

## Pray before a Nativity scene for plenary indulgence

VATICAN: This year, Catholics will be able to receive a plenary indulgence from December 8, the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, to February 2, 2024, the feast of the Presentation in the Temple of Our Lord Jesus Christ, by praying before a Nativity scene in a Franciscan church.

Earlier this year, on the feast of St Francis of Assisi, the faithful gathered at the Basilica of St Francis in Assisi, Italy, to honour the beloved Italian saint and celebrate the 800th anniversary of the approval of the Rule of St Francis (1223) and the creation of the Nativity scene in Greccio.

As part of the celebration of this Franciscan Centenary, the Conference of the Franciscan Family asked Pope Francis for the approval of this plenary indulgence.

The conference wrote: "In order to promote the spiritual renewal of the faithful and increase the life of grace, we ask that the faithful receive a plenary indulgence under the usual conditions from December 8, 2023, the solemnity of Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, to February 2, 2024, feast of the Presentation in the Temple of Our Lord Jesus Christ, by visiting the churches run by Franciscan families throughout the world and stopping in prayer in front of the Nativity scenes set up there."

The Apostolic Penitentiary welcomed the request, allowing the faithful to receive this indulgence under the usual conditions.

Those who are sick or unable to participate physically can obtain the indulgence by offering their sufferings up to the Lord or by "carrying out practices of piety."

### What is a plenary indulgence?

A plenary indulgence is a grace granted by the Catholic Church through the merits of Jesus Christ, Mary, and all the saints to remove the temporal punishment due to sin. The indulgence cleanses a person of all temporal punishment due to sin. However, it must always be accompanied by a full detachment from sin.

### Conditions to receive a plenary indulgence in all cases:

Detachment from all sin, even venial.

Sacramental confession, holy Communion, and prayer for the intentions of the pope. Sacramental confession and receiving the Eucharist can happen up to about 20 days before or after the act performed to receive a plenary indulgence.

It is appropriate that Communion and the prayer take place on the same day that the work is completed. One sacramental confession is sufficient for several plenary indulgences. However, for each plenary indulgence one wishes to receive, a separate reception of the Eucharist and a separate prayer for the intentions of the Holy Father are required. —

By Francesca Pollio Fenton, CNA

# Pull out this poisonous weed



**V**ATICAN: As the world marked the *International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women on November 25*, Pope Francis reiterated his urgent call for tangible action to eradicate this scourge, especially through education.

"Violence against women is a poisonous weed that plagues our society and must be pulled up from its roots," the Pope wrote in a post on X (formerly Twitter).

"These roots grow in the soil of prejudice and of injustice; they must be countered with educational action that places the person, with his or her dignity, at the centre," he said.

The *International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women* has been observed annually on Nov 25 since 1981. This date was selected to honour the Mirabal sisters, three political activists from the Dominican Republic who were brutally murdered in 1960 by order of the country's ruler, Rafael Trujillo.

The observance, which marks the start of 16 days of global activism, calls for global action to increase awareness, promote advocacy, and create opportunities for discus-

sion on challenges and solutions.

Violence against women and girls remains one of the most prevalent and pervasive human rights violations in the world. It is often perpetrated from within the family; estimates say that a woman is murdered by a partner or family member every 11 minutes.

According to the most recent UN data, globally, over 700 million women — almost one in three — have been subjected to physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual violence, or both, at least once in their life.

The phenomenon has intensified in various settings, including the workplace and online spaces, and has been exacerbated by post-pandemic effects, conflicts, and climate change.

Women and girls are particularly vulnerable in armed conflicts where sexual violence is used as a weapon of war and is also rife in refugee camps.

In a statement released on Nov 25, the Prefect of the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life, Cardinal Kevin Farrell, reiterated the Catholic Church's commitment to combating and preventing gender violence and offering support to victims.

"The Church has the task of remaining close to women who are victims of vio-

*Demonstration in Madrid on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (ANSA)*

lence and exploitation," he said, "and such closeness can be expressed in many ways: from providing safe housing for victims of violence, to psychological and spiritual support so as to help the victims themselves to overcome the trauma and report the abuse."

Echoing Pope Francis' words, Cardinal Farrell noted that a key aspect is also education towards respect for women, "which begins with recognising the problem within families and Christian communities as well.

"Educating people about affectivity, love, respect for others, and first of all for their own lives, which is so necessary in preventing violence against women, is strongly and deeply rooted in the Gospel," he said.

Cardinal Farrell, therefore, urged all Churches around the world to take action "to provide families, youth, engaged couples, and communities with educational pathways aimed at preventing violence against women."

"This is a pastoral responsibility," the Cardinal concluded, "in which the Church's vocation to be an instrument of peace is manifested." — By Liza Zengarini, *Vatican News*



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## LETTERS

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

**Pope's prayer intention for December:**  
**For persons with disabilities**

*We pray that people living with disabilities may be at the centre of attention in society, and that institutions may offer inclusive programmes which value their active participation.*

Throughout Advent, we embark on a journey of spiritual contemplation and hopeful expectation in anticipation of the birth of Jesus Christ. It's a period where communities unite, fostering compassion and understanding.

This season calls us to embrace virtues like Hope, Love, Joy, and Peace. It challenges us to prepare the way for those often marginalised, making room in our hearts and communities for them. It urges us to be agents of change, advocating for justice and embodying compassion.

The Pope's intention for December magnifies the very soul of Advent, emphasising the vital need for inclusivity and attention toward individuals facing disabilities. This intention serves as a reminder that inclusivity isn't just a gesture; it's a fundamental aspect of a compassionate and just society. It urges us to centre our attention on individuals with disabilities, recognising their inherent dignity and affirming their right to be integral members of our communities.

Persons with disabilities constitute a vibrant part of our global community, possessing diverse talents, insights, and experiences. Yet, they are frequently sidelined, face obstacles in accessing fundamental resources and participating fully in societal affairs. The Holy Father's intention urges us to shift this narrative, emphasising the importance of inclusive programmes that honour and celebrate their active involvement.

Institutions and communities must embrace a proactive approach, constructing



environments that cater to the diverse needs of individuals with disabilities. This inclusivity goes beyond physical accommodation; it necessitates a cultural shift wherein everyone is valued for their inherent worth and is empowered to contribute meaningfully.

Central to this objective is the need for inclusive education, employment opportunities, and accessible infrastructures. It's about fostering a culture of understanding, empathy, and respect. When institutions prioritise inclusive programmes, they create spaces where the richness of diversity thrives, where barriers dissolve, and where every voice is heard and cherished.

The season of Advent teaches us the significance of preparing the way for others, making room in our hearts and communities for those often overlooked. It challenges us to be instruments of change, advocates for justice, and ambassadors of compassion.

As we embark on this Advent journey, let's enrich our preparations for Christmas with a renewed dedication to inclusivity. Let's actively seek ways to create environments that not only accommodate but celebrate the contributions of persons with dis-

abilities. It's in these acts of inclusion that the true spirit of the season finds its most profound expression.

As Church, let us proactively seek opportunities to collaborate with governments, organisations, and individuals to foster an environment where persons with disabilities are not merely recipients of charity but active participants in all aspects of life.

During this season, let our prayers be coupled with concrete efforts to create a society where diversity is celebrated, where everyone, regardless of ability, is not just included, but cherished. This Advent, may our hearts be open wide, embracing the beauty of inclusivity and ensuring that no one feels marginalised or excluded.

As we tread towards a more inclusive world, may we carry the Advent spirit, radiating hope, love, and dignity to all, particularly to those eagerly awaiting recognition in the core of societal attention. Let us commit to actively building a community where differences are embraced, and everyone finds belonging, reinforcing the essence of this season through our deeds and attitudes.

*Patricia Pereira*

## Advent — A time of reflection and expectation

As we begin our journey of Advent, we embark on a journey of waiting, a season of anticipation, and a call to keep ourselves alert and prepared for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The liturgical year begins anew, and we find ourselves standing at the threshold of a sacred time of reflection and expectation.

The reality of waiting and preparing in anticipation is something that is all too familiar for all of us. From young, we wait in anticipation for many things and events - like going to school, passing our examinations, getting a good job, starting a family for some and the list goes on. In a way, our whole life is a series of waiting. While we wait for something to happen, naturally we will prepare ourselves adequately so that when the day comes upon us, we will be ready to face it.

This is true especially if we are waiting for someone. There will be times when we invite guests or relatives to our homes and when that happens, we would want to be as presentable as possible. Before our guests arrive, we will do a lot of spring cleaning, ensuring that our houses are clean and comfortable and there is adequate food and beverages in the house. In a sense, we try to make our homes as perfect as possible so that when our guests or relatives come, they will feel at home. However, the reality of spring cleaning is not limited to physical preparation but inner preparation as well, and this theme applies very much to our spiritual lives too.

The Scriptures for today resound with



the theme of waiting, keeping alert, and preparing oneself. In the Gospel of Mark, (Mark 13:33-37), Jesus speaks to us about the importance of being vigilant, of staying awake and watchful. He tells a parable about a master who goes on a journey, leaving his servants in charge and commanding the doorkeeper to be watchful. The master's return is uncertain, and the doorkeeper must be ready at all times.

The Apostle Paul, in his *Letter to the Corinthians* (1 Corinthians 1:3-9), reassures the Christian community of God's faithfulness. He reminds us that we are not lacking in any spiritual gift as we eagerly wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. In our waiting, God sustains us and enriches us, so that we may be blameless on the day of Christ's coming.

Many people will ask, "When will this happen? When will Christ come? We have been waiting for a long time and still He is not here." The question that we need

to ask ourselves is not "when" or "how" but rather, how are we going to prepare ourselves in the meantime. The question of "how" and "when" are beyond our control since Jesus Himself said that only God the Father knows the exact hour and day. How, then, do we live out this season of Advent with its call to waiting, alertness, and preparation? In other words, what kind of spring cleaning are we required to carry out so that, when Christ comes, He will find a clean room within us?

Firstly, let us cultivate a spirit of watchfulness in our daily lives. This means being attentive to the presence of God in the ordinary moments, recognising His hand at work in our joys and challenges. Instead of always searching for the miraculous, let us continually ask God for the grace to sense His guiding hands in our day to day living.

Secondly, let us be intentional about preparing our hearts for the coming of Christ. Just as we prepare our homes for

### Reflecting on our Sunday Readings with Fr Philip Tay, OCD

#### 1st Sunday of Advent (B)

**Readings: Isaiah 63:16-17, 19; 64:1, 3-8**  
**1 Corinthians 1:3-9**  
**Gospel: Mark 13:33-37**

special guests, let us prepare the dwelling place of our souls. This may involve a recommitment to prayer, repentance, and acts of kindness that reflect the love of Christ. If we can spend hours and days preparing our homes for the coming of our guests, all the more reason we should double our efforts in making our souls, the Temple of the Holy Spirit, a home that is fit for the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

Lastly, let us engage in acts of hopeful expectation. Our waiting is not passive; it is an active anticipation of the fulfilment of God's promises. As we light the first candle of the Advent wreath, let it symbolise the growing light of Christ dispelling the darkness, reminding us that our waiting is not in vain.

May this Advent season be a time of profound spiritual renewal and awakening. As we wait, keep alert, and prepare ourselves, may we be filled with the hope that Christ's coming brings, a hope that transcends the challenges of the present and directs our gaze to the glorious future when He will come again in triumph.





## KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

### Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

#### December

- 3 **International Day of Persons with Different Abilities – Church of St Joseph, KL**
- 9 **Feast Day – Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Puchong**
- 10 **Legacy Nite – AOHD**
- 16 **Re-dedication – Church of the Assumption, Petaling Jaya**
- 17 **Christmas Hi Tea – Christian Federation of Malaysia**



## PENANG DIOCESE

### Diary of Cardinal Sebastian Francis

#### December

- 3 **Confirmation – Church of St Anthony, Teluk Intan at 9.00am**
- 8 **Confirmation – Church of St Anthony, Nibong Tebal at 8.00pm**
- 9 **Meeting – CHARIS Penang at the Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam at 11.00am**
- 9 **Confirmation – Church of the Holy Name of Mary, Permatang Tinggi at 6.00pm**



## MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

### Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

#### December

- 4 **Fr James Rajendran's 25th Sacerdotal Anniversary Thanksgiving Mass – Church of the Immaculate Conception, JB**
- 5 **Meeting – MJ Pastoral Advisory Committee (PAC)**
- 7 **Staff Meeting – MJD Young Peoples' Network**
- 9 **Sr Jennyfera, FdCC Final Vow – St James Chapel, Merlimau, Melaka**
- 12 **Advent Penitential Service – Church of St Joseph, Plentong**
- 13 **Advent Penitential Service – Church of the Immaculate Conception, JB**
- 14 **Advent Penitential Service – Church of Divine Mercy, Skudai**
- 17 **Confirmation – Church of St Theresa, Masai**
- 18 **Meeting with all MJD Seminarians**
- 18 **Advent Penitential Service – Church of the Holy Family, Ulu Tiram**

# Advent — a time of hope, love and compassion

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

As we enter the blessed season of Advent, a time of hopeful anticipation and preparation for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, I greet you with love and blessings in the name of our Saviour.

During this sacred period, we are called to reflect on the profound message of love, compassion, and justice that Christ brought into the world. Advent is a time of spiritual renewal, a moment to rekindle our faith and reawaken our hearts to the profound mercy and love of our Heavenly Father.

As we eagerly await the birth of our Lord, let us remember those among us who are most in need, especially our brothers and sisters who endure the burdens of poverty and hardship. The Advent season invites us to embody the spirit of generosity and kindness, reaching out to those who are marginalised, vulnerable, and oppressed in our communities.

Moreover, amidst our joyful anticipation, let us not forget our duty to stand in solidarity with all who suffer, including those affected by the ongoing conflicts in Palestine and Israel. It is heartbreaking to



witness the anguish and devastation faced by innocent civilians caught in the midst of conflict. As followers of Christ, we are called to be agents of peace and advocates for justice. Let us earnestly pray for peace in the region and in other parts of the world filled with turmoil due to war and extend our support to those affected, offering our prayers, compassion, and practical assistance wherever possible.

As we light the candles on the Advent wreath, each flame symbolises hope, peace, joy, and love. Let these virtues guide our actions and attitudes as we journey through this Advent season. May the light of Christ shine brightly in our hearts, inspiring us to be agents of love and compassion, carrying the light of hope to every corner of our society.

Let us come together in prayer, seeking God's grace and guidance, that through our collective efforts, we may bring comfort to the afflicted, relief to the suffering, and peace to troubled lands.

In this time of Advent, let us open our hearts wide to receive the Prince of Peace, and may His presence transform our lives and our world.

Wishing you and your families a blessed and spiritually enriching Advent season.

"Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace at all times in every way."  
(2 Thessalonians 3:16)

Most Rev Julian Leow Beng Kim  
Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur



## Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #155



**Greetings to you, dear friends and faithful.** A happy new year to you. Oh! Actually, a happy New Liturgical Year. With Advent, we begin Year B.

**Shake-up Times:** A near collapse. I was rushed into emergency at Sibu General Hospital. It was severe pneumonia. Grounded. It shook me up. The wars, the blindness and the unthinking many, are unimaginable. Racial intolerance and religious bigotry have got the better of many. Going to the courts to regain justice and safeguard our constitutional rights is the only lawful option to shake-up unlawful, prejudicial and unconstitutional decisions. Deaths and near-death experiences, crises and upsets, and media announcements and denunciations do have a similar impact. Just be still and know that He is God. Disturbing. Disrupting. Frightening. Stormy. Deafening silence. But know that He walks with us. He is in the boat with us.

### A Thought for the Week: A Blue Ribbon

A teacher in New York City decided to honour each of her graduating high school seniors by telling each of them the difference she felt they each made as individuals. She called each student to the front of the class, one at a time. **First, she told the student how they had made a difference to her and the class.** Then she presented them with a blue ribbon imprinted with gold letters reading: *"Who I Am Makes a Difference."* She noticed a considerable attitudinal change in the class. So, she decided to do a class project to determine

what impact such recognition could have on their local community. **She gave each student three more ribbons, and asked them to go out and spread an "acknowledgment ceremony."**

**A lesson from the teacher:** A simple act of kindness. Affirmation transforms and transforms. It leaves an impact on the hearer. It humbles the 'proud' and raises the 'poor'. Let those who are close — at home or in the workplace — know that they make a difference to you.

### Announcements for this Week

1. The diocese has another priest. Aaron Alammalay joins the presbyterium. He will continue serving at the Church of St Andrew, Muar.
2. The Feast of Christ the King marks World Youth Day. Vicariate level celebrations (Young People Day) took place at the Church of St Louis, Kluang on Friday, November 24 at MAJODI Centre on Saturday, November 25, and at the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Krubong on Sunday, November 26.
3. The **IFFAsia or Fondacio Asia** offers a five-month **online Self Leadership Development**; 10-month **on-site Leadership Development** and two-year internship. Contact [iffasia@gmail.com](mailto:iffasia@gmail.com) or bishop's office: [bishopbernard@mjdioocese.my](mailto:bishopbernard@mjdioocese.my) or your **parish priest**.
4. The 25th Sacerdotal Anniversary of **Fr James Rajendran** will take place on December 4 at the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Johor Baru.
5. **The Holy See's diplomatic position**

**on Palestine is the two-state solution with clearly delimited borders and a special statute for Jerusalem.**

### QnQ: Q asks?

Is it our call to preserve and protect the Church? Have we forgotten that she lives to evangelise?

Pope St John XXIII once remarked, "We are not on earth to guard a museum, but to cultivate a flowering garden of life."

I absolutely love this quote. I think that we should have it on all of our church doors and signs. It is not enough to place those words at the front door however, if there is not a fire burning within the Church that will allow this cultivation to become reality.

Too many of our church communities have become museums that we work hard to guard, protect, maintain, and honour. We actually use those words in practice. It is not uncommon to hear Catholics say, "we must protect the Church from culture and the ways of the world." How about a comment like, "We cannot do that here it does not fit with our tradition." All the while, our churches are in decline. At times I hear the words of John XXIII ringing in my ears and wonder how long before all that we have left are museums to guard?

To the youth of the diocese, you are M.A.D.! (you make a difference). The Lord walks with you.

God bless. Be safe. Be different.

Bishop Bernard Paul





By Aaron Lim

PENANG: It was a day where many thoughts were expressed with common aspirations and dreams for a welcoming Church, in “enlarging the space of the tent” for all to enter.

With this being the theme and takeaway message, more than 300 delegates from the various parishes and ministries gathered for the Penang Diocesan Pastoral Assembly 2023, at the Church of the Immaculate Conception on November 18. The assembly served as a preparation for the upcoming Malaysian Pastoral Convention (MPC) in 2026.

### Keynote Address



Cardinal Sebastian Francis, delivered the keynote address in which he quoted from Scripture that “we are God’s co-workers, God’s field, God’s building; you are the temple of God in which the Spirit dwells.” (1 Cor 3:9-10, 16-17)

The prelate shared that the enlarging of one’s tent is a sign of the universality of our Church that was revealed on Pentecost by the

symphonic unity of the people from all parts of the world.

The cardinal also emphasised the continuity of the mission in the Diocese of Penang, which began its renewal together with the Peninsular Malaysian Church through the *Aggiornamento* held in 1976 with the subsequent Peninsular Malaysian Pastoral Conventions (PMPC).

Cardinal Sebastian highlighted the many focus areas which were identified through the subsequent PMPC events, which indicated that the tents of the Church continue to widen, being inclusive to everyone.

In sharing the vision of the Church through a post-Synod exhortation from the Penang Diocesan Synod in 2016, the Cardinal reminded the delegates of the need to follow-up with the directives of PMPC IV in becoming a creative, inclusive and bridge-building Church.

The prelate then urged the faithful to continue praying for the second and final phase of the Synod next year, which will be followed by the



celebration of the Jubilee Year of Hope in 2025.

### Summary of Findings

Throughout the second half of 2023, parishes in the diocese have been conducting their respective pastoral assemblies via applying the SEE-JUDGE-ACT method in identifying the various challenges and

situations confronting them.

These findings were then presented at the assembly by Iruthaya Das and Aaron Lim, with the aim of helping the delegates to understand current realities, touching on spirituality and community building whilst the search for solutions remains an ongoing effort.

**Family** – Catholic families in general must live up to their role as the domestic Church in promoting a holistic Christian way of life, in the face of challenges of the separation of sexuality and procreation. They too must be aware of the creep of materialism and be aware of their vocation to support social life in all aspects.

**Society** – There is a need to address the contention between secular values that overshadow the sacred values based on the Gospel, with an increasing income inequality creating much disparity amongst peoples including a gap between the young and old. The societal fabric of the nation relies heavily on cultural context which is seen to promote superiority of majority groups, thus it becomes more crucial to make the Catholic faith relevant in the world today.

**Ecology** – Widespread environmental disasters, especially those in our nation such as flash floods and landslides, had also given cause to social injustice, with unchanged lifestyle habits leading to continuous pollution and ineffective implementation of green policies. All must be able to see and feel the tangibility of efforts being placed to ensure that practices such as lowering carbon footprint can be sustained.

**Church** – Our way of witnessing through mission must be a personal effort in facilitating the encounter between man and God, and that religious pluralism in our nation provides endless opportunities for evangelisation. Empowerment of clergy towards the laity will ensure that they become movers for the growth of the community, whilst digitalisation should never replace the personal touch of faith and experiencing God.

## Synodality and spiritual conversations

Fr Paul Dass SJ led the assembly in reflecting on the Spirituality of Synodality by referencing to three key areas: Exodus (journeying out), *Synodus* (journeying together) and *Metaodus* (journeying beyond).

“The discernment of God’s will is at the heart of the synodal process with topics like listening and spiritual conversation, with time for the Word of God, searching through the teachings of the Church and time for personal prayer,” he said.

Fr Paul shared that this process of discernment will then lead to an understanding of the structures of society, and that through the pastoral method, forms of real action will spring from a real-life experience that leads to a conversion of heart. He also urged the delegates to exercise discernment through the seeking of spiritual consolation that will increase the faith, hope and love of every individual.

“Synodality enables us to become sacraments at the edges, peripheries, margins; as well as amongst the excluded and the ostracised, because nowhere than at these places is there a greater need for the sacrament to be seen and exteriorised,” he said.

In this common journey towards MPC 2026, Fr Paul shared that the local Church, in gathering in its fullness as one community, needs to hold on to a common identity marked by geography, history, language and culture to develop a shared context and reality.

### Spiritual Conversation

The delegates then entered into a time of spiritual conversation where they shared their experiences and aspirations on the topics of family, society, ecology and Church.

The conversations were divided into three rounds: to ponder on their deepest experiences



The delegates during the spiritual conversation.

on the given topic, a sense of collectiveness and understanding towards shared goals, and finally a take away from the whole discussion.

On the topic of family, reflections were made on families living in the margins of society to combine efforts as one Church to address their well-being.

The assembly also seeks to understand the social health of society that are largely dependent on families, looking at aspects of health, housing, education and protection of the vulnerable.

As ecological efforts were still new to all, delegates also sort to embed this teaching more deeply into Catholic consciousness and explored the topics of climate change, greenhouse effect, air pollution, food security and its impacts on livelihoods.

After identifying the areas of action for the family, society and ecology; the assembly turned towards the focus area of Church in a moment of self-reflection.

They took ownership and responsibility of discerning for the Malaysian Church and its structural dimensions as well as the call to be more synodal, ecumenical and towards the

building of human communities.

### Plenary Session and Conclusion

Delegates then took to the floor during the plenary session to share their spiritual consolations in which faith increased with spiritual virtues grown throughout the conversation.

Chan Lilian from the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit said that she was inspired by the youth of today who overcame obstacles in embracing the faith and that in keeping focus on Christ, we can conquer all challenges and journey together.

“Love is the greatest mover for us to begin helping each other without any partiality, let us continue to search for long term solutions for continuous betterment of our society,” said Andrew Lloyd Doray, from the Church of Christ the King in Sungai Petani.

Sr Mary David FdCC shared that her faith was enriched by so many who kept the zeal in building the Kingdom of God, and that the Church will remain intact as one body in Christ.

In affirming the assembly and assuring them of their support, Fr Dr Lawrence Ng (Diocese

of Malacca Johore) and Fr Mitchel Anthony (Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur) urged the assembly to be led by the Holy Spirit to ensure “a freshness of the faith” within the diocese.

Msgr Jude Miranda, chairman of the Diocesan Pastoral Team, expressed his appreciation to all delegates who came in the spirit of synodality and urged all to “exodus ourselves out of the familiar” towards a future in touch with the realities of today.

“The stories that we have shared today and the experience that we have gained through the methodology of spiritual conversations is a sign of the movement of God’s Spirit,” he said.

He encouraged all to bring this methodology of spiritual conversations back to the parishes, families, communities, societies and BECS, using it during every encounter and dialogue.

### Closing Mass

At the closing Mass, Cardinal Sebastian, through his homily, addressed the message of the Gospel of Matthew to the congregation - “they have been faithful in the small things, and that God shall entrust greater things.”

The cardinal shared several tent images; namely Yahweh, Moses and the tent of meeting in the Book of Exodus, the unwanted tents from the Transfiguration story in the Gospel of Luke, the Kenosis tent of self-giving with Jesus at the Garden of Gethsemane fully exposed without cover, the Pentecost tent that is enlarged and universal in welcoming all, and finally the Nazareth tent of Joseph, Mary and Jesus which is the image of a home for rest.

“Let us move forward to a synodal Church of apostles led by the Holy Spirit, and I dream that you will experience all these tents; and that the Church will keep enlarging the space of her tent,” he said.





# Caritas Malaysia National Assembly

By Pauline Yeo

SIBU: The third Caritas Malaysia National Assembly, themed *Union of Minds and Hearts*, brought together 49 members from the nine arch/dioceses across Malaysia. Led by Caritas national director, Fr Fabian Dicom, the assembly held from November 12 to 16, was a blend of spiritual reflection and operational discussions. It encompassed two days devoted to introspection and two days focused on operational aspects, fostering unity and a shared sense of purpose among Caritas Malaysia members.

## Day 1-2:

### Reflection and Spiritual Growth

The Assembly began with a two-day recollection led by Fr Alvin Ng, SJ. The aim of this recollection was for participants to spend time with the Lord and to internalise their reflections using the fruits of their prayers as matter for the spiritual conversations.

### Spiritual Development and Identity within Caritas

The session highlighted sanctity as the pinnacle of human development, referencing key papal encyclicals and emphasising the intrinsic link between human well-being and social welfare. Participants explored charity as the core of Christian identity, following Pope Francis' emphasis on 'caritas.' The discussion centred on practising charity in daily life across personal, familial, and ministerial roles, fostering a deeper awareness of others' dignity, a spirit of poverty,



Fr Alvin Ng, SJ

a commitment to the common good, and a pursuit of peace.

### Synodality and Centring on Christ

The session on *Synodality* highlighted fraternal collaboration and communal discern-

ment, drawing parallels from the Exodus journey to emphasise unity in the Church's path. It emphasised listening to grassroots members without judgment, focusing actions on Christ, and seeking inspiration from God's love for charitable deeds in response to a changing world. Discussions stressed prayerful, truthful, and respectful conversations, valuing both listening and speaking courageously. Participants were urged to recognise God's work through everyone, encouraging engagement in synodality, partnership, and networking with the universal Church for goodwill.

A cautionary note highlighted the consequences of losing sanctity, including the potential replacement of human discernment by artificial intelligence and the human desire for god-like powers. The importance of maintaining sanctity while fully engaged in the world was stressed.

*Synodality* and *Solidarity* were portrayed

as collaborative pathways, emphasising the value of unity in diversity, pluralism, and diverse perspectives while striving for the common good. Solidarity was defined as a committed determination to pursue the common good, encompassing the responsibility for each individual because we are all interconnected.

### Synthesis: Union of Minds and Hearts

Fr Alvin synthesised the theme, drawing parallels between the Holy Trinity and the essence of sanctity, synodality, and solidarity. Just as the components of a lit candle — flame, heat, and light — are inseparable, these attributes form a singular entity. Each attribute complements the others, mirroring the interdependency within the Holy Trinity.

The analogy emphasised the need to trust the Spirit to bind everyone together, even when physically apart. It was highlighted that challenges may arise, threatening to extinguish the light, symbolising the need to trust and see God's hands during difficult times.

The reflection concluded with an encouragement to adopt a reflective mode of being, allowing intentional listening to the divine in daily life. The idea of continuing this contemplative mode, even amidst the fast-paced world of ministry work, was proposed, to draw strength from God's peace.

The participants shared their initial insights, emphasising authenticity in sanctity, unity in diversity in synodality, and a steadfast commitment to the common good and the marginalised in solidarity.



Participants from the Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu and Dioceses of Malacca, Johore and Penang.

## Children and Vulnerable Adults Safeguarding Policy

### DAY 3-4: Sessions on Advocacy and Safeguarding

#### Advocacy

Guest speaker Josef Benedict, Asia-Pacific Civic Space Researcher at CIVICUS, conducted a comprehensive session on advocacy, focusing on addressing societal problems through planned, sustained efforts targeting discrimination, inequality, and exploitation. The session highlighted advocacy strategies and the multifaceted nature of effecting meaningful change within communities. The Problem Tree Analysis emerged as a valuable tool for dissecting issues and planning strategic advocacy approaches.

Participants found this session highly relevant to their work within Caritas, benefiting from group exercises and practical applications of advocacy concepts.

#### Safeguarding

The final day featured Domnic Selvam, a lawyer and former chairman of the Industrial Court of Malaysia, discussing the *Safeguarding of Children and Vulnerable Adults*. This session

elaborated on legislative measures and guidelines aimed at protecting minors' rights, safety, and welfare.

Fr Fabian highlighted that the Caritas Malaysia Children and Vulnerable Adults Safeguarding Policy delineates our purpose, scope, and the responsibilities we bear in safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults within Caritas. This policy is formulated in conformity with Canon Law and the statutory requirements of Malaysian state legislations, including the Child Act 2001, Child (Amendment) Act 2016, Sexual Offences Against Children Act 2017, Penal Code, and other pertinent laws. Caritas Malaysia has embraced the Safeguarding Policy of Caritas Internationalis, integrating specific elements from the Child Protection Manual of the Diocese of Malacca Johore.

Applicable to all Caritas Malaysia national, diocesan, parish staff, members and associates, this policy serves as a guiding framework for our collective actions.

Also implemented will be a readily accessible public reporting system, ensuring the appropriate management of received information and a swift response mechanism for any



Advocacy group work.

reported instances of child abuse or neglect. Additionally, a detailed flowchart outlining the steps and procedures for reporting and handling complaints will be provided to aid in comprehension.

All participants were allotted time to review and sign the acknowledgement form, signifying their commitment to adhere to the established safeguarding procedures and protocols.

Representatives from eight arch/dioceses unanimously agreed to endorse this policy and consequently signed the acknowledgement form, with the exception of the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur.

### Conclusion

The National Assembly focused on integrating sanctity, synodality, and solidarity into personal and ministerial aspects, highlighting unity, openness, and commitment to charity in Christian identity and service.

Participants were encouraged to embody the unity and empowerment experienced, engaging confidently with diverse perspectives and embracing truth. Acknowledging the transformative influence of the Holy Spirit, the participants found the assembly impactful, deepening their understanding of Caritas service's spirituality and reinforcing their roles in ministries.

Several participants openly expressed gratitude for the assembly's role in broadening their understanding of concepts such as sanctity, synodality, solidarity, and advocacy, which were previously unfamiliar to them.



Longhouse experience.



# Uniting communities at World Day of the Poor initiative



Mass for World Day of the Poor at Church of the Sacred Heart, Jalan Peel.

KUALA LUMPUR: In a concerted effort to observe the seventh World Day of the Poor, district level events were organised by the Ministry of the Poor, under the Archdiocesan Office for Human Development.

The event, a testament to the global significance of combating poverty, brought together communities in a unified stance against neglecting those in need. Encouraging collective action, participants rallied to extend support to the most vulnerable among them.

A multifaceted approach characterised the event, featuring a blend of religious observances and community-driven initiatives with the celebration of Mass and the Kindness Community Bazaar.

At the *Cathedral of St John the Evangelist* in Kuala Lumpur, a haven for the homeless and urban poor emerged, offering a bazaar providing complimentary haircuts, food provisions, and essential supplies, courtesy of dedicated volunteers.

Collaborative efforts echoed in Petaling district, as the *Church of St Ignatius* joined hands with local entities such as Majlis Perbandaran Petaling Jaya, Perkeso, Sri Maha Mariamman Temple, and Nurul Yaqin Mosque in Kelana Jaya. The bazaar facilitated not only provisions but also employment prospects overseen

by Perkeso.

Across locations like the *Church of the Sacred Heart*, Peel Road and *Chapel of Christ the Light* in Kepong, similar initiatives unfolded, featuring mobile clinics, dental screenings and comprehensive aid packages to those in need.

Expressing solidarity, the *Church of Our Lady of Lourdes* in Klang and the *Church of St Thomas* in Kuantan organised their own bazaars, extending vital assistance to communities facing hardships.

The *Church of the Visitation* in Seremban commemorated the occasion with a Eucharistic celebration, emphasising the spiritual significance of the event.

Archbishop Julian Leow presided over the Mass at the Church of the Sacred Heart and made visits to the bazaars at the Cathedral of St John, Chapel of Christ the Light, and Church of St Ignatius.

Commending the tireless efforts of the parishes involved, the archbishop underscored the reciprocal nature of giving, remarking, "They provide us with the opportunity to exhibit generosity. If there were no sick or poor among us, would we still be generous? Would we genuinely care for others, even our neighbours?" — **By Aaron Koh, Coordinator for Ministry of the Poor**

## Kindness Community Bazaar



Cathedral of St John, KL



Archbishop Julian Leow visiting one of the residents of PPR Lembah Subang with Fr Lawrence Ng, CDD.



Fr Peter Anthony assisting a wheelchair bound person as Archbishop Julian Leow greets them at the Chapel of Christ the Light, Kepong.



Some members of the migrant community with Fr Gregory Chan at the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Klang.

## Kuantan parish celebrates Family Day and World Day of the Poor



A clown entertaining the children during the Family Day celebrations.

KUANTAN: The Church of St Thomas the Apostle celebrated a joint activity on November 19, marking both Family Day and the World Day of the Poor.

The event took two months of meticulous planning, led by the organising committee, with guidance from the parish priest and in partnership with BECCOT and BECs.

Parish priest, Fr George Packiasamy, explained that in aligning with the Holy Father's call to focus on the needs of the poor, the event's primary objective was to unite families in a celebration alongside the underprivileged members in their vicinity.

Activities commenced after Mass despite the morning drizzle. The

various BECs set up food stalls offering an array of Malaysian delicacies. These stalls were manned by BEC members who sold coupons and T-shirts, while the underprivileged were sponsored by generous benefactors.

Proceeds from sales and donations will contribute to flood relief efforts and educational initiatives for the underprivileged. Additionally, the needy received clothes and essential electrical items during the event. The youth and university students organised engaging games for children, and lively stage performances included karaoke and entertainment by a clown magician which captivated the audience.

The event drew a crowd compris-

ing parishioners, local residents, Indonesian migrants working in and around the city and Orang Asli families. The migrants and Orang Asli, arrived in busloads the night before and were given accommodation at the parish community centre.

Despite the light drizzle, everyone had a memorable time. Fr George expressed gratitude for the overwhelming support from the organising committee, the parish community, and the generous sponsors of food and donations, acknowledging the success of the event without any hitches. Grateful for the favourable weather, the community thanked God for the success of the event. — **By Dr Francis Leong**



# Cardinal reminds seminarians to be rooted in discipleship

By Alvin Lucas  
Devesahayam

PENANG: College General seminary hosted a thanksgiving Mass recently to celebrate the elevation of the bishop of Penang, Cardinal Sebastian Francis, who is also the president of College General.

Concelebrating with the cardinal at the College chapel were the archbishop of Kuala Lumpur, Most Rev Julian Leow, rector of College General, Fr Simon Labrooy and a few clergy from Penang Island. Also present at the Mass which was animated by the seminarians, were external lecturers and students of the seminary.

During his homily, Cardinal Sebastian explained the principle of discipleship, based on the Gospel text of Luke 14:25-33 – “Anyone who does not carry his cross and



Cardinal Sebastian Francis with the seminarians of College General after the Thanksgiving Mass on November 8.

come after Me cannot be My disciple”, which includes the petitions of discipleship.

“The fundamental call is the call to discipleship, which encompasses the Church’s mission, including women in the life and mission of the Church, consecrated life, and lay associations and movements. We are formed by the Church to be priests, prophets, and kings, to worship God, to speak on behalf of God, and to accompany God’s

people.”

Then, directing his words toward the seminarians, Cardinal Sebastian emphasised that while their commitment to the ministerial priesthood is paramount, the foundational call remains rooted in discipleship. Drawing parallels from the call of Moses, he urged a reconsideration of the vocation narrative, beginning with God’s response to the cries of the oppressed.

The cardinal questioned whether

discipleship is initiated at baptism, hinting that for many baptised as infants, the adult commitment of discipleship might manifest later in life. Referencing Peter’s awakening at the Sea of Galilee and St Paul’s transformative vocation on the road to Damascus, he urged the seminarians to remain open to discovering their true calling at any moment.

Sharing a poignant exchange from the recent Synod in Rome with Pope Francis, Cardinal

Francis expressed unwavering faith in the Holy Spirit’s guidance for the Church and the synod, a sentiment echoed by the Pontiff, with a smile.

After Mass was the blessing of the statue of St John Marie Vianney, the Patron Saint of Priests, generously gifted by the parish of St John Marie Vianney, Tampin to the college community. Fr Simon expressed his thanks to Fr Albert Arokiasamy and the parishioners for their generosity. He also thanked Cardinal Sebastian for making time to celebrate Mass at College General.

The celebration continued with a communal dinner, during which Fr Simon lauded the concerted efforts of Fr Ryan Innas Muthu, the organising team, and the dedicated seminarians, acknowledging their role in making the celebration a resounding success.

## Fostering understanding between Catholics and Sikhs

KUALA LUMPUR: In a gesture of interreligious harmony and goodwill, members from the Parish Ministry of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (PMEIA) of the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, paid a visit to the Gurdwara Sahib Temple in Kampung Pandan, November 15.

Led by coordinator, Dr Florence John, the PMEIA mem-

bers were welcomed by temple chairman, Inderjeet Singh, his deputy, Jasvinder Singh, and Sikh guruji, Madam Gurjeet Kaur.

The gathering saw a display of warm hospitality as both communities engaged in meaningful dialogue and fellowship. The evening culminated in a dinner fellowship in the temple’s hall, where conversations deepened

understanding between Catholics and Sikhs.

Dr Florence expressed hope for reciprocal visits, inviting the Sikh community to visit the church in the near future. The aim remains to foster cooperation, goodwill, and deeper understanding between the two religions through continued interaction and engagement. — **By Bernard Anthony**

## Ministries Open Day at Jesus Caritas parish

KEPONG: The parishioners of the Church of Jesus Caritas (JCC) came together for a Ministries Open Day. Held on the weekend of November 18 and 19, approximately 25 ministries showcased various ways to get involved and grow spiritually within the parish community.

The ministries set up booths to share their unique missions, covering areas like Liturgy, PIHDM, Youth, Social Communications and more. This provided parishioners with a glimpse into the many opportunities available to serve and be part of the JCC community.

JCC’s parish priest Fr Simon Lau, shared a simple message during the weekend Masses, connecting the Gospel which spoke of the Parable of the talents with the Ministries Open Day. He said that the talents and gifts we have are meant to be shared in service to God, not kept hidden away.

Adding that our gifts are tools for us to use to glorify God, Fr Simon explained that we’re not

supposed to be selfish with them by hiding them away. Instead, we should share them with others and create disciples for Jesus Christ in the Church.

The Ministries Open Day encouraged parishioners to think about how they could use their talents to contribute to the parish. The display made it easy for people to understand the different ministries and find where they could fit in.

Overall, parishioners loved the idea of a Ministries Open Day, some expressing thanks for the chance to explore ministries that caught their interest. The event not only helped recruit new members for the ministries but also created stronger relationships within the JCC parish community.

The planning committee hopes that the Ministries Open Day will become an annual celebration, improving along the way and showing JCC’s commitment to rebuilding our church through discipleship. — **By Malcolm Francis Solomon**

## SIC community celebrates 35 years

PETALING JAYA: The Church of St Ignatius (SIC) marked its 35th anniversary on November 18 with a thanksgiving Mass, followed by a street food carnival.

Archbishop Julian Leow presided over the Mass with the CDD Fathers — parish priest Fr Lawrence Ng, his assistant Fr Martin Then, provincial superior Fr Andrew Wong and Frs Anthony Heng and Thomas Koo concelebrating.

Archbishop Julian emphasised the collective responsibility to nurture faith, drawing parallels to the growth of a mustard seed that provides shelter and sustenance to many.

Indeed, like a mustard seed, starting as a modest chapel in Sungai Way new village, SIC’s humble origins in a wooden house evolved to serve 600 devoted followers. In 1987, the Congregation of the Disciples of the Lord (CDD) donated land for a new church which was completed in 1988. This laid the foundation for SIC’s expansion into a parish with over 2,000 families and more than 5,000 faithful, as indicated by the latest census data from September 2023.

The anniversary celebrations included a cake-cutting ceremo-



Archbishop Julian Leow flanked by Fr Lawrence Ng, CDD and Fr Martin Then, CDD officiating the street food carnival.

ny featuring a 14kg cake resembling St Ignatius Church, symbolising the congregation’s unity. This was followed by a vibrant Street Food Carnival at a covered park, transformed into a bustling food court adorned with colourful decorations, signifying a jubilant atmosphere.

Archbishop Julian, Fr Lawrence and Fr Martin, inaugurated the carnival with a ribbon-cutting ceremony, while donned in chef attire. Amidst the festivities, young Brian Lim, a special child, serving as a balloonist clown, delighting the archbishop with a bouquet of balloon flowers sculptured by him.

The clergy and parish community numbering approximately 700, enjoyed a diverse culinary

experience from seven food trucks and stalls, fostering community bonds through shared meals and with zero food wastage.

The celebration extended beyond gastronomic pleasures with children’s games and a live band featuring members from RCIA and Charismatic groups, uplifting the ambiance with Gospel melodies and nostalgic tunes.

Expressing gratitude, Fr Lawrence conveyed heartfelt appreciation to the SIC-My Family community, emphasising the blessings and unity experienced on this special occasion, culminating the celebrations with prayers for continued blessings and favourable weather. — **By Bob Ho**



Parishioners taking time to visit the booths set-up by the different ministries.



# MJD welcomes Fr Aaron

By Dr Mark David  
Edward Nathan

MUAR: The sacerdotal ordination of Deacon Aaron Alammalay on November 20 carried immense significance for the parish community of the Church of St Andrew, marking a historic moment as the church's first ordination in its 114-year history.

Maybe it was also symbolic for this young man who, three decades earlier, considered himself a 'nobody', yet now found himself called by the Lord to 'Look after my sheep' (John 21:16).

Hence, it seemed only fitting that the organising committee, dedicated volunteers, and parishioners laboured tirelessly through-



out the entire planning and preparations, ensuring the ordination's success. With over 300 individuals congregating in the church, accompanied by a broader online Catholic community witnessing the ceremony through live stream-

ing, the impact and reach of this momentous event were truly profound.

Bishop Bernard Paul presided over the Eucharistic celebration and ordination rites. Concelebrating with him at the altar were the

two vicar generals of the diocese, Msgrs Peter Lai and Michcel Mannayagam and St Andrew's parish priest, Fr Jason Wong.

The celebratory gathering included Bishop Emeritus Paul Tan, clergy, deacons, religious brothers

and sisters, family and friends, as well as parishioners from the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, where Aaron is originally from.

Following the final blessing, Fr Aaron delighted the congregation with his thanksgiving speech delivered in multiple languages.

Bishop Bernard announced that the newly ordained priest would continue serving in his present parish for the foreseeable future. Additionally, he used the occasion to extend an invitation to all young men to attend an upcoming Vocation camp themed 'Come follow me,' encouraging them to explore their calling within the Church

See page 12 for Fr Aaron Alammalay's vocation story

## Demonstrate love and compassion like St Elizabeth



Msgr Michcel Mannayagam and Fr Martinian Lee distributing bread to the parishioners after Mass.

KOTA TINGGI: The Church of St Elizabeth celebrated the parish patronal feast day of St Elizabeth of Hungary, November 18.

Msgr Michcel Mannayagam was the main celebrant, with Fr Martinian Lee concelebrating and Deacon Steven Wong assisting.

Fr Martinian's sermons, delivered in English and Mandarin, centred on Jesus' teachings on forgiveness and love for one's enemies. He shared a personal anecdote about a misunderstanding with another priest that had left him feeling bitter and impatient. However, upon praying and seeking forgiveness, Fr Martinian experienced a transformative moment when he forgave the priest, leading to an inner peace and enhanced patience. Drawing parallels with St Elizabeth's life, he highlighted her forgiveness towards her 'unkind' uncle and her selfless acts of charity and compassion towards the less fortunate.

Acknowledging human imperfection, Fr Martinian emphasised the importance of compassion and forgiveness, urging everyone to follow in St Elizabeth's footsteps by demonstrating love and compassion towards others.

Msgr Michcel preached in Bahasa Malaysia and Tamil, highlighting St Elizabeth's steadfast faithfulness to Jesus and her mission of aiding the less fortunate. He urged the congregation to emulate her exemplary life.

Preceding the feast day celebration were triduum Masses held from Nov 15 to 17. Fr Patrick Tyoh from Batu Pahat was the presider on the first two days and preached on *Communion (Inclusive)* and *Participation (Creative)*, while Fr Martinian preached on *Mission (Bridge Building)* on the final day.

Both the priests expressed their gratitude to all parishioners for their support and participation in making the feast celebrations memorable and joyous.

Fr Martinian highlighted St Elizabeth's renowned dedication to feeding the impoverished. Inspired by her legacy, the parish initiated *A Bread for Help* project, using bread as a symbol of donations to emulate the parish's patron, St Elizabeth of Hungary.

He then proceeded to bless three baskets of bread and, together with Msgr Michcel and Deacon Steven, distributed the bread as parishioners lined up, graciously contributing cash donations of any amount into a designated box.

Fr Martinian explained that the collections would benefit the POHD, aiding the less fortunate by providing nourishment to the poor and hungry in our community.

The festivities extended to a dinner fellowship in the hall, with many taking the opportunity to seek intercessions from St Elizabeth at her beautifully adorned statue. — **By Bernard Anthony**

## A celebration of culture and talent

KUALA LUMPUR: The Migrant and Refugee Got Talent 2023 event was a vibrant celebration of unity and culture where barriers between communities dissolved amidst a showcase of remarkable talent.

Held on November 5 at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre, there were performances from 11 teams comprising nearly 50 migrants and refugees residing in Malaysia. The participants, representing various countries, including Myanmar, Philippines, Vietnam, Pakistan, Indonesia, and Africa, expressed their rich cultures through songs, dances, and

traditional attire.

A seven-member Vietnamese dance troupe stole the spotlight, mesmerising both judges and spectators with their captivating rendition of the Rice Drum dance. Nguyen Lam Phu Quy, the troupe's leader, shared their journey to success, highlighting the dedication of each member practising individually through video recordings before uniting for collective rehearsals on weekends.

The atmosphere was akin to a joyous carnival, echoing with resounding applause after each performance. At times, the audience, totaling around 300 people, enthusiastically joined the dances, infusing the air with energy and joy.

The event's theme, *Free to choose whether to migrate or to stay*, echoed Pope Francis' message for World Migrant and Refugee Day, underscoring the importance of individual rights in migration choices.

Josephine Tey, coordinator for the Archdiocesan Office for Pastoral Care for Migrants and Itinerants, praised the event's essence, highlighting how it showcased talents and unity amidst challenges. She emphasised the strong sense of community among participants, noting the visible spirit of unity and communal support.

Archbishop Julian Leow, Archbishop Emeritus Murphy Pakiam, Fr Christopher Soosaipillai, ecclesiastical assistant for the migrant ministry, and Florida Sandanasamy, the national project coordinator for the International Labour Organisation in Malaysia, graced the occasion.

In his speech, Archbishop Julian acknowledged the invaluable contributions migrants make to Malaysia's economy and society, emphasising their indispensable role in the fabric of the nation.



Josephine Tey (far right) thanking the organising team and those who had supported the event, November 5, 2023.

## Limbanak parish community rejoice at children's First Holy Communion, baptism



PENAMPANG, Sabah: The congregation of St Aloysius Church Limbanak shared the joy of the catechism children, who received the Sacrament of Baptism and Eucharist, November 11.

A total of 42 candidates received First Holy Communion, while 22 others received both the Sacrament of Baptism and First Holy Communion during the Sunset Mass presided over by Rector Fr Wilfred Atin.

With the help of the Limbanak Zone catechists and parents, the children were prepared to receive the real presence of Christ in the Eucharistic celebration. — **By Ronney Wong (Soccom St Aloysius Church, Limbanak)**



# Synodality as possible antidote to priest suicides?

SAO PAULO: A growing number of priest suicides in the world's largest Catholic country has left Brazilian clergy taking a hard look at the causes of suffering in ecclesial life, with some suggesting synodality may offer an antidote.

According to Fr Lício de Araújo Vale, an expert in suicide among clergy members, with decades of research on the topic, between August 2016 and June 2023, 40 priests committed suicide in Brazil.

Given that the country overall has a relatively low suicide rate by global standards at 5.7 per 100,000 inhabitants, according to the medical journal *The Lancet*, one would expect roughly 1.7 suicides among Brazil's 30,000 priests each year, or around twelve over a seven-year span.

Forty, therefore, represents a priest suicide rate almost four times higher than the national average. And the number keeps growing. On November 18 alone, two priests, ages 34 and 45, killed themselves, as well as a former priest.

"Among so many issues, that problem appears as a major concern for us. Most of us knew a brother who appeared to be fine and suddenly took his own life," said Fr Geraldino Rodrigues de Proença, a member of the group *Priests of the Path*, which gathers dozens of progressive clergy members all over Brazil.

Formed under former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro (2018-2022), the *Priests of the Path* works not only as an ecclesial movement that puts pressure on the Church for reforms, and on the government for sociopolitical change, but also as a space where ministers can talk frankly about their problems and expectations and share their fears and sufferings with their colleagues.

During their second national encounter in São Paulo recently, the *Priests of the Path* discussed great national themes, such as the environmental destruction in the Amazon



A meeting of "Priests of the Path" in São Paulo, Brazil, in November 2023. (Crux photo/Image courtesy of Priests of the Path)

and the growing financial inequality in Brazil, and also ecclesiastical topics, including the search for new church models which could favour their pastoral work.

The building of a more synodal Church, one that can reduce historical problems like clericalism and ecclesial authoritarianism, was highlighted as a possible solution for the disturbances behind the suicide of priests.

"There are a few factors that increase the risks of a priest committing suicide. All of them are somehow connected to clericalism, a problem many times mentioned by Pope Francis," said Fr Lício Vale.

One of the major drivers of emotional distress among priests in Brazil is occupational stress, he said. The country's total of 30,000 priests is considered strikingly low relative to the overall Catholic population, with some experts claiming that Brazil needs at least 80,000 priests to sustain the current ecclesial model.

"We work too much. You're not only in charge of giving the sacraments, but you

also need to work as a psychologist, a community organiser, a social worker, and so on. So much stress can rapidly become burnout syndrome," Vale said.

Another central problem is loneliness. Most priests come from other cities and live alone at the rectory, without contact with their families and without real friends, he said.

"Especially for diocesan priests, ecclesial life can be an experience of living alone. Lay communities have difficulties to grasp the priests' humanity. People would rarely invite their priest to take a beer. Most of them demand a certain attitude of correctness from him," he said.

Priests end up assuming a superman attitude, Vale pointed out, requiring from themselves an almost unreachable individual level of moral faultlessness.

"All those aspects are reinforced by clericalism and can damage mental health," Vale said.

He argued that in order to enhance the clergy's quality of life and avoid mental

health issues, the Church needs to implement changes in its ecclesial model.

"Synodality is a key element in that process, because it generates closeness. Walking side by side, the priest and his community are closer and his humanity is more easily recognised and experienced," he reasoned.

Lício Vale believes that the Brazilian Church has been making progress in understanding the problems involved in clergy life and has been looking for ways to intervene.

The international effort to build synodality has been a central aspect in that process, de Proença affirmed.

"Clericalism suffocates the priests. The Pope has been calling for us to walk side by side because we need to listen more to each other and to be able to share our sentiments," de Proença said.

In the opinion of Fr Manuel Godoy, a member of the *Priests of the Path* and a theology professor at the St Thomas Aquinas Institute in Belo Horizonte, many priests have been suffering with bureaucratic bishops who fail to really accompany them.

"Many bishops are only worried about their dioceses' financial problems. There's a deficit in humanity among them," Godoy lamented. Synodality, he argued, would be a way of avoiding such distortions.

Godoy emphasised that the meeting of the *Priests of the Path* was itself an example of how the Church can be more healthfully organised.

"Many participants went back to their dioceses feeling that the meeting strengthened their commitment to the Church," he declared.

"That happened because there we could face our problems in an honest way and fraternally discuss controversial topics like new ministries, for instance," Godoy said.

— By Eduardo Campos Lima, *Crux*

## Church in Turkey to celebrate 2024 as Year of the Eucharist

ANKARA: The Catholic Church in Turkey has announced that 2024 will be the Year of the Eucharist for the local Church, celebrated not with grand festivities but instead with an individual choice driven by faith and charity.

"Through the celebration of the Year of the Eucharist, the Church of Turkey wishes to know, love, serve and proclaim the Lord Jesus more and more and to recognise Him present, like the disciples of Emmaus, in the act of breaking bread," said Archbishop Martin Kmetec of Izmir, president of the Turkish Catholic Bishops' Conference in a pastoral announcing the special "Year of the Eucharist" beginning on December 3, the first Sunday of Advent, and ending on November 24 next year, the Solemnity of Christ the King.

"Together we wish to deepen the faith of the Church community on this Sacrament through catechesis and other means, to participate more and more actively and consciously in liturgical celebrations, and to remember after eating the Bread of Heaven that we are called to share," the archbishop wrote, reminding his "dear brothers and sisters" that the "immense gift of God's love is the Holy Eucharist."

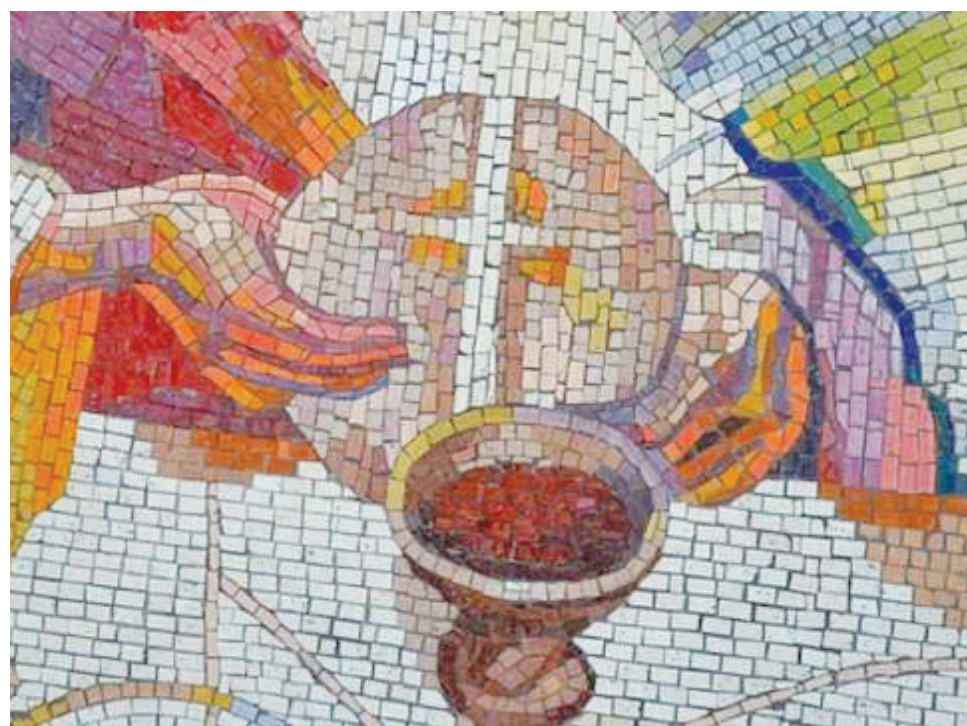
"This great sacrament, instituted by Jesus at the Last Supper as a memorial of His

Passover, is spiritual nourishment for the faithful, a sign of unity and a bond of charity, a promise of future glory. It shows the perpetual fulfilment of the promise of the Saviour who said "I am with you all days till the end of the world."

Archbishop Kmetec said that during the synodal process, it was emphasised that in Christian communities in Turkey, "Mass is still very important... (yet) the urgency of arresting the decline in the spirit of unity that occurs in many realities of our Church emerged".

This is why the Turkish bishops, in confirmation of the statements made at the Synodal Conference in Izmir in October 2022, approved the proposal to "devote a special time so that in all our communities, we may increasingly place the Eucharist at the centre and, starting from it, build new bonds of communion and renew our Christian life and pastoral action", the archbishop wrote.

During this special time, everyone — bishop, presbyter, deacon, religious, consecrated person, lay person, is invited to ask: "How do I want to live in the best manner this term?" "What concrete choices can and do I make so that the Year of the Eucharist that I am given as a gift of living, would leave a true sign of newness and joy on my life?" — *LCI* (<https://international.la-croix.com/>)



**"Through the celebration of the Year of the Eucharist, the Church of Turkey wishes to know, love, serve and proclaim the Lord Jesus more and more and to recognise him present, like the disciples of Emmaus, in the act of breaking bread,"**  
said Archbishop Martin Kmetec of Izmir





# Influence vs Control

## The Heart of Pastoral Ministry

At times, we yearn for everyone to align with our wishes — a feeling I've certainly experienced, hoping my wife, kids, and others would adhere to my expectations. As a father of five, my contentment once relied on others following my lead meticulously.

Yet, as my children transitioned into young adulthood, my parenting approach evolved. What used to be effective became outdated. I've come to recognise that dictating terms no longer suffices. Nor should I shoulder every challenge my kids encounter. Guiding teenagers now demands a different strategy as they mature.

Granting space for my children to make choices and confront the consequences has proven crucial.

Life often imparts its most profound lessons amidst uncertainties and difficult decisions. Embracing failure as a tool for growth has become integral, backed by guidance when needed.

Parenting young adults has taught me a crucial lesson: influence outweighs control. This principle extends beyond the home—it holds true in the leadership of the Catholic Church. Attempting to control others is fruitless; our inability to control renders it counterproductive.

### Control vs Influence

You have probably met a pastor, parish administrator etc. that tried to exercise complete control over a parish. They have to make all the decisions, they don't want to allow

others to take the reins over any part of the parish, and they manage others with a "my way or the highway" mentality.

Has any leader ever truly helped a parish with this style of leadership? If so, the gains were marginal at best. This is for many reasons, but here are some:

In a parish (or diocese) where the person in charge is exerting CONTROL, you get:

#### The leader's ideas

- People who follow based on fear (I don't want to lose the job) or necessity (need the money).
- A team that feels underappreciated and underutilised.
- An organisation limited by the knowledge, skill, and ability of the leader.

- High burnout and low morale.
- Little creativity and slow (if any) growth.
- People who are poorly managed and feel the burden of being supervised.
- A leader who can't see beyond the short-term.
- A culture where failure is unacceptable. Fear is a primary motivator.
- A decision-maker who is self-focused and must get their way. The bottle-neck of decision making causes everything to drag.

In a parish (or diocese) where the person in charge is exerting INFLUENCE, you get:

#### The team's ideas

- People who follow because they believe in the mission. They are

willing to sacrifice to achieve the goals set out.

- A team that feels united and appreciated. They are empowered to use their gifts.
- An organisation limited by the team's combined knowledge, skills, and abilities, which far surpasses any one person.
- High morale and low burnout.
- Creative thinking and growth.
- People who feel supported and encouraged by supervisors.
- Leadership with a long-range vision. Short-term failure for long-term success is acceptable.
- Decisions are based on principles that can be applied by various people in various situations.
- The culture is other-focused. It desires the good of the other. Delegates many decisions to others.

## Pastoral Practise

So, what does influence look like in a healthy parish? Well, it starts with the truth and ends in trust. Truth is the foundation of all good pastoral ministry and leadership. Truth is never to be sacrificed at the altars of unity, listening, influence, pastoral practice, etc. We can't truly have any of these if we leave truth behind. Truth guides us in how we act, live, make decisions, & treat others.

Still, the truth is not a weapon to hammer others with. We have to learn how to wield it in a way which will be accepted by others.

Building on the truth, we need to work on earning the trust of others, listening to their experiences, being patient and kind with them, but when we discern that it is appropriate to do so, we also need to love them enough to tell them what is true, good, and

beautiful, starting with the Good News that Jesus has come to save us from our sins.

This isn't aiming for control, but influence.

Influence says, "consider this" and "this is what changed my life and I think it might help you too". It also believes in the God-given ability of others to do great things.

Control says, "you must do this or else" and "I can't love you until you do this". It doubts the God-given ability of others.

Here lies the Catch-22 situation. To provide good pastoral care, you need to know your people and spend time with them. This means that a pastor by himself (or with a team helping him with pastoral care) can't serve everyone in the parish in the way they need to be served, at least not with the current model most parishes operate with today.

If there is anyone who could command others to do what he wanted, it was Jesus. God made man. He had the authority, right, and power to command others. Yet, more often than merely commanding others to do what He said, He chose to influence them. He wanted them to follow Him freely and out of love. Not mere obedience due to obligation.

We Catholics know obligation, but we should also know that mere obligation no longer suffices. Most Catholics don't care that they are obligated and commanded to attend Sunday Mass every week. Most Catholics don't care about the moral laws that are imposed on them.

We can no longer merely command. We must lead with integrity and influence.

Influence is actual power in practice. It means that a leader has responsive followers who have been influenced and thus accepted leadership. A leader with no influence has no actual power to do anything.

In many ways, this is the state of

## In Practise

the Catholic Church. Many don't accept the influence of our leaders. Leaders must thus win back influence. Power, influence, and leadership can change our Church. The questions of what strategies and tactics are best to use are therefore paramount.

How you treat people matters. Trying to exert control by fear, punishment, guilt, or negative consequences rarely has the desired outcome.

People respond when they have ownership, buy-in, clarity in mission, encouragement, they feel like they are cared for, they matter, their opinions are listened to, etc. This model of pastoral care does not mean that every decision needs to be democratic or that we have to slow down the growth to poll everyone about everything. Rather, it means people are truly cared for by their pastor(s).

Psalms 23 tells us a lot about pas-

toral care. A good shepherd cares for the flock. He nourishes, provides shelter and food, protects, guides, and comforts the flock.

The fact is that most parishes are simply too large for the priest(s) to be able to adequately serve the flock in the manner they need and want. Thus, we need a shift from priest-centric pastoral care to lay-centric pastoral care. We see this in the early Church. The most important duties of the leaders (priests and bishops) became harder to accomplish as the Church grew post-Pentecost. Thus, in Acts 6 we see the establishment of the diaconate to share some of the administrative responsibilities and free the Apostles to preach the Gospel and shepherd the flock. Then the burden was shared by the laity as well. The women who helped fulfil the needs of the community. The poor. The rich. The elderly. The young. Everyone had a role in bringing the Gospel to others, but a role that was dependent on their gifts.

## Lay assisting in pastoral care? Yes!

Some Catholics get worried when the role of the laity goes beyond pray, pay, and obey. It need not worry us though. We also need not blur the lines between the clergy and laity. Only our priests can give us the Sacraments. Only our priests can pastor our parishes. Only our clergy can preach homilies during Mass, etc. There are many things laity can't do. Therefore, to have a lay-centric pastoral care model we need to define what that might look like. Here are a few markers for such a parish:

**1. Focusing on conversion beyond the confines of Mass attendance is crucial.** In our current understanding of "discipleship" and "ministry," there's an emphasis on passive absorption of information. However, our aim should transcend mere reception and lead to transformative change rooted in heart conversion and tangible actions. Knowledge serves a greater purpose — to nurture love, not just accumulate facts. Therefore, our pastoral ministry should centre on fostering

transformed lives, striving to align ourselves closer to the saints God envisions for us. This transformation necessitates opening our hearts to prayer, allowing the Holy Spirit to work through us, and actively sharing the Gospel with those who might never step into our parishes. Building a community of missionary disciples among the laity is essential for this endeavour.

**2. Creating purposeful and intimate friendships is key.** These relationships must possess a clear mission — cultivating and nurturing missionary disciples who, in turn, replicate this process with others. This approach is both learned and observed. Intimacy here means investing time and effort to develop trust within meaningful conversations. Spiritual friendships thrive on this foundation, mirroring the accompaniment we aspire to offer fellow parishioners. Recognising the limitations of our clergy's capacity, it's imperative for the laity to take on this role too.

**3. A vision for growth is vital.** Every Catholic should understand the purpose behind their friendships and articulate how these connections contribute to fostering the next generation of disciples. Each friendship stands as a valuable goal on its own, yet it should also serve as a stepping stone in our mission. Those we mentor should be equipped to empower others to become disciples themselves, fostering a chain of multiplication in our faith community.

I know of many small groups that have been going on for years. The members grow in knowledge of Scripture, Church teachings, etc. but their personal prayer, action, and mission are not changed over the course of those years. This is primarily due to the fact that the group is fulfilling what it was started for — education on different subjects. It isn't started to be a process that transforms members' lives and then equips them to be transformative agents in the lives of others. To change lives, we have to have our own lives changed first.

## Outcome

Some of the outcomes of having intentional lay-centric pastoral care are:

It takes much of the burden off of our pastors. I know that during a spiritual crisis the men that I walk with are more likely to make their first call to me (or another lay friend they are walking with) than to a priest. This can't be said for someone who has no other meaningful spiritual relationships.

It makes pastoral care scalable. We can't just reproduce a ton of new priests to care for all the Catholics in our world. We can care for one another. Thus, this model is scalable, while a priest-centric one is not.

It fills in the gaps where Catholics are weak. Our parishes aren't helping people find meaningful community or relationships. Furthermore, it gives a place where active conversations can happen, rather than just passive reception of infor-

mation. For these two reasons alone, the model can benefit many who are on the cusp of disaffiliation.

Slows the decline and turns it into growth. Without large-scale changes in HOW we operate, we won't make a dent in the decline, at least while you and I still live. But, with this kind of model in place, we can not only slow the decline, but turn it around. We can grow. Only disciples of Jesus can make other disciples of Jesus. This is our mission. This is our calling.

This kind of pastoral care is dependent on our clergy being leaders who influence their flocks in ways that have them take up their rightful place in caring for others. A good shepherd cares for his sheep. Good sheep make more sheep. None of this will be done by controlling others. — **By Marcel LeJeune, Catholic Missionary Disciples**



# Sources of catechesis

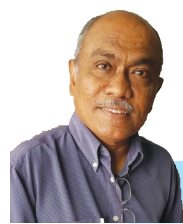
In the previous article, I examined the tasks of catechesis. In this article, I will discuss the sources from which the content for catechesis, whether it is aimed at children, teenagers or adults, is drawn. The *Directory of Catechesis* (DC, 90-109) identifies seven key sources from which catechesis draws its content. These are Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, the Magisterium, the liturgy, the testimony of the saints and martyrs, theology, Christian culture and beauty, all of which can be traced back to the word of God.

## Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition

Among the sources of catechesis, Sacred Scripture has a preeminent place. Sacred Scripture is the Word of God as it is put down in writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, both the Old Testament and New Testament have an essential place in catechesis. However, in the Catholic Church, the Word of God cannot be confined to Sacred Scripture alone. Sacred Tradition has an important place as well since it transmits the totality of the Word of God which has been entrusted to the Apostles by Christ. A key element in the Church's Tradition is the thoughts and writings of the early Fathers of the Church.

## Magisterium

Jesus Christ gave the Apostles the mandate to proclaim the Gospel to the world, and He promised to send the Holy Spirit to help them. The Apostles transmitted the word of God orally (Tradition) and in writing (Scripture). The bishops, successors of the Apostles, continued this task. They also safeguard and interpret the Gospel in its totality, as well as teach the message of salvation. All the bishops, in communion with the Pope, as successor to Peter, have the main responsibility, as the Church's Magisterium, of preserving, interpreting



## ECHOING THE FAITH

Dr Steven Selvaraju

and transmitting the Gospel to the People of God. Therefore, the teachings of Church Councils and papal documents are important sources of catechesis.

## The liturgy

The liturgy is another essential source. Firstly, because the Word of God is constantly proclaimed, heard, interiorised and explained in the celebration of the liturgy. As such, catechesis draws "its contents, vocabulary, actions and words from the liturgy" (DC, 95). Secondly, the liturgy is "the privileged place for catechising the People of God" (CCC, 1074). Catechesis reaches its true fulfilment when the one being catechised takes part meaningfully in the liturgical life of the Church. Catechesis is not to be viewed as merely preparing someone for the sacraments or how to celebrate the Mass. Instead, it is meant to help him or her enter fully and consciously into the liturgical experience.

## The testimony of the saints and martyrs

Examples from the lives of Mary, the saints and martyrs are also important sources of catechesis. Throughout the centuries, personalities and stories from the Bible and the life of the saints and martyrs have served as meaningful sources for catechesis. Martyrs are especially seen as "illustrators of the faith" because, through their suffering and death, they help us realise the meaning of remaining true to the faith even at the cost of one's life. In modern times, known as the century of martyrdom, many men

and women serve as witnesses of the faith through their martyrdom. Their stories and testimonies must be safeguarded and transmitted in catechesis. The lives of saints and martyrs of every culture and people, including those from Asian and other non-Western cultures, must also be used as sources of catechesis.

## Theology

Theology is an indispensable part of the Church. It helps a person seek an understanding of the faith. However, theology should not be done for its own sake. It has to be at the service of the Church. According to St John Paul II, "theological work in the Church is, first and for all, at the service of the proclamation of the faith and catechesis" (*Fides et Ratio*, n. 99). However, theology, as a source of catechesis, has its unique role. It makes its contribution more in general instead of highlighting any specific form of theology or the work of a particular theologian. Aspects of fundamental theology, dogmatic theology, moral theology, spiritual theology, ecclesiology, pastoral theology, etc., are to be taken into consideration in selecting the content for catechesis.

## Christian culture

Over the centuries, diverse cultures have been influenced by the Word of God. By slowly permeating different cultures, Christianity "has adopted, purified and transformed them from within, contributing to the creation of a new and original culture, that is, Christian culture". At the same time, Christian culture has played a decisive role in the preservation of cultures that came before it, as well as, in the advancement of international culture. This can be seen in the emergence of literary and scholarly texts, architectural masterpieces, musical compositions, paintings and other forms of art, etc., which serve as a heritage for all humanity.

## Beauty

In recent years, Pope Francis has been highlighting the importance of beauty as a source of catechesis. The Pope states that it is necessary "that every form of catechesis... attend to the 'way of beauty' or via pulchritudinis" (DC, 108). This includes the beauty found in creation, in liturgical and artistic settings, contemporary art and music and others. I will discuss beauty as a source of catechesis in greater detail in the next article.

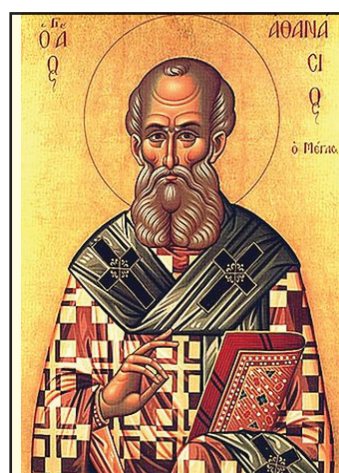
## Implications for catechesis

It is the responsibility of the Church, as guided by the Holy Spirit, to understand, interpret and transmit truthfully and entirely the Word of God. The seven sources of catechesis are important aspects in the Church's duty to transmit the Word of God. Each of the sources is important and inter-related to the others. Generally, most catechisms would incorporate elements from all these sources. In presenting the lessons, catechists may give preference, depending on the participants and contexts, to one or more of the sources. However, they should not over-emphasise certain aspects, such as the biblical, liturgical or theological elements, all the time at the expense of the others. In general, catechesis must be done with balance and without practising a one-dimensional approach.

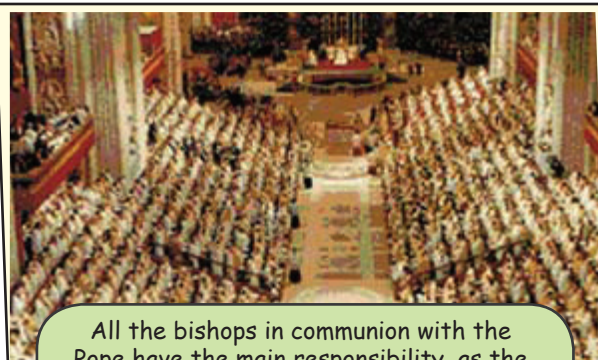
*The key ideas of the article are presented in a simple illustrated format as below. The images used are taken from the common domain.*

● Dr Steven Selvaraju, STD, STL, holds a Doctorate in Theology with Specialisation in Catechetics and Youth Ministry from Pontifical Salesian University, Rome. He serves as Director of the Archdiocesan Catechetical Centre, Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur.

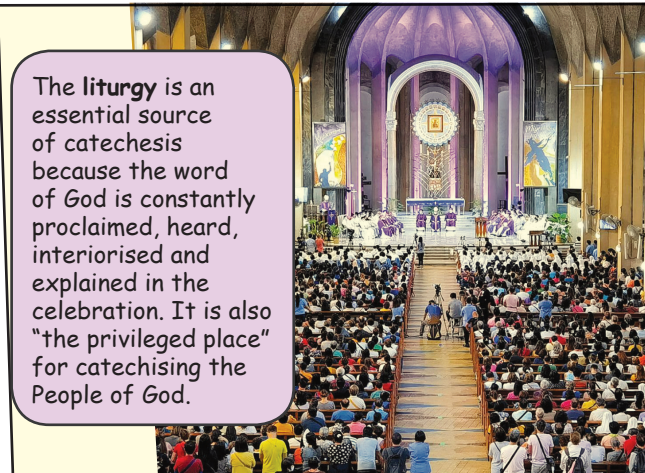
## SOURCES OF CATECHESIS



**Sacred Scripture** has a preeminent place in catechesis. **Sacred Tradition** has an important place too since it transmits the totality of the word of God. A key element in the Church's Tradition is the thought and writings of the early Fathers of the Church.



All the bishops in communion with the Pope have the main responsibility, as the **Church's Magisterium**, of preserving, interpreting and transmitting the gospel. Church Councils and papal documents are important sources of catechesis.

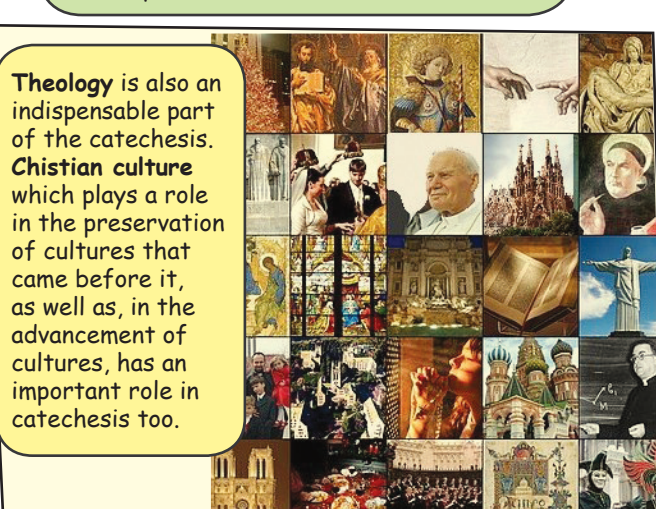


The **liturgy** is an essential source of catechesis because the word of God is constantly proclaimed, heard, interiorised and explained in the celebration. It is also "the privileged place" for catechising the People of God.

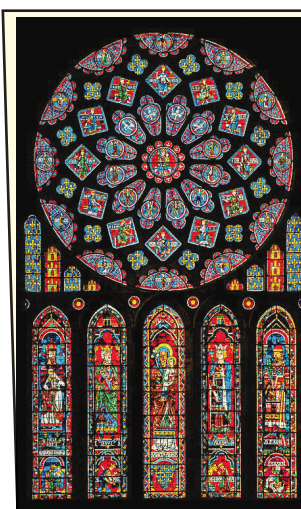


Painting of Vietnamese martyrs.

Examples from the lives of **Mary, the saints and martyrs** are important sources of catechesis. This includes the lives of saints and martyrs of every culture and people, including those from Asian and other non-Western cultures.



**Theology** is also an indispensable part of the catechesis. **Christian culture** which plays a role in the preservation of cultures that came before it, as well as, in the advancement of cultures, has an important role in catechesis too.



Every form of catechesis must keep in mind the '**way of beauty**' or via pulchritudinis". This includes the beauty found in creation, in liturgical and artistic settings, contemporary art and music and others.



# Look after my sheep

By Fr Aaron Alammalay

Thirty years ago, a nine-year-old boy received Jesus for the first time through the Sacrament of Holy Communion, and although he seemed like a nobody in Sunday school or in the life of the church, the Lord kept bringing him back for the Eucharist through the actions of a very dedicated priest, the late Fr Andrew Volle, MEP.

I was that little boy and the meeting with Jesus at Mass was the starting point of a bigger journey; the diocesan priesthood. It somehow was, for me, about the Mass, Fr Volle and the catechists, that I had the unconscious inclination towards the priesthood. Throughout my childhood years, just the Sunday Mass was what I aimed for even if there was no catechism on that Sunday.

Gradually, as I grew older, I still kept this intention towards the priesthood and sometimes as a little innocent child I would just simply tell my parents and grandma about this. However, it was with a doubtful feeling, because of the challenges my parents and grandma would poke fun at me, which had to do with my character and my immaturity. Even with all the doubts, I still kept it in my heart as the consciousness became a little clearer along the way.

I was, as I said, a nobody in church since my childhood days at the Church of the Assumption in Petaling Jaya. My parents were not that religious, but would insist that I go for catechism and sometimes, the catechists would bring up the issue about spending one extra hour a week for the education of the faith. Although I received all my sacraments there, I was not an active man in the parish, and shortly after receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation, I just stopped meeting with Jesus.

However, it was not a complete stop, because, God, in His own way, had the skill to fish me back to Him. Although my parents were willing to take me to church on a Sunday because my younger brother still had catechism, sometimes they would make a big fuss about me skipping church, as for me, I never had the intention to just fulfil an obligation. I did give excuse after excuse but in all of these, God still had His skill in fishing me back.

After Form 5 and in college, I was a sort of an independent man and would travel on my own. For example, I would take the bus from Puchong to KL, or use KTM

Kommuter to meet up at a classmate's house or just to go to town. This was where God cast His net to gradually fish me back. Sometimes I would pass by the Church of Our Lady of Fatima in Brickfields and it reminded me of going for Mass there with my maternal grandma when she was living just nearby.

It so happened that some of my course mates in college were from the Church of Our Lady of Fatima and somehow, I felt they were part of God's fishing team. Those tugs at the heart eventually brought me back to Mass at least once a month.

Eventually, after graduating from college, starting work, and owning a car, I did return for Sunday Mass, as that was what I promised God I would do if I had a car.

It was only in 2006 that I plucked up the courage to be part of a newly built parish but a longer standing BEC of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Puchong. It was one of those favourite ministries I always wanted to be a part of: Catechism. I started off with forming Form 1, and a little involvement in the preparation for their sacraments. It was also here I began my term as a parish office administrator which shaped much of my life in the church. It was also here

that I became more involved in my parish through the PIHD, Liturgy and BEC. These were all for me God's fishing net.

During my two years in parish work and life, I had my meeting with Jesus again and this time, through the power of silence. We had holy hour once a week and that was, I believe it was the last time God needed to cast His net, as it was also a discernment period for me whether to consider religious life. This was the period where I casually applied to the Carmelite Friars who were then only in Singapore and was eventually accepted in 2010 and it was there that I had my Philosophy formation at the former St Francis Xavier Major Seminary in Singapore. During my novitiate, I was experiencing uneasiness about continuing my first vows, but I did not bring up the issue with anyone, as I told myself to continue trying with the support of my Spiritual Director then. During this period, I had the inclination to return to the heart of my original vocation, to the diocesan priesthood,

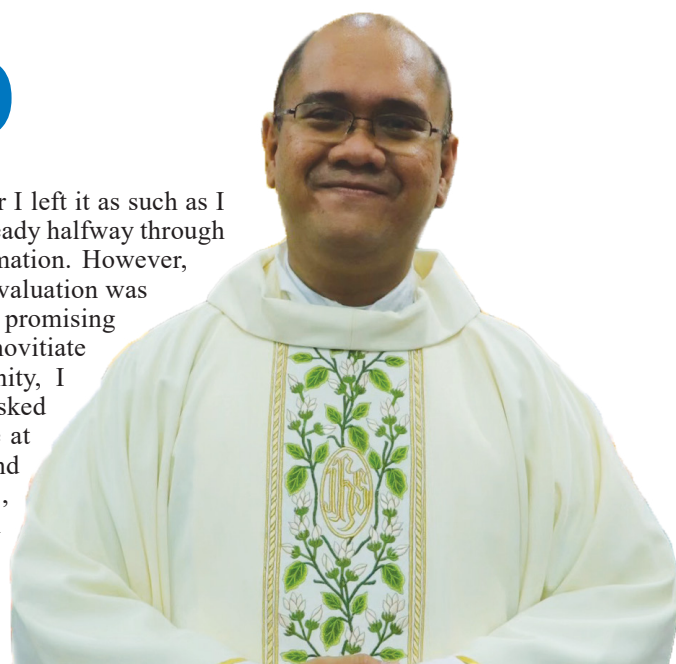
however I left it as such as I was already halfway through my formation. However, as my evaluation was not that promising to the novitiate community, I was asked to leave at the end of 2013, which I left with much peace.

As I continued my discernment towards the diocesan priesthood for almost a year, I was already back in the secular world, working and accompanied by Fr Vincent Thomas who checked in on me and eventually recommended me to write in to Fr Eddie Rayappan who was then involved with vocations in the Diocese of Malacca Johore. After meeting up with Fr Eddie in Malacca, it so happened that Rt Rev Paul Tan, SJ, then bishop of the diocese, was in the same district at that time for a vicariate meeting. To my surprise, I was introduced to him, and he followed up with me from there. Long story short, he took my case, did my evaluation and my journey to the diocesan priesthood continued from there.

Of course, the application to the local seminary to complete my theological studies was not promising either due to some lack of exposure in the evaluations. However, this did not stop the bishop emeritus from finding me other options. It was either to the Philippines to be formed by the Jesuits or to St Bede's College in Rome for later vocations. I took the Philippine option and to my surprise, I had both the theological formation at the school and seminary formation as the rector and faculty agreed to admit me into the seminary formation although I had to restart my Theology from my first year again, having Jesuit formators but forming seminarians all over the Philippines for the diocesan priesthood.

Despite all the struggles, issues, evaluations and formations I had, I never regretted remaining with Jesus, even during my almost two-year working break after I graduated in 2020. Although my formation lasted 13 years, it only reminded me of the hidden life of Jesus. It was through prayer and self-emptying that I experienced the meaning of the priesthood and that self-emptying is not about being filled with graces, blessings, good things etc. but to discover the self-emptying of God and to allow myself to be attracted to that emptiness in which I find meaning for the priesthood.

There is no right or wrong in formation, only the willingness to learn, give, take the risk and love. Through prayer we discern, we contemplate, we put ourselves into the shoes of Christ and walk together as Church towards our end with God. Look after my Sheep.



## Newly ordained missionary on mission to the peripheries

Fr Elvost Lunchi, appointed to Pakistan after finishing his studies in Nairobi, was ordained on July 22 this year in his hometown in Malaysia. As Fr Elvost takes up his first appointment as Mill Hill Missionary, he will continue to serve the last, the least and the lost in missionary discipleship.

As Mill Hill Missionaries, we go where we are most need: to serve the people, build local communities, learn new experiences and respond to unfamiliar situations.

Fr Elvost was born in Malaysia, and upon joining the Society, he did his Philosophical studies at the University of San Agustin in Iloilo, Philippines, followed by his studies for the priesthood at the

Tangaza University College, Nairobi, Kenya.

Fr Elvost's appointment will allow him to share his great gifts with the Kachi Kholi community in the Diocese of Hyderabad. Today, November 18, the people of the parish welcome Fr Elvost as he starts the good work for the glory of God. His dedication and kind-hearted spirit, together with the people, will for sure bear great things.

Let us join Fr Elvost in prayer and best wishes as he undertakes this new ministry throughout the years to come. — **By Edson Paguntalan MHM** [millhillmissionaries.com](http://millhillmissionaries.com)



The Kachi Kholi community welcoming Fr Elvost Lunchi MHM.



# Reflecting on the true meaning of Christmas



FROM THE  
OTHER SIDE

Regina William

*She will give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins – Matthew 1:21*

We are now in the season of Advent, a significant liturgical season in the Catholic Church that marks the beginning of the liturgical year leading up to Christmas. The celebration of Advent is a time of spiritual preparation and anticipation for the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ at Christmas.

I remember those years growing up, it was years before my parents could actually afford a Christmas tree and our decorations would usually be those we made ourselves. It was the time of the year we really looked forward to.

It was during Christmas that my Mom would stitch us new clothes and we would usually have close family and relatives coming over to spend the festivities with us or we would travel to spend Christmas with them.

It was never about the presents as we never had any to begin with until later years. I remember the Christmas decorations would only go up after the first Sunday of Advent, never before.

The religious significance of Christmas was always emphasised and drilled into our heads by my parents. It was always about giving, and not receiving.

These days, even as early as October, the Christmas hype is already underway. The commercialisation of Christmas over the years has led to increasing emphasis on the material and consumer aspects of the season, often overshadowing its religious and spiritual significance.

Now the emphasis is on gift-giving, decorations, and festive events, sometimes



at the expense of the religious aspects of the celebrations. The true meaning of Christmas, the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ, has been overshadowed by materialism and consumerism.

The pressure to conform to the “trends” has created societal expectations and pressures which has not only contributed to stress and financial strain for individuals and families but also distracted everyone from the spiritual aspects of the season.

Having raised three daughters and now my three young grandchildren, I am cognisant of the commercialisation of Christmas which has a significant influence on children, impacting their understanding of the true religious significance.

Ask any child now and often, their perspective of Christmas is materialistic, associating the celebrations with receiving presents rather than understanding the religious meaning of Christmas.

Children are often influenced by their peers and feel the pressure to conform to

societal norms, especially during Christmas, as the focus is heavily on material gifts and commercial celebrations.

Often children are compelled to participate in a way that aligns with the cultural expectations.

The pervasive marketing of extravagant gifts also creates unrealistic expectations for children and when reality does not align with these expectations, it leads to disappointment.

As a parent and grandmother, I’ve been guilty of succumbing to these pressures too, but often, I try to counter this by teaching them to be grateful, humble, compassionate, being generous and the true spirit of giving during Christmas, not only just receiving.

It is also important to actively engage children through age-appropriate activities, storytelling, and religious education to ensure they understand the significance of Christmas beyond the commercialised elements.

At the parish level, churches can also enhance the educational initiatives to teach children about the religious significance of

Christmas which can be included in Sunday school programmes, holiday-themed events, and family activities that focus on the biblical narrative of the Nativity and the teachings of Jesus.

To counteract the materialistic focus, we can encourage children to participate in acts of kindness and charity. This might include volunteering, collecting donations for those in need, or engaging in other activities but these should not only be during Christmas but throughout the year. Acts of kindness and generosity aligned with the teachings of the Church can bring a deeper sense of fulfilment.

All of us can play a role in providing a counter-narrative that emphasises the spiritual and moral aspects of Christmas. By fostering a deeper understanding of the religious significance of the holiday and promoting values that align with the teachings of the Church, we can help children develop a more meaningful and balanced perspective on Christmas.

Advent is a sacred and meaningful season for Catholics, providing a time of spiritual reflection, preparation, and joyful anticipation for the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. It serves as a reminder of the fulfilment of God’s promises and the hope that Christ brings to the world.

For me, as always, Christmas is a time with family and friends, fostering spiritual connections with loved ones by spending quality time together, expressing gratitude for the relationships in my life.

● **Regina William** is an ex journalist turned head of communications, now full-time grandmother to three children aged between 4.5 and one, crisscrossing the globe to play the role. She can be reached at [regina.william1223@gmail.com](mailto:regina.william1223@gmail.com)

## SOCIAL JUSTICE



Making a  
Difference

Tony Magliano

Think of a new-born baby. In your mind’s eye marvel at the beauty, the complexity, the mystery of this tiny human being. And consider that this baby didn’t just magically somehow appear at birth, but, rather, was exquisitely knitted together in the mother’s womb through a myriad of mathematically incalculable, step by step, perfectly ordered cellular processes, resulting in the formation of organs, blood, bones, muscles all interacting with each other to form the most wonderful reality in all of God’s marvellous creation – a human life!

Be inspired by the marvellous nine-minute TED Talk *Conception to Birth* <https://bit.ly/47i2GiX>. And please disseminate it widely as part of a much needed massive, comprehensive, ongoing strategy to educate as many children and adults as possible about the beauty, the truly awesome wonder of the conception and miraculous development of each human life inside the womb of every mother!

Social media, podcasts, TV and radio ads, billboards, homilies, church bulletins,

university seminars, peaceful demonstrations with photos, school curriculums (*see: <https://studentsforlife.org/fetaldevelopment/>*), are some of the routes we need to take to educate society regarding the wondrous scientific facts associated with human development in utero.

It has been said that all social engineering is preceded by verbal engineering. When enough people allow themselves to accept words presented to them in a false context, lies replace truth!

A powerful example here is that those who promote abortion often claim that the legal option to have abortions is a matter of protecting “reproductive rights.” On the contrary, abortion is not about whether to reproduce or not, it’s about brutally destroying what has already been produced – a human baby. Any issues regarding “reproductive rights” come before the child is conceived.

Therefore, as people of faith in the Lord Jesus, who if the truth, an essential part of our calling as missionary disciples is to promote the truth!

As essential as it is for us to mount well-organised, comprehensive educational strategies, it is also vitally important to

commit ourselves to being legislatively active.

Well-coordinated, comprehensive pro-life legislative efforts are especially needed as pro-abortion groups — particularly in the US — are aggressively mounting a strategy to enshrine into state constitutions the guarantee that abortion on demand will be the law of each state.

The recently passed referendum in the US state of Ohio, in which a clear majority of Ohioans voted for, will likely ban the most effective pro-life laws in Ohio and prevent the possibility of passing future laws designed to protect unborn human life. This is an extremely serious setback for pro-life advocates.

This should be a wake-up call for us to redouble our efforts — not only in the US where over 800,000 abortions occur annually, but globally. A large majority of countries allow abortion for numerous reasons resulting in 73 million abortions taking place every year worldwide.

Not only are pro-abortion advocates at war with unwanted unborn babies, but war itself is at war with the unborn.

According to *The Guardian*, it is estimated that 50,000 pregnant women in Gaza are

facing uncertainty about how they will give birth due to Israel’s destruction of 14 hospitals and 46 clinics and its blockade of essential supplies.

One bombed out woman, Noor Hammad, 24, said “I have no idea where I will give birth to my daughter and how I will receive her without shelter or clothes.”

Dr Zaher Sahloul, president of MedGlobal said, “As hospitals turn off the last of their equipment due to lack of fuel, neonatal wards are falling dark, and new-borns and mothers are suffering” (*see: <https://bit.ly/3MJ6h1k>*).

Just as advocates for the unborn need to better realise that war is an enemy to the unborn, anti-war advocates need to better understand that abortion is war upon the unborn. So, let us pray for peace on earth, and in the womb.

And may we remember that God is the God of life! And in His awesomeness continues to wondrously create unborn life – and all life. And our God-given mission is to non-violently protect and cherish it all.

● **Tony Magliano** is an internationally syndicated Catholic social justice and peace columnist. He can be reached at [tmag6@comcast.net](mailto:tmag6@comcast.net).

## Making abortion unthinkable





Fr Ron Rolheiser

# The pew and the academy

I live on both sides of a border. Not a geographical one, but one that separates the church pew from the academic halls of theology.

I was raised a conservative Roman Catholic. Although my dad worked politically for the Liberal party, most everything within my upbringing was conservative, particularly as this pertains to religion. I was a staunch Roman Catholic in most every way. I grew up under the papacy of Pius XII (and the fact that my youngest brother is named Pius will tell you how loyal our family was to that pope's version of things). We believed that Roman Catholicism was the one true religion and that Protestants and Evangelicals needed to convert and return to the true faith. I memorised the Roman Catholic catechism and defended its every word. Moreover, beyond being faithful churchgoers, my family was given over to piety and devotions: we prayed the Rosary together as a family every day; had statues and holy pictures around our house; wore blessed medals around our necks; prayed litanies to Mary, Joseph, and the Sacred Heart during certain months; and practised a warm devotion to the saints. And it was wonderful. I will forever be grateful for that religious foundation.

I went from my family home to the seminary at the tender age of seventeen and my early seminary years reinforced what

my family had given me. The academics were good and we were encouraged to read great thinkers in every discipline. But this higher learning was still set solidly within a Roman Catholic ethos that honoured my religious and devotional background. My initial university studies were still friends with my piety. My mind was expanding, but my piety remained intact.

But home is where we start from. Gradually, through the years, my world has changed. Studying at various graduate schools, teaching on graduate faculties, being in daily contact with other expressions of the faith, reading contemporary novelists and thinkers, and having academic colleagues as cherished friends has, I confess, put some strain on the piety of my youth. Truth be told, we don't often pray the Rosary or litanies to Mary or the Sacred Heart in graduate classrooms or at faculty gatherings.

However, academic classrooms and faculty gatherings bring something else, something vitally needed in church pews and in circles of piety, namely, a critical theological vision and principles to keep unbridled piety, naïve fundamentalism, and misguided religious fervour within proper boundaries. What I've learned in academic circles is also wonderful and I am forever grateful for the privilege of being in academic circles most of my adult life.

But, of course, that's a formula for tension, albeit a healthy one. Let me use someone else's voice to articulate this. In his book *Silence and Beauty*, Japanese American artist, Makoto Fujimura, shares this incident from his own life. Coming out of church one Sunday, he was asked by his pastor to add his name to a list of people who had agreed to boycott the film, *The Last Temptation of Christ*. He liked his pastor and wanted to please him by signing the petition, but felt hesitant to sign for reasons that, at that time, he couldn't articulate. But his wife could. Before he could sign, she stepped in and said: "Artists may have other roles to play than to boycott this film." He understood what she meant. He didn't sign the petition.

But his decision left him pondering the tension between boycotting such a movie and his role as an artist. Here's how he puts it: "An artist is often pulled in two directions. Religiously conservative people tend to see culture as suspect at best, and when cultural statements are made to transgress the normative reality they hold dear, their default reaction is to oppose and boycott. People in the more liberal artistic community see these transgressive steps as necessary for their 'freedom of expression'. An artist like me, who values both religion and art, will be exiled from both. I try to hold together both of these commitments, but it is a struggle."

That's also my struggle. The piety of my youth, of my parents, and of that rich branch of Catholicism, is real and life-giving; but so too is the critical (sometimes unsettling) iconoclastic theology of the academy. The two desperately need each other; yet someone who is trying to be loyal to both can, like Fujimura, end up feeling exiled from both. Theologians also have other roles to play than boycotting movies.

The people whom I take as mentors in this area are men and women who, in my eyes, can do both: like Dorothy Day, who could be equally comfortable, leading the Rosary or the peace march; like Jim Wallis, who can advocate just as passionately for radical social engagement as he can for personal intimacy with Jesus; and like Thomas Aquinas, whose intellect could intimidate intellectuals, even as he could pray with the piety of a child.

Circles of piety and the academy of theology are not enemies. They need to befriend each other.

● **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)



## As I was contemplating

Fr Gerard Steve Theraviam

Advent is a time of waiting. As a child, it was all about awaiting Christmas Day itself. That was the ultimate goal! Of course, there were prior preparations to be made — the putting up of the tree and decorations, sending out Christmas cards (an almost forgotten practice today!), caroling, buying of gifts on a tiny schoolboy's budget..... and all that was great fun! Of course, my mother ensured that we go to Confession as well, something I hadn't learnt to fully appreciate yet. Advent then meant little to me.

The whole focus was on Christmas Day itself. Having been to midnight Mass, we had supper together and we were then allowed to open just one gift each and the rest would have to await the departure of the very last guest the next day. And sometimes, there was great disquiet and impatience awaiting some friend of my father to finish yet another drink, praying that that was his final one. Those were the days when we had guests over all day long — a true open house where guests never needed an invitation. At the end of the day, we'd have carols playing while we opened gifts again, one per hour, to ensure that we appreciated each and every one — my father was a great one for teaching patience! Try as I did, I struggled to stay up late to make the day last for as long as possible but I never quite made it to midnight as we were all too tired.

The next day, however, I would awake with a deflated feeling. All the anticipation had evaporated into thin air. It was as if grief and depression had set in. After all that hype and expectation, Christmas was over all too

quickly! Having to await another 365 days seemed so terrible — but there was nothing one could do about it.

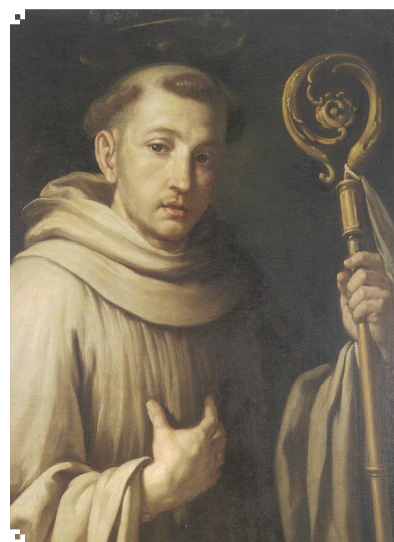
Having grown up, I have subsequently learnt to see Christmas as a season, rather than a single day. The carol about the *Twelve Days of Christmas* makes more sense now. However, with Epiphany being a moveable feast relegated to the nearest Sunday in our region, we will have an extra day to celebrate since January 6 happens to be a Saturday! Thus, we will get to enjoy the thirteenth day of Christmas!

Christmas is not just recalling the history of a baby born for us but rather, appreciating the Incarnation: God taking on human flesh. It is the mystery of God choosing to be one with us. God enters into human history as a participant rather than as an onlooker or bystander. Even more awesome is that God enters into my own personal history as well!

However, as a priest, it can be hard to really get into the depth of the celebration due to the busy-ness of the season, with daily penitential services all Advent weekdays plus home visits to the sick and the elderly who are housebound. Add to that all the normal workload and special preparations, it is no wonder that when all the liturgical services are over on Christmas Day, I am ready to crash into bed. With my parish feast two days after, there is hardly any time to recover — thus, Christmas may be delayed in terms of my own heart as I put all my energies into making it meaningful and joyful for others, and neglecting my own spiritual needs. Thus, one simply must make an effort to celebrate Advent well, in order that Christmas becomes more meaningful.

However, the Incarnation can truly be experienced daily, not just at Christmas. I remember a priest who used 'Merry

## Awaiting the Christ in Advent



"In the first coming He was seen on earth, dwelling among men; He Himself testifies that they saw Him and hated Him. In the final coming all flesh will see the salvation of our God, and they will look on Him whom they pierced. The intermediate coming is a hidden one; in it only the elect see the Lord within their own selves, and they are saved. In His first coming our Lord came in our flesh and in our weakness; in this middle coming He comes in spirit and in power; in the final coming He will be seen in glory and majesty."— St Bernard of Clairvaux

Christmas' as a greeting throughout the year and I was initially taken aback by this. I gradually came to realise that he was trying to create an awareness of Jesus being born in our hearts and being with us 365 days of the year.

St Bernard of Clairvaux talks of the *Three Comings of the Lord*. At His first coming, He chose to become a human being, dwelling among us, taking on our humanity, being like us in all things except sin. This was the first Christmas.

We know too that He will come again at the end of time in glory and majesty, 'to judge the living and the dead.'

Yet the intermediate coming is a hidden one. God shows Himself to those He has chosen and we are saved. We experience Him in the ordinary events of our daily lives. We have His assurance of this in Scripture: If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him [Jn. 14:23]. Perhaps we are not

always aware of His presence. Yet there are *kairos* moments when He bursts into our existence in a special visible manner and we are touched deeply. Mostly though, His is a quiet presence that needs us to be quiet to fully discern, appreciate and welcome! No drama, no fanfare, just a subtle quiet presence that brings comfort and quiet joy. Surely this experience of the Incarnation will help us to truly experience Christmas all year long.

*Maranatha!* Come Lord Jesus!

May we know You as EMMANUEL [God-is -with-us!] and bask in Your presence, power, protection, provision and peace!

A blessed Advent everyone!

● **Fr Gerard Theraviam** is the Parish Priest of the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist in Kuala Lumpur, as well as the Spiritual Director to the World Community for Christian Meditation, Malaysia.



# Little Catholics' Corner

Dear children,

Advent is here!

It's time to begin preparing for the coming of Jesus at Christmas. Jesus came the first time long ago in Bethlehem.

Now He comes to us in Holy Communion every time we go to Mass.

This Sunday, we celebrate the first

week of Advent.

Advent is the time to get ready for Christmas. We get our houses ready by cleaning and decorating. We get our souls ready by learning and thinking about Jesus.

Here are some things that will help you get ready for Christmas:

✧ Light a candle on an advent wreath when you say your prayers every day.

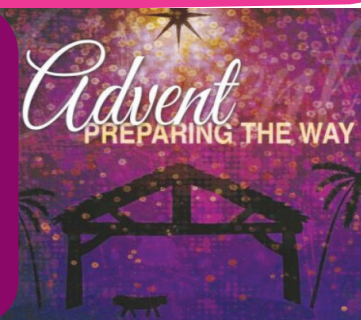
✧ Read a book about Advent or Christmas

✧ Do nice things for people

✧ Save some money to buy food for poor children

Children, remember that anything you do for someone else you do for Jesus!

Aunty Eliz



Be on \_\_\_\_\_!

Be alert!

You do not know when that \_\_\_\_\_ will come.

It's like a man going \_\_\_\_\_:

He leaves his \_\_\_\_\_

and puts his \_\_\_\_\_ in charge, each with their assigned \_\_\_\_\_, and tells the one at the \_\_\_\_\_ to keep \_\_\_\_\_.

(Mark 13: 33-34)

time

door

watch

servants

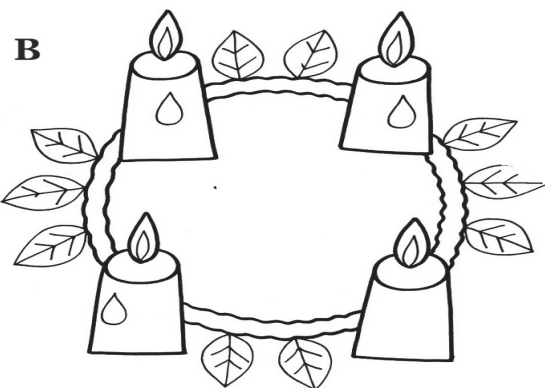
time

away

task

house

Spot the FIVE differences in the picture



Make a beautiful Advent wreath.

Colour three candles purple, one candle pink, the leaves green and the bow a bright red to complete the scene.

Add a little yellow glitter to the flames to make your candles shine.



## Advent Word Search

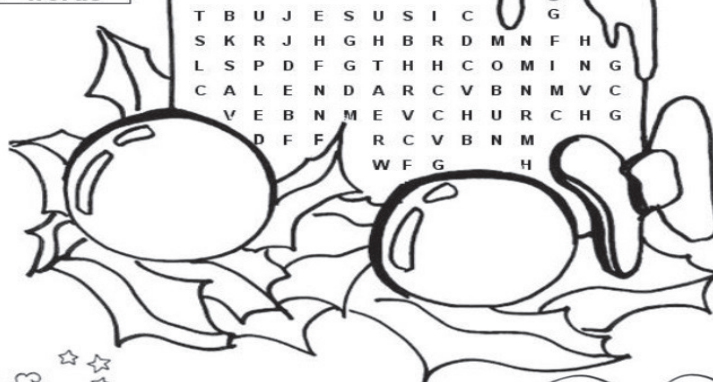
Prophecy Candle



Bethlehem Candle



Find the hidden words



Christmas  
Jesus  
Lights  
Calendar  
Coming  
Church  
Purple  
Wreath



Shepherds Candle



Angels Candle





# YOUTH

DECEMBER 3, 2023

## SIXTH SABAH YOUTH DAY LAUNCHED

**P**APAR: Young Catholics in Sabah continue to walk together in the spirit of synodality and helping the Church in her mission of living and proclaiming the Gospel in our lives and communities. Always bring Jesus, who lives in us, to preach to others, urged Archbishop John Wong during his speech.

More than 200 youth from the three arch/dioceses in Sabah gathered at the Church of St Joseph for the launch of the sixth Sabah Youth Day (SYD-6), November 3-4.

Archbishop John Wong celebrated the opening Mass as he welcomed all the delegates from the Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu, Keningau and Sandakan.

In his homily, the archbishop touched on

the theme of SYD-6 taken from Luke 1:39: Mary arose and went with haste.

"As baptised Catholics, we are called to reflect Christ and be sent. We too are to be the hands and feet of Christ in the world today, to bring the Good News to others," said Archbishop John to the young people.

The prelate reminded them to always emulate Mother Mary in being faithful to their call and to stand firm as witnesses of Christ in this generation.

SYD-6 will take place at St Francis Xavier Cathedral, Keningau in 2024. Although no exact date has been decided, the main organising team hope it will be held in August/September 2024, targeting participants aged between 15 to 45 years to join this big five-day event.

SYD 6 was launched with the cutting of the SYD ribbon by Archbishop John and video screening of the SYD 6 logo and theme song.



Archbishop John Wong officially launching the sixth Sabah Youth Day.



## Catholic Varsity Students Welcoming Gathering 2023

SHAH ALAM: Since it was established 18 years ago, it has become a tradition for the Catholic Varsity Students' (CVS) ministry to welcome the new batch of university students from various campuses through the CVS Welcoming Gathering programme.

The CVS Welcoming Gathering 2023 with the theme *Mary arose and went with haste* (Luke 1:39), was held at the St Faustina Hall at the Church of the Divine Mercy (CDM) on October 22 after Mass.

The programme began with the registration of 200 new and old university students, most of whom are from UiTM Shah Alam, Puncak Alam, and Puncak Perdana campuses.

They were given a warm welcome by Fr Michel Dass, who was accompanied by the Parish Pastoral Minister for CVS, Joseph Asim, and Dr Lovelyna Benedict Jipiu, UiTM Senior Lecturer. This was followed by praise and worship by the CVS EXCO team.

The main objective of this gathering was



to introduce the students to CBS which is under the purview of CDM. Thus they may

engage spiritual support from this ministry and also from the community.

The parish plays an important role to care for the needs of these students especially in giving social support, helping in their growth in faith and checking on the welfare of these young Catholics who are away from their families and facing a new environment. This gathering gave them the opportunity to know one another more.

Carnixon Jiksing, a UiTM Puncak Alam first semester student, felt touched to see the committee members coming together to organise this Welcoming Gathering, it has inspired me to serve God with all my heart in any form of service."

"Personally, the praise and worship session brought me to tears, because I have been facing a lot of difficulties throughout my studies here," said Suncaroline Hairry, a UiTM Puncak Perdana second semester student.

CDM provides support for the students from meals to transportation. Fr Michel gave them the final blessing at the closing of the programme. — *By Edna Pristy Fenning*



# Meeting the Carmelite Nuns of Kuching

KUCHING: Thirty students from St Teresa's Secondary School and 19 single young ladies were invited to meet with the nuns at the Carmelite Monastery recently. They met them at the visitors' parlour from 3.30pm – 5.00pm, followed by Vespers from 5.00pm – 5.30 pm at the Carmelite chapel.

The girls were enlightened about the life of St Teresa of Avila, the patron saint of the school and the foundress of the Carmelite Sisters. Throughout the meet session, the nuns shared on the origin of the Carmelites, Carmel's purpose, prayer, community life, work and their daily routine. They also shared how they were called to be Carmelite Sisters, which was very inspiring to the students. Their experience as Carmelite Sisters has inspired the students to believe more in

God's plans when making a decision.

Archbishop Simon Poh also came for a short visit, giving encouraging and inspiring words and blessings to everyone present.

The meet ended with 30-minute Vesper prayers where the students joined the nuns in praying and singing at the Carmelite chapel. The students were touched by the sisters' kindness and friendliness as they welcomed them with open arms and hearts.

On behalf of St Teresa's Secondary school, I would like to thank the Carmelite Sisters for this opportunity to meet them and we will pray for their well-being as much as they pray for us. God bless them always! Amen! — **By Adrianna Chan, Today's Catholic**



SMK St Teresa's young ladies pay a visit to the Carmelite Monastery, October 15, 2023.

## Students share their experiences meeting the Carmelite Nuns

"The visit was really eye-opening. In a short period of time, I learnt a lot about St Teresa of Jesus, the patron saint of my own school.

"I'm also very impressed with the nuns. They were very humble and they live a simple life, fully devoting themselves to God. They explained the importance of vocation and God's calling, which was really beneficial, especially to those who want to become nuns in the future. The brochure given was really detailed as well. I got to know the daily routine of the nuns at the monastery, which was something I've been wondering about for quite some time.

"The nuns were very welcoming and friendly in answering all our questions. They've shown that our faith will be the thing leading to what we become in the future. Maybe one day, there will be an inspiration of calling for me too. Overall, it was an unforgettable experience and I had a lot of fun." — **Anastasia Chamie**

"I was excited learning about the sisters and St Teresa. I was very interested in learning about St Teresa because my Baptism name is Teresa and so is my Confirmation name. I also found out that the date when St Teresa became a Doctor of the Church is the same date as my birthday. It was really fascinating!

"The sisters were so wholesome. Their experience as nuns made me believe more in God's plans and be less doubtful when I make a decision. What surprised me was when the sisters made an announcement that if we were interested to become Carmelites, we could drop an email to them. At that moment, two of the sisters suddenly called my name and said, 'Clarissa, I'm sure you will be interested'. That made me emotional. I've been working on my faith very often these past few months and hearing that made me trust God and leave my fate in God's hands." — **Clarissa Danesse**

"Meeting with the Carmelite Sisters was an enjoyable encounter, a once-in-a-lifetime experience. It was very fun as we listened to their stories and how they go about their daily life in the monastery. The sisters were very kind and welcomed all of us with open arms and hearts.

"I learnt a lot from the meeting with the sisters, especially how they always pray for everyone, but have we ever thought of praying for them? When that thought hit me, it made me realise that the sisters always pray for everyone's well-being, but do we return them the favour by doing the same thing? That made me tear up a bit. Nevertheless, I enjoyed spending my time talking to them and listening to their stories." — **Shannon Victoria Sendi Ngumbang**

"My experience meeting the Carmelite sisters was something I experienced for the first time in my life. I had fun listening to their interesting stories on how they chose to become nuns and some other stories they shared.

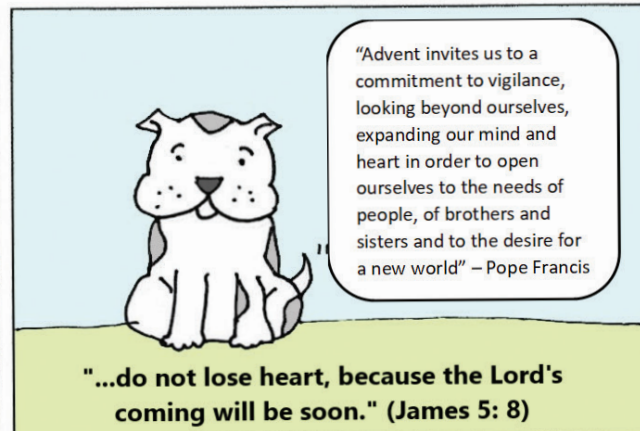
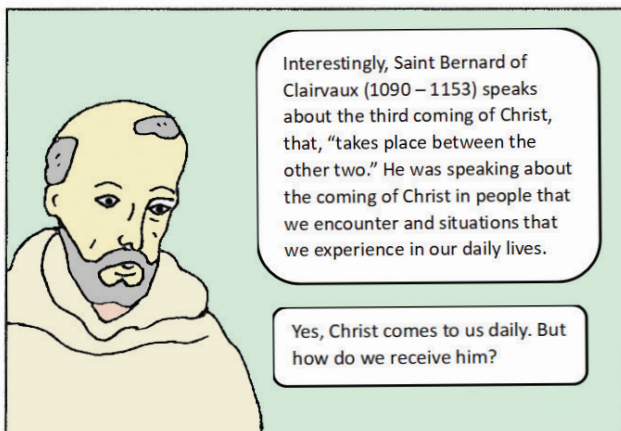
"Another thing I liked about the whole session was us singing together with the sisters during the Vespers. Even though we had difficulty catching up, we still did quite well with the sisters' guidance. All in all, I'm very grateful I took the opportunity to meet them as it will be something I'll remember forever." — **Erika Yeo Tze Jia**



The students joining the prayer session with the nuns.

## THE SIMPLE LIFE...

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





# Remembering Venerable Agnelo



Catholic Bishops of India at a Mass to celebrate Agnelo de Souza's 96th death anniversary on November 20, 2023 at Pilar hillock.

NEW DELHI: Devotees flocked to shrines dedicated to Venerable Agnelo de Souza in various places in India on his 96th death anniversary.

"Venerable Agnelo is an inspiration for Catholics in their journey of faith," said Cardinal Filipe Neri Ferrao, president of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India, in his homily during the commemorative Mass on November 20 at Pilar hillock, 13 km southeast of Panaji, capital of Goa state.

Venerable Agnelo, a renowned 20th century preacher, confessor and administrator, was a member of the Society of the Missionaries of St Francis Xavier, a Goa-based religious congregation.

He died in 1927 at the age of 58. The Vatican has accepted the cause for his canonisation and, in 1986, declared him Venerable, the second stage in the four-phase canonisation process.

"Venerable Agnelo took Jesus as his model and strengthened his relationship with Him through prayer and service to the poor and the needy, thus becoming an inspiration in our journey of faith," Cardinal Ferrao elaborated in his homily on the theme, "Walking together in the footsteps of Venerable Agnelo to our sanctification."

Concelebrants included Archbishop Anil Couto of Delhi, Bishop Emeritus Alex Dias of Port Blair, and Pilar superior general, Fr Nazareth Fernandes.

Cardinal Ferrao hailed Venerable Agnelo as a person who had strong communion with Jesus, love for Scripture, regular participation in the Eucharistic Celebration and in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. He also highlighted the saintly priest's role in imparting these values to his community.

He said one felt increased responsibility toward the needy and the impoverished when he or she experiences Jesus. The cardinal wants the faithful to extend their faith journey by embracing others as siblings, drawing inspiration from Venerable Agnelo's altruistic service as a pastor in Siroda, Kumta and Sanvordem, and as spiritual guide at the Patriarchal Seminary of Rachol.



On the same day at Pilar Ashram in Bandra, a suburb of Mumbai, Bishop Henry D'Souza of Belary presided over a concelebrated commemorative Mass and hailed Venerable Agnelo as a man of simplicity, goodness and holiness.

The Mass was preceded by novenas in English, Gujarati, Marathi, Tamil and other languages from November 11. Many people of other religions too attended the nine-day prayers. People from Gujarat came in large numbers.

Bishop D'Souza said Fr Agnelo had worked tirelessly for the people, encouraging his faithful to build family life through prayer and encounter with God and sacraments.

The prelate also encouraged people to walk with the poor as Venerable Agnelo had done.

In Goa, the Pilar superior general said devotees often inquire about the process of beatification, which he said is lengthy and a miracle, attributed to the intercession of Venerable Agnelo and sent to Rome, is now studied by the doctors. He requested the devotees to pray unceasingly for Venerable Agnelo's beatification. — **By Elvis Fernandes and Nirmala Carvalho, Matters India**

## MEMORIAM

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### 10th Anniversary In Loving Memory of



#### Aloysious Loo Hock Hin

Still miss you dad after all these years.  
Thinking of you everyday.  
"We shall meet on that beautiful shore."  
Love you Dad.

### 23rd Anniversary In Loving Memory of



#### Vincent Gabriel Pereira Departed: 04-12-2000

"Acknowledge that the Lord is God.  
He made us and we belong to him." – Psalm 100:3

Fondly remembered by  
Lily, Xavier, Emmanuel, Sharuna, Rita, Molly,  
Michael, grandchildren, relatives and friends.

### In Loving Memory

#### 42nd Anniversary 3rd Anniversary



#### Stephen P. Pereira Departed: 7th December 1981



#### Gerald Pereira Departed: 10th November 2020

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

Dearly missed and forever remembered  
by loved ones.

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The Lord is my  
shepherd;  
I shall not want.  
He makes me lie down  
in green pastures.  
He leads me beside  
still waters.  
He restores my soul.  
He leads me in paths  
of righteousness  
for his name's sake.  
Even though I walk  
through the valley of the  
shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil,  
for you are with me;  
your rod and your  
staff, they comfort me.

Psalm 23:1-4

## Thanksgiving Prayers

### Prayer to the Blessed Virgin (never known to fail)

Oh! Most beautiful flower of Mount Carmel, fruitful and fine splendour of heaven, Blessed Mother of the Son of God, Immaculate Virgin, assist me in this my necessity, (make your request) Oh! Star of the Sea, help me and show me herein, that you are my mother. Oh! Holy Mother of God, Queen of heaven and earth, I humbly beseech you, from the bottom of my heart to succour me in this my necessity (make your request) There is none Dear Mother that can withstand thy Power. Oh! Mary Conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee (thrice Hail Mary) Thank you Dear Mother, for your mercy towards us.... to me and mine.

— Julianna

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# Pope Francis congratulates president-elect Milei of Argentina

BUENOS AIRES: Pope Francis contacted the president-elect of Argentina, Javier Milei, to congratulate him on his victory in the recent presidential election. The libertarian economist, who ran for the *La Libertad Avanza* (Freedom Advances) party, will take office on December 10.

The pontiff called the future president of Argentina on Nov 21 and had a "pleasant and very good" conversation, those close to the politician told *Infobae online news*.

According to the news outlet, the person who made the contact possible was the Pope's ophthalmologist, Fabio Bartucci.

When the call was made, Diana Mondino, a member of Milei's *La Libertad Avanza* party just elected to the national Legislature, personally went looking for Milei, who was recording a television interview, and the president-elect interrupted the report to talk with the Holy Father.

Milei also extended an invitation for Pope Francis to visit Argentina next year "as head of state and leader of the Church," *Infobae* added.

The *Todo Noticias* portal stated that, according to members of Milei's team, the Holy Father reportedly "responded positively" to the invitation.

During the conversation, the libertarian addressed the pontiff as "His Holiness," and a leader close to Milei said that "they spoke together very well. It was thrilling".

Witnesses to the communication between the two told *Infobae* that Pope Francis pointed out to the new president that "health, education, and poverty are very important issues."

In response, Milei said he is convinced that changes he plans to make "are going to be good for the population."

Pope Francis urged the future president to have "wisdom and courage to govern," to which Milei replied: "I have the courage, I am working on the wisdom."

The phone call from Rome comes after some harsh criticism of the Pope by Milei. In public statements, the next president had claimed that the pontiff was "the representative of the evil one on Earth" and had proffered other insults, for which he



President-elect Javier Milei

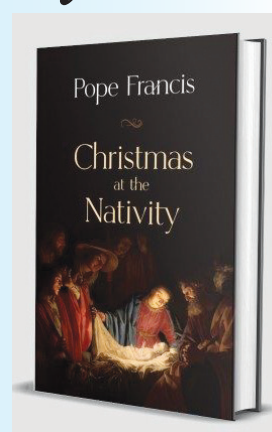
was urged to apologise.

In the presidential debates, Milei, in addition to offering his apology, guaranteed that if the Pope wants to visit Argentina, he will be respected "not only as head of state, but as leader of the Catholic Church."

In recent weeks, the possibility of Pope Francis visiting his native country began to gain momentum, and the nation's bishops, gathered at their 123rd plenary assembly, even formalised the invitation with a letter to the pontiff. — **By Julieta Villar, CNA**

## Pope releases new book *Christmas at the Nativity*

VATICAN: Pope Francis, marking the 800th anniversary of St Francis of Assisi's creation of the first Christmas crèche, has introduced his new book, *Christmas at the Nativity*. Released in multiple languages — English, Italian, French, and Portuguese — the book encapsulates the Pontiff's reflections on the Nativity scene, emphasising its profound significance.



Whether simple or elaborate, the same every year or constantly changing, a Nativity scene echoes "the beauty of our faith", Pope Francis wrote in the introduction.

The text contains a series of texts, reflections, speeches, and homilies that the Pope has dedicated to the Nativity scene and the characters that populate it.

The Italian version of the book entitled *Il mio presepe*, was released on November 21. The book was released earlier in English on Nov 1 by publishing house Focolare Media/ New City Press and can be purchased at the following link: <https://www.focolaremedia.com/bookstore>. — **Vatican News**

## Peruvian bishops hail new law that specifies the rights of the unborn child

LIMA: The Peruvian Bishops' Conference congratulated the country's congress for the passage of Law 31935, which specifies the rights granted in the constitution to unborn children.

"This legislative decision reinforces our commitment to the defence of life from the moment of conception and consolidates the recognition of human dignity as the supreme principle. Children, from their conception, are the greatest treasure in the world, the future of the human family," says the Nov. 20 statement from the bishops' conference signed by Miguel Cabrejos, the archbishop

of Trujillo and conference president.

Article 2 of the Political Constitution of Peru recognises the right of the conceived child in "everything that favours him." However, the current Civil Code in Article 1 makes a distinction between the conceived child and human person by establishing that "the human person is a subject of law from birth" and thus leaves room for arguing "but not from conception."

As amended, the civil code states: "Human life begins with conception. The human person is a subject of law from his conception. The Peruvian state recognises

and guarantees respect for the dignity of the conceived child, as well as its right to life, individual identity, mental and physical integrity, as well as to freely develop in the womb [i.e., without external interference]."

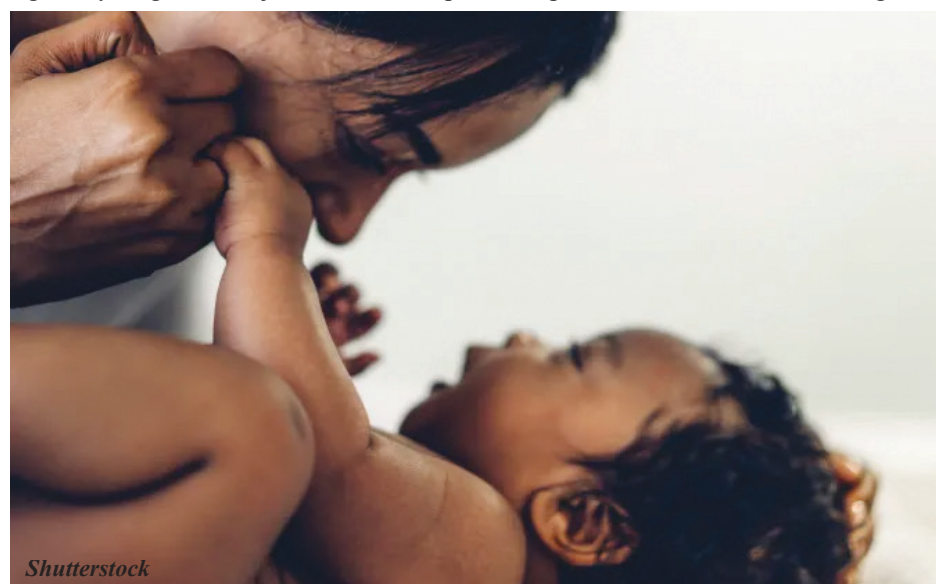
After its initial approval, on May 19 the executive branch exercised its power to make partial or total changes to the bill. Congress then put the bill to a new vote, and the law was definitively passed. These legislative proceedings made the law not subject to a presidential veto.

The bishops conference message notes that the promulgation of this law "constitutes an important step towards the construction of a society that respects and defends human life and overcomes a culture of death".

Cabrejos wrote that work must continue "to guarantee that children come to a world that receives them with welcoming love, an expression of the beautiful gift of life and the hope of humanity."

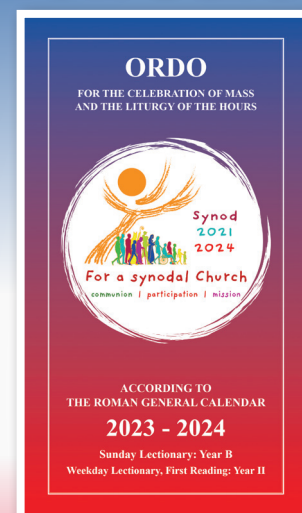
"We are all challenged to renew our commitment, especially families, to protect the dignity of all boys and girls and offer them the opportunity to grow up in a healthy environment," the statement adds.

The call to action appealed to the faithful and people of goodwill, urging them "to work together to build a society that respects and defends the fundamental rights of all, especially children, from the moment of conception." — **By Diego Lopez Marina, CNA**



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