower individuals to contribute to a corrupt-free society that values transparency, accountability, and the well-being of all its members.

One practical way the local Church can promote social justice is by collaborating with civil society organisations to monitor government policies and hold leaders accountable. Additionally, the Church can provide platforms for dialogue and discussion on critical social and political issues, fostering a culture of active and informed citizenship among the faithful.

Conclusion

Pope Francis, in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, reminds us, “An authentic faith — which is never comfortable or completely personal — always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 183). This call to action is a powerful reminder of our duty to engage in the political sphere.

Pope Francis’ prayer intention calls us to reflect on the vital role of political leaders and the need for our active engagement and prayer. By understanding the true meaning of politics and the social teachings of the Church, we can better appreciate our responsibility to participate in public life. Let us pray fervently for our political leaders, that they may be guided by wisdom and compassion, and let us commit ourselves to working for a just and equitable society that reflects the values of the Gospel. In doing so, we contribute to the common good and honour our call as Christians to be witnesses of God’s love and justice in the world.

● **Fr Fabian Dicom** is the National Office Director for Caritas Malaysia.

The bishop of the abandoned tabernacle

INDIANAPOLIS: National Eucharistic Congress participants heard the story of St Manuel González García (1877–1940), a little-known saint who passionately urged people to recognise the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist and to never leave Him abandoned in the tabernacle.

Bishop Gerardo Colacicco, an auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of New York, shared the story of the passionate Spanish saint who has been called “the bishop of the abandoned tabernacle” during a homily at Mass during the congress.

“The Eucharistic Revival began a few years ago because, sadly, some of our Catholic brothers and sisters do not know or believe that our Lord is present, body, blood, soul, and divinity in the most Blessed Sacrament,” Bishop Colacicco said.

“Many have been wandering in the desert of despair, preoccupied by self and grumbling because they are hungry and nothing seems to satisfy. ... Why? Because we failed to change. We failed to tell them the truth. Worse than that, we failed to fall on our knees in adoration. And many have been lost.”

The bishop said that the example of St Manuel, one of the patron saints of the US

bishops’ National Eucharistic Revival, can show us “how we move forward to make known the truth of the Real Presence in our midst.”

Born in Seville, Spain, in 1877, González was ordained a priest in 1901. He arrived at his first assignment to find that the tabernacle was ignored and the parish church neglected.

St Manuel wrote in his journal: “My faith was looking at Jesus through the door of that tabernacle, so silent, so patient, so good, gazing right back at me. ... His gaze was telling me much and asking for more. It was a gaze in which all the sadness of the Gospels was reflected.”

“For me, this turned out to be the starting point — to see, understand, and feel what would consume the whole of my priestly ministry. On that afternoon, I saw that my priesthood would consist of a work of which I had never before dreamt. All my illusions about the kind of priest I would be vanished. I found myself to be a priest of a town that didn’t love Jesus, and I would have to love him in the name of everybody in that town,” González said.

González devoted himself untiringly to loving the Eucharistic Lord with such in-

tensity and devotion that others were drawn to that once-abandoned tabernacle, Bishop Colacicco explained. He founded schools, an order of sisters, preached missions, and was ordained a bishop.

After his episcopal ordination in Seville, he said: “I desire that in my life as a bishop, as before in my life as a priest, my soul should not grieve except for one sorrow which is the greatest of all, the abandonment of the tabernacle, and that it should rejoice for one joy, the tabernacle, which does not lack company.”

On his tomb in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel of Palencia Cathedral, it is written: “I ask to be buried next to a tabernacle, so that my bones after my death, like my tongue and my pen in life, may always be repeating to those who pass by: ‘Jesus is here! Jesus is here! Do not leave Him abandoned!’”

First-class relics of González’s bone, blood, and hair were brought to Indianapolis by several sisters who are members of the Eucharistic Missionaries of Nazareth, the community he founded.

“Bishop Manuel teaches us that the very first thing we do is fall on our knees in front of the tabernacle and simply love Jesus who dwells within,” said Bishop Colacicco.



National Eucharistic Congress participants heard the story of St Manuel González García (1877–1940), a little-known saint who passionately urged people to recognise the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist and to never leave Him abandoned in the tabernacle. (CNA/CarlosVdeHabsburgo, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons)

“It is our fervent prayer that our love for Jesus present in the Blessed Sacrament will be increased and be strengthened,” he said. “And when we leave this place and return to our homes, please God, may our love ignite a fire in the hearts of others that they may come to know, love, and serve our Eucharistic Lord.” — **By Courtney Mares, CNA**

United by our common love of our Saviour

The 10th National Eucharistic Congress (July 17–21) was a pious experience. Religious sisters huddled together reciting their daily office. Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament was a constant. I noticed how meeting Jesus in the sacraments led me to encounter the Father’s love. I cried as I heard confessions because I was so moved by the goodness of the penitents and their desire to receive God’s mercy. The sacramental life of the Catholic Church is the way to the Father.

I also noticed how well the US Catholic Church has catechised the faithful about the truth of the Eucharist. There were youth groups with “Body, Blood, Soul, Divinity” T-shirts adorned with a monstrance. Inspirational quotes from patrons of the revival like Blessed Carlo Acutis (“When we face the sun, we get a tan... but when we stand before Jesus in the Eucharist, we become saints”) found their way onto the merchandise of the vendors.

In his homily on the first full day of the Congress, Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan of New York reminded the faithful that the Eucharist is “sacrifice, real presence and a meal.” It was stunning to see that the National Eucharistic Revival had achieved one of its principal aims — Eucharistic coherence. The truth of our salvation in and through the Eucharist was not only in the hearts of the



Pilgrims sing along with Catholic musician Matt Maher during the July 20, 2024, revival night of the National Eucharistic Congress at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis. (OSV News photo/Bob Roller)

faithful but also on their lips.

There was a joyousness of life at the Congress as well, nowhere more than on the streets of downtown Indianapolis on the afternoon of July 20, as 40,000 people joined a Eucharistic procession. I found myself in a line of 1,000 priests as we processed through a cannon of noise. I felt like we had won some sort of sports championship. Heads poked out of the upper levels of parking garages. Children held out their hands hoping for a high-five from a priest. People shouted their

gratitude toward us: “Thank you, priests, for letting us have Jesus.”

Priests and participants alike sang Eucharistic hymns. People screamed, *Viva Cristo Rey!* Some women wore veils; others Birkenstocks; others traditional Igbo dresses. They were all, in the words of Bishop Andrew Cozzens from the diocese of Crookston, Minnesota, during his homily: “A Church in procession.” This is a Church moving toward new life in and through Jesus.

Jesus had brought us here, to the streets of

Indianapolis, filled by our common love of our Saviour.

At a reception hosted by the Pontifical Mission Societies, Cardinal Luis Tagle of the Philippines first noted that collections for world missions have dropped in the past years. His theory for the decline was simple: People had lost sight that the world missions are really about our love of Jesus.

But he then shared a story of going to a refugee camp in Lebanon. A girl there commented on the strangeness of his visit from her perspective, as there were no Christians in the camp: “Why did you come here if there are no Christians?” The cardinal said he then told her, “My friend and mentor Jesus tells us that we should love everyone.” The girl then tugged on the cardinal’s garment and replied, “I want to meet your friend Jesus.”

The Eucharistic Congress commissioned us today to be a Church in procession, to bring God’s love to the ends of the earth. The places we go may or may not be Christian, but they are places that need the kind of love our friend and mentor Jesus preaches. We now take Jesus to our local streets full of knowledge, devotion and life. May we be attuned to the suffering in these streets and bring the source of all life, Jesus, our friend and mentor, there. — **By Fr Paul J. Shelton SJ, America**



Nearly 60,000 people attended the National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis. (CNA photo/Jeffrey Bruno)



Religious sisters pray at the closing Mass. (CNA photo/Jeffrey Bruno)



ON THE FENCE

Jacelyn Johnson

A recent online survey found that Malaysia was the fifth happiest country in the world! The source and extent of this survey is negligible, but is it really that far from the truth? Reading comments on social media every day is enough to tell you that there are a lot of unhappy Malaysians, the current gripe being the ringgit exchange rate, and the increased cost of living.

However, this is indeed a global phenomenon and not something specific to Malaysia. The onset of the COVID-19 economic downturn has led to inflation, which has caused us to be in this situation. Otherwise, as I look around me, I do not find a problem with the country as a whole.

Having just spent almost a month in the landlocked country of Nepal, a country known for its highest mountains and deepest, most fertile valleys and plains, I can safely say that I am indeed proud and grateful to have been born in Malaysia.

Nepal is beautiful. And it comes with the most amazing people. Surprisingly, 1 in every 10 people I met, be it taxi drivers, hotel staff, waiters, security guards, restaurant owners or random strangers, have either worked or studied in Malaysia. Upon finding out we're Malaysians, they started conversing with us in *Bahasa Malaysia*. How cool is that? I have never been prouder to speak the language. Even the village children I met on my numerous hikes know of Malaysia, as they have an uncle or an aunt who is currently working in Malaysia. We are actually great in the eyes of random people from random parts of the world. Yet, when back in Malaysia, you get

I will always choose Malaysia!

a whole negative vibe about the country.

Let's talk about infrastructure. Yes, as Malaysians, especially in Kuala Lumpur, we often complain about the numerous traffic jams caused by road closures, because some road or another is constantly being built. While it does pose a major inconvenience to our daily commute, just think about the convenience once it is built. I complained about the road closure leading to my home for five years living here, but now that the SPE is complete, it is my most favourite highway, as it takes me home in a jiffy.

Comparatively, Nepal is just extremely bad at infrastructure. Having lived in Pokhara (tourism city of Nepal) and Kathmandu (capital of Nepal) for two weeks each, and travelling around, I did not spot a single traffic light, or a highway. The roads were constantly in repair due to sinkholes and landslides because the government did not care to improve the country's infrastructure to benefit its people. Also, their government changes every six months. Just when you thought Malaysia was bad, here you have another country where its people have absolutely no faith in the government, and everyone's aim in life is to move abroad.

We took a 9.5-hour bus ride from Pokhara to Kathmandu, which could have been a 25-minute plane ride, and I swear it was the most beautiful bus ride ever, sans the landslides strewn all through the journey. The ride went around the mountains and valleys, hence the landslides, which were very normal. One wonders why this is never fixed if it is a constant issue. I mean, they had machinery in place to clear up the landslides, and they were often cleared within the hour!!

Imagine if we had such situations in

Malaysia. We do! Landslides often happen on the road to Cameron Highlands, but probably not as often as it does in Nepal. But in Malaysia, you would hardly have fatalities. Two bus-loads of people perished in landslides just hours before we took our journey. Through God's grace, we were not affected and I was happily taking videos of remnants of the landslide. My mother's prayers clearly saved us.

I went to two churches in Nepal. St Anne's Church in Pokhara, where I attended the Mass in English one Sunday — it was small, but to my surprise, there were five of us who formed the congregation apart from 10 or so nuns from various orders and four other parishioners who came in colour coordinated sarees to form the choir, readers and commentator. Essentially, five people contributed to the offertory.

The cathedral in Kathmandu was, however, a bigger, very beautiful church, with 100 people who attend regular weekend Masses, according to the caretaker we spoke to. This was also the church that was bombed by Hindu extremists in 2009. While we in Malaysia often complain about rights to religion, we should be extremely proud and grateful, sans a couple of bomb threats, that we have not had any churches bombed. We live in an Islamic country, and that is a fact that cannot be denied, but we should be grateful for having the opportunity to worship without fear.

Nepal is known as a land of spirituality — according to Wikipedia, 81 per cent of its population are Hindus, with eight per cent of them being Buddhist (although it is known as the birthplace of Buddha). Only one point eight per cent of the 30 million population are Christians. Though they all mostly look alike, they are strong in their caste systems.

However, the Maoist government ensured equal rights for all, especially women. I was most impressed that women there were empowered, capable and not at all inferior to their male counterparts.

I met a very kind lady who ran an unassuming little food shop in Nepal. I call it a food shop and not a restaurant, because it had two tables, with two chairs each. She was divorced after her first child. The child is now 25 years old, ready to get married to someone from China. This Chinese person bought over the shop to have this lady, the mom of his girlfriend, run it. The Chinese have taken the opportunity to infiltrate Nepal, buy lands, taking government projects, etc, but it does benefit the local community, and they are not complaining. Anyway, this lady led me into her tiny kitchen and taught me to cook her Nepalese recipes. It wasn't too different from your regular Indian-style cooking, but they had their spices mixed slightly differently. But this lady educated me about women's rights in Nepal and told me that women can do anything they want, unlike other under-developed countries, and to me, this is progress.

The more countries I visit, the more I love Malaysia. Yes, I would of course love strolling around the streets of Europe, amidst its beautiful old architecture and fresh air. But nothing beats being in your own country, where life is simple, luxurious, and comfortable, and while you can complain for days on end, it still provides everything you need to have a fulfilled life. No doubt, we are the happiest country in the world.

● **Jacelyn enjoys the occasional religious discourse and says it as it is, in an attempt to diffuse stereotypical observations.**



WORD MADE FRESH

Nicholas Lye

Have you felt like a failure, think of yourself lesser when compared with others, or find yourself falling short of the ideal you imagine or expect of yourself in life?

When someone shared with me about having once left a religious community, after a period of discernment, and before any vows were taken, it was admitted how much of a failure that felt like, like that of a fallen angel. I could very much relate to that sharing, having also left the priestly path after eight years of seminary formation, and had someone even ask me if it was Satan who tempted me away from the priesthood.

"If I should walk in the valley of darkness, no evil would I fear. You are there with Your crook and Your staff; with these You give me comfort." (Psalm 23:4)

At a recent *Prayer through Sights and Sounds* workshop I was conducting, I invited participants to pick from a series of images what might express their "valley of darkness" in this current season of life. For myself, I picked an image of fallen flowers on the ground, depicting how I still do sometimes feel like a 'fallen angel', looking with envy at the flowers in 'high places' up on a tree, and wondering if I had actually taken the wrong path.

Subsequently, I led the participants through a meditative exercise by closing our eyes and listening to a piece of music to invite the Good Shepherd into our valley of darkness, before



drawing whatever inspired images came to our mind. As I brought to mind the image of the fallen flowers, I saw how the fallen flowers were eventually swept up by the wind and landed onto a nearby stream which carried the flowers to many different places, bringing its beauty wherever it went. At some point, someone on a boat noticed the flowers and picked them up, and brought them home for his mother, who gratefully placed one in her hair, and carried the rest in a basket to the market where she started giving out the flowers to others.

Through this, I felt God reminding me that it is because of my 'fallen' nature that I get to go places and bring beauty to others in ways that flowers on a tree cannot. In fact, He clarified that I was not fallen, but CHOSEN for this particular kind of work. Indeed, in the last five years of being a lay missionary, I have been privileged to enter spaces I never imagined going into, and minister to people beyond Catholic parishes, whether it be people in Protestant circles, non-Christians in homes

or secular organisations, and even Catholics overseas beyond my own diocese.

"Though He was God, He did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, He gave up His divine privileges; He took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being." (Phil 2:6-7)

It is easy for us to cling on to aspirations of being in high places, whether of a worldly nature or even those considered noble and worthy within the Church, and get disappointed or upset when we find ourselves far away from those places, and even jealous of those who are there. Yet, Jesus Himself did not cling on to His divinity, but humbled Himself in obedience to become one of us on the ground. In the same way, it was only by choosing not to cling on to high worldly aspirations, or even the noble desire of becoming a priest, that I was able to humbly allow God to bring me to places on the ground that I never expected, but where I found myself to be the chosen gift for those He was sending me to.

Perhaps places of rejection are really a redirection of God's greater plan for us. Perhaps things that do not go our way are opportunities for God to show us a better way more in line with our unique purpose. Perhaps the 'lowly' places that we find ourselves in are the very places God desires to be present and loving to His people through us.

In fact, through my own experiences, what may appear as 'lesser' or 'smaller' in terms of the work we do or the value we bring as compared to people in 'high places', may actually mean so much more to the people in such 'lowly' places; what may appear as insignificant in the eyes of the world could be of great value to the very persons whom our unique presence and work were meant to bring them.

'The leaves are dying,' said Tiny Dragon. 'Don't be sad,' said Big Panda, 'Autumn is nature's way of showing us how beautiful letting go can be.'" (from *Big Panda and Tiny Dragon*, by James Norbury)

When I can learn to let go and free fall into the loving arms of God Who knows my true value and worth that is not dependent on where I am but who I am in His eyes, then I can trust Him to bring me to the very places where I have been chosen to fulfil a very unique purpose that no one else can replace. For anyone who still feels like a fallen angel or flower, envious of those 'on top', may you be affirmed in your chosen nature, wherever you find yourself, and continue to bring God's beauty, fragrance and love to all you meet on the ground, for that is where Christ is too.

● **Nicholas is a lay missionary and creative evangelist who loves to use creativity and various art forms to share the faith and help people encounter God's truths in a fun and meaningful way.**



Fr Ron Rolheiser

The illusion of our own goodness

One of the great tragedies in all literature is the biblical story of Saul. Saul makes Hamlet look like a Disney character. Hamlet, at least, had good reasons for the disaster that befell him. Saul, given the gifts with which he started, should have fared better, much better.

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

But, at a point, things begin to sour. That point was the arrival on the scene of David — a younger, more handsome, more gifted, and more acclaimed man. Jealousy sets in and envy slowly turns Saul's soul to poison. Looking at David, he sees only popularity that eclipses his own, not another man's goodness, nor indeed, how that goodness can be a gift to the people. He grows bitter, petty, cold, tries to kill David, and eventually dies by his own hand, an angry man who has fallen far from the goodness of his youth.

What happened here? How does someone who has so much goodness, talent, power, and blessing, grow into an angry, petty man

who kills himself out of disappointment? How does this happen?

The late Margaret Laurence, in a brilliant, dark novel, *The Stone Angel*, gives us an interesting description of exactly how this can happen. Her main character, Hagar Shipley, parallels somewhat the biblical Saul.

Hagar's story begins like his: She is young, good, and full of potential. What's to become of such a beautiful, bright, talented, young woman? Sadly, not much at all. She drifts into everything: adulthood, an unhappy marriage, and into a deep unrecognised disappointment that eventually leaves her slovenly, frigid, bitter, and without energy or ambition. What's as remarkable as it is sad, is that she doesn't recognise any of this as happening to her. In her mind, she remains always the young, good, gracious, popular, attractive young girl she was in high school. She doesn't notice how small her world has become, how few friends are around, how little she admires anything or anyone, or even how physically unkempt she has let herself become.

Her awakening is sudden and cruel. One winter day, shabbily dressed in an old parka, she rings the doorbell of a house to which she is delivering eggs. A young child answers the door, sees Hagar, and Hagar overhears the child tell her mother: "That

horrible, old egg-woman is at the door!" The penny drops.

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

To a greater or lesser degree, this happens to us all. It's not easy to age, to absorb the death of much of what we dreamed for ourselves and to watch the young take over and receive the popularity and acclaim that once were ours. Like Saul, we can easily be filled with jealousy and anger to which we are blind and, like Hagar, do not notice inside ourselves. Others, of course, do notice.

But, for most of us, as this is happening, we remain still good and generous people, except that we are more caustic, cynical, and judgmental than we once were. We remain good people but whine too much, feel too sorry for ourselves, and curse more than bless those who have replaced us in youth,

popularity, and status.

Hence, one of the pre-eminent human and spiritual tasks in the second half of life is precisely to recognise this jealousy, this ugliness, inside ourselves and to come back again to the love and freshness of our youth, to revirginise, to come to a second naivete, and to begin again to give others, especially the young, the gaze of admiration.

At the beginning of the Book of Revelations, the author, speaking in God's voice, has this advice for us, at least for those of us who are beyond the bloom of youth: "I've seen how hard you work. I recognise your generosity and all the good work you do. But I have this against you — you have less love in you now than when you were young! Go back and look from where you have fallen!"

We might want to hear those words from Scripture before we overhear them from some young girl telling her mother that a bitter, ugly, old person is at the door.

● **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

Whether you're 8 years old or in your 80s, at some point in your life you've probably struggled with the question, "Why do we have to go to Mass?"

You just may not feel like going at times. You may not like the music or the homilies in your parish. You may think Mass is boring. You may feel as if the parish is not welcoming. You may try to convince yourself that you can pray just as well outdoors or in the comfort of your own home.

Even though you know that going to Mass is a good thing, you can talk yourself out of going by focusing on the negatives. At first, you may feel a little guilty, but eventually, you can justify your decision by convincing yourself that you are too busy, too tired, too bored or too frustrated.

When that happens, you miss the great gift that God gives to us in the Eucharist.

Good reasons to go to Mass

If you feel like skipping Mass, here are 10 good reasons to go:

- 1. God asks us to make one day holy.** He asks us to set aside one day to refocus physically, mentally and spiritually. We live in a secular world. Going to Mass helps us to see everything from a different perspective. We begin to see, in the depths of our being, that God is in charge. We can let go of our own agenda because we know that God will inspire us, guide us and strengthen us for the week ahead.
- 2. Jesus gives us the gift of Himself.** When we go to Mass, we are doing what Jesus commanded His followers to do. It is a command to love and to be loved by God. Jesus offers Himself to us in the Word of God that we hear and in His Real Presence, offered to us in the Blessed Sacrament at Communion.
- 3. We need to be part of a community.** When we come together at Mass to pray and worship God, we fulfil a deep need inside of us to be in communion with other people. The



other parishioners — even if we don't know all of them — give us support, affirmation and encouragement in our attempt to live the Gospel message. They help us to see that we are not alone. They remind us that we are all part of the Body of Christ.

- 4. God has a special message for us.** When we listen to the readings, the homily and the prayers of the Mass, God speaks to us in a special way. We should come away from each Mass with at least one inspiration that will impact our lives in some way. We just have to pay attention and be open to what the Lord is trying to tell us.
- 5. We need to talk to God.** When we go to Mass, we speak to God through our singing, our communal responses and prayers, and our personal prayers from the depths of our hearts. During the Mass, we have the opportunity to ask God for what we need, promise God that we will do what He wants us to do, and thank God for the many blessings He has bestowed upon us.
- 6. People need our prayers.** We can pray for other people anytime, but when we pray for others during Mass, we pray in a special way. It doesn't matter if the other people are separated from us by distance or by death. The Mass brings us together in the Body of Christ, and we become the communion

of saints. It is part of the cosmic dimension of the Mass that unites heaven and earth by reaching across time and space.

- 7. We need to stand up for what we believe.** Being a follower of Jesus is counter-cultural. At every Mass, we have the opportunity to stand up and proclaim what we believe publicly. We admit that we believe in God, in Jesus, in the Holy Spirit, in the Catholic Church, in the communion of saints, in the forgiveness of sins, and in life after death. It is a powerful statement of allegiance and an opportunity to recommit ourselves.
- 8. We need to acknowledge that we make mistakes.** At every Mass, we have the opportunity to review the past week. We admit that we have sinned in thought, in word, in deed, in what we have done and what we have failed to do. We seek forgiveness, and we are assured that God still loves us. Before we receive Communion, we admit that we are not worthy and ask God to heal us. Going to Mass helps us to strengthen our commitment to live moral lives.
- 9. We need ritual in our lives.** Mass is a ritual, which means that through the repetition of prayers, movements, and the changing of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, we are formed,

disciplined and consoled. The "sameness" of the Mass carries us along the spiritual journey — even when we don't "feel" like praying. The "sameness" of the ritual allows us to be transformed on a soul level, even if we are unaware of what is happening.

- 10. We need to experience something bigger than ourselves.** When we go to Mass, we share in the death and resurrection of Jesus. When we offer our ordinary lives to God through Jesus, we enter into God's great plan for the world. We are strengthened by the Eucharist and sent out into the world to bring the Gospel message to all people. The Mass gives meaning and purpose to our lives. It gives us a sense of destiny and offers the kind of peace that the world cannot give. It helps us develop a sense of wonder and awe. It helps us to see that there is something bigger than ourselves.
- What if you changed your attitude about going to Mass? What if you began to think of Mass as the time in the day when you can connect with God and with other people in a special way? What if you concentrated on the things you like about your parish instead of what you don't like? What if you made Mass a priority? The effects of these kinds of positive attitudes may surprise you. — **By Lorene Hanley Duquin, OSV**

Little Catholics' Corner

"I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, 'At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God.'" (Exodus 16:12)

(John 6: 32-33)



Colour the picture

Some of the words in the picture below contain codes. Can you decipher the code?




A 2 D 8 N 4
L 13 I 12 U 10 A 6
N 3 A 11 M 1
A 5 Q 9 N 7

Exodus 16:2-4, 12-13

Exodus 16:2-4, 12-15

In Exodus 16, the people of Israel were starving in the desert. When Moses prayed to God, He sent them food. What was it? Sort out the letters by their numbers to find out!

Answer: manna and quail

energy= 

eternal = 😊😊😊

concerned = $\tilde{\varepsilon} \circ \tilde{\varepsilon}$

Son =

food = ááá

perishable = $\frac{\cdot}{\cdot}$ ♪ ♪

Aunty Eliz

(John 6: 27)

YOUTH

August 4, 2024

Katholikos 2024



By Ben Chong

MELAKA: The Malacca Johore Diocese Young People Network (MJDYPN) recently held its annual parish youth leaders and advisors' formation camp, *Katholikos*. This event brought together 52 youth leaders from 22 parishes within the diocese, representing different language and age groups, at the Good Shepherd Seminary.

Through this leadership training, the new parish leaders explored how to guide their parish youth closer to the Lord, with the accompaniment and leadership of

the Holy Spirit, in line with this year's theme, Those who hope in the Lord will run and not be weary.

The camp featured two guest speakers from the Archdiocesan Single Adults and Youth Office Kuala Lumpur (ASAYOKL), Jacinta Fernandez and Gregory Pravin, who delivered talks on conversing in the Holy Spirit. Participants learned how to listen to the opinions of every young person, synthesise diverse viewpoints to understand the needs of the youth in each parish, and fulfil their responsibilities as leaders by organising meaningful activities for the youth.

Each young person's heart should be considered "holy ground," a bearer of seeds of divine life, before which we must "take off our shoes" to draw near and enter more deeply into the Mystery

(*Christus Vivit*, 67). Before explaining or making decisions, we must listen attentively and recognise the truth, facing reality with humility. Listening becomes impossible if we do not walk alongside young people on their earthly journey. The Gospel message the Church preserves must be spread using today's advanced technology. Moreover, we recognise that on the journey of God's people, young people might be leading the way.

During the two-day training camp, the youth had the opportunity to meet and exchange ideas with leaders from different parishes, discuss potential joint activities, and share event information. The camp was filled with a prayerful atmosphere, joyful hearts, and communion in the Lord. Everyone looks forward to gathering again at next year's training camp

Sharing by participants:

"The experience was really good, I got along well with everyone and met new youth from other parishes."
— *Alexander Wong, Church of Holy Family, Ulu Tiram*

"I learnt how to make everyone feel included and not excluded, to build a youth ministry where everyone can share and feel welcome. It is not an event place but a "home" for them to share." — *Marisse Tan, Church of St Peter, Melaka*

"I learnt to be an example to the youth in my parish." — *Destiny Isaacbel, Church of St Louis, Kluang*



Spiritual Conversations.



Fun and fellowship

Sacrament of Confirmation

Go on mission and sacrifice for God

NEGERI SEMBILAN: On July 13, twenty-two confirmands from the Church of St Theresa, Nilai, the Church of St Aloysius, Mantin, and Gereja Bonda Maria, Kampung Tekir, received the Sacrament of Confirmation. This group included both catechism students and those from the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.

Archbishop Julian Leow presided over the Mass, with parish priest, Fr Christopher Soosaipillai, concelebrating. In his homily,

the archbishop explained the significance of the colour red worn during the sacrament, explaining that it represents the mission and the readiness to suffer and make sacrifices for God. Additionally, it symbolises the Holy Spirit's guidance as we bear our crosses.

The ceremony was followed by a joyful evening of fellowship, a potluck organised by the parents and plenty of merrymaking. — *By Aileen Anthony*



The confirmands celebrating with a cake.



Church of Sacred Heart of Jesus, KL



Church of Christ the King, Selayang



Church of St Francis of Assisi, Cheras

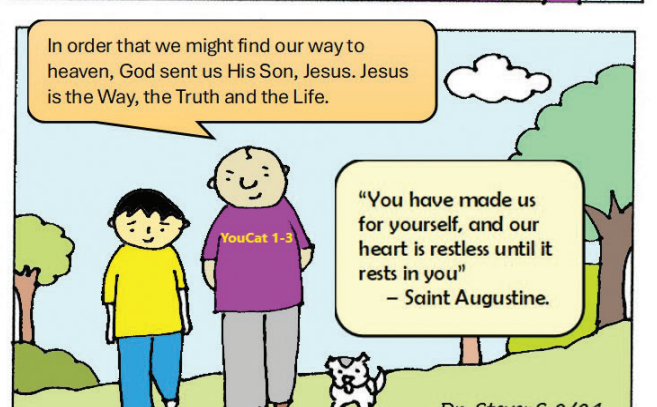
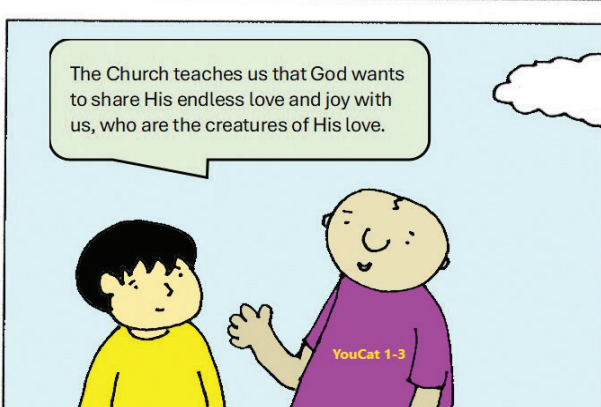
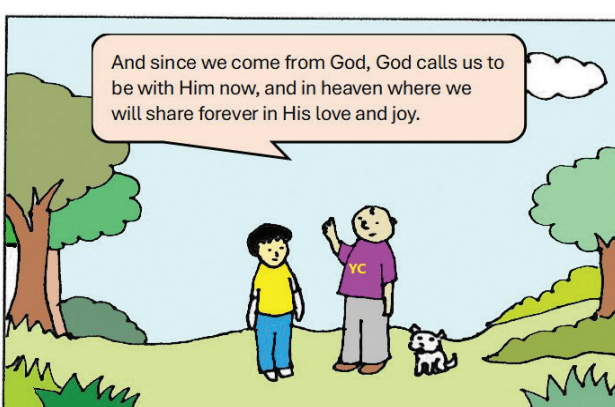
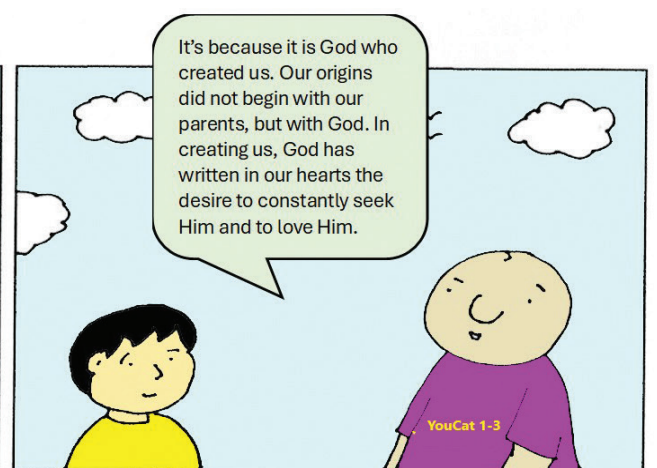
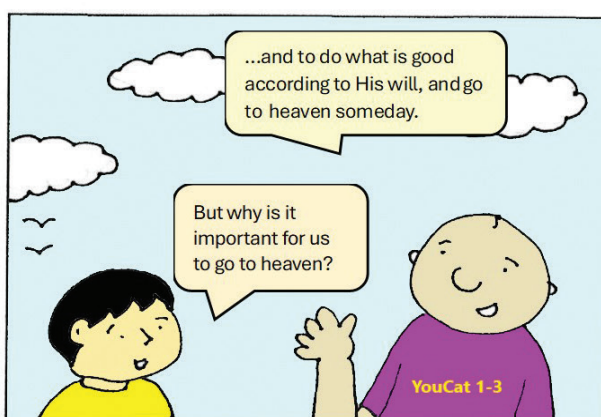
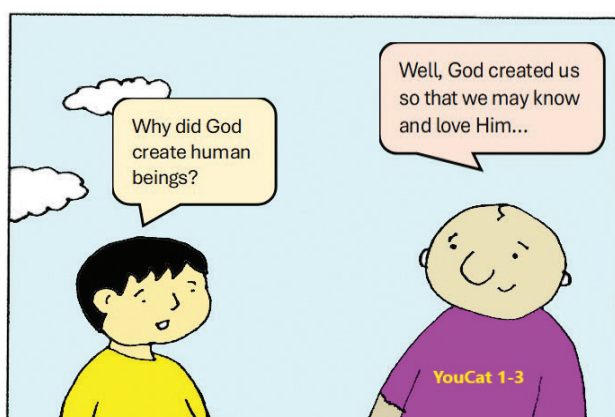


Church of the Holy Family, Kajang



THE SIMPLE LIFE...

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



Scores dead in Ethiopia landslides



People searching for survivors after the mud slide. (Gofa Zone Government Communication Affairs Department)

ETHIOPIA: At least 157 people have been killed by two mudslides in the remote Gofa zone of Ethiopia which has been hit with heavy rainfall.

Many of them were trapped and buried as they tried to reach survivors of a first mud slide that was triggered by heavy rains on July 22, followed by a second one the next morning that struck during rescue operations.

Local authorities said young children and pregnant women were among the victims and they warned that the search is ongoing and "there are bodies yet to be recovered" and many people remain unaccounted for.

Gofa is part of the state known as the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region, located about 320km

southwest of the capital, Addis Ababa.

Landslides are common during Ethiopia's rainy season, which started in July and is expected to last until mid-September.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said that "floods impacted over 19,000 people in several zones, in May, displacing over a thousand and causing damage to livelihoods and infrastructure".

The flooding and landslides occurred even as other parts of the country face severe drought.

The UN reports that millions in the country face malnutrition due to recent climate-related challenges.

Source: AP and other news agencies

Forty migrants die off the coast of Haiti

PORT-AU-PRINCE: At least 40 migrants have died and dozens more have been injured after the boat they were travelling on caught fire just off the coast of Haiti.

According to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), which announced the news on July 19, the coastguard was able to rescue another 40 people. The tragedy is yet another consequence of the harsh reality that Haitians are attempting to flee from as they undergo perilous journeys in search of safety outside of their violent nation.

Between January and May, armed gangs controlling the Haitian capital, Port-au-Prince, have killed more than 3,000 people. The spiral of violence has forced more than half a million people to flee their homes.

The boat, which reportedly had at least 80 migrants on board, had left the

northern city of Cap-Haïtien at around 4.00am local time on July 17 and was headed for the islands of Turks and Caicos, British Overseas Territories, 250km from Haiti.

The migration situation in the country is desperate. More than 86,000 people have been forcibly repatriated to Haiti this year alone. Since February 29, local authorities have observed an increase in attempts to leave by sea, an observance which has been confirmed by interceptions of boats at sea by the US, Bahamas, Turks and Caicos Islands and Jamaica.

Just a week before the incident, a second group of 200 police officers from Kenya arrived in the capital, Port-au-Prince, as part of an international security operation supported by the UN to counter the overwhelming power of armed gangs, which control at least 80 per cent of the city. — *Vatican News*

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3rd Year Anniversary In Loving Memory of



**Robert Ganesan
A/L Kuppan**

Departed: 10th August 2021

Deeply missed and forever cherished by
Wife Elizabeth Amutha,
Son Maxmillan Robert,
Goopenthiran and
Daughter Sylvia Robert.



2nd Year Anniversary In Everloving Memory of Mr Mariasusai Innasi Udayar

Date of Birth: 11-07-1944
Departed: 05-08-2022

*God saw that he was getting tired,
A cure was not to be. So, He put His arms
around him and whispered, "Come with Me".
With tearful eyes, we watched him suffer,
and saw him fade away. Although we loved
him dearly, we could not make him stay.
A golden heart stopped beating, hard working
hands to rest. God broke our hearts to prove
to us He only takes "the best".*

Deeply missed by wife, Jayanyanam
Sinnappan, sons, daughter, son-in-law,
daughters-in-law, grandchildren,
relatives and friends.

Anthony Griffon: 019-3104264



15th Anniversary In Loving Memory of Sr Betilda D' Cruz, fdcc

Born on
22nd March 1949

Called home
to the Lord on
10th August 2009

*God created you.
Jesus loves you.*

*The Holy Spirit dwells within you,
Entrusting you and every need you have,
To the Lord's ever present faithful care.*

Deeply missed and forever cherished by
loved ones.

5th Year Anniversary In Ever Loving Memory of



Sandanasamy Anthony Pillay (JPN)

Gift from God: 8th April 1934
Returned to the Lord: 7th August 2019
Wife: Late Ruth Mary Michael Pillay

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

We Love and Miss you

Forever loved & dearly missed by
family members, relatives and friends.

9th Anniversary In Loving Memory of



Thomas Fong Choon Tuck Called home to be with the Lord on 10th August 2015

*"You are forever in our hearts and minds.
The most precious and dearest memories of you,
and the legacy of kindness you left behind will
carry us through until we meet again."*

Deeply missed by family, relatives and friends.

20th Anniversary In Loving Memory of



Peter Joseph Departed: 5 August 2004

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

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

19th Anniversary In Loving Memory of



Clarence F. Sta Maria Departed: 04-08-2005

*I lie down and sleep in peace
for you alone, O Lord.
Make me feel safe and secure.*

We miss you dearly.
You are always in our thoughts
and in our prayers.

Fondly remembered by
your loving wife, son,
daughter, son-in-law,
daughter-in-law and grandson.

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*He will wipe away
every tear
from their eyes,
and death shall
be no more,
neither shall
there be mourning,
nor crying,
nor pain anymore,
for the former things
have passed away.*

Revelation 21:4

1st Anniversary In Loving Memory of



Anthony Francis Joseph Called home: 11-08-2023

*It's been a year since you
passed but the memories of the
day is still fresh in our minds.
You showered so much love,
brought joy and laughter, on
all those who came your way.*

Always missed and forever
remembered by family,
relatives and friends.

15th Anniversary In Loving Memory of Steven Subramaniam



*Remembering and honouring you on this day,
fifteen years after this world
lost a precious soul.*

Deeply missed by wife, Helen Philominah,
daughters, son, sons-in-law, daughter-in-law,
grandchildren, relatives and friends.

28th Anniversary In Loving Memory of



Joseph Paul Recalled to the Lord on 6th August 1996

*"Their Life – A Beautiful Memory,
Their Absence – A Silent Grief"*
*"Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord and let your perpetual
light shine upon them. May their souls rest in peace. Amen"*

Dearly missed by:
**Louise Paul, Arokiamary, Pritashini M. Paul,
Siddesh J. Paul, Mishalini M. Paul
and all extended family members.**

30th Anniversary In Loving Memory of



Mary Magdelene Paul Recalled to the Lord on 22nd November 1994

Cardinal Pizzaballa asks Christians in the Holy Land to unite in prayer

JERUSALEM: "We have to leave politics behind, we have to meet and pray together. Now the wounds are bleeding is not the time to speak of politics," said Cardinal Pizzaballa, pointing out that it is very difficult to recognize the suffering of the other when one is suffering.

The Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem was speaking to a delegation of the

pontifical foundation, Aid to the Church in Need (ACN), which is visiting the Holy Land to show solidarity with the local Christians and evaluate projects to help the Church in the region.

"The situation is so polarised that if you are close to the Palestinians, the Israelis feel betrayed, and vice-versa. When I speak of the suffering

of Gaza, the Hebrew Catholics tell me about the areas which suffered in the October 7 attacks, and on the other side, the Palestinians think only of Gaza. Everybody wants to have a monopoly on the suffering," he said.

Noting that the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem includes Catholics of the Hebrew vicariate serving in the

army in Gaza as well as Catholics being bombed in Gaza, he expressed his belief that the Church must avoid being "sucked into the conflict" and be a constructive presence.

"I keep being told I need to be neutral. Come with me to Gaza, speak to my people who lost everything, and then tell me I have to be neutral. It doesn't work. But we can-

not become part of the political, or military clash or the confrontation," he said.

Meanwhile, the Patriarchate is doing what it can to help the small Christian community in Gaza, but the situation is so unstable it can take weeks to get aid to where it is needed. — **By Linda Bordini, Vatican News**

African faith leaders join pleas for Jubilee debt forgiveness

KIGALI, Rwanda: As the 2025 Jubilee Year approaches, African faith leaders have joined growing pleas for a new round of debt forgiveness for Africa, saying that debt servicing is again making it impossible for poorer nations to support their populations through investments in health, education and social services.

Representatives from Christian Churches, the Muslim community, national councils of Churches and interreligious councils across 13 countries in Africa met in Kigali, Rwanda, last week to discuss this crucial issue to which Pope Francis has also drawn attention on several occasions.

In a joint statement addressed to the G20, G7, United Nations, IMF and World Bank, they called for substantial changes in the economic global system to allow these nations to develop and to invest in social, health and educational services for their populations.

"Our countries face, again, ago-



nising choices between spending and investing on their people and paying their creditors," said the statement, remarking that "this year alone, Africa will spend 90 billion US dollars servicing public debt" while "the average African country's combined spending on health, education and social protection is two-thirds of their debt payments."

The religious leaders recalled the successful campaign of faith communities and activists in the leadup to the Great 2000 Jubilee year which led to the largest ever collective debt

relief initiative. The idea was inspired by the biblical 50-year Jubilee of ancient Israel, which the Catholic Church celebrates every 25 years as a time for spiritual renewal dedicated to forgiveness and reconciliation with God and others.

The Jubilee 2000 initiative mobilised 130 billion US dollars in debt relief, allowing for important poverty reduction investments in several countries.

"Unfortunately," the statement notes, "inequities in the international tax, financial and trading sys-

tems, together with gaps in domestic governance, continue to foster unsustainable debt." The religious leaders remark that these financial challenges have been compounded by conflicts and wars, among other "multiple shocks", including the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change.

The faith leaders, therefore, urge global lenders to align their action and decisions in the coming months with the Jubilee values "that put people and the Earth above debt"

The statement, first of all, calls for "forgiving debts that are unpayable without endangering the achievement of 2030 UN development and climate goals."

According to the religious leaders, developing countries should have access to permanent, rules-based and predictable processes that bind all creditors into debt reductions, "to limit unnecessary suffering and reduce the cost of crises for all."

They further call for implementing responsible lending and borrowing

principles: "Through laws, regulations and best practices, lenders and borrowers have a role to prevent the emergence of new cycles of wasteful and unbearable debts, including through authorisation and disclosure regimes for debt contracts," they say. There is also a need to mainstream risk sharing between creditors and debtors in debt contracts: "In a world more prone to shocks, developing countries in debt should not be left alone to bear the costs of climate-related disasters, pandemics and other events beyond their control," the religious leaders' remark.

Finally, the statement calls for scaling up access to resources for development in non-debt-creating and affordable terms.

The faith leaders conclude their statement by reminding the international community that is at a crossroads: "You have the power and the responsibility to steer it in the path that restores hope and renewal," they said — **By Lisa Zengarini, Vatican News**

More than 200 Christian leaders sign letter calling for cease-fire in Gaza

WASHINGTON: More than 200 Christian leaders from an array of traditions have signed a letter calling for a permanent cease-fire in the Israel-Hamas war and the release of hostages taken by Hamas, as well as a list of other measures aimed at providing relief in Gaza.

"We speak out as Christian leaders with a deep concern for the common good of all affected by war and conflict, without exception," reads the letter, which was organised by Churches for Middle East Peace, a coalition of Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox churches based in Washington.

"We speak with urgency. We speak in a spirit of peace. We speak because we are deeply inspired by the courageous and selfless commitment of our Palestinian Christian brothers and sisters in the Holy Land, who suffer alongside their Muslim and Jewish neighbours and remain reso-

lutely determined to help bring about a just and dignified future for all inhabitants of these lands."

Besides a cease-fire and the return of hostages, the letter goes on to call for "the release of Palestinian prisoners held without due process," as well as a free flow of humanitarian aid and a halt on shipping arms into the region.

"Without decisive action now, the consequences of this drift to deeper, broader, and more entrenched conflict will be more destruction and loss of innocent lives," the authors said. "It is time for the international community, as well as Israeli, Palestinian, and regional decision-makers, to act. Our common humanity demands it."

The letter came before Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited the US where he was scheduled to address Congress on July 24 and meet with President Joe Biden the following day. A cover letter from

CMEP addressed to Biden implores him to use Netanyahu's visit to annul "monetary and diplomatic cover for Israel to continue its military assault on the people of Gaza."

Among the signers of the letter were Roman Catholic Cardinal Alvaro Ramazzini, bishop of Huehuetenango in Guatemala, and Bishops Steven Biegler of the Diocese of Cheyenne in Wyoming; Stephen Lowe of the Diocese of Auckland in New Zealand; Christian Carlassare of the Diocese of Rumbek in South Sudan and Coffi Roger Anoumou of the Diocese of Lokossa in Benin.

The presidents of the Maryknoll Sisters and the Sisters of St Joseph Philadelphia, both orders of nuns, also signed.

Among the Protestants who signed the letter were the presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, bishops of the United Methodist Church, the Anglican



What remains of a city in the Gaza Strip. (Hosny Salah/Pixabay)

Church of Southern Africa, the Community of Christ, the Church of England, and the Anglican Church of Sri Lanka.

In addition, the stated clerk of the Presbyterian Church (USA), the general secretary of the Reformed Church in America, a conference minister in the United Church of Christ and the clerk of Britain Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) signed it.

The heads of the National Council of Churches, Pax Christi Korea, the Asian American Christian Collaborative, and The Witness, A Black Christian Collective, also

signed the letter.

The letter warned that the conflict has the potential to expand into the surrounding region, including the possibility of a full-scale war between Israel and Hezbollah. It also cautioned that, as nonviolent resistance to decades of occupation is continuously met with "unjustified violence," individuals will increasingly turn to armed resistance.

"The window for constructive dialogue between combatant parties is rapidly closing. It will be replaced by more violence and further erosion of hope and trust," said the letter. — **By Chloe-Arizona Fodor, NCR**