

**V**ATICAN: Pope Francis highlighted the feminine dimension of the Church, emphasising the need for women's perspective in theology. "The Church is woman and if we do not understand what a woman is, what a woman's theology is, we will never understand what the Church is."

Asking pardon for speaking plainly, Pope Francis told members of the International Theological Commission (ITC) that "one of the great sins we have committed is 'masculinising' the Church," which also can be seen by the fact that only five of the commission members are women.

The Pope, who appoints the 28 members of the commission, said the Church needs to make more progress in balancing such bodies because "women have a capacity for theological reflection that is different from what we men have."

Pope Francis met members of the commission at the Vatican November 30. He handed them a prepared text, which he described as a "beautiful speech with theological things," but said that because of his ongoing respiratory problems due to bronchitis, "it's better that I don't read it."

Greeting members of the group, the Pope said that perhaps his conviction about the importance of women theologians comes from the fact that, "I've studied a lot the theology of a woman," — "Hanna-Barbara Gerl-Falkovitz, and her work on Fr Romano Guardini, a German priest, philosopher and theologian, who died in 1968."

Coincidentally, Gerl-Falkovitz is one of four German women who wrote to the pontiff about their concerns regarding the German Catholic Church's Synodal Path. In a letter published by a German newspaper Nov 21, Pope Francis responded to the women saying, "I, too, share this concern about the numerous concrete steps that are now being taken by large parts of this local Church that threaten to move further and further away from the common path of the universal Church."

He told members of the commission that at the next meeting of his international Council of Cardinals, "we will have a reflection on the feminine dimension of the Church."

The problem "is not solved in a ministerial way, that's another thing," he said, repeating his belief in the concept that in the Church, there is a "Petrine principle" and a "Marian principle" that describe the important but different roles women and men play in the Catholic Church.

"You can debate this, but the two principles are there," the Pope said. "It is more important to have the Marian [dimension] than the Petrine," because the Church is the bride of Christ.



# The Church is woman

Pope Francis said having more women on the commission would help, but the theologians also need to dedicate more energy to studying the issue and to "de-masculinising" the Church. "This is a task I ask of you, please. Unmask the Church."

This should lead not only to more women represented in the ITC, but to greater reflection on the Church as woman and as bride. "This is a task I ask of you, please. Unmask the Church."

Pope Francis also encouraged commission members to continue work on "an evangelising theology that promotes dialogue with the world of culture," and decides what questions and challenges to focus on by listening to concerns that come from the grassroots.

The Pope then noted the Commission's

work on anthropological and ecological questions, while focusing especially on their "updated and incisive reflection on the permanent relevance of the Trinitarian and Christological faith confessed by Nicaea," which is being undertaken in preparation for the 1700th anniversary of the first Ecumenical Council.

Pope Francis highlighted the spiritual, synodal, and ecumenical significance of the Council of Nicaea. Theologians, he said, are called "to spread new and surprising gleams of Christ's eternal light in the house of the Church and in the darkness of the world."

The Pope insisted that synodality "is the way to translate into attitudes of communion and processes of communion, the Trinitarian dynamic with which God, through

Christ and in the breath of the Holy Spirit, comes to humanity"; while theologians have the responsibility "of unleashing the richness of this wonderful 'humanising energy'."

Finally, the Holy Father recalled the ecumenical significance of the anniversary, noting that all "disciples of Jesus" are united in professing the Creed proclaimed at Nicaea. He noted that in 2025, the year of the anniversary, all Christians will celebrate Easter on the same date, saying, "How beautiful it would be if it marked the concrete start of an always common celebration of Easter!"

He invited those present to "carry this dream in our hearts, and invoke the creativity of the Spirit, so that the light of the Gospel and of communion may shine more brightly." — *CNS/Vatican News*

**Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ,**  
To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.  
*2 Pet. 1:1*



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## HERALD

ESTABLISHED 1994

Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre  
5, Jalan Robertson, 50150, KL  
Tel / Whatsapp: 03-20268291  
Website : www.heraldmalaysia.com  
Facebook : www.facebook.com/  
heraldmalaysia

Jointly published by the  
Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur,  
Diocese of Malacca Johore,  
Diocese of Penang and  
Diocese of Keningau



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## EDITOR'S NOTE

On December 10, 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration on Human Rights — a milestone enshrining the fundamental rights of every individual. Seventy-five years since its inception, these principles remain aspirational for many, yet to be fully realised and embraced worldwide.

Despite tireless efforts from figures like Pope Francis, advocating ardently for the protection and respect of all people, especially the most vulnerable, our world still grapples with the pursuit of these fundamental rights. This year's theme for World Human Rights Day, *Freedom, Equality, and Justice for All*, resounds louder than ever, echoing through a world marked by strife, inequality, and ongoing struggles for basic human dignity.

Conflict-ridden regions bear witness to the urgent necessity for global unity in upholding these fundamental human rights. From the devastations of armed conflicts to the plights of refugees seeking safety, millions endure daily violations of their basic rights. Peace remains a distant goal in various parts of the world, underscoring the pressing need to redouble efforts toward creating a world free from violence and oppression.

Pope Francis, a leading advocate for social justice and human rights, consistently emphasises solidarity and compassion, particularly towards marginalised and oppressed communities. His call to action echoes the teachings and actions of Jesus, highlighting our shared responsibility to ensure the dignity and respect of every person, irrespective of race, creed, or socio-economic status.

Jesus emphasised the inherent worth and dignity of every individual. His actions and words consistently highlighted the importance of treating everyone with respect, regardless of social status, ethnicity, or background. His parables often conveyed



the message of inclusivity, urging His followers to embrace all members of society, especially the marginalised and oppressed. In the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus emphasises the essence of empathy and compassion, teaching us to extend help to anyone in need, regardless of their identity.

The concept of freedom, one of the pillars of this year's theme, echoes throughout Christ's teachings. He spoke of a freedom, not just from physical bondage, but also from spiritual enslavement — freedom found in truth, love, and living a life in accordance with higher principles. Jesus famously proclaimed, "And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32), emphasising the transformative power of truth in liberating individuals from ignorance and injustice.

Equality, another fundamental aspect of human rights, was central to Jesus' ministry. He challenged societal norms by engaging with people from all walks of life, breaking barriers of prejudice and discrimination. His actions, such as dining with tax collectors

and welcoming the outcasts, exemplified a radical message of inclusivity, where every person was seen as valuable and worthy of love and acceptance.

Moreover, justice was a cornerstone of Jesus' teachings. He advocated for fairness, compassion, and mercy, encouraging His followers to actively seek justice for the oppressed and downtrodden. In the Beatitudes, He blessed those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, underscoring the importance of striving for justice in a world marred by inequality and suffering.

World Human Rights Day is not just a remembrance but a call to action, urging us to recommit to the values in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Let us use this day to renew our dedication to championing freedom, equality, and justice for all. May we stand in solidarity with those whose rights are violated, tirelessly advocating for a world where every individual can live with dignity, peace, and equality.

Patricia Pereira

## Are you for God's Kingdom?

A few years ago, I met someone who told me about his conversion to Christianity. He came from an atheist background, and he wasn't familiar with the Gospels. But he was writing a doctorate on social justice and Marxism, and he realised that many ideas could be traced to the Gospels. So he thought that, as part of his research, he should at least open the Bible and read it. And as he read the Gospels, he said, the figure of Christ was so radical, so compelling, so attractive that he knew it had to be true. So, he sought baptism as a Catholic.

How often do we listen to the Gospel and think we know it already; we zone out. Can it be that our familiarity with the Christian story causes us to miss Christ's presence? Or maybe our problem is that we're not familiar enough with the Scriptures — you might think you know the story but when did you last open the Bible and actually read the Word of God?

We often think that Advent is about us waiting for Christ, but in fact, the Lord has been waiting for you and for me. From all eternity, the Lord has been waiting to have a heart to heart with us, to speak words of consolation to us, to fill us with His Holy Spirit. And so, we're invited to make room for God to speak to us; to come to us in the wilderness of our lives; to make a straight way forward through the crooked paths that we find ourselves walking along. This is what Advent is for.

So, Advent began last Sunday with a call to be alert and vigilant; to be awake and



attentive to God's grace at work in our lives. And then, having woken us up, the Advent herald comes today crying out and making great declarations, getting us to sit up and listen again. For St Mark's Gospel opens with a great announcement: "The beginning of the Gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mk 1:1). So much is packed into this first sentence, but we can often miss its radical newness because we've become too familiar with Jesus being called Christ and Son of God, and we think we know what the word 'gospel' or 'Good News' means — it's the story about Jesus' life, we'd say.

So, when Mark's Gospel opens, we're being alerted that there's going to be an impending regime change. St Mark then quotes from the prophet Isaiah, and here's the news from the frontline: "[Jerusalem's] time of service is ended... her sin is atoned for... the Lord is coming with power". The Gospel, therefore, begins with a declaration

that God is taking charge; He Himself is coming to rule the world, and to establish justice, and to shepherd His people. But are we ready for this regime change? So, John the Baptist arrives to prepare us, and every Advent we're called, as it were, to cast our vote, to make a choice. Do we want to live under the regime of the devil, under the reign of sin, or will we switch allegiance and choose to live under God's rule, in His Kingdom? Thus, John arrives "proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mk 1:4): he's canvassing for votes, getting us to change our ways of thinking and behaving and to come on the side with God rather than stick with the rebels. For every moral decision that we make, every action that we undertake, is either for God and His Kingdom, or against Him.

Therefore, the Lord speaks now, in this Advent season, and indeed, every day, He speaks to our hearts, calling us to listen to

## Reflecting on our Sunday Readings

with Fr Lawrence Lew, OP

### 2nd Sunday of Advent (B)

Readings: Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-14;

2 Peter 3:8-14

Gospel: Mark 1:1-8

His voice. It is a voice that is ever new, and we should not allow a false familiarity with the Gospels to mute it. Rather, we're challenged to turn away from our familiar habits of sin and embrace a new regime in our lives. Let Christ be king; make His paths straight so that He can enter our hearts and reign. This is what it means to be baptised by the Holy Spirit: it means that I am filled anew with the transforming power of God so that from then on it is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who is the Lord of my life, my actions, my thoughts.

Today St Mark announces good, life-changing cosmic-scale news. Let us not be passive newsreaders but be newsmakers — by allowing the Lord to come with the power of His Holy Spirit into our lives to convert us. So, if you dare, say with me: "Come, Holy Spirit!" And then, go home, pick up your Bibles, open and read.

Fr Lawrence Lew is a member of the Order of Preachers, also known as the Dominican friars. This reflection is taken from the archives of 'Releasing the Arrow'.





## KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

### Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

#### December

- 16 **Re-dedication — Church of the Assumption, Petaling Jaya**
- 17 **Christmas Hi Tea — Christian Federation of Malaysia**



## MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

### Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

#### December

- 17 **Confirmation — Church of St Theresa, Masai**
- 18 **Meeting with all MJD Seminarians**
- 18 **Advent Penitential Service — Church of the Holy Family, Ulu Tiram**
- 19 **Advent Penitential Service — Church of St Theresa, Masai**
- 20 **Advent Penitential Service — Church of Christ the King, Kulai**
- 21 **South Johor Vicariate Clergy Christmas Lunch**



## Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #156



**Greetings to you, dear friends and faithful.** Another new year. Another Advent. The world waited for the Prince of Peace then. Today, people everywhere long for peace, fitful sleep, food, reasonable water and light. It is again Christmas without the basics, Christmas with the deprived and it is becoming more and more Christmas without Christ.

**Dark Times:** Will we see cease-fires in the many troubled places? The “COVID-19 is back” warning is out. “Prepare for the monsoon floods”, the media warns. Exams and school holidays can be stressful. Festivities add more burdens on the family. To spend or not to spend is a dilemma. Who sets the tone? The adverts and megamalls or the heads of families? Decide on what you want to celebrate. The poor and the deprived improvise. They celebrate the reason for the season. The rich may splurge and miss the Christ in Christmas. Let us remember the call of this year’s Protec Year 4 “cut down on (fuel) consumption”. Remembering a Filipino saying: “I eat less. You eat less. They eat more.”

#### A Thought for the Week: The Greatest Distance

If you were to take a trip around the globe, you would travel almost 25,000 miles! Yet, this distance is still not the farthest, in the sense of importance to an individual and what they do with the life they are given. What is the greatest, most important distance in the world?

It is an astounding 18 inches...the dis-

tance from a person’s heart to their head. People can have all the knowledge about a particular subject matter in their head and be as smart as the wisest individuals who walk the earth but unless they LIVE it and USE their abilities, it will mean nothing.

One of the favourite slogans in athletics is also so very true in a person’s everyday life: “The difference between an ordinary person and an extraordinary individual, is that little EXTRA.” There are an untold number of people that have great ideas, thoughts, inventions, solutions to the world’s problems, etc., and actually DO something about them. They ACT on their THOUGHTS. A person may have all of the book knowledge but if they never actually use it...it is worthless. An individual may know how to build a house, where to place the lumber, the plumbing, the electrical systems, the foundation, etc., but if that person never goes out and physically builds a house...what good is having that knowledge?

So, are you a THINKER or a DOER? How well are you conquering the greatest distance in the world?

#### Announcements for this Week

1. Congratulations to the Malacca Johore Diocese Young People Network for the dedicated service and groundwork done for the **Vicariate level World Youth Day celebrations**. There were 475 participants in Malacca, 380 in South Johore, and 180 in North Johore. It is wonderful to see the young people express themselves in song, dance, clapping and fellowship.

2. The 25th Sacerdotal Anniversary

of **Fr JR Rajendran** took place on December 4 at 6.00pm at the Church of the Immaculate Conception Johor Bahru.

3. **Sr Jennyfer Palanisamy**, a Canossian, will be making her final profession on December 9 at 11.00am at the Chapel of St James, Merlimau. Pray for vocations.

#### QnQ: Q asks? Can one be happy, when many are sad?

An anthropologist proposed a game to children in an African tribe. He put a basket of fruit near a tree and told the children that whoever got there first would win the sweet fruits.

When he told them to run they all took each others’ hands and ran together, then sat together enjoying their treats. When he asked them why they had run together like that as a single winner could have had all the fruits for himself, they said: **‘Ubuntu, how can one of us be happy if all the other ones are sad?’**

Ubuntu in their civilisation means: **I am because we are.** That tribe knows the secret of happiness that has been lost in all societies which transcend them and which consider themselves civilised societies!

The Malacca Johore Diocesan Pastoral Assembly 2023 reminds us to be faithful to the three pillars of “Being A Synodal Diocese” ie Communion, Participation and Mission. May we be faithful to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. God bless you all.

Bishop Bernard Paul



## ARCHDIOCESE OF KUALA LUMPUR

CHAN/CD/05/2023

## Chancery Notice Appointment and reassignment of priests

1. **Rev Fr Alvin Ng Sze Syn SJ** is appointed as the Parish Priest of the Church of St Francis Xavier, Petaling Jaya with effect from January 1, 2024.

2. **Rev Fr Norris Seenivasan SJ**, will be ending his term as Parish Priest of the Church of St Francis Xavier, Petaling Jaya on December 31, 2023. In January 2024, he will be leaving for the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, California, USA for a six-month sabbatical programme.

3. **Rev Fr Andrew Manickam OFM Cap**, is appointed as Parish Administrator of the Church of Our Lady of Fatima, Kuala Lumpur effective December 11, 2023.

4. **Rev Fr William Michael**, the current Parish Priest of the Church of Our Lady of Fatima, Kuala Lumpur is being reassigned as a priest in residence at the Church of the Good Shepherd, Setapak, Kuala Lumpur, while continuing to be the Judicial Vicar of the Peninsular Malaysia Ecclesiastical Tribunal, Kuala Lumpur.

5. **Rev Fr Bernard Hyacinth SJ**, who

has been serving in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur since 2019, has moved to the Diocese of Penang. Starting November 15, 2023, he is appointed Assistant Priest at the Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam.

Archbishop Julian Leow and the faithful of the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur express their heartfelt gratitude to Frs Norris Seenivasan SJ, William Michael, and Bernard Hyacinth SJ for serving faithfully in their respective assignments and to Frs Alvin Ng Sze Syn SJ and Andrew Manickam OFM Cap for willingly accepting their new appointment.

Let us always keep our priests in prayer as they continue to serve in the Lord’s vineyard

**Rev Fr Dr Clarence Devadass**  
Chancellor  
Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur

November 26, 2023



## DIOCESE OF MALACCA JOHORE

CHAN/LN/2023/005

## Chancery Notice Parish and ministry appointments

His Lordship, Bishop Bernard Paul DD, Bishop of Malacca Johore Diocese (MID), has hereby made the following appointments. They are as follows:

#### 1. Parish Appointment with effect January 1, 2024:

1.1. **Rev Fr Adrian Francis**, Assistant Parish Priest of St Louis, Kluang, has been appointed Assistant Parish Priest of Church of St Philip, Segamat.

#### 2. Ministries Appointments with effect from December 1, 2023:

2.1. **Rev Fr Patrick Tyoh Kai Hong** has been appointed as the bishop’s delegate and Priest-in-Charge to the Chinese Language and Cultural Council (Chinese-LCC), replacing Fr John Baptist Yoew Kah Chok.

2.2. **Rev Fr John Baptist Yoew Kah Chok** has been appointed as the Liturgical Coordinator of MJD, with Rev Fr Adrian Francis continuing as his assistant.

2.3. **Rev Fr Adrian Francis** has been appointed as the Vocation Director of MJD, replacing Rev Fr Lionel Thomas.

2.4. **Rev Fr Lionel Thomas** has been

appointed as the bishop’s delegate and Priest-in-Charge to the English Language and Cultural Council (English-LCC), replacing Rev Fr. Edward Rayappan.

2.5. **Rev Fr Moses Rayappan Paul Raj** has been appointed as the bishop’s delegate and Priest-in-Charge to the Bahasa Malaysia Language and Cultural Council (BM-LCC).

2.6. **Rev Fr Cyril Mannayagam** has been appointed as the bishop’s delegate and Priest-in-Charge to the newly formed Tamil Language and Cultural Council (Tamil-LCC).

2.7. **Rev Fr Edward Rayappan** has been appointed as the bishop’s delegate and Head of Ecumenical Inter Religious Dialogue (EIRD) for both states of Johor and Malacca.

**Rev Fr Dr Lawrence Ng**  
Chancellor  
Diocese of Malacca Johore

November 29, 2023



# Baptism is our common identity

SIBU: The Diocese of Sibu's Pastoral Assembly, held at the Sibu Kemuyang Pastoral Centre November 24-25, resonated with a message of unity and communion.

The event, attended by 133 individuals from 12 parishes, and a religious representative, saw the launching of the official theme song, inspired by Psalm 133: *Behold how good and pleasant it is for the brethren to dwell together in Unity.*

Led by Capuchin Friar Raphael Samosir and the Puteri Karmel sisters, the theme song reverberated the call for unity and communion in the mission of Jesus Christ, echoing the diocese's vision, *That we may all be one* (John 17:11, 21-23).

Bishop Joseph Hii, in his welcoming address, emphasised on the theme 'Celebrate our Baptism', urging all to recognise baptism as the common identity uniting them as children of God and siblings in faith.

The assembly delved into reports from the 12 parishes and the religious representative, highlighting each parish's distinctiveness and their journey in transmitting the message received during the preparatory events of the Jubilee Year 2025 and the Malaysian Pastoral Convention 2026.

A significant highlight was the introduction of "Spiritual Conversation," a concept stemming from the Synod on Synodality, facilitating discussions among the assembly's 10 groups in three different sessions. Delegates shared their profound experi-



Parish and religious representatives sharing their experiences and concerns during the group discussions.

ences and the most striking messages that resonated with them.

The assembly culminated with Mass, celebrated by Bishop Joseph Hii and the clergy of the diocese concelebrating.

In his homily, Bishop Joseph reiterated that our baptism calls upon us the duty to transmit our faith. He reminded parents of their baptismal vocation. "You should be the first catechist of your children. The obligation to transmit faith to your children, foremost falls upon parents, not the Sunday school teachers or catechists."

He emphasised the importance for all representatives and priests to embrace their leadership roles with humility, embodying the spirit of humble servants offering selfless service. Particularly in their engagement with the youth, he stressed the necessity of meeting them on their level, advocating against condescension. "Our role isn't to instruct but to walk alongside them. Listening outweighs speaking in this journey." He cautioned that a lack of this approach might inadvertently alienate the youth, hindering their connection with Christ.

Regarding communal living among fellow believers, he underscored the significance of fostering encounters with God through acts of forgiveness and mercy. Ultimately, he urged everyone to remain receptive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, highlighting how assemblies like these present opportunities to heed the Spirit's call through attentive listening and discernment.

The Sarawak Regional Pastoral Assembly is scheduled to be held from September 16-20, 2024. — *Sibu Social Communication Team*

## Are you concealing your inner light?

IPOH: The Church of St Michael saw an impressive turnout of 150 leaders and parishioners at the parish pastoral assembly, which took place on November 26.

The assembly commenced with a praise and worship session, spearheaded by a group of 12 English and Mandarin-speaking youth. Parish priest, Fr Anthony Liew, set the tone for the assembly by delivering the Gospel reading from Matthew 5:13-16, drawing the thematic essence for the Church in 2024: *Salt of the Earth and Light of the World*. He challenged the parishioners, questioning whether they were concealing their inner light. Commending the joint participation of the bilingual youth groups in the praise and worship session, he expressed admiration for their unity in leading the assembly.

The session featured slides showcasing the church's activities over the past year. Aligned with the Synod's theme, *Enlarge the space of your tent*, Fr Anthony urged all



Parishioners of the Church of St Michael participating in the parish pastoral assembly.

to broaden their horizons, extending beyond mere membership, conventional church boundaries, and traditional approaches.

Before the parish assembly, parishioners were tasked with completing a questionnaire addressing family relationships, capturing joys, blessings, anxieties, struggles, hopes, and aspirations. Over 100 completed

surveys were received, revealing prevalent concerns affecting family dynamics, notably financial instability and a lack of spiritual formation.

Fr Anthony concluded that the Church must radiate as the light of the world and the salt of the earth. Emphasising the need to elevate spirituality among the community,

he stressed the importance of recognising God's presence in their lives. Encouraging a positive focus on strengths and opportunities within groups rather than weaknesses and threats, he prompted each BEC and ministry to deliberate on ways to achieve this objective.

The parish priest then proposed specific activities for the upcoming year, highlighting the importance of praise and worship sessions, regular fellowship for physical exercise, and video sessions to foster stronger interpersonal bonds and spiritual growth.

Each BEC and ministry was then tasked with drafting their activities for the upcoming year and to discuss these plans within their respective groups and submit finalised proposals to the office by January 31, 2024.

The parish assembly concluded with a prayer for the collaborative efforts of all parishioners in nurturing enhanced spirituality among the community. — *By Jennifer Duarte*

## Reflecting on the past, charting the future



The participants posing for a group photo.

KUANTAN: The Church of St Thomas the Apostle held its parish pastoral assembly on November 25 to mark the closure of the 2022/23 liturgical year. Delegates representing the various groups and ministries of the parish including the FMM Sisters gathered to review the journey of the past year.

Approximately 50 participants participated in the assembly, which commenced at 9.30am with the Liturgy of the Hours led by parish priest Fr George Packiasamy. This was followed by a 30-minute period of silent meditation and invocation of the Holy Spirit, setting the tone for the day's agenda.

Each ministry leader presented an annual report, giving a comprehensive review of the year 2022/23, along with strategic plans for the forthcoming year.

Reflecting on the challenges encountered over the past year, the parish community demonstrated resilience and commitment in fostering a more vibrant and fruitful Church, relying significantly on the dedica-

tion of consistent ministry leaders.

Fr George shared his insights on the parish's positive strides toward executing every formation, activity, and celebration within its precincts. He expressed gratitude for the collaborative efforts in offering pastoral care to local parishioners, including East Malaysians, the Orang Asli, and migrants. Emphasising the importance of communal harmony and active participation, he outlined the Parish Vision, Mission, and highlighted areas of concern. As a cohesive parish community, he emphasised the importance of fostering communion, active participation, and a sense of mission, grounded firmly in our adherence to the Word, Faith, and Values. These aspects form integral parts of our synodal journey, pivotal in fortifying the Church for the forthcoming year.

The assembly concluded with a time of fellowship, followed by a photo session. — *By Dr Francis Leong*





RESPONDING TO THE HOLY SPIRIT: TOWARDS PMPC2026 IN THE SPIRIT OF COMMUNION, PARTICIPATION & MISSION

By Fr Dr Lawrence Ng

The clergy of the Malacca Johore Diocese (MJD) followed up the Diocesan Pastoral Assembly (DPA) with a common pastoral plan at vicariate level. At the same time, each parish in the respective vicariate will implement at least one to two pastoral actions at parish level.

The DPA is part of the Church's journey towards the Malaysia Pastoral Convention (MPC) 2026. That convention will see the totality of the Malaysia Church gathering together to reflect on four core areas: **Family, Church, Ecology, and Society**. This was also made clear to the DPA delegates, pastoral workers, and clergy.

Msgr Michel Mannayagam noted at a South Johore vicariate level meeting on November 8 at the Church of St Elizabeth, Kota Tinggi, that these areas have always been worked on in the diocese and parishes. He said, "What is different is that we are focused on these areas as part of our pastoral plan next year."

The DPA came at a time when the Catholic Church was embarking on the thrust of syno-

dality as a way of being Church. Synodality means walking together. This was the theme adopted by the diocese. Before the DPA, Bishop Bernard announced that the pastoral orientation priorities of the diocese are *Walking Together in a Spirit of Communion, Participation and Mission Towards MPC 2026*.

### Vicariate and Diocesan Pastoral Assemblies

Part of what the Vicariate and Diocesan Pastoral Assemblies grappled with was how we journey or walk together in a synodal spirit while building the areas of Family, Church, Ecology, and Society. The diocese focused on speaking about "building" while being aware of feedback from past diocesan and parish assemblies, including the diocese synod findings discussed last year.

The tool used to accomplish this was "spiritual conversation" or "conversation in the Spirit." Rather than seeing it as a result to be achieved or a product to be rolled out, it is more helpful to see it as a continual process until MPC 2026 or beyond. It is a journey. Vicar Forane for Malacca, Fr Alexchelvam, noted this, stating, "We cannot accomplish

everything all at once but take focus and do well in one or two pastoral responses each year at our parishes."

### Follow Up to the DPA

The clergy were given some time to discern and reflect on the findings discerned by the delegates at the VPA, including the responses noted by the secretaries from the four language groups during the open forum at the DPA. The Vicariate meetings were held before the Annual Clergy Discernment (ACD) on November 21 and 22. The clergy in each vicariate gathered to discern a common pastoral response at the vicariate level. This includes setting the direction for each parish priest to discern, with their parish communities, on a pastoral response at the parish level.

There are three vicariates in the diocese: Malacca, North-Central Johore, and South Johore. The Vicar Forane helped coordinate the pastoral responses following the DPA as each Vicariate may have different needs. North-Central Vicar Forane Fr Paul Wong noted that "the context of each Vicariate is different. The needs of Malacca parishioners are different from Segamat, just as Segamat is different from Johor Bahru, which is shaped by its parishioners working in Singapore."

### Annual Clergy Discernment 2023

The discernment and pastoral response were presented to the clergy at the ACD 2023 in the Good Shepherd Seminary, Melaka. During the presentation, Vicar Forane for South Johore, Fr Matthew Bun, said that "this pastoral response is meant to be realistic, according to the situation of each place." After the presentation by each Vicar Forane, a period of time was allotted for discernment before it was open to all for responses.

Bishop Bernard Paul thanked the clergy for coming together and working on it at a vicariate and parish levels. He said that whatever is proposed is our diocese's pastoral plan for 2024. To endorse the plan, he said, "Please make it into a pledge and sign it. Take it as your pastoral commitment for 2024. Do your best and review your parish pastoral plan at your parish assemblies for next year."

The following are the final statements of their pastoral pledge for 2024. These pledges were signed by all the clergy.

## Pastoral response by the Malacca Johore Clergy

Coordinated by the Vicar Forane of each district, the clergy of each respective vicariate met and deliberated as a follow up to the District Pastoral Assembly (DPA) as the diocese journeys towards the Malaysia Pastoral Convention (MPC) 2026.

The Clergy of the Diocese of Malacca Johore (MJD) remains committed to the aspirations of our diocese to be a listening and discerning Church, where we walk together in a spirit of communion, participation, and mission. We thank the delegates of the DPA for their contributions at the Vicariate Pastoral Assemblies (VPA) on Monday, June 5, 2023, and their responses during the Open Forum of the DPA on Saturday, October 14, 2023.

Therefore, the pastoral thrust of our diocese in 2024 are based on the findings, reflections, and sharing of recent VPAs and DPA. Our response and follow-up will be at the Vicariate level as the context of each district is different.

### MALACCA VICARIATE

#### Vicariate Level:

We, the clergy of Malacca Vicariate, in a spirit of synodality, are committed to journey as a **family** while serving towards an inclusive society with greater care for the environment in living together as one Church.

The clergy of Malacca will cooperate towards a vicariate level Family Day on Malaysia Day, September 16, 2024. This is part of our response to foster a stronger bond in families but also to create a better sense of belonging with the Church and one another.

#### Parish Level:

##### Family:

The keywords of how the parishes will build families are as follows:

1. Teaching
2. Collaboration
3. Accompaniment
4. Commitment

##### Church:

The BEC will still be the main focus of each parish.

##### Ecology:

The parishes of each district will see to create greater awareness on the need to protect our environment.

##### Society:

Focus on the attitude of the community (to move from an 'I' to 'WE'). There is much that can be done, such as *gotong royong* or mutual cooperation.

### NORTH CENTRAL JOHORE VICARIATE

We the Clergy of the North Central Johore Vicariate hereby pledge to carry out these initiatives and formations at our vicariate and parish levels with the faithful, for our spiritual and temporal growth, journeying as a synodal diocese.

#### Vicariate Level:

The North Central Johore Clergy will focus on **ecology** and **society** at the vicariate level. This is by:

1. Hosting and participating in the Diocese Ecological Programme Year 5 that will be held at the Church of St Henry, Batu Pahat in October 2024.
2. As a vicariate, to host a common weekend for a blood donation drive e.g. pledging 100 packs of blood, to be held sometime during the Lenten Season (March 16-17, 2024), as a part of our contribution to society.

#### Parish level:

##### Family:

1. Various forms of family accompaniment through prayer and spiritual growth.
2. Visit by priests of the parish to every family in the BECs.
3. Annual or regular formations in areas of family life by the parish ministries, particularly with the collaboration of the Family Life Ministries.

##### Church:

1. Provide formations through the various



Members of the clergy during the North Central Johore Vicariate meeting.

- BEC initiatives such as celebrating BEC area Masses at a particular time or quarter of the year and restoring BEC gatherings.
2. Conduct youth camps as a vicariate. Camps will be hosted in a parish as an annual or bi-annual formation for the youth of the parish/vicariate.
  3. Ongoing updates through parish formations that cover areas of the life of the church, such as catechetics for parents' liturgical and biblical formations, including social action in the life of the church.
  4. Celebrate an annual parish family day.

#### Ecology:

1. Host the Ecology Programme for the diocese.
2. Beautify through nature by maintaining parishes through green initiatives involving ministries related to Creation Justice and Care through the efforts of the youth or BECs e.g. landscaping, arts and deco using recycling materials.

#### Society:

1. Provide psycho-spiritual formation through professionals.
2. Encourage awareness and educate non-Christians on how Christians celebrate Lunar New Year, Ponggal, or KAGAPE as a Church.

### SOUTH JOHORE VICARIATE

#### Vicariate Level:

We, the South Johore Vicariate Clergy, have chosen to focus on **family** at the vicariate

level for 2024. The focus proposed and being worked out are:

1. To have an activity that brings families and family members together.
  - a. To reflect deeper on how we can journey with men facing life issues by offering formation, direction, and accompaniment.
  - b. It is proposed that a renewal programme be tailored for the renewal of families in parishes of South Johore Vicariate. The programme will be translated into three languages by the clergy themselves: Tamil, Mandarin, and Bahasa Malaysia.

#### Parish Level:

The clergy have discussed and pointed out that the four core areas have always been worked out at parish level. For example, there is always a continual care for building families through BECs and parish family day. Therefore, the parish priests will discuss with their parish leaders on the next step for their parishes.

The general guidelines that all have agreed upon are as follows:

1. Propose activities that bring families together, (Family)
2. Build parish communities (Church).
3. To create awareness on ecology and to protect our environment so that this habit becomes our way of life.
4. Parishes must always continue to have outreach toward social mission, i.e., care for our Friends-In-Need (FINs).



# Learning how to graft avocados

KUCHING: The Bunan Resilience Project of the Archdiocese of Kuching is one of the Decarbonisation Projects under the Episcopal Commission for Creation Justice of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei. The project tagline is *Green Transition – Transforming Food Production*. The avocado project “One household, One Avocado Tree” in Bunan is the brainchild of Archbishop Simon Poh. The objective is to leave a legacy to the younger generation as a reminder of the forefathers’ tilling the land.

A practical avocado grafting course was conducted recently at St Peter’s College Seminary. It was a collaborative programme between Kuching Archdiocese Creation Justice Commission and the Lighthouse of Hope, Sarawak.

The Lighthouse of Hope, Sarawak was established in Kapit, with the core aim of seeking to bring transformation of mind, soul, and heart of the next generation to



The participants trying their hands at grafting the avocado seedlings.

achieve its true potential and in facing challenges of the 21st century. The target is the youth, community, family on social and

economic development through engaging and empowering transformation process.

The course started with an opening

prayer by Fr Francis Dakun and a brief introduction by Dr Leesun from Lighthouse of Hope, Sarawak. This was followed by a talk and demonstration on avocado grafting by the trainer, Voon Boon Hoe, a retired researcher from the Agriculture Department, Sarawak. A practical session was also included for the participants to have hands-on activity on grafting the avocado seedlings generously provided by Voon.

The grafting shoots were from the avocado tree at the seminary ground. A total of 21 participants took part in the course. They came from Bunan, parishes, ACCPC Building and Plant Maintenance team, seminary and the Anglican parishes.

The objective of the course was achieved as all participants had successfully acquired the know-how on how to graft, grow and produce avocado. All the 40 seedlings were grafted without injury. The course ended with a closing prayer by Fr Francis. — *Today’s Catholic*

## Receiving Christ for the first time

Church of the Holy Redeemer, Klang



The 18 youngsters of the Church of the Holy Redeemer, Klang with their parish priest Fr Andrew Kooi.

KLANG: The parish community came together on November 19 to witness 18 children from the parish receive the Sacrament of First Holy Communion.

Parish priest Fr Andrew Kooi presided over the Mass, guided the communicants as they partook in the sacred ritual, receiving the Body and Blood of Christ in both species. For these children, it marked an unforgettable and spiritually enriching moment. The community also expressed gratitude for a year of dedicated catechism classes. The children and their families participated devoutly in the prayers and singing throughout Mass.

The celebration continued with the distribution of certificates, tokens, and a ceremonial cake cutting, culminating in a luncheon at the parish hall. To everyone’s delight, the 18 communicants were invited by the HRC youth group to join in an unexpected dance performance set to the tune of Jesus is my best friend.

Reflecting on the preparations and festivities, the catechists expressed their gratitude, acknowledging the invaluable support received from parents, various HRC groups, and ministries. Their shared hope is to continue journeying together as one community, united in glorifying God. — *By Mary Ng*

Church of St Aloysius, Mantin

MANTIN: Twelve youngsters received Jesus for the first time during the celebration of Christ the King.

The special day marked a joyous culmination of their anticipation and years of preparation. As they entered, dressed in white and glowing with excitement mingled with nervousness, they eagerly awaited the reception of the King of Kings. When asked by parish priest Fr Christopher Soosaipillai whom they were about to receive, they resounded with vigour, “Jesus”, affirming their understanding of the sacrament they were about to receive.

Fr Christopher acknowledged and thanked the parents, recognising their essential role as the foundation of faith within their families.

After the Eucharist, each child received a certificate as a keepsake of their memorable First Holy Communion day.

The festivities continued with a potluck fellowship, enjoyed by all in attendance.

Earlier on November 18, two Orang Asli children from Kampung Belihoi received the sacrament of the Eucharist at Rumah Besar Kebangkitan Kristus. — *By Selva Manogary*



The First Holy Communicants with Fr Christopher Soosaipillai and catechists, proudly displaying their certificates. (photo/Marie Ashley Andrew)

## Celebrating Christ the King

SUNGAI PETANI: The Church of Christ the King celebrated her parish feast with a nine-day novena and Eucharistic celebration, culminating on the Feast of Christ the King, November 17 to 26.

The celebration commenced with a flag hoisting ceremony on the first day, with Mass celebrated by Fr Raymond Raj who preached on *Mission to love as Jesus loves*.

The celebrants for the other days included Fr Desmond Janssen, Msgr Henry Rajoo, Fr Martin Arlando, Fr Louis Loi, Fr Nelson Joseph and Fr Francis Xavier. There was also a special healing Mass on November 23, presided over by Fr Varghese Parakal from Perth.

Each day, Mass concluded with sponsored refreshments from different BECs, adding warmth and a community spirit to the gatherings.

The celebrations culminated on the feast of Christ the King, with the theme *Proclaiming Jesus as Lord and Saviour*, with Fr Arulnathan Joseph as the main celebrant.

During the celebration, parish priest Fr Victor Louis launched a video and banner to mark the journey towards the centenary (100th year) celebration of Christ the King, scheduled for Nov 22, 2025.

The festivities drew to a close with a celebratory dinner sponsored by the parish. — *By Julianna Fernandez*



The parishioners listening intently during the Mass.

## Love endures through the years

KULIM: In a heart-warming event that echoed the essence of enduring love, 21 couples revisited their wedding vows on the morning of November 25. Ranging from marriages as recent as five years to those lasting a remarkable 55 years, the couples gathered to reaffirm their commitment to each other.

Friends, family members and parishioners of the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus bore witness to this auspicious event and joined in the joyous celebration. The event was the brainchild of parish priest, Msgr Henry Rajoo, who wanted to emphasise the importance of marriage and to uphold the commitments made by the couples on their wedding day.

The celebration was made possible through the dedicated efforts of the Family Life Ministry, which meticulously planned both the renewal of vows service and the subsequent reception. The morning culmi-



The married couples walking into the church.

nated in fellowship, as friends and relatives congregated in the newly inaugurated parish hall, sharing warmth and joy in each other’s company. — *By Agnes Teh*



# Using modern media to communicate the Gospel



The delegates at the annual Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences' Office of Social Communication meeting in Bangkok, November 20-24, 2023.

BANGKOK: Asian Catholic media professionals and Church leaders are looking at ways to use modern media in the Church's mission to communicate the Gospel.

"What I am understanding these days is that from Asia, from the East, let's say, we can learn a lesson: that Eastern culture knows how to understand that everything is united, how to see beyond appearances," Paolo Ruffini, Prefect of the Dicastery for Communication, told 30 bishops, priests and lay people at the annual Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences' Office of Social Communication (FABC-OSC) meeting that took place in Bangkok, November 20-24.

Ruffini, a professional journalist since 1979 and director of the Italian Bishops' Conference television station before Pope Francis appointed him as prefect of the Dicastery for communication in 2018, addressed the theme of Communication in the Synodal Church. He highlighted the Holy See's commitment to fostering collaborative partnerships with local Churches. He emphasised that the essence of the Synodal Church lies in cultivating relationships rather than merely transmitting information. Ruffini also underscored that the Church functions as a community of evangelising disciples, stressing the call for Christians to act as missionaries in the digital age.

Cardinal Sebastian Francis, the Bishop of Penang and FABC-OSC chairman of the FABC's Office of Social Communication, noted that this was the first FABC-OSC in-

person meeting in several years. "Communication is our way of life, our way of relating with one another," he said, adding that Asians are "basically storytellers, and we have a story to tell." Expressing the hope that young digital missionaries will effectively share the Gospel narrative of mercy and joy, Cardinal Francis said, "There are so many young people, in Asia particularly, who are becoming part of this mission and part of this story and who are going forward, going ahead of us even, to evangelise, to share this story of the Gospel with Asia."

Also, during the meeting, Nataša Govekar, director of the Department of Pastoral Theology in the Vatican's Dicastery for Communication, joined the FABC-OSC meet for an online session on Faith Communication in the Digital World. This project, run by the Dicastery for Communication, seeks to prepare young people for the communication challenges they will face in their respective vocations. Govekar also presented the dicastery's 34-page document, *Towards Full Presence: A Pastoral Reflection on Engagement with Social Media* released last May, inviting Catholics to "live in the digital world as 'loving neighbours' who are genuinely present and attentive to each other on our common journey along the 'digital highways'."

According to that document, the challenge of fostering peaceful, meaningful, and caring relationships on social media prompts a discussion in academic and professional circles, as well as in ecclesial ones prompts one to

ask: What kind of humanity is reflected in our presence in digital environments? How much of our digital relationships is the fruit of deep and truthful communication, and how much is merely shaped by unquestioned opinions and passionate reactions? How much of our faith finds living and refreshing digital expressions? And who is my "neighbour" on social media?

The aim of that document — the result of a reflection involving experts, teachers, young professionals and leaders, lay persons, clergy, and religious — is not meant to be precise "guidelines" for pastoral ministry but to promote a common reflection about our digital experiences, encouraging both individuals and communities to take a creative and constructive approach that can foster a culture of neighbourliness.

Today's forms of communication and information dissemination encompasses a wide range of platforms and technologies used to convey information to a large audience. This includes traditional media such as newspapers, magazines, radio, and television, as well as newer digital media like websites, social media, podcasts, streaming services, and more. It plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion, spreading news and entertainment, and connecting people globally. Modern media — diverse, dynamic, and constantly changing as new technologies and platforms continue to emerge — allows for more interactive and personalised content consumption. — LCI (<https://international.la-croix.com/>)

## Catholic peacemaker receives Mother Teresa award

MUMBAI: This year's Mother Teresa Memorial Award for Social Justice has been conferred on a US-based Catholic global peacemaker working to replace the scourge of landmines with sustainable agricultural farmland for more than 25 years.



"Heidi Kuhn's work through [her non-profit] *Roots of Peace* perfectly embodies the spirit of the Mother Teresa Memorial Awards," said Abraham Mathai, founder-chairman of Harmony Foundation.

Kuhn, also the recipient of this year's World Food Prize, received the award instituted by the voluntary group based in Mumbai, western India, on November 26.

"Her [Kuhn's] commitment to replacing the scars of war with the seeds of hope is a remarkable example of 'humanity in action,'" said Mathai.

Accepting the award, Kuhn said *Roots of Peace* was "cultivating peace through agriculture — leading with the 'shovel' not the 'sword.'"

Quoting St Mother Teresa, who founded the Missionaries of Charity congregation in India, Kuhn said, "Not all of us can do great things, but we may do small things with great love."

Kuhn said removing a landmine and planting a fruit tree "is an act of peace."

The activist said that "to plant a seed we fall to our knees, touch the ground, and nurture both the soil and the soul."

"As bombs fall from the sky in so many nations, we as humans must fall to our knees, kiss the ground, and plant a flower, a tree, or even an orchard, in an act of solidarity to heal the wounds of war."

Founded in 1997, *Roots of Peace* has turned "mines into vines" in over 10 countries and reached out to over 1 million farmers in Afghanistan, Angola, Azerbaijan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cambodia, Croatia, Guatemala, Iraq, Israel, Palestine and Vietnam. — By Michael Gonsalves, [ucanews.com](http://ucanews.com)

## Student suicides raise alarm bells in Hong Kong

HONG KONG: A surge in suicide cases among students has prompted authorities in Hong Kong to adopt a plan for greater mental health support in the city, says a report.

The move comes after Hong Kong reported 27 cases of student suicides, the highest in four years, *Hong Kong Free Press* reported on November 22.

In a letter to the city's Legislative Council (LegCo), Secretary for Education Christine Choi cited the COVID-19 pandemic and pressure on students after the resumption of schools as possible factors behind the surge, the report stated.

"It is believed that the upward trend may be affected by the epidemic and the greater challenges facing students after the resumption to normalcy," Choi said.

The surge in suicides recorded until October has already surpassed the annual figures recorded for 2022 and 2020, *HKFP* reported.

In 2020, Hong Kong schools reported 21 suspected student suicides which rose to 25 in 2021 and remained the same in 2022.

The Hong Kong Jockey Club Centre for

Suicide Research and Prevention released its suicide figures last week which stated that 37 students took their lives between January and early November.

"Student suicide figures peaked in May and October... while five students had attempted suicide on school premises," the group said.

Choi pointed out that multiple factors were affecting the mental health of students, often prompting them to harbour suicidal tendencies.

"Students' personal problems — such as having to adjust to school, depression, and other mental health issues — may also lead to risk of suicide," Choi said.

Choi emphasised that suicide was a complicated problem and "could not be attributed to any single factor."

Some of the major risk factors identified from recent suicides involving primary and secondary students included family, social, and relationship problems.

Choi said that the government was trying to reduce suicide among students with help from all concerned stakeholders and

seeks to implement a three-tier emergency mechanism.

"To address the recent tragic incidents of students, the government is pooling efforts from all parties through cross-sectoral collaboration to strengthen support for schools, students and parents so as to build a stronger safety net for students," Choi said.

The first level of the three-tier mechanism will help schools identify students who may have a greater risk of suicidal thoughts or mental health needs, Choi said.

The second level involves providing "external support" in cases where the school does not have sufficient workforce to cater to students' needs.

This level includes support from registered social workers and professionals such as psychologists from the bureau or government-supported NGOs.

In the final tier, students with severe mental health needs will be referred to public psychiatric specialist services by their school principals.

"They would be given priority by the hospital authority," Choi said. — [ucanews.com](http://ucanews.com)





# A shrine of hope and healing for women

WALES: The Shrine of St Winefride in Holywell, north Wales, has been elevated to the status of a national shrine for England and Wales. It's one of the oldest places of pilgrimage in Britain and has an unbroken 1,400-year tradition of pilgrimage.

The local Catholic bishop, Bishop Peter Brignall of Wrexham, is delighted the Bishops of England and Wales have given the shrine this recognition.

"It's an important recognition by the bishops of the value of shrines and is totally in accord with Pope Francis. Recently, the Holy Father met the directors of shrines and spoke to them of the importance of shrines as places of pilgrimage, prayer, consolation, and hope for all who visit them.

"Indeed, the Jubilee Year of 2025 has been given the theme Pilgrims of Hope. We

are all pilgrims and these shrines are little windows onto the whole pilgrimage of our lives."

Bishop Brignall also wants St Winefride's Shrine to be a beacon of hope and healing for women who have suffered from violence and abuse, in parallel with the experiences of the saint herself.

In 630, St Winefride spurned the advances of Caradog, a chieftain from Hawarden who attempted to seduce her. The aggressor then pursued and decapitated her as she ran towards the church which had been built by her uncle, St Beuno. In the place where her head fell, a spring of water came up. St Beuno came out from the church, took up her head and placed it back on her body before praying and miraculously raising her to life.

Bishop Peter Brignall said, "One of the

things that I inaugurated this year, drawing on the story of St Winefride and the abuse and attack upon her, was to make the shrine at Holywell a place of consolation for those who have suffered similarly in their own lives.

"I wanted to draw on that tradition of healing in Holywell, that healing that comes through the intercession of St Winefride, through the grace of God, that those who, in our own time have suffered violence of any sort and are inevitably traumatised by it — particularly women — may find consolation, hope, comfort, reconciliation and healing at Holywell.

"When we speak of healing, to my mind, it's that global form of being made 'whole' rather than being 'cured' of a particular illnesses or disease." — *Exaudi*

## Indian nuns pledge to eradicate human trafficking

BARASAT, India: Catholic nuns working against human trafficking in various parts of India have pledged to live the values of the Indian Constitution and continue their mission with renewed vigour.

Around 170 nuns from 80 religious congregations gathered November 24-26 at Proggaloy, Barasat, West Bengal, to share their adventurous and successful moments, as well as the challenges they face while combating human trafficking.

The meeting was the 13th annual general body meeting of Amrat Talitha Kum India which is affiliated to Talitha Kum International.

Bishop Shyamal Boss of Baruipur, who led the inaugural Mass, reiterated the significance of working against human trafficking and appreciated the women Religious for their tireless and courageous efforts to check the social menace. He also hailed the nuns' contribution in enhancing the Church's effective presence in the country and the world at large.

PM Nair, a renowned retired police officer who was the resource person of the day, shared his personal interventions in rescuing children and his attitude of Christ-like compassion to the victims and survivors of human trafficking. He said he was "so happy to interact with so many Sisters in the divine and universal mission to work on preventing

human slavery."

Nair said his motto is *No Child is for Sale, No Woman is for Sale, No Human Being is for Sale*, and that we all shall work to end trafficking in persons by *SPOT IT, SPEAK IT, ACT IT AND STOP IT*. He had introduced the Anti Human Trafficking Cell in India.

Fr Isaac Rumao of Gujarat Jesuit Province, the director of St Xavier's Social Service Society Ahmedabad, spoke on the importance and the strength of networking. He said that to resist, to reduce and to stop organised crime, people have to be well organised through networking.

Bethany Sr Jyoti Pinto, the founding president of Amrat Talitha Kum India, who coordinated the programme, stressed the importance of working in solidarity with a heart of passion for Christ and compassion for humanity.

Sr Meera Mathew, a member of the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd and the president of the organisation, explained to the participants the theme, *Power to Care, Power to Empower and the Power to Restore*.

The meeting aimed to motivate women religious across India to take up the challenging ministry. Besides this, to capacitate the sisters with different skills to address ground level realities on the issue. — *Matters India*



## Pope meets with French abuse victims

VATICAN: Pope Francis met with a group of clerical sexual abuse victims from the French diocese of Nantes, a public appointment Francis kept despite a lingering bacterial infection that is causing inflammation of the lungs and has caused him to curtail his schedule significantly over the past few days and cancel a trip to Dubai for the COP-28 climate change summit, December 1-3.

The Nov 28 encounter between the Pope and sex abuse survivors took place in the Casa Santa Marta guesthouse where Francis has lived throughout his pontificate. It followed a round of meetings the victims had with officials at the headquarters of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors (PCPM).

The official *Vatican News* website called the meeting in the PCPM "a moment of listening, learning, and dialogue focused on the path of testimony, memory, and prevention that they are pursuing with the local Church and the Congregation."

In a message written for the occasion and delivered to participants, Pope Francis acknowledged that victims of clerical sexual abuse have suffered "the greatest evil in a place where [they] have, together with [their] families, sought what is true and good."

"The subversion of a child's rights through violence and abuse is a betrayal of our God-given humanity," Francis wrote.

The group of victims were led by the religious of the Montfort Brothers of St

Gabriel and the Nantes diocese's Commission for Recognition and Reparation (CRR), part of an independent national apparatus established specifically to help victims of abuse committed by members of religious congregations. The CRR also assists vulnerable adults.

Pope Francis' handling of high-profile abuse cases involving adult victims in situations of vulnerability has been under scrutiny for some time. The scrutiny has intensified over the past year, as increasingly disturbing details have emerged regarding the management of a case involving a former Jesuit, Fr Marko Rupnik, accused of abusing nearly 20 adult victims — most of them women religious — over some thirty years.

Rupnik first escaped prosecution when, despite mountainous evidence and ample opportunity for the accused to defend himself, Pope Francis did not lift the statute of limitations to allow for a trial. Rupnik then left the Jesuits and found a bishop willing to take him as a priest in good standing in his native Slovenia.

Only in late October of this year, after sustained media pressure and incandescent public outcry over the news that Rupnik would be continuing in ministry, did Francis agree to re-open an investigation. In explaining the reversal, the Vatican cited "serious problems" in the handling of Rupnik's case, which the Vatican said were brought to Francis' attention by the PCPM. — *Cruix*

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# Evangelisation includes care for the poor and the Earth

VATICAN: An effective proclamation of the Gospel must speak with hope to the real-life problems of the poor, to the need to protect the Earth and to the ability of people of goodwill to change the social and financial systems that harm the poor and the environment, Pope Francis said.

“Ten years after the publication of *Evangelii Gaudium* [The Joy of the Gospel], let us reaffirm that only if we listen to the often-silenced cry of the earth and of the poor can we fulfil our evangelising mission, live the life Jesus proposes to us and contribute to solving the grave problems of humanity,” the Pope wrote to a conference marking the anniversary of his first exhortation.

The Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development organised the conference November 24, the anniversary of publication of the exhortation, which was widely described as outlining Francis’ vision for his pontificate.

In his message to the conference, the Pope said the proclamation of the Gospel today — like it was for the Church of the first centuries — “requires of us a prophetic counter-cultural resistance to pagan, hedon-



At the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development at the Vatican Nov 24, participants discuss Pope Francis’ exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* on the 10th anniversary of its publication. (CNS/Cindy Wooden)

istic individualism,” resistance “to a system that kills, excludes and destroys human dignity, resistance to a mentality that isolates, alienates and limits one’s inner life to one’s own interests, distances us from our neighbour and alienates us from God.”

Being a “missionary disciple,” he said, means working for the kingdom of God by

struggling for justice, providing food to the hungry and working for a fair distribution of goods.

Putting the poor at the centre of one’s concern, the Pope wrote, “is not politics, is not sociology, is not ideology — it is purely and simply the requirement of the Gospel.”

The practical implications of that require-

ment could vary, depending on whether one is a government leader or a business owner, a judge or a labour union worker, he said, “but what no one can evade or excuse themselves from, is the debt of love that every Christian — and I dare say, every human being — owes to the poor.” — **By Cindy Wooden, NCR**

## Parishes play ‘vital role’ in bringing Christ to the world

WASHINGTON: Parishes play a “vital role” in bringing Christ’s transformative love to the world, said two US bishops as a key document on social ministry marked its 30th year.

*Communities of Salt and Light: Reflections on the Social Mission of the Parish* was approved by the US Catholic bishops in November 1993 and continues to serve as a roadmap for parish social ministry.

The document’s title points to Jesus’ likening of the disciples to salt and light, called to season and illuminate the world with the Gospel message (Mt 5:13-16).

“Three decades after its release, we see the enduring importance of this guiding document,” said Archbishop Borys A. Gudziak of the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia, chairman of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, and Bishop David J. Malloy of Rockford, Illinois, who in mid-November completed his three-year term as chairman of the USCCB’s Committee on International Justice and Peace.

“We continue to invite faith communities to integrate social ministry throughout the life of the parish, and to take up the call to be communities of salt and light, forming and sending the faithful to protect the least of these,” said Archbishop Gudziak and Bishop Malloy in a statement issued Nov 20.

The statement noted that updated resource pages, available in both English and Spanish, have integrated Pope Francis’ teaching with the original document. Also available are new prayer and educational materials, including an interactive assessment tool to help parishes implement their social ministry initiatives.

While preceded by major pastoral letters on several issues, *Communities of Salt and Light* was the US Catholic bishops’ first effort to specifically address what they called “the crucial role of parishes” in the Church’s social ministry.



Volunteers with the Ladies of Charity of Calvert County, Md, load turkeys and other provisions into the car of a person in need at a food pantry November 20, 2021, held on the grounds of the Church of St Anthony in North Beach. Thirty years ago, in November 1993, the US bishops approved the statement “*Communities of Salt and Light: Reflections on the Social Mission of the Parish*,” which continues to serve as a roadmap for parish social ministry. (OSV News photo/Bob Roller)

“We are convinced that the local parish is the most important ecclesial setting for sharing and acting on our Catholic social heritage,” since “the parish is where the Church lives,” said the bishops in the document.

Parish social ministry “has clear biblical roots,” and “especially in the Hebrew prophets and the life and words of Jesus,” wrote the bishops.

They noted that biblical mandates to uphold human dignity — for example, through care of the poor and marginalised — “have been explored and expressed in a special way in Catholic social teaching.”

In 1990, the US bishops outlined the development of that teaching in a pastoral message for the 100th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, an 1891 encyclical by Pope Leo XIII that articulated the Church’s stance on issues of social justice, particu-

larly those raised by the impact of the Industrial Revolution on modern society and human dignity.

In *Communities of Salt and Light*, the bishops stressed that “our faith is profoundly social,” since “we cannot be called truly ‘Catholic’ unless we hear and heed the Church’s call to serve those in need and work for justice and peace.”

At its heart, the Church’s social teaching “is the life, dignity and rights of the human person,” they said.

Social ministry should not be a separate component but rather, “an integral part of the entire parish,” woven “into every aspect of parish life — worship, formation and action,” said the bishops in the document.

Rather than a specific model, the bishops offered a framework of seven elements for integrating social ministry into parish life.

### The Seven Elements

- Social ministry must be anchored in prayer and worship, since “the most important setting for the Church’s social teaching is not in a food pantry or in a legislative committee room, but in prayer and worship, especially gathered around the altar for the Eucharist.”
- Preaching and education must reflect the Gospel’s social dimensions, without turning the pulpit into “a partisan rostrum” or neglecting to include social doctrine in Catholic school curriculum and life, religious education programmes, and sacramental and Christian initiation preparation.
- Helping parishioners “to understand and act on the social dimensions of the Gospel in their everyday lives.”
- Reaching out to the poor and vulnerable through “concrete acts of charity.”
- Promoting “a revived sense of political responsibility calling Catholics to be informed and active citizens.”
- Partnering with other parishes and faith groups in community efforts of common concern.
- Being willing to go beyond parish boundaries “to serve those in need and work for global justice and peace.”

The document also encouraged parishes to exercise creativity, cultural sensitivity, wisdom, charity and zeal in exercising their social ministries.

“This is not a new message, but it takes on new urgency in light of the increasing clarity and strength of Catholic social teaching and the signs of declining respect for human life and human dignity in society,” said the bishops in the document. “In these challenging days, we believe that the Catholic community needs to be, more than ever, a source of clear moral vision and effective action. We are called to be the ‘salt of the earth’ and ‘light of the world.’ ... This task belongs to every believer and every parish. ... The pursuit of justice and peace is an essential part of what makes a parish Catholic.” — **By Gina Christian, OSV**



# Are bishops, priests, and laity pulling in the same direction?

The Catholic bishops of Togo made their *ad limina* visit to Rome in October and, wanting to better understand the purpose of these famous five-yearly encounters, I carefully read the interview the president of the bishops' conference gave to *Vatican News* afterwards. "The Pope asked us about the current challenges facing our particular Church," he said, at the very start of the interview. "We told him that the first of these challenges is the formation of future priests, our seminarians."

Taken aback, I thought to myself that if someone had asked me about the biggest challenge facing our Church today, my answer would have been quite different. Then, on deeper reflection, I realised that I shouldn't have been surprised by the bishop's response. And I also realised that if the question had been put to lay Catholics in Togo, there would probably have been as many answers as there were individuals. It's clear that we are not working towards the same goals.

## Not enough dialogue in our Church

But I do believe that if all the members of a particular Church, sharing the same context at a given moment in their common history, do not indicate the same priority, then their shared boat will have great difficulty in moving forward. It is therefore essential to ask ourselves about this situation.

The first observation is that we don't interact enough in our Church. Indeed, a common objective can only be the result of a consensus. But I hardly see how we might reach such a consensus. What forum would bring together the bishops, priests, religious and laity to discuss their Church together and map out its future? Yes, a pastoral theme or priority is set forth each year, but it's handled in a rather administrative way — it's chosen by the bishop. On his own? I don't know.

These priorities come to us through the parish priests, who negotiate them as they



(SIC Photographers flickr)

see fit. Is it not possible to adopt a different approach? At some point, we could listen to lay Catholics about their concerns, and have discussions that would lead to the year's theme. Wouldn't it be better to replace the administrative approach (which favours a hierarchical structure) with one that favours a more horizontal structure?

## A unifying theme

What's certain is that a yearly theme or priority that is chosen in this way would be a real mobiliser, because everyone would feel involved in the common objective, and — at the very least — we'd be made aware that we're all in the same boat, that we're all challenged by the duty to bring the boat safely to port. I can already hear the objection: the process would be too cumbersome, and therefore too long to have any chance of success. And I would reply: it's precisely because our Church is sometimes reduced to

an administration that its operations are so cumbersome.

What if we had the audacity to do things differently, even just once? What if we gave lay people, say, two months to express their most important concerns? What if we asked a commission (made up of members from all states of life) to synthesise these concerns, not as in the human sciences, leaving out those that are in the minority, but with a view to taking everything into account?

If the bishop then convened, say, two or three assemblies for free discussion with the lay faithful, not forgetting the possibility of doing this online, after six months we'd have a theme. This procedure would be valid for the first time, but then the Catholic people, knowing that their points of view are taken into account, would get into the habit of giving their views at a time fixed in advance. A utopia, one might retort, evoking the level and commitment of lay people in particular.

## Risking to be innovative in the Church

When will we take the risk of innovation? And what chance do we have of truly living synodality if we don't make the effort to share the same priorities? How can we transform our communities and our world, and how can we bring about the kingdom of love if we do not share the same urgent needs? "No one can draw a free breath who does not share with others a common and disinterested ideal," says Antoine de Saint Exupéry. "Life has taught us that love does not consist in gazing at each other but in looking outward together in the same direction," he adds.

And then there's the Yiddish proverb that says, "If everyone pulled in one direction, the world would tip over." — **By Maryse Quashie, LCI** (<https://international.la-croix.com>)

*Although dignified and powerful men are usually shown standing, Jesus Christ is most often on His knees, at the level of the poor — a posture that Pope Francis calls us to adopt.*

## On one's knees, like a true king



Human dignity... We talk about it when it's threatened, and there's no shortage of opportunities at the moment. But let's also look at human dignity when it is exalted. It is illustrated in the human being's ability to stand tall, even in the face of trials or threats. Images that come to mind are the Ukrainian people still standing or a woman standing up to demand justice. And there are so many more. Even the presence of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother that "was standing" at the foot of the cross — the *Stabat Mater*.

Standing is not only a sign of dignity. It is also a sign of power. The man standing in front of the camera, the army commander standing in front of a parade of his troops, and so on. This is undoubtedly how the Jews imagined their Messiah ruling over his Kingdom: standing.

Throughout the Gospels, however, Jesus — who we have just celebrated as Christ

the King — adopts an entirely different royal posture. He kneels to care. In a way, He stoops to meet those on the ground.

The Seventh World Day of the Poor, which the Catholic Church celebrated on November 19, was overshadowed by the clash of arms in the Middle East. But the reality is there.

In our world, there are people kneeling under the weight of precariousness. Some 700 million people live on less than €2.15 (RM11.00) per day, the threshold which defines extreme poverty. Admittedly, the relative proportion of the world's population living in extreme poverty is declining. But 700 million people is not a neg-

ligible number.

Caritas France (*Secours Catholique*), in its recently published annual report, noted the damaging impact of inflation on the standard of living of people that come to their centres. More than half of them live on less than €18 (RM92) a day.

The prevailing culture is deceptive in two ways. First, it dangles before us — especially young people — the idea that true happiness is found in possessions, which is just a mirage. Second, it cleverly keeps the unseen poor and needy invisible to us.

"Haste, by now the daily companion of our lives, prevents us from stopping to help care for others," Pope Francis warned in his message for the Seventh World Day of the Poor.

That's why we need to learn how to get down on our knees, as thousands of volunteers do when they're out on the streets, and just as Jesus did at the feet of His disciples. As Pope Francis says in this same message, "We are called to acknowledge every poor person and every form of poverty, abandoning the indifference and the banal excuses we make to protect our illusory well-being". — **By Arnaud Alibert, LCI** (<https://international.la-croix.com>)



# Building Haiti one student at a time

In the face of dire poverty, widespread gang violence, recent natural disasters, and a breakdown of basic social-political structures, making progress in Haiti today can feel impossible. But for Haitian missionary priest Fr Louis Merosne, everything is possible with God, and that's the attitude he has taken to the Herculean task of rebuilding the Catholic education system where he serves in Haiti.

"We have a big dream, a huge dream, but we will start small. We want to build schools so we can build Haiti one student at a time," Fr Merosne said in a Facebook video he recently posted, inviting people to pray for and donate to the mission.

Fr Merosne, who was born in Haiti and educated in the US, is the pastor of the Cathedral of St Anne in Anse-a-Veau, in the Nippes department in the southwest part of the country. (The cathedral was greatly damaged during the 2021 earthquake and has not yet been repaired due to the high cost.)



Fr Louis Merosne celebrates Mass with and for the prisoners of Anse-a-Veau. (CNA photo/Father Louis Merosne)



Fr Louis Merosne at College Sainte Anne, a parochial Catholic school from seventh-twelfth grade. (CNA photo/Fr Louis Merosne)

He is also the founder of *Mission to the Beloved*, a non-profit organisation that preaches the Gospel, serves the poor, and builds up the local Church. The ministry also funds most of the operational costs of the Cathedral of St. Anne, since many parishes in Haiti can't afford to pay staff or run ministries.

The effort to establish Catholic schools among the faithful in the region Fr Merosne serves is no easy task, but the effort began before he arrived in Anse-a-Veau.

The first school was partly in place already, and Merosne then helped "to push it through to complete it. Thank God for those who helped us to build it before I became pastor. That school was seventh grade to senior year. Then we realised we needed kindergarten to sixth grade so we went searching for money ... and got this amazing opportunity with Catholic Relief Services, in addition to some generous individual donors, to be able to build more

classrooms. So [this fall], we should have all the classrooms from kindergarten to senior year in the town of Anse-a-Veau."

"In order for kids to get a good Catholic education, they have to take dangerous motorcycle-taxis or walk long distances to come from those villages to the town," he explained. "Transportation is more expensive than the cost of the education itself. So, I said, 'I'm going to start a school, a Catholic school, inside every little church in each village.' And that's how I started this crazy project. It's very daunting to build so many schools and run them, but it can be done."

Fr Merosne is working with what he has while he fundraises, and he keeps a sense of humour.

"We put a blackboard in there [the mission church] and on Sunday we have Mass, and then on Monday to Friday it's a classroom; isn't that how everybody does it?"

Investing in Catholic education in Haiti is about the students and their families, but there is a bigger picture, too.

"We are also investing in education because the Catholic population has shrunk in Haiti," said Fr Merosne. "Haiti was considered a Catholic country, but the population has gone down because there are systematic efforts to convert people out of the Church. And it works. And we haven't had a systematic response to it. So, education is very important — not only as ministry but also to inform the mind and heart of the young child, to bring them up in the faith and as good citizens who will love the country."

Fr Merosne believes that forming the minds and character of students and helping them to grow in virtue is important for the recovery and flourishing of Haiti. "If they don't grow in virtue then we're not doing the country any favours because some of the corrupt people that are in the country went to Catholic school. And yet, their heart is not where it's supposed to be; it's not converted with the Lord. So that's why I'm taking education seriously. It has been hard but it's important. We are seeing the results — beautiful kids are getting Catholic education."

Fr Merosne said he relies on providence to provide through the generosity of others who feel called to support their brothers and sisters in Haiti and to rebuild the country little by little.

"If I look at the big picture, I can't do it. But if we start small and allow God to work with us consistently, we can make this happen. We can actually turn this thing around by investing in the Haitian people, giving them something that will last for a lifetime — an awesome Catholic and strong academic education that can help to bring about good citizens for the country of Haiti and for the kingdom of God." — **By Zoe Romanowsky, CNA**

## Aaron Neville on singing, crashing and St Jude

On a balmy afternoon in 1979, I interviewed New Orleans rhythm-and-blues singer Aaron Neville under his favoured tree by the Audubon Park lagoon. He came ambling down the park road in gym shorts, track shoes and a tank top, looking more like a full-back than a vocalist raised on doo-wop who loved singing Ave Maria.

Of the dagger tattoo covering his left cheek, he said freely, "Some people see me and think I look thuggish." In the next breath he spoke about his daily prayers and reliance on St Jude. With a fleeting reference to the shackles of a drug addiction, he said, "Believe me, bro, I was a hopeless case."

The International Shrine of St Jude occupies a corner of Our Lady of Guadalupe Church on N. Rampart Street in New Orleans. At the time of that long-ago interview, Neville took Jonathan Foose, my colleague on a book project, to the shrine. Foose, a lanky chap raised in the big house on a Mississippi delta plantation, was awestruck at the burning candles and sounds of some people sobbing as they prayed. Neville nudged him: "You got to kneel for the dude, Jude." Foose, raised an Episcopalian, got down on his knees on the marble floor next to Neville.

St Jude's role in Neville's life flickers through his new memoir, *Tell It Like It Is: My Story*. The acknowledgements' first line reads: "I want to first thank the Lord Jesus and St Jude Thaddeus, the saint of impossible and hopeless cases." Roughly half of the book recounts in graphic detail his years of addiction, the strange ritual attraction of heroin, collisions with cops, stretches behind bars and the unstinting love of his wife, Joel — pronounced

Jo-el. He was 18 when they married, their first baby on the way. She died of cancer shortly before their 48th anniversary.

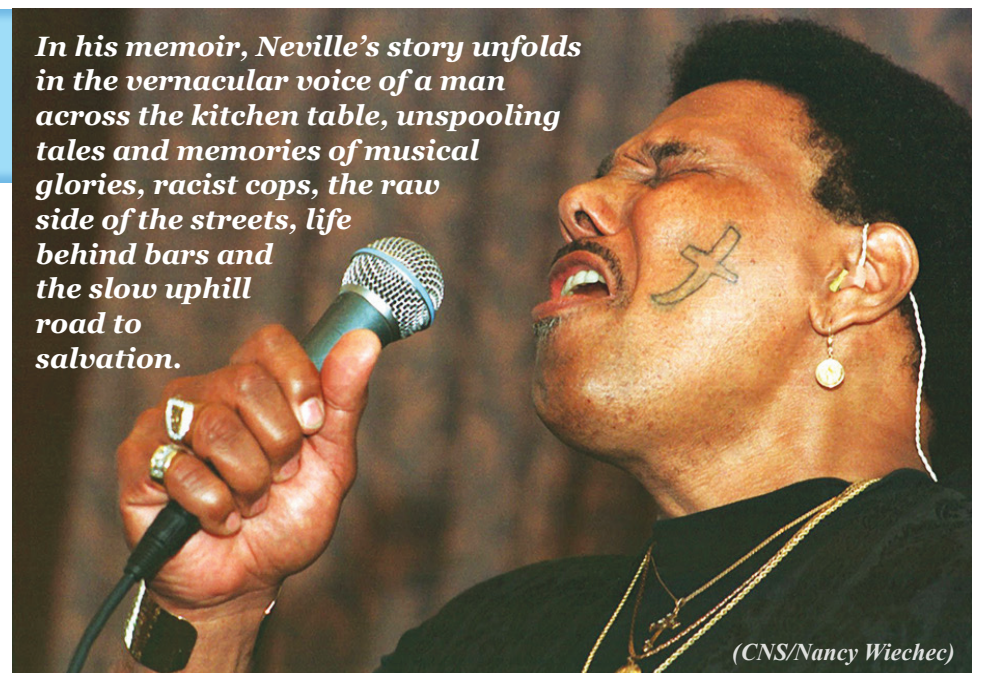
Neville had a huge hit in 1966 with the tender ballad, *Tell It Like It Is*, but the money never materialised; he took work on the Mississippi docks, unloading cargo to support his family. He kept performing and recording, drugging and running till rocket fuel came in 1977 with the formation of The Neville Brothers band. Art, the oldest brother with past hits of his own (*Mardi Gras Mambo* and *All These Things*) guided the starship on keyboard with Charles on an ethereal tenor sax, Aaron with the soaring octaves and Cyril, the youngest, on conga drums and vocals. The Nevilles had one serious front line: strapping guys in rolling, four-part harmonies, singing chants of the Mardi Gras Indians, doo-wop, rock and more at Tipitina's music club, jam-packed shows that often ran till dawn.

The Nevilles became rock royalty, touring with *The Rolling Stones*, and playing at *Grateful Dead* concerts. They travelled 300 days a year, often with New Orleans legends Professor Longhair, Dr John, Irma Thomas and Allen Toussaint.

In his memoir, Neville's story unfolds in the vernacular voice of a man across the kitchen table, unspooling tales and memories of musical glories, racist cops, the raw side of the streets, life behind bars and the slow uphill road to salvation, with great credit given to Joel, and his second wife, photographer Sarah Ann Friedman — a narrative feat for which he duly thanks collaborator Beth Adelman for assistance.

As the crashes, incarcerations and near-

*In his memoir, Neville's story unfolds in the vernacular voice of a man across the kitchen table, unspooling tales and memories of musical glories, racist cops, the raw side of the streets, life behind bars and the slow uphill road to salvation.*



(CNS/Nancy Wiechec)

misses accelerate in Neville's story, his depth of character, shaped by loving parents and a Catholic schooling experience he considers largely positive, achieves a powerful poignance at telling moments:

Yes, I wanted to be famous, but it was a lot more than that. Singing purified me. When I was onstage, I was closest to my true self, closest to God. My heart turned inside out so everyone could hear what was in it. When I wasn't singing, I was an angry, drugged-out thug with a voice like an angel but no reason to be one.

A few pages later, he goes deeper:

I was sitting in the gutter in front of an area I used to call the snake pit — three dive bars on Lyons Street. I was in a bad way, confused, and all of a sudden I thought of Ave Maria. I had first heard it at St Monica's School when the choir would sing it at Mass. ... I never knew what the words meant until later — it was in Latin — but every time I heard it, it did

something to my heart and soul. And later in life it became a light at the end of the tunnel for whatever I was going through. I would get a cleansing feeling.

The beauty of Aaron Neville's great falsetto reach and heart-pulsed phrasing led to sensational duets in 1989 with Linda Ronstadt, *Don't Know Much* and *All My Life* for which they shared Grammy awards. (He has five in all, including ones with the Neville Brothers.)

In 2015, Neville received the Laetare Medal for service to the faith at the University of Notre Dame's graduation ceremony.

Hurricane Katrina destroyed his house in the eastern suburbs of New Orleans; he moved his family to Nashville, and after Joel's death, found rejuvenation with Friedman. They moved to New York City, then to a farm in Hudson Valley. When COVID-19 hit, Neville retired from touring. — **By Jason Berry, NCR**



# The incredible story of Fr Vincent's chalice

There are some coincidences in which it's hard not to see a wink from God's providence. Such is the story of Fr Vincent and his chalice, mysteriously left to him by the last pastor of his home church, in 1968.

## From a family of winegrowers in a small town

Vincent Charmet, 30, was ordained on June 25, 2023 at the Cathedral of St John in Lyon, France. He's currently the parish priest at St Augustin's Parish en Beaujolais. Born in 1993 into a family of winegrowers from the Pierres Dorées region, he first studied management and philosophy. Then, following an experience of God in an abbey and the World Youth Day in Krakow in 2016, he entered the seminary in Lyon.

All four of his grandparents were winegrowers, as was his father. They all hail from the Azergues valley, more specifically from the pretty yellow-stone village of Le Breuil. The town is home to a small 15th-century church, Saint-Pancrace d'Oingt, in which Vincent was baptised as a baby, like so many other locals. The last priest to live there, Fr Claude Clavel, died in 1968. Since then, as in many French villages, the little church has only been open occasionally, for specific events.

The most recent occasion was on July 7, 2023. Fr Vincent, ordained just two weeks earlier, went to say his first Mass for family and neighbours, in thanksgiving and in memory of his baptism on August 1, 1993. It was then that the deputy mayor informed the parishioners of an astonishing discovery, a few months earlier, in a cupboard in the sacristy.

## A chalice for Vincent

In January 2023, while tidying up the sacristy, a few parishioners — including Vincent's father and one of his uncles — discovered in a cupboard a beautiful box containing a chalice and a piece of paper. Unfolding it, they read an astonishing message, written in the hand of the parish secretary and dated June 24, 1968:

This Chalice belonged to Fr Claude Clavel, who wanted to leave it to a child of the Dupeuble Family, if one should become a priest, or for any other child of the parish who should become a priest.

It's signed by "the parish secretary, in accord with Fr Domez and Canon Devay."

The Dupeuble family mentioned in the message, a practising family close to the parish priest at the time, is none other than the family of Vincent's paternal grandmother! This message, dated June 24, 1968, was therefore written exactly 55 years (plus one day) before Vincent's ordination on June 25, 2023.

Because there was no doubt that this chalice was intended for Fr Vincent, a deputy mayor handed it to him a few minutes before Mass, so that he could celebrate with it. A providential sign!

After this first Mass, all participants were invited to an aperitif — with Beaujolais of course — for an official presentation, with speeches and applause. Many confessed to being moved by this message of faith and prophetic hope.

Fr Clavel "was much loved, and had left a lasting impression



Mass on July 7, 2023 in the Church of St Pancrace d'Oingt, with the chalice of Fr Clavel on the altar. He was the church's last pastor, more than 55 years ago. (Aleteia/Vincent Charmet)

on the villagers with his strong personality and deep faith," says Fr Vincent. "The story goes that every year, during Holy Week, he would go to the vineyards to see the workers and tell them that he was looking forward to seeing them at Easter Mass, and everyone obeyed him!"

## Tradition revived

Deeply moved by this beautiful and mysterious inheritance, Fr Vincent admits that he's still astonished. "I'd never heard of this chalice story," he says, "and it's amazing that no one in my family had mentioned it before. It didn't confirm my choice of priesthood, as I was already well on the way. But it certainly sheds new light on it, anchoring me in a history, in a passing of the baton that's a little beyond me."

Fr Vincent says that the chalice now accompanies him everywhere, and that he uses it on a daily basis. "Although it's neither rare nor precious, and has no par-



ticular monetary value, it clearly has exceptional value in my eyes. At every Mass, I think of my predecessor in heaven".

Is that the end of the story? Not quite. As soon as Vincent received the chalice from the parishioners, he stated loud and clear: he is go-

ing to pass it on. "Whether in my lifetime or not, in five years or in fifty, if a child from the parish is ordained a priest one day, I'll give it to him right away!"

And so, a tradition has begun. — **By Bérengère de Portzamparc, Aleteia**

# Catholic Miss Universe winner thanks God for her crown

The 2023 Miss Universe pageant wrapped up on November 18 and made history in all kinds of ways.

For the first time ever, married women and women who are mothers were allowed to compete. The pageant included its first "curvy" contestant. And for the first time ever, the winner was from Nicaragua.

But the sweetest moment of the historic pageant came when the winner, Sheynnis Palacios, 23, thanked God for winning the crown. This is particularly notable because the Church in Nicaragua is being persecuted to such a degree that the Pope has compared the ruling regime to Nazis and Communists.

Catholic Study Fellowship shared Palacios' words:

*I am a Christian person, a Catholic person. To me, prayer is a way I feel more comfortable. When I say "Thanks, God," it's because this crown is not mine. It is for Him. It is for all the delegates that I share with and it is also for my*



Sheynnis Palacios of Nicaragua, thanked God for winning the crown. country and my family.

She also publicly shared how she prayed and asked God for help throughout the competition. In an interview with *Hola!* she said:

*"Lord, help me," I asked God for a lot of wisdom. I remember that at that moment, I started to feel a bit of anxiety, and I began using my techniques to manage my emotions. When the question was over, I said, "Well, Lord, I consider myself well-served, thank you. I*

*did a great job up to this point..."*

She managed this moment of anxiety with both spiritual help and emotional wisdom, in keeping with her message. Mental health awareness is the focus of her Miss Universe platform, stemming from her own experiences with anxiety.

Her mission is to make mental health help more accessible and normalised in Nicaragua, according to her Miss Universe profile.

Coming from a country where this issue is rarely addressed, she started an accessible initiative called "Understand Your Mind," in which she interviews a specialist on emotional care in her television segments. She has also produced events and other audiovisual projects on this theme.

## In the shoes of Mary Wollstonecraft?

Another special moment in her competition came when judges asked her in which woman's shoes she would like to spend a year. She chose the 18th-century British philosopher and feminist, Mary Wollstonecraft, who, she said "gave an opportunity to many women."

Wollstonecraft was deeply religious in her early years and often appealed to God, and was known for virtue in her brilliant writing on women's rights.

Wollstonecraft's impact on Catholic and other religious thinkers remains so great today that a project for virtue-based engage-

ment in questions of sexual equality and freedom is named for her. The Wollstonecraft Project website explains her influence:

Her vision for marriage — the highest form of friendship; a relationship of reciprocity between equals built upon sexual integrity, mutual trust, and collaboration; a shared project for the upbringing of children; and the best means to restore harmony between the sexes — remains Wollstonecraft's most farsighted vision.

With Wollstonecraft's deep affirmation of intellectual, professional, and domestic life for both men and women — alongside her still unsurpassed rationale for women's rights — the 18th-century philosopher is the obvious patroness of our work.

Hopefully Palacios' mention of Wollstonecraft can draw attention to her writings. And in a history-making competition, it's inspiring to see the winner take time to pause and give thanks to God. — **By Theresa Civantos Barber, Aleteia**





## WORD IN PROGRESS

Karen-Michaela Tan

I have supported a safe house for girls and women-at-risk for nearly 30 years now. As an independent fund-raiser, I share the life and challenges of the girls and women this non-profit helps with the people that my career brings me in contact with. In my head I have the dossiers of these women, and I try to match a donor to one specific person so that I am able to give personalised updates on how their gifting affects a life positively.

While it takes a lot more effort, I believe giving a face and a name to a person elevates them from a statistic, number, or a catchall phrase like 'migrant' or 'underprivileged.' A name makes someone real. It humanises them, and sometimes opens hearts.

Christmas is the one time of the year that I get to rest from my fundraising. This is because corporations come out of the woodwork seeking good causes for their year-end Corporate Social Responsibility programmes. On the run-up to Christmas, orphanages and kids' homes are inundated with offers of Christmas meals, days out, and gifts.

While many of the younger children are thrilled when friendly strangers come to their normally quiet residences, with Santa and gifts in tow, not all home residents are as pleased. I have a 17-year-old friend who will soon be leaving the care system when she ages out (the term used when minors become adults and can no longer depend

on social care systems to support them). She entered into care as a three-year-old, when her drink-addled father left her at a cousin's house, and disappeared, never to be seen again.

After a few months, the cousin, a single mother who had four children of her own, and whose husband had died, surrendered my friend — we will call her Nina — to the shelter where she has lived since. After 14 Christmases of strangers hosting her and her friends to meals, and receiving well-meaning but trite gifts of dolls and teddy bears, Nina has had it.

"No one from these organisations have ever come before their whole office arrives, and asked us what we wanted for Christmas. The office just gives a list of genders and ages, and leaves it to the companies to buy whatever present they see fit. For years all I wanted was a music player so I could listen to the *bhangra* that makes me happy. The other residents in the house don't like it so I cannot have it on the CD player there, even if I did have any CDs to play. I just wanted something private so I could do my chores with it playing without disturbing anyone," Nina told me.

Situations like these are why we need to put names, ages and faces to the people we are trying to help. Most old folks and homes for the disabled are thrilled when visitors come to spend time with the shut-ins. The mental capabilities of people in these homes are such that most will accept

the food, fun and games, and then forget when the event has happened, because of dementia or lower cognitive function.

It is not so when the recipients are in complete possession of their faculties. When younger, kids in orphanages can be cajoled to dance and play with visitors. By a certain age, their boundaries need to be respected. Nina is old enough to be allowed to stay back in the home when her other housemates are brought to a party, but she tells me that some even as young as 13 have expressed a lack of desire to go to these functions.

"We are not real to these people. After the event they leave and we never see them again. Nobody remembers us, and even if we remember them, they do not return. I would rather stay in the home and eat bread than feel that I have to act a certain way to impress them," she tells me defiantly.

Nina is just one of the hundreds, if not thousands, of children who will pass out of the social welfare system yearly. Educated enough to have an SPM certificate, all that she has ever known of life is the rhythm of the care centre, where everything is structured, and safe, if boring.

Many of the young people who pass out of the system will fall through the cracks because they have not been given the emotional and social scaffolding they would/should have had if they had had families. They will be thrust into a world where they have to learn financial planning, economics, negotiation. In a

world of job applications, interviews and work commutes, many of them will not be able to find proper footing, and will become prey to cruel, conscienceless users. For a young girl, one ill-fated relationship can saddle her with a pregnancy that forces further dependence on the father of the child, setting into motion the entire cycle of lost hope.

So, this Christmas, should your workplace plan an outing with the underprivileged, take this chance to seek the face of God in those who are alone and lost. While food, shelter and clothing fulfil Maslow's hierarchy of need, humankind, especially young lives, need so much more to grow and thrive. Look for ways that enhance your interaction with them. Go beyond Matthew 25:36. ("I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.")

Find ways for the goodwill of Christmas to stretch well into the year ahead. Jesus did not clap straw and stable dust off His hands after He was born. His birth was just the beginning of 33 years of love, service, and ultimately, sacrifice. If we call Him 'Lord' and 'Messiah', then we too must be called 'Emmanuel' and allow others to see God-with-us throughout the entire coming year

● **Karen-Michaela Tan** is a poet, writer and editor who seeks out God's presence in the human condition and looks for ways to put the Word of God into real action.



## INFORMED OPINION

Prof Xavier V. Pereira

On this World Human Rights Day, observed annually on December 10, let us take time to acknowledge mental health as a fundamental human right. The theme for this year's World Mental Health Day, *Mental Health is a Universal Human Right*, underscored the importance of this often over-looked aspect of human rights.

The Right to Mental Health approach derives from the Right to Health frame work which was developed by Professor Paul Hunt, professor of Law at the University of Essex, and others in the Health and Human Rights movement. Paul Hunt was the first Health and Human Rights (Right to Health) Special Rapporteur to the United Nations.

I had the opportunity to participate in a Health and Human Rights symposium in London organised by the British Medical Council (BMC) and the University of Essex in 2008. Also present were many advocates for the Right to Health from countries across the globe. It was clear to all present that numerous people in many countries, especially LMICs (Low- and Middle-Income Countries) did not have access to basic healthcare, let alone quality healthcare. The people who had least access to health care were the people on the margins of society.

Persons with severe health problems, especially those who are poor, often live on the margins and lack access to quality health services. These include the rural and urban poor, migrants and migrant workers, asylum seekers and refugees, and indigenous people.

Health systems can also impact on access to health care. Many developed countries have universal healthcare coverage. Some like Switzerland utilise a universal private health insurance system whereas others like

# Health and human rights — Promoting access to health and healing

the UK have a national system providing equitable healthcare available to all. The healthcare system in the US though has been heavily criticised for the lack of access for those who cannot afford insurance, namely the poor. Obamacare was a step towards providing healthcare to those who lacked financial access to health care.

In Malaysia there are two parallel healthcare systems, public and private. Access to consultations and treatments in the public health system in Malaysia, and many LMICs, is often hampered by the huge number of patients seeking treatment at government hospitals, the long waiting time before patients can consult a health professional and the lack of health professionals to address the health needs of the populace. Seeking treatment from a health professional in private practice can be financially taxing, especially for those who are socio-economically challenged and do not have personal or group health insurance. Issues of integrity, quality and charity are also challenges in accessing quality health care in private clinics and hospitals. The saying 'What you see is not what you get' also applies to some health professionals in private practice, and some private hospitals.

Creating access to health services, including health strategies of health education, prevention, intervention, and rehabilitation, should be motivated by the awareness that everyone has the right to the highest attainable standard of health (UN Rapporteur for Health and Human Rights, 2002).

Jesus created access to healing. In fact, most of Jesus' miracles were acts of healing. The Gospels are littered with narratives of Jesus healing all those who sought healing

from Him. A significant passage of this kind of healing is in Matthew 8: 1 -3. A man with leprosy exclaimed, "Lord, You can heal me if You will." Jesus said to the man "I will. Be healed." There are so many healing narratives in the Gospels. The daughter of Jairus (Mark 5: 21 - 43). The servant of the Roman centurion (Luke 7:1-10). The daughter of the Syrophenician woman (Mark 7: 24 -30). Jesus healed people from different ethnicities and backgrounds. He healed ALL who sought healing. He gave freely because He received the gift of healing freely. Thus, I believe Jesus is the ultimate role model for creating access to healing.

The healing work of God continued to be manifest in the early Church. The *Acts of the Apostles* is testament to the gifts or charisms of healing bestowed on the Apostles and disciples of Jesus through the Holy Spirit. There was healing of the blind (Acts 9:17 - 18), healing of the paralysed (Acts 9: 33 -35), healing of the lame (Acts 14: 7-9) and healing of the possessed (Acts 16: 16 - 18). These gifts of healing resurfaced in the twentieth century through the Charismatic and neo-Pentecostal movements in various churches including the Catholic Church. One of the pioneers of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal who possessed the gift of healing was Francis MacNutt who authored the best seller, *Healing*, a book that I would recommend highly. I believe that the tradition of prayer for healing through healing ministries should be encouraged in the Catholic Church, albeit in an organised way, so that people can have access to healing.

The Catholic Church is also known for her missionary work in the area of healthcare. I was blessed to have received training at St John's Medical College and Hospital,

India. The medical college (renamed St John's National Institute of Health Sciences) celebrated its diamond jubilee this year, and it was evident at the jubilee celebrations that the institution had produced doctors, especially religious nun doctors who serve those who are at the margins of society. The various health facilities and hospitals set up by the Indian Catholic Church and its religious have created access to healthcare in places where there is a need for the provision of healthcare, especially in socio-economically deprived urban and rural areas.

In Malaysia, NGOs from both secular and faith-based backgrounds like Buddhist Tzu Chi, IMARET, an NGO comprising of Muslim health professionals, MERCY Malaysia, ACTS and Health Equity Initiatives, have provided access to health services including mental health services. Most of these NGOs have developed services to address the health of refugees, who have the least access to healthcare in Malaysia.

I believe that the Catholic Church in Malaysia needs to discern and decide upon strategies to provide access to healthcare for those who live in the margins and who are economically deprived, now that our mission hospitals have merged into the private sector. Health remains a universal human right.

● **Xavier V. Pereira** is a medical doctor, psychiatrist and psychotherapist, and an adjunct professor at Taylor's University School of Medicine, Malaysia. He is co-founder and director of the NGO Health Equity Initiatives and former chair of the Health and Human Rights Committee of the Malaysian Medical Association. In the Catholic Church he serves as the founder and chair of the Catholic Counsellors and Therapists of Malaysia.





Fr Ron Rolheiser

# Rickard “Rick” Gaillardetz — RIP

**N**o community should botch its deaths. Mircea Eliade said that. What underlies his wisdom here is the truth that what we cease to celebrate we will soon cease to cherish.

With that in mind, I would like to highlight what we, both the religious and secular community, need to celebrate and cherish as we mourn the recent death of Richard Gaillardetz.

Richard, known as “Rick”, was a husband, a father, a friend to many, and (by most every assessment) the best ecclesialogist in the English-speaking world. He taught at Boston College, but lectured widely elsewhere, both as an academic lecturer and as a popular speaker. Beyond his stature as an academic, he had a humanity, a robust sanity, a keen intellect, a natural warmth, a friendliness, and a sense of humour that made him both pleasant and stabilising to be around. He brought calm and sanity into a room.

What’s to be said in terms of highlighting his contribution? What should we not botch in processing his death? What must we celebrate so as to continue to cherish?

Many things might be highlighted, all of them positive, but I would like to focus on four extraordinary gifts he brought to us.

First, he was a theologian who worked actively at bridging the gap between the academy and the pew. Rick was a highly

respected academic. No one questioned his scholarship. Yet, he was highly sought after as a popular lecturer in spirituality and never compromised his scholarship for the sake of popularity. That combination of being understood and respected, both in the academy and the pew, is a rare thing (it’s hard to be simple without being simplistic) and a huge risk (being a popular speaker generally makes you suspect among your academic colleagues). Rick took that risk because he wanted his scholarship to serve the whole community and not just those fortunate enough to be in graduate classrooms.

Second, he was an ecclesialogist who used his scholarship to unite rather than divide. Ecclesiology is about Church, and it is Church denominationalism that still divides us as Christians. The divisions among us are largely ecclesial. In most other things, we are together. We share Jesus; we share a common Scripture; we share (in different modalities) the Eucharist; we share a common struggle in trying to be faithful to Jesus’ teachings; and we share many common human, moral, and social struggles. Spirituality unites us, but ecclesiology still divides. Rick’s work in ecclesiology is a breath of fresh air in terms of helping us move beyond centuries of division. He loved his own denomination, Roman Catholicism, even as he was

fully appreciative of other denominations. His secret? He didn’t just do a theology of the Church; he also did a spirituality of the Church.

Next, he was a man who loved the Church, even as, inside that love, he could be healthily critical of the Church when it was merited. I attended his final public lecture in September of last year, and he began that lecture with these words: I was a Catholic by birth; then by choice, and now by love. He went on to share how the Catholic Church was the greatest love in his life and how, too, it has brought him continual disillusionment and pain. He challenged us to love the Church and to be critical of it, both at the same time. That manifests a big heart and a big mind. Some can love the Church and never see its faults; others can see its faults but never love the Church. Rick could do both.

Finally, he was a man who faced his death with faith, courage, and dignity that can serve as a paradigm for the rest of us who, all, someday will have to face what he faced. About eighteen months ago, Rick was diagnosed with terminal pancreatic cancer. He knew that, barring a miracle, he probably had less than two years to live. Whatever his own internal anguish and struggle to come to peace with that, everything he said, did, and taught during the eighteen months following that diag-

nosis manifested faith, trust, courage, and a concern for others. He kept a journal of his thoughts during this period and those journals are soon to be published and will constitute Rick’s last great gift to the Church and to the world.

I’d like to end this tribute with a little anecdote which Rick himself, I’m sure, would appreciate as adding a bit of colour to a tribute which otherwise would be too sombre. Some years ago, I went to hear Rick give a public lecture at one of the local universities here in the city. He was being introduced by a well-known theologian, Marianist Bernard J. Lee. After listing off for us, the audience, Rick’s academic achievements, Lee turned to him and asked: “Richard, how the hell do you get the pronunciation ‘Gay-lar-des’ out of this spelling?”

Whatever the spelling and whatever the pronunciation, Richard Gaillardetz was a theological treasure whom we lost much too early.

● **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](http://www.ronrolheiser.com)**

## Navigating grief this Christmas season

**N**ot everyone eagerly anticipates the Christmas celebrations; those who are grieving the loss of a loved one might dread the season. While they are already in pain and devastated, the rest of society celebrates — which only makes these weeks more difficult.

However, there are positive actions individuals or families can take to navigate this season and make the holidays meaningful, which I, as a counsellor, outline in my book *Grieving: A Spiritual Process for Catholics*. The following suggestions offer a reassuring blend of spiritual support from Catholic wisdom and current best practice from the mental health field.

### Plan ahead

Planning can provide a sense of control when so much seems out of control. First, consider what you would like to do, modify or not do, for the holidays. Then gather your family — in person, on a phone conference call or video meeting — to discuss and solicit input.

You all may find that suspending some family traditions is just what is needed. For instance, instead of Christmas cards with individual notes, write a letter, make copies and send them (or email a PDF) to those on your list, asking them to share a favourite memory of your loved one in return. Grief is mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually exhausting, and changes like this can save time and preserve energy. You can always bring back beloved traditions, and you may even find that you keep some new ones you start this year.

### Give yourself permission to say no

You have permission to accept or decline invitations to social events. You know yourself best. If you accept, go to the event by yourself. This allows you the comfort of leaving when you need to. You may let the host know this ahead of time.

You can also go with a “buddy,” a friend who may make it easier to walk into a group, yet understands that when you ask to leave, they respect your request. If you do not feel up to accepting an invitation, it might be more gracious to say “No, not at this time.” Or “No, I am not ready for that yet.”

### Honour your loved one

We acknowledge that our loved ones are physically absent, but their spiritual presence is always with us. The bonds of love shared while they were alive continue after their death, but in a transformed way. This is underscored in the Order of Christian Funerals, the beautiful book of rituals and prayers, as it emphasises the Church’s “confident belief that death is not the end nor does it break the bonds forged in life.”

Some families set a place at the holiday dinner table to honour their loved one, or place a photograph with a lit candle on a table or fireplace mantel. Other families may decide on a day during the season to do volunteer work in honour of their loved one’s memory.

### Engage in prayer and the Eucharist

Grieving the loss of a loved one can be an opportunity to deepen your relationship with God. In prayer you can ask for help,



(Unsplash/Nick Fewings)

for strength and for comfort. Our Catholic tradition offers a richness of options: traditional and spontaneous prayers, silent centering prayer, Eucharistic adoration, walking a labyrinth, the Rosary, Novenas, the Divine Mercy Chaplet, *Lectio Divina* and Ignatian imaginative prayer. Seek out an Advent choral programme or Taizé prayer service, both of which offer more mellow music than a joyous Christmas concert.

Finally, being nourished by the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist is a lifeline. Attend the early liturgy on Sunday, where there are fewer people and the music is more subdued. If you prefer companionship, ask a friend to accompany you. Sit in the back of church so that if you begin to cry, you can easily slip out for a while. You may find that daily Mass, with its smaller numbers and absence of music, feels more manageable for you.

### Advocate for yourself

When you lose a loved one, people will say or do things they intend to be supportive, but you might find hurtful. “Aren’t you over it yet?” is one classic example. Be prepared to

gently educate others. Say “I know that you are trying to be supportive, but I don’t find what you just said to be helpful. Everyone grieves differently, and there is no timeline or ‘expiration date’ for grief. And you don’t ‘get over it.’ So here is how I would like you to support me ...”

In the company of others, use your loved one’s name and talk about him or her. In turn, encourage others to do so, especially sharing favourite memories. If you get teary, they may feel badly that they “upset you.” Just reassure them that it is all right, it happens.

### Connect with others

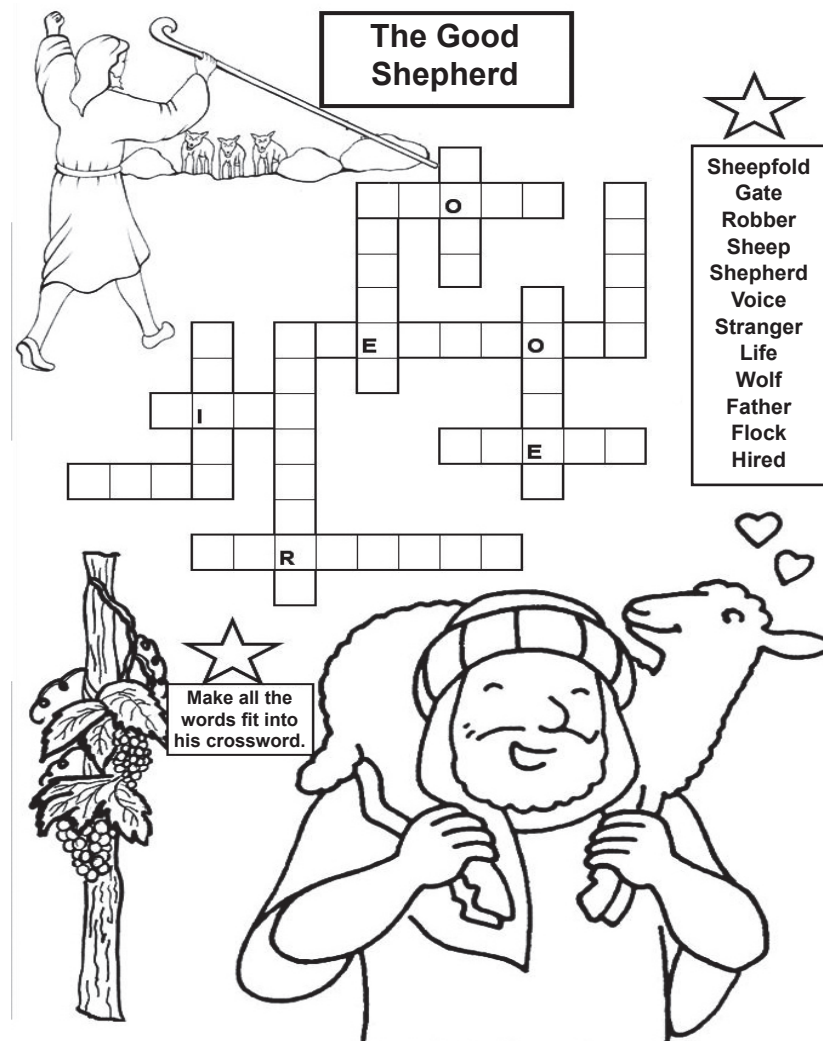
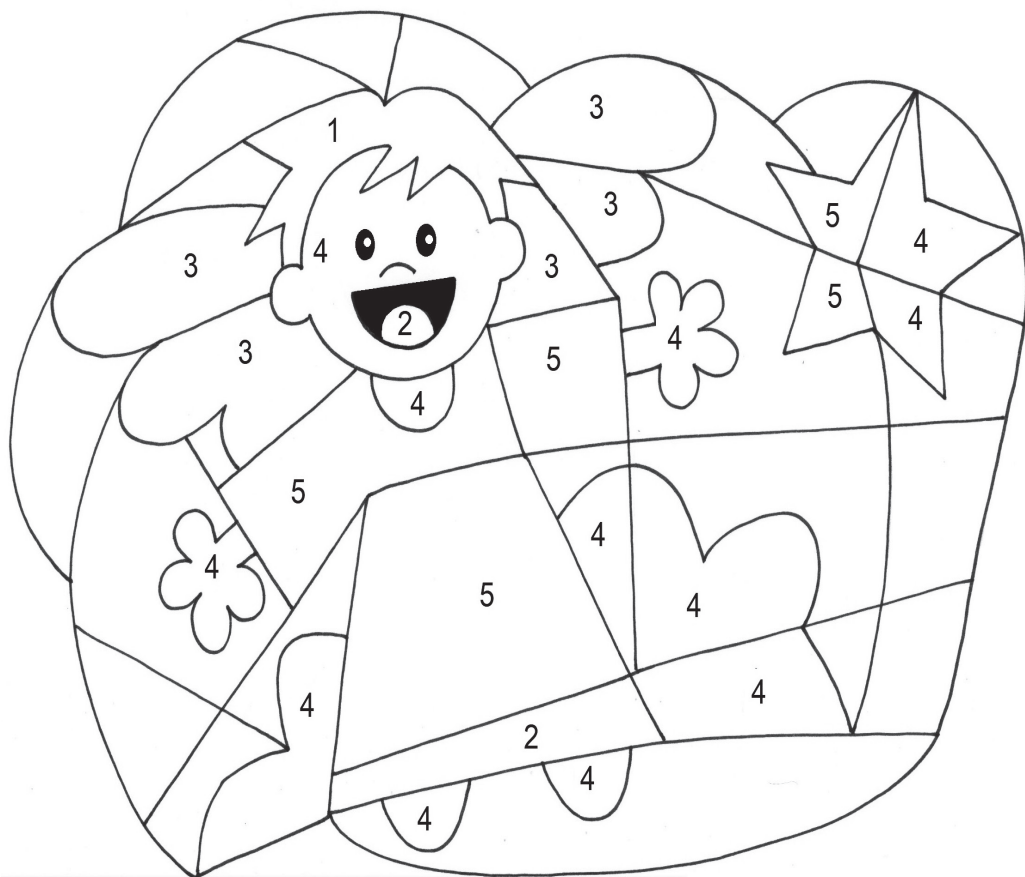
When a loved one’s death is recent, grief is acute, raw and consuming. Often the inclination is to withdraw from others and the outside world, convinced that you are the only one who feels this bereft. You are not. Reach out to a trustworthy family member or friend for support. Look for someone who can set aside their need to “fix your grief” and cheer you up, someone who can just listen compassionately without any judgment. — **By Paula Kosin, NCR**



# Little Catholics' Corner

## Colour by numbers

1. BLACK 2. RED 3. LIGHT BLUE 4. YELLOW 5. PINK



Dear children,

The Second Week of Advent readings remind us that we are preparing for the coming of Jesus.

The first reading says, "A voice cries out in the desert, 'Prepare the way of the Lord!'" St Paul in the second reading, tells us to conduct ourselves in holiness and devotion, waiting for the day of the Lord.

In the Gospel reading, we hear about Saint John the Baptist preparing the people for the coming of Christ.

What can we do to prepare for the coming of Jesus, which we remember, especially at Christmas?

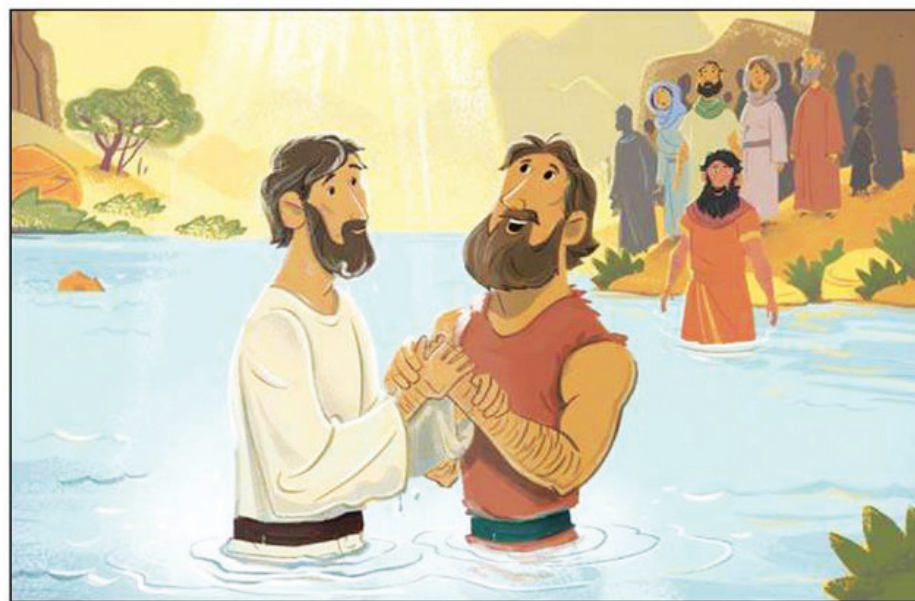
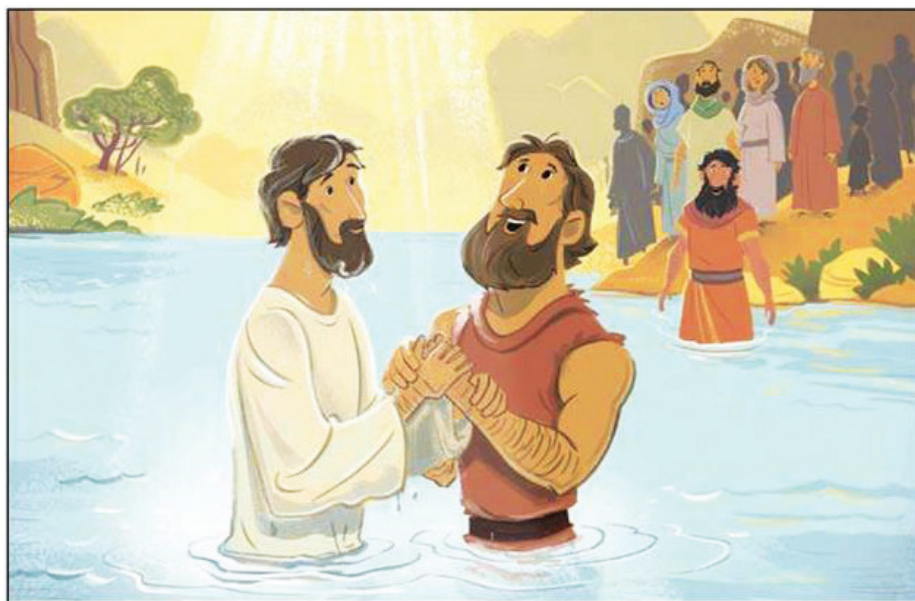
First, we should try to be holy like Saint Paul says. We should make sure that we have repented of all our sins, like St John the Baptist taught the people. Finally, we should tell people about Jesus!

The first reading tells us, "Fear not to cry out and say to the cities of Judah! Here is your God!"

Love  
Aunty Eliz

Compare the picture on the top with the picture on the bottom.

Spot ELEVEN things that are different.



COLOUR THE  
PICTURE

IF YOU LOVE ME, KEEP MY



CODE:

✋ - A      ☞ - D  
☞ - O      ☞ - C  
■ - N      ☞ - M





# YOUTH

DECEMBER 10, 2023

## More than 1,000 celebrate Diocesan Young People Day

By Karen Chan

**JOHOR BAHRU:** MJD Young People Day, the diocesan celebration of World Youth Day for the Diocese of Malacca Johore, took place November 24 to 26 in the vicariates of North Central Johore, South Johore and Malacca with more than 1,000 young people.

The preparation for the celebration began in January 2023, where the Young People Councils were formed for each vicariate, consisting of the parish youth and young adult leaders and advisors, and also campus leaders and advisors. The vicariate councils prepared and planned based on the six cornerstones of World Youth Day, from the pastoral guidelines given by Pope Francis. They also added their creativity and ideas, with the guidance of the Young People Network team.

Each vicariate's Young People Day was carried out differently but with the same goal, to invite all the young people of the diocese to come together for a time of community building, through prayer, formation and fellowship on the Feast of Christ the King weekend. Generally, all three celebrations had ice-breaking, talk, group sharing, praise and worship, and Mass celebrated by Bishop Bernard Paul. The programme also prepared to cater for the four main language groups in the diocese — English, Bahasa Malaysia, Mandarin and Tamil.

The first was the **North Central Johore Vicariate**, on November 24 in the Church of St Louis, Kluang. With around 150 participants, the programme kicked off with a welcoming ceremony, with each parish processing with their flags into the parish hall. They were then broken into groups for games, before moving into their respective language rooms for a talk on discovering and living out our vocation in our daily lives, group sharing, and dialogue with the speakers. The invited guests were Sr Evelyn, FdCC, for English, Msgr Peter Ng for Bahasa Malaysia, Fr Paul Wong for Mandarin, and Fr Andrew Arockia Samy for Tamil. There were also exhibitions during lunch where each parish and campus promoted their youth or student groups. This was followed by praise and worship, performance, and another round of fun games, before a time of sharing and prayer. The celebration ended with multilingual Mass animated by young people from the various parishes.

The next day, the **South Johore Vicariate** celebrated at MAJODI Centre, Plentong, with nearly 400 participants. It began with praise and worship. During the Eucharistic adoration, Rosary was recited and Confessions conducted simultaneously before Mass. After lunch, the participants were broken into groups for games and group activity. Each group discussed the five things that make a young person "young" and created an artwork based on what was shared. Then, the participants left for their respective language rooms for a time of formation on the theme of the celebration,

which was *Mary Arose and Went With Haste*. (Luke 1:39) The invited speakers were Fr Dr Lawrence Ng for English, Fr William Pillai for Bahasa Malaysia, Sr Josephine Thong, OFS, for Mandarin, and Fr James Rajendran for Tamil.

On November 26, nearly 460 youth celebrated in the **Malacca Vicariate** at the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Krubong. The programme began with the recitation of the Rosary and Mass with the local parishioners, followed by welcoming and ice-breaking in the hall. The participants then moved into the language rooms for session input on vocation, given by Sr Shanti, FdCC, for English (13-17), Fr Neville Arul for English (18-39), Sr Liza Anggie, FSIC, for Bahasa Malaysia (13-17), Sr Maria Magdalena, FSIC, for Bahasa Malaysia (18-39), Sr Mary Tay, FdCC, for Mandarin (13-17), Fr Joseph Heng for Mandarin (18-39), and Fr Alexuchelvam Mariasosai for Tamil (13-39). After lunch, praise and worship was held before a dialogue session with Bishop Bernard, where the questions asked were taken from the online registration form and from the floor. The participants then enjoyed performances by the various parishes e.g. skit, singing and dancing.

All three vicariate celebrations ended with an announcement of the upcoming Young People Day. Next year, the celebration will take place at diocesan level in Majodi Centre, Plentong. In 2025, it will be held in the respective parishes, and in 2026, the vicariate level celebration will be carried out at the Church

of St Henry, Batu Pahat, the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Johor Bahru, and the Church of St Peter, Malacca. This will ensure that the journey of the young people of MJD do not end at this celebration but continues, forming a network of young Catholic apostles towards becoming 4E Catholics, and where the spirit of World Youth Day is to be shared and experienced at all levels.

The highlights of the Young People Day 2023 was the gathering of around 1000 young people from all over Malacca Johore Diocese, that the celebrations were animated by the Young People Councils who learnt to work with each other and with the four language groups.

The MJD Young People Network thanks all parish priests and host parishes for providing the young people with a space to gather. We also thank the vicariate Young People Councils who planned and prepared these celebrations. Thank you dear Bishop, all invited speakers and guests, committees, facilitators and performers for honouring us with your presence and assistance and making this programme a meaningful and exciting one for all. Lastly, to the young people of the vicariates, we pray that each one of you had a good experience meeting other young people and participating in the celebration. May we all be inspired by Mary and go in haste to share the joy and hope received from the celebration with other young people in our family, friends, and parish.

Let us meet again next year on November 24, 2024 at Majodi Centre, Plentong.



KAJANG: Youth from the Church of the Holy Family (HFK) recently concluded a transformative four-part talk series titled *Your Identity in Christ*, marking a significant physical gathering since the end of the Movement Control Order (MCO). Engaging youth aged between 13 and 26, the series became a Friday night rendezvous fostering camaraderie and spiritual exploration.

The sessions were a blend of worship, ice-breaking activities, and enlightening discussions centred on understanding one's identity in the context of faith. Various songs of praise were sung in relation to the topics discussed each night giving a connection between knowledge and music, providing a deeper understanding and reflection.

Topics that were discussed were along the lines of temptations faced in the world. As youth, it is very challenging because of the limitless exposure to the outside world. It is important for one to have the ability to discern the many temptations in life and how to have a strong stand on one's belief.

# Your identity in Christ



Holy Family youths.

Another theme delved into the art of entrusting life's burdens and hardships to Jesus, seeking solace and wisdom within the teachings of the Word. Life's inevitable struggles, regardless of their scale, were acknowledged. Yet, amidst these trials, we are reminded of a

constant presence, someone steadfastly walking alongside us, even when that assurance escapes our immediate thoughts.

A delightful insight about the event's speakers and musicians: they were once vibrant youths of the parish themselves and

have stayed connected throughout the years. Their collaborative effort and continued performances painted a compelling picture — a testament to unity despite diverse life journeys. Despite the divergent paths taken — marriage, parenthood, geographical distances — they showcased the possibility of future reunions, emphasising the timeless truth that age holds no sway when you share a bond as close as family with a group of friends.

With the year drawing to a close, the upcoming Christmas celebrations hold significance beyond the commemoration of Jesus' birth. They symbolise a unifying spirit, fostering love and joy among the youth, their families, and the community. Reflecting on the essence of the festive season, the hope is to embody compassion, kindness, and goodwill throughout the year, inspired by the Christmas spirit.

## Being Confirmed into the Faith

IPOH: The evening of November 25 saw the Church of St Michael abuzz with activity, not only because the newly-elected Cardinal Sebastian Francis was visiting but also because the parish was celebrating with 25 youth who were going to be confirmed in their faith.

Ten of the youth were from the Chinese Catechetical section while the rest were from the English section. During his homily, the cardinal emphasised the youthful vigour of the Church in Asia, highlighting its predominant demographic. He also announced the forthcoming World Youth Day to be held in

Korea, marking the event's first occurrence in Asia.

Encouraging the congregation to *Enlarge the space of your tent* (Isaiah 54:2), echoing the Synod's theme, Cardinal Sebastian urged everyone to explore various avenues of involvement. His mention of the unfamiliar territory of prison ministry opened the parishioners' eyes to new opportunities for service.

In congratulating the confirmands, parish priest, Fr Anthony Liew, extended gratitude to all catechists. He acknowledged not just the Confirmation catechists but also every



individual who had imparted their faith during catechetical sessions.

May these newly confirmed individuals

discover and walk the path that leads them to serve God and His Church on this earthly journey. — **By Jennifer Duarte**

## CHRIST THE KING – WORLD YOUTH DAY

KOTA KINABALU: Approximately 50 youth from the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, Church of Mary Immaculate, St Paul Don-tonzidon as well as from the parishes of St Simon Likas, Our Lady Queen of Peace Kobusak, and St John the Baptist Kopungit came together to celebrate World Youth Day!



Youths of the Church of Our Lady Of Good Health, Parit Buntar



Embracing the spirit of World Youth Day!



Paitan Mission youth at the World Youth Day celebration with Fr Arthur John and Sr Noemi FSIC. Jasrin Maisin gave an introduction on World Youth Day, followed by a sharing by Sr Noemi FSIC on *Rejoice in Hope*.

At the Church of Jesus Caritas, in Kuala Lumpur, Clarise Tan and Ashley Patrick relived the joy and inspiration after their unforgettable pilgrimage to Lisbon, Portugal for World Youth Day 2023.

The celebration was marked by fellowship and followed by sharing by the pilgrims. The hope is that more young people would be inspired to attend World Youth Day in 2027 in South Korea!



SFX Youth on Fire!

In honour of the Feast of St Francis Xavier (SFX), the Youth Committee of SFX Church in Petaling Jaya organised activities for the youth. This successful event commenced with two formative sessions discussing Spiritual Conversation, followed by Finding God in All Things. It concluded with an Ignatian experiment guided by UAP principles, encouraging youth to step outside their comfort zones. They gained fresh perspectives, experiencing everything anew in Christ.

These fruitful sessions culminated in a closing Mass, with a powerful message from Fr Alvin Ng SJ to all parishioners, "we are creating a hope-filled future."



# First Franciscan priest from Penang

By Aaron Lim

PENANG: As Catholics throughout the nation joined the Franciscan Friars of the Custody of St Anthony in bidding farewell to the late Friar Arul Sagayaraj Mariadass OFM who returned to the Lord on November 28, a sense of loss was greatly felt at the place where it all began for him.

The Catholic community, especially within the Penang Island Deanery, mourned the demise of a faithful servant whom they were privileged to have witnessed from the time the seeds of his vocation were sown at a young age.

The late Friar Arul was born into a family of four siblings and grew up within humble settings in the suburbs of George Town.

His service towards the Kingdom of God can be traced back to the 1970s where he was an altar server at the Church of Our Lady of Sorrows (part of City Parish) before being active in the BECs and Parish Tamil Apostolate.

Whilst venturing into an engineering profession, he discovered a greater calling towards building bridges for the faithful to draw closer to God, and thus embarked on a vocation towards the priesthood and joined the seminary in the year 1985.

After making his solemn profession in 1995, Friar Arul was ordained to the priesthood on July 18, 1997 by then Bishop Antony Selvanayagam at the Church of Our Lady of Sorrows.

Friar Arul held the prestige of being the first Franciscan priest from the Diocese of Penang, thus helping to build the Franciscan community beyond Singapore, into Malaysia.

Although he was posted to various places such as Johor, Sarawak, and Sabah; he never lost touch with parishioners and friends from the tiny island he always regarded as home.

In 2017, at the invitation of Cardinal Sebastian Francis in his capacity as the Bishop of Penang, the Franciscan Friars were assigned to shepherd the flock at the Church of the Risen Christ in Air Itam.

It was a homecoming of sorts for Friar Arul, who served as the parish priest for five years; and in 2022, he was blessed to be able to celebrate the silver jubilee of his sacerdotal ordination fittingly in Penang.

Fr Arul passed away on Nov 28 in Kota Kinabalu. A wake was held at the Church of St Michael Penampang on Nov 29 and 30.

On the next day, his body was flown to Penang. A wake was held at the Church of the Risen Christ Dec 2-4.

The funeral Mass was held on Dec 5. In remembering and rejoicing in the gift of God through Friar Arul, many shared their personal experiences journeying with him:

"We thank and praise God for the gift of Fr Arul Mariadass, OFM, a son of our diocese. He was a joyful disciple and faithful pastor, serving with genuine sincerity until the very end of his life. We remember with gratitude and thanksgiving his significant contributions in building God's Kingdom of love through his humble and dedicated service. We have another intercessor with God and



the mission continues with us." — **Cardinal Sebastian Francis, Bishop of Penang**

"It was very evident that he (Friar Arul) was a shepherd who was out of the ordinary, and wherever he went, especially in the East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak, he was already living in the spirit of synodality where he was well-received by parishioners. Though he passed away so suddenly, let us remember him as being a faithful and well-loved priest." — **Bishop Emeritus Antony Selvanayagam**

"I have lost a great mentor whom I gained a lot of valuable knowledge. He had the missionary passion, and it was always in him. I believe he made his home wherever he was sent, and with the people that he served; he was always there for them, whoever they were from all walks of life. Having worked together with him in the Risen Christ parish for five years, it was remarkable to be with someone who was able to give so much to his ministry. I am honoured to be have worked with him as he was not only a brother but also a mentor to guide and guard." — **Fr Oliver Tham, former assistant parish priest of Church of the Risen Christ**

"When he was five, he suffered a serious illness and my mother prayed for him at the altar of the church that he would one day become the priest of. Eventually, the Lord did make him a priest, to the surprise of everyone. He was a very pastoral minded shepherd who always prioritised community building and being friendly to everyone, especially the youth. We never expected him to leave us so suddenly, as he was the youngest sibling in the family. Nevertheless, the family is grateful to God for allowing him to serve in His vineyard as a priest for 26 years. — **John Sandana Dass, sibling, former parish pastoral council chairman of City Parish**

"Fr Arul was a simple and jovial person who was very easy to work with. He not only cared very much for his sheep but also the environment. He made it a point to go from house to house to visit his parishioners. He was a priest and a friend to all of us, especially the young ones." — **Birgitta Claire Abeysekera, Church of the Risen Christ**

## MEMORIAM

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

### 11th Anniversary In Loving Memory of



**Betty Sivasothy  
nee Scully**

From the Lord: 07-07-1926  
To the Lord: 01-12-2012

"Now may the Lord of peace  
himself, give you peace at all  
times and in every way."  
- 2 Thessalonians 3:16 "

Always remembered  
and deeply missed by  
sons, in-laws, grandchildren,  
great-grandchildren  
and friends.

### In Loving Memory of Our Parents 25th Anniversary 8th Anniversary



**Betzy John**  
Departed:  
4.1.1999

**E. K. John**  
Departed:  
11.12.2015

A memorial mass will be celebrated for Mr & Mrs John to commemorate their 25th anniversary and 8th anniversary respectively at the Church of St Francis Xavier, Petaling Jaya on January 4, 2024 at 6.15 am.

Dearly missed by Children, Grandchildren and all loved ones.



### 1st Anniversary In Loving Memory of Our Beloved MICHAEL EDWARD DANKER

11 October 1933 –  
14 December 2022

"His Lord said unto him:  
Well done, good and faithful servant;  
thou has been faithful over a few things,  
I will make thee ruler over many things:  
Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."  
- Matthew 25:23

Deeply missed and forever cherished by  
children, grandchildren,  
great-grandchildren and loved ones.

### 1st ANNIVERSARY FOREVER IN OUR HEARTS

"She is clothed with strength  
and dignity." Proverbs 31:25

### MARGARET ANDREW

29th JULY, 1925 –  
10th DECEMBER, 2022



#### Legacy of Love

A wife, a mother, a grandma too,  
This is the legacy we have from you.  
You taught us love and how to fight,  
You gave us strength, you gave us might.  
A stronger person would be hard to find,  
And in your heart, you were always kind.  
You fought for us all in one way or another,  
Not just as a wife not just as a mother.  
For all of us you gave your best,  
Now the time has come for you to rest.  
So go in peace you've earned your sleep,  
Your love in our hearts, we'll eternally keep.  
Deeply missed and fondly remembered by  
Sister, Children & all loved ones.

### 7th Anniversary In Loving Memory of Stanley Gomez

1 Corinthians 2:9

What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,  
nor the heart of man imagined, what God  
has prepared for those who love him.



Arrived from the Lord:  
13th August 1942  
Returned to the Lord:  
9th December 2016

He never looked for praises.  
He was never one to boast.  
He just went on quietly working  
For the ones he loved the most.  
His dreams were seldom spoken.  
His wants were very few,  
And most of the time his worries  
Went unspoken, too.

He was there...a firm foundation  
Through all our storms of life,  
A sturdy hand we held on to  
In times of stress and strife,  
A true friend we could turn to  
When times were good or bad.  
One of our greatest blessings,  
The man that we called Acha.

Dearly missed by Hilda, Kenneth, Pauline,  
Felicia, Samantha and loved ones.

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REST IN PEACE

## 40TH DAY MEMORIAL

### Madam Selvanayagam A/P Pappu

18th March 1945 - 4th November 2023

A Memorial Mass will be celebrated on  
Saturday, December 16th 2023 at 6:00 p.m.,  
at Church of Our Lady of Fatima, Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur

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



## Russian drone damages Kyiv Catholic Cathedral

KYIV, Ukraine: Russia's extensive drone attack on Kyiv November 25 damaged the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Patriarchal Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ.

Russia launched close to 75 Iranian-made Shahed drones at Ukraine's capital, as Ukrainians marked Holodomor Remembrance Day, which commemorates the 7 million to 10 million victims of an artificial famine against Ukrainians waged by Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin, from 1932-1933.

No fatalities were reported, but five individuals were injured.

The assault was Russia's largest drone attack on Kyiv since the start of the full-scale invasion in February 2022. Ukraine's forces said 74 of the drones had been successfully eliminated. Kyiv remained under an air raid alert lasting more than six hours.

One Shahed drone was shot down in the Dniprovskiy district of Kyiv, beside the Patriarchal Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ and the residence of Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, the head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, or UGCC.

The debris impacted doors and shattered windows within the cathedral. A nearby multi-storey building sustained even greater destruction, according to the UCGG information department.

The UGCC reported that "six windows in

the basement of the Patriarchal Cathedral were damaged," as "the blast wave shattered the glass panes".

"The hardware on four cathedral doors was damaged, and door locks were torn off," said Vasyl Bukatyuk, director of the Construction Directorate at the UGCC Patriarchate.

Bukatyuk said that Major Archbishop Shevchuk's residence also suffered damage.

"The hardware on three doors was affected at both the Patriarchal residence and the Patriarchal curia," he said.

Slight damage to the cathedral facade was also documented, and fragments of varying sizes from the drone were gathered on its grounds.

"In return for gifts from St Nicholas, we'll be receiving unique souvenirs," said Major Archbishop Shevchuk.

According to the Ukrainian Institute for Religious Freedom, some 500 religious sites in Ukraine have been "wholly destroyed, damaged, or looted by the Russian military" between the start of Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022 and January 2023. That number has only increased since then, according to Religion on Fire, a nongovernmental project headed by several Ukrainian religious scholars.

On July 23, Russia launched an X-22 anti-ship missile that struck the Ukrainian Orthodox Holy Transfiguration Cathedral



Clergymen enter the Patriarchal Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ in Kiev, Ukraine, June 5, 2017. (OSV News photo/Valentyn Ogirenko, Reuters)

(Spaso-Preobrazhensky Cathedral) in the port city of Odesa. The missile directly hit the central altar, as a result of which the cathedral building and the three lower floors were partially destroyed, while the interior and icons were significantly damaged.

Since launching its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 — which continues attacks begun in 2014 — Russia has killed more than 10,000 Ukrainian civilians (including 510 children) and injured some 18,500, while committing close to 113,525 documented war crimes. From 2014 to 2021, some 14,400 Ukrainians were killed and 39,000 injured in Russian attacks, according to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

At least 2.5 million Ukrainians have been

forcibly taken to the Russian Federation, and close to 19,600 children are being held in Russian "re-education" camps, with the actual number for the latter feared to be much higher.

Currently, there are an estimated 5.1 million individuals internally displaced within Ukraine, according to the International Organisation for Migration, part of the United Nations network. More than 6.2 million Ukrainians have sought safety abroad since the start of the full-scale invasion.

In a July 2023 joint report, New Lines Institute and the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights reiterated their May 2022 conclusion that Russia has violated the 1948 Genocide Convention through its atrocities in Ukraine. — By Lilia Kovalyk-Vasiuta and Gina Christian, OSV

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## Thanksgiving Solemn Mass

MONDAY 8 JAN 2024 6.00 P.M.

MINOR BASILICA OF ST. ANNE, BUKIT MERTAJAM, PENANG, MALAYSIA

LET US JOIN TOGETHER AS ONE UNIVERSAL CHURCH TO GIVE THANKS AND CELEBRATE THE APPOINTMENT OF H. EM. CARDINAL SEBASTIAN FRANCIS TO THE COLLEGE OF CARDINALS

Thanksgiving Mass Celebrated by His Eminence Cardinal Sebastian Francis together with his brother bishops from the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia - Singapore - Brunei, the Clergy, Religious, Lay Faithful and all People of Goodwill