

The Publisher,
Editor and Staff of
HERALD wish all
our readers Gong
Xi Fa Cai.

There will be no
issue on
February 18, 2024.
Our next issue
will be on
February 25, 2024.

So, whether you eat or drink, or
whatever you do, do all to the glory of
God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks
or to the church of God

1 Cor. 10:31



Embracing a synodal future
as permanent deacons

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Celebrating Christian
Unity Week

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Negeri district organises
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Pastoral Statement for the eve of Chinese New Year and Ash Wednesday

Dear People of God,

This year, Chinese New Year falls on
Saturday 10 February 2024 and Ash
Wednesday 14 February 2024 falls on the
fifth day of Chinese New Year.

The Catholic Bishops Conference of
Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei in consulta-
tion with the Episcopal Regional Liturgy
Commission of Malaysia, Singapore,
Brunei offers the following guidance:

1. On Friday February 9, 2024, being
the eve of Chinese New Year, dis-
pensation is given from abstinence.

2. The liturgy for the sunset Mass on
Saturday February 10, 2024 shall be
the liturgy of 6th Sunday in Ordinary
Time.

3. Fast and abstinence shall remain
for Ash Wednesday which falls on
February 14, 2024.

Wishing you the Lord's abundant bless-
ings and joyous celebration of the
Chinese New Year.

William Cardinal Goh
William Cardinal Goh
President

Episcopal Regional Liturgy Commission
Catholic Bishops' Conference of
Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei

January 31, 2024

Let go of anger before the sun sets

VATICAN: At the weekly
General Audience, Pope
Francis reflected on the sin
of wrath and invites us to guard
against channelling our anger un-
justly, insisting that we follow the
Lord's example of forgiveness.

Wrath and anger have a tendency to grow
out of control, and thus we are called to ac-
tively seek peace and reconciliation.

Pope Francis gave this reminder during
his Wednesday General Audience, January
31 held in the Vatican's Paul VI Hall.

Continuing his catechesis series on vir-
tues and vices, the Pope focused on the
sin of wrath, calling it a particularly "dark
vice."

Wrath, the Pope said, is perhaps the easi-
est to detect from a physical point of view.
"The person dominated by wrath can hardly
conceal this impetus; you recognise it by
the movements of their body, their aggres-
siveness, their laboured breathing, their
grim and frowning gaze."

In its most acute manifestation, the Pope
noted, anger is a vice "that leaves no res-
pite."

"If it arises from an injustice suffered or
deemed to be so," the Pope observed, "it is
often not unleashed against the guilty party,
but against the first offender."

"There are people," he acknowledged,
"who hold back their anger at work, prov-
ing to be calm and compassionate, but once
at home they become unbearable for their
spouses and children."

Wrath, he acknowledged, can pervade
our being, robbing us of sleep and causing
us to rerun it in our minds.

Moreover, he said, it destroys relation-
ships. Lingering resentment and detestation
slowly but surely degenerate relationships,
he said.

The Apostle Paul, aware of how anger
can grow out of control, the Pope said,
urged Christians "to address the problem at
once and seek to reconcile."

"It is important that everything be dis-
solved immediately, before the sun sets,"
the Holy Father insisted.

"If some misunderstanding may arise
during the day and two people may no
longer understand each other, suddenly
perceiving themselves to be far apart," the
Pope said, address it and reconcile, so "the
night will not be handed over to the devil."

Otherwise, he observed, wrath will "keep
us awake in the dark, brooding over our
reasons and unaccountable mistakes that
are never ours and always the other's."

The Pope recalled the 'Our Father'
prayer's call to forgiveness.

If forgiveness isn't practised, he said,
people break away from one another.

The Pope said that while wrath is a terri-
ble vice and often at the origin of wars and
violence, "not everything that is born of
wrath is wrong." The ancients, he recalled,
were well aware that there is an irascible
part in us that cannot and must not be de-
nied.

"We are not," the Holy Father pointed
out, "responsible for anger, in its arising,
but always in its development."

Sometimes, Pope Francis said, it is good
to vent anger in the right way.

"If a person never gets angry, if they are
not indignant at an injustice, if they do not
feel something quivering in their gut at the
oppression of a weak person," the Pope
said, "it would mean that this person is not
human, and much less a Christian."

Pope Francis acknowledged the exist-
ence of "holy indignation."

"Jesus knew it several times in His life,"
he recalled, marvelling that the Lord "never
responded to evil with evil."

"In His soul, He felt this feeling and, in
the case of the merchants in the Temple,
performed a strong and prophetic action,
dictated not by anger but by zeal for the
house of the Lord."

Pope Francis concluded by urging the
faithful to seek the help of the Holy Spirit
in properly managing their passions, in or-
der to turn them into a tool for good. — **By
Deborah Castellano Lubov, Vatican News**

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Embracing interiority through prayer and reflection

As Wednesday (February 14) begins another Lenten Season. But what is Lent all about? It is **not** mainly a time for more penance and sacrifices, as popularly believed, but its focus is, and must be, on cooperating more with the Holy Spirit in the difficult task of transforming “me” and “us” into “other Christs.” Jesus is the Model for every Christian, in all seasons.

Pope Francis has suggested that in preparation for next year’s Jubilee of the Redemption, all Christians should make 2024 a special Year of Prayer. And personal prayer is where Jesus has given us an outstanding example to imitate! Jesus increased in “wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour” (Luke 2:52). How? By His never omitted, never shortened, **personal prayer!** In His childhood, His youth, and in His adulthood, and especially in the two-three years of very busy public ministry before His Death, Jesus made time to be alone with His Father in heaven, and not just for a few rushed minutes, but He would spend long hours *communing* with His Abba, as all the four Gospels testify.

He also made the effort to become familiar with the Scriptures, so that even at the tender age of 12, He could hold His own while discussing with the learned teachers in the Temple of Jerusalem: “All who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers” (Luke 2:47). So, His daily prayer-time consisted of contemplation on the Word of God and on nature, in loving intercourse with His Father, and in intercession for various needs (“Peter, Satan has desired to sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you” (Luke 22:31).

So, it is a **convenient fallacy for us** to think that we have spent Lent well if we have just abstained from meat on Fridays, fasted on two stipulated days, made other small sacrifices here and there, and given small alms occasionally — these are all only external actions! Whereas Lent is a time to help us *think like Jesus, feel like Jesus, and act like Jesus!* Christianity is not a religion of mere rules and observances, but of interiority.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus has emphasised such interiority. “For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:20).

“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift” (Matt 5:23, 24).

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt 5:27-29).

“Be careful not to practise your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honoured by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” (Matt 6:1-4).

“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, Who is unseen. Then your Father, Who sees what is done in secret, will reward you” (Matt 6:5,6).

To conclude, here is a quote from St Paul’s Letters which best characterises a Lenten Spirituality of interiority (and which in turn I want to see verified in my own Christian life):

Gal 2:20: “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live but Christ Who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me!”

What about you, dear reader? Please choose some special NT texts to guide your own personal Lenten spirituality! — **By Fr Fio Mascarenhas, SJ**

● **Fr Fio Mascarenhas SJ is a retired Bible teacher and retreat director. He can be contacted at frfiomas@gmail.com**

● **See pages 10 & 11 for the Pope’s Lenten Message and resources from the Peninsular Malaysia Church.**

A call to respond with compassion

Today’s Gospel contains a short but powerful story of a leper coming to Jesus and making an unusual statement. The leper says to Jesus, “If you want to, you can make me clean.” Now what’s so unusual about this statement is that, for starters, it’s not really a request. The leper doesn’t ‘ask’ Jesus to be ‘healed’. Instead, he announces what he believes — that, if Jesus chooses, Jesus can make him ‘clean’.

The man’s ailment is described as ‘leprosy’. Leprosy is a painful skin disease that makes your skin look like it is melting, like ice cream on a hot day. People were afraid of it because they didn’t know how to cure it. And because people feared the worst, lepers had to live outside of town, apart from their family, and keep their distance from healthy people while supporting themselves through begging. Thus, whenever a person with leprosy walked into a village, he or she had to shout out loud, “Unclean! Unclean!” And everyone would run away from them.

The only way lepers could be cured was if a priest deemed them so. But worst of all, people equated leprosy with punishment for sin, which led to a lot of bad blood toward lepers — you know, the attitude that said, “You’re getting what you deserve”. So while we tend to focus on the physical consequences of leprosy in Jesus’ day, the total impact of being unclean had religious, social, and financial dimensions as well.

Can you imagine how it would feel if you were forced to shout out, “Unclean!”

before walking into school or walking into work? Can you imagine how sad you’d feel if people ran away from you because of the way you looked? It’d be humiliating!

And this is why Jesus’ actions in the Gospel today are so beautiful. Instead of running away from this poor man like everyone else, He reaches out and touches him because He was, “moved with pity.” He touches the man, acknowledging his humanity. Jesus sees what other people choose not to. He sees a man who is hurting, a man who needs to be loved. This was somebody’s son, maybe even a brother. He was a real person; he had a name.

Jesus consistently defies societal norms throughout the Gospels, reaching out to the untouchable, dining with sinners, and engaging with the marginalised.

But let’s get back to the leper’s statement which goes beyond a simple request for healing; it reflects his belief that Jesus can make him spiritually and socially whole. He desires more than physical healing; he longs to be ‘clean,’ restored to family, work, and worship. Jesus, understanding this, heals him through a compassionate touch, reinstating him into the community.

Jesus warns him not to tell anyone and to go and show himself to the priest. It’s an odd command, but Jesus doesn’t want to be known simply as a healer. Despite Jesus’ instruction to keep quiet, the former leper cannot contain his excitement and spreads the news about Jesus freely. The story is rich in reversals: Jesus responds with compassion,

defying societal treatment of lepers; Jesus touches the leper, overturning the customary avoidance of physical contact; the ex-leper is restored to the community, while Jesus is compelled to stay outside the town; and although Jesus advises silence, the ex-leper passionately shares the good news.

Jesus loves reversals and much of His call to us is to see where His touch in our lives turns things upside down for the better. But how are we spreading the health, the wholeness, the healing, and the cleanliness that we have been blessed with? You see, unlike the leper, most of us experience Jesus’ touch not once but many time over the course of our lives. We are made clean, we experience healing, forgiveness, wholeness, and holiness, not just once but repeatedly.

For our part, we are called to consider what it means to be made clean. We are prompted to consider how Christ’s touch has impacted our lives. Unlike the leper, many of us experience Jesus’ touch repeatedly throughout our lives. We receive healing, forgiveness, and wholeness, offering us fresh starts. This calls us to reflect on what it means to be made clean and to extend kindness to others, especially those who feel isolated.

This Lent, we are challenged to set aside judgments and practise kindness as a concrete expression of our faith. In doing so, we emulate Jesus and contribute to spreading the health, wholeness, healing, and cleanliness that we have received as blessings.

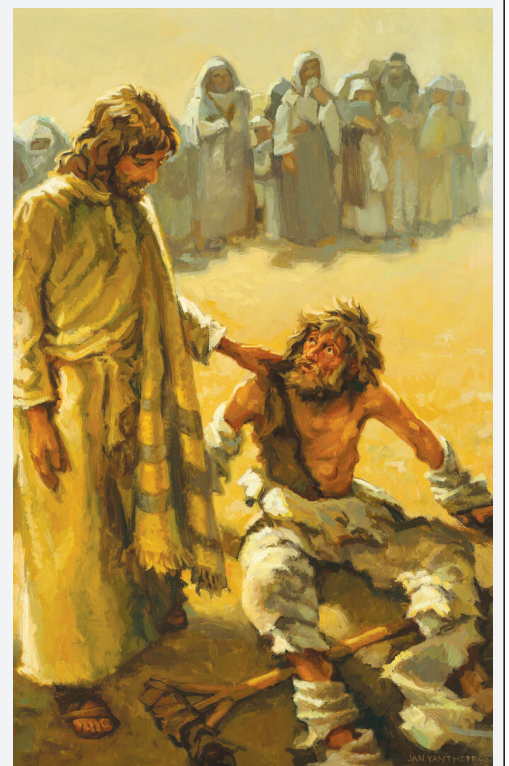
Reflecting on our Sunday Readings with the Editor

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)

Readings: **Leviticus 13:1-2, 45-46;**

1 Corinthians 10:31 — 11:1;

Gospel: Mark 1:40-45





KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

February

- 19-23** **FABC Central Committee Meeting in Bangkok**
- 25** **Rite of Election – Church of the Holy Family, Kajang**



PENANG DIOCESE

Diary of Cardinal Sebastian Francis

February

- 17** **30th Anniversary Memorial Mass for Msgr Ignatius John Aloysius at 10.00am – Church of St Francis Xavier, Penang Road**
- 17** **Rite of Election (Northern and Penang Island Deanery) at 4.00pm – Church of Assumption, Penang**
- 18** **Rite of Election (Perak Deanery) at 3.00pm – Church of Our Mother of Perpetual Help, Ipoh**
- 19-23** **Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference (FABC) Central Committee Meeting – Bangkok, Thailand**
- 21-22** **Clergy Monthly Recollection (Deanery Level)**



MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

February

- 15** **MAJODI Centre Reporting Meeting – Bishop's Office**
- 17-18** **2024 MJ Catechumenal Recollection & Rite of Election – Church of the Immaculate Conception, JB**
- 20-21** **Clergy Monthly Recollection – MAJODI Centre**
- 20** **Anniversary Mass – Dedication of the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart of Jesus**
- 21** **Diocesan Finance Council Meeting – MAJODI Centre**
- 24** **Malaysian Catholic Youth Ministers (MCYM) Committee meeting – Good Shepherd Seminary**
- 25** **Mass – Malaysian Catholic Youth Ministers, Good Shepherd Seminary**



DIOCESE OF PENANG

PKK/BDN/2024/02/175

My Dear People of God in Perak, Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan and Penang, as we move into the second month of the year and continue to be witnesses to God's love and blessings, I invite you to take an interior journey that reaches out to others as we prepare and journey through the Season of Lent.

May the three pillars of Lent: Prayer, Fasting and Alms-Giving, nourish us, and through us nourish others. May the Spirit of the Lord be upon you as you bear witness to the Love of Christ in your lives. I remain united with all of you in prayer.

1. Ribuan terima kasih to all for the thanksgiving Solemn Mass on my appointment to the College of Cardinals

My heartfelt gratitude to all of you for your prayers, blessings, support and arrangements during the recent celebration of the Thanksgiving Solemn Mass at the Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam. I humbly ask for your continued prayers for me, as I pray for you, in my new role and responsibilities for the mission entrusted in the diocese and beyond.

2. Penang Diocese Lenten Campaign 2024: Together we rebuild our Church, community and common home

Sharing with you the Lenten Campaign Kit 2024 and the available resources for this year's Lenten Season at the Caritas

Penang website. I wish you a blessed preparation and journey for Lent 2024. <https://caritaspenang.com/lent2024/>

3. Appointment of resident parish priest – Church of St Joseph, Bagan Serai

I am pleased to inform that Fr Stanley Antoni has been appointed resident parish priest of the Church of St Joseph, Bagan Serai with effect from January 16. We wish him the very best and continue to keep him in prayers as he embarks on this new mission, strengthened by the Holy Spirit. I take this opportunity to also thank Msgr Stephen Liew and Deacon Charles Lazaroo who have been administering the parish and looking into the needs of the community.

4. Heartfelt thanks to Sr Marysia Malating and Sr M. Rusiah Garuk | Incoming Sr M. Lucynia Jeprin

The Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception (FSIC), Sr Marysia and Sr Rusiah, will be transferred back to Sabah with specific missions assigned to them. We thank them for their contributions especially to the Bahasa speaking community through their mission with the Bahasa Apostolate. With joy we welcome Sr M. Lucynia to the Diocese of Penang as she joins Sr Florence in the FSIC community here in Bukit Mertajam and begins her mission in February.

Notifications and Updates

5. Lunar New year message 2024 Year of the Dragon

As I take this opportunity to wish each one of you a Blessed and Glorious New Year, I wish to share with you a reflection prepared by Fr Stephen Chin in English and Mandarin, explaining the Year of the Dragon. <https://www.shorturl.at/shortener.php>

6. 30th Memorial Mass for Msgr Ignatius John Aloysius

In a spirit of thanksgiving, I invite you to join in the celebration of Mass for the repose of the soul of Msgr Ignatius John Aloysius on his 30th memorial anniversary on February 17 at 10.00am at the Church of St Francis Xavier, Penang. Fondly known as Msgr Aloysius, he was a faithful shepherd tending his flock at the Church of St Francis Xavier (City Parish). We remember with gratitude that Msgr Aloysius built the Church of St John Britto more than 50 years ago, as well as the Chapels of St Joseph in Hong Seng Estate and St Mary in Gottlieb Road. He was ordained at College General in 1929. He became the first Vicar General of the Diocese of Penang. For his outstanding and dedicated contributions to the Church, he was made Honorary Prelate by Pope Paul VI in 1978 which carried the title of Monsignor. For more than 20 years he served as parish priest of St Francis Xavier Church, Penang Road, before his demise in 1994 at the age of 91. For more details: <https://shorturl.at/akH24>

Sebastian Francis
Cardinal Sebastian Francis



Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #163

F12
MJD NEWS
UPDATES

Greetings to you. Struggling Ringgit. Cutting cost drives in civil service. Spiralling cost of living. Ending pensions of elected officials. Malaysian wolves roaming free. *Mysteries of Faith* on Netflix show the power of Catholic relics. But life goes on.

Credibility Times: To be credible means being believed, being worthy of confidence, reliable. When you are credible, you are worthy of other people's trust. They know they can count on you.

People lie easily. Disinformation and no information is the order of the day. History is rewritten, omitting facts. Heroes are created for want of heroes. Rewards are seldom based on merits. Plagiarised and unverified claims appear in research papers and books. For people to respect us, secular or religious, leaders or influencers, researchers or reporters, we need to be honest and truthful, respectful and treat everyone the way we would like to be treated. Listen to learn from people. Be generous with power and information. Enlighten people to the truth to heal and build. Find out if unsure or have no answers. Give credit where credit is due. Avoid the maxim: "Lembu punya susu, sapi dapat nama".

Thought For The Week: The Best Medicine

An unorthodox doctor, who always thought beyond prescriptions, pills and medication, once said to one of his regular patients: "I'm starting to suspect that the best medicine for humans is love." The patient, surprised and shocked said: "What if love doesn't work?" The doctor smiled and said, "Increase the dose". A lesson from the doctor: "Medicine does cure some. Time heals some wounds, but love heals them all." — Matshona Dhliwayo

Announcements for this Week

1. The Malaysian Church has opted for the local BM version, popularly called the *Alkitab Versi Borneo*. Now the Catholic version comes with the *Deutero-Canonical Books*. They are now available. *Get one*.

2. We need you, young people and skilled leaders! Join the Youth Office, Social Communication Ministry, Mission Pastoral Institute or Caritas MJD Office as volunteers, interns and pastoral workers.

3. Montfort Youth Centre offers you, young people, aged 16-19, and physically challenged, *studies in Culinary Arts* which touches on pastry arts, food and beverage service, training to be a barista. Contact Pauline 06-3510114/5 or download the form available on the website. <https://montfortyouthcentre.org>

4. The Creation Justice Ministry invites you to follow the world days for various ecological issues, presented in easy-to-read slides. The month of February will feature "*February 2 – World Wetland Day*". Watch out for the links.

5. The English *Marriage Preparation Weekend*, planned for March 15-17 is closed. You can register for the next one, scheduled for June 21-23 at MAJODI Centre.

6. The MJD Special Needs Parents' Ministry is calling all parents of special needs children (E/BM) for a gathering at MPI MAJODI Centre on February 17 at 3.00pm. Contact Dass or Veronica 016-20950017.

7. The Diocesan Family Life Ministry of MJD is organising a zoom session on "*Talking About Sexuality to Youth and Children Today!*" Happening on March 3, at 8.00pm. Look out for the poster for more info.

This Weeks QnQ: Q asks? Do stories influence us?

It doesn't matter how old we are; we all need

stories to believe in. If there's no storyline, no integrating images that define who we are or give our lives meaning or direction, we just won't be happy.

Thomas Kuhn's book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* introduced the term "paradigm shift"; defined as a set of beliefs, stories, images, concepts, and structures that govern the way we think about something, and held that paradigm change becomes necessary when a previous paradigm becomes so full of holes and patchwork "fixes" does not help. Then a shift in thinking, adopting a new story, a new set of beliefs, values, and systems may save us.

Brian McLaren uses the phrase "*framing story*" to describe a similar change in paradigms, which gives people direction, values, vision, and inspiration, which may provide a framework for their lives. It tells us our purpose in life: if we are only pleasure-seekers or hoarders, accumulating as much as possible, or obsessed and oppressed, warring all the time.

But if our *framing story* tells us that we are free and responsible creatures in a creation made by a good, wise, and loving God, and that our Creator wants us to pursue virtue, collaboration, peace, and mutual care for one another and all living creatures, and that our lives can have profound meaning ... then our society and our world will take a radically different direction.

Remembering the many religious priests, sisters and brothers dedicated to the Lord, His people and His mission on this Feast of the Presentation of the Lord. Thank you for your dedicated self-giving.

Just to tickle you: *Don't wait until six strong men finally take you to church.*

Bernard Paul

Bishop Bernard Paul

Embracing a synodal future as permanent deacons



By Isaac Alfred Simbun

BUKIT MERTAJAM: Eighteen permanent deacons, accompanied by their spouses, along with three candidates from the Diocese of Penang, participated in the Peninsular Malaysia Deacons and Wives Annual Gathering held from January 26 to 28 at the Minor Basilica of St Anne.

Facilitating the sessions were Fr Colin Nunis, a Melkite Catholic priest, and his wife Agnieszka, currently residing in Melbourne.

Also in attendance were Cardinal Sebastian Francis and Archbishop Julian Leow.

This gathering was primarily aimed at providing deacons with necessary tools and insights to embody synodal values such as listening, sharing, and collaborative ministry. These elements are crucial in their service to both the Church and the broader community, ensuring a more effective and inclusive approach to ministry.

An integral aspect of this event was the dedicated sessions for the wives, providing them with opportunities to share and discuss experiences related to their individual journeys as partners to these deacons.

Archbishop Julian, in his homily,

highlighted the essential leadership skills that every permanent deacon should develop: transparency, trustworthiness, and consistency. These qualities are fundamental for effective pastoral leadership, enabling deacons to build strong, honest relationships within their communities. Transparency fosters open communication and accountability, trustworthiness builds credibility and faith in their leadership, and consistency ensures stability and reliability in their ministry. By embodying these traits, permanent deacons can effectively guide and support their congregations, reflecting the core values of their sacred role.

In his closing remarks, Cardinal Sebastian imparted two pivotal messages to the participants. First, drawing from Isaiah 54:2, "Enlarge the space of your tent," he encouraged each participant to initiate a synodal journey in their ministry, emphasising the importance of growth and inclusivity as reflected in the Scripture.

Secondly, in alignment with the central theme of the current synod's documents by Pope Francis, the cardinal elucidated the deep significance of deacons kissing the four corners of the Eucharistic table. This gesture, he explained,

serves as a reminder for all deacons to integrate the spirituality of the Eucharist into their service, symbolising a comprehensive embrace of their faith and responsibilities. Therefore, these two messages underscore the vital role deacons play in the Church's life.

In the context of a synodal Church, the gathering focused on the importance of listening and sharing as foundational elements. This aligns with the broader vision of synodality in the Catholic Church, which Pope Francis has championed as a journey of "walking together" — a process that involves listening to each other and to the Holy Spirit. For permanent deacons, this theme would be particularly relevant. Their role often bridges the clergy and the laity, making them well-positioned to facilitate dialogue and understanding within the church community. A gathering with this focus would encourage deacons to develop skills in active listening and empathetic communication, enabling them to better serve their communities. Additionally, such a gathering has included discussions on practical ways to foster a culture of open dialogue in parishes, as well as how to engage in community outreach that reflects a listening Church.

Permanent diaconate in Malaysia

The permanent diaconate is a unique and vital ministry within the Christian church, particularly in the Catholic tradition. It represents a distinct order of ordained ministry, characterised not by a stepping stone to priesthood, but as a lifelong commitment. The genesis of this role can be traced back to a poignant moment in the early Church, as depicted in Acts 6:1-7. This Scripture highlights how the Apostles, responding to the growing needs of their community, selected seven men to assist them. This decision was rooted in the recognition of the cries of the people of God, emphasising the deacon's role as a servant and caretaker of the community.

The responsibilities and ministries of permanent deacons are multifaceted; they include proclaiming the Gospel, performing charitable works, assisting in liturgical roles, and embodying the Church's mission to serve the marginalised and the needy. This sacred calling reflects a profound dedication to both God and the community, striving to be a living example of Christ's love and service.

In Malaysia, the permanent diaconate's history is marked by significant milestones and a growing sense of vocation. The journey began with the ordination of A.P. Thomas, from the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, as the country's first permanent deacon in 1974, a seminal event that laid the foundation for this unique ministry in the Malaysian Catholic Church. This pioneering figure's ordina-

tion signified a new chapter in the Church's service to the community, marking the introduction of a dedicated role focused on serving the needs of the faithful.

In June 2010, Dr Sherman Kuek became the first permanent deacon in the Diocese of Malacca Johore, followed by the ordination of seven deacons in August 2011. While in the Diocese of Penang, Clement Samuel Gomez was ordained as the diocese's first permanent deacon in November 2014. These events marked a period of increasing recognition and appreciation for the role of deacons within the local church communities, highlighting a deepening understanding of their importance in serving the faithful.

An integral part of this evolving narrative has been the organisation of annual gathering for deacons and their wives from dioceses in Peninsular Malaysia. The first event was held on May 20-22, 2016 organised by the Diocese of Malacca Johore. These gatherings have played a crucial role in providing support, fostering a sense of community, and facilitating ongoing formation for the deacons and their spouses. They have become pivotal in addressing the challenges and opportunities within this ministry, underscoring the collaborative nature of diaconal service. Thus, the permanent diaconate in Malaysia has grown into a vital and dynamic ministry, continuously adapting to meet the spiritual and communal needs of the Church.

Missionary disciples sent forth to be evangelisers

GEORGE TOWN: More than 60 lay faithful were formed, renewed, commissioned and sent

forth to share their faith at the Formation for Evangelisers organised by the Penang Diocesan New

Evangelisation Commission.

Held from January 27 to 28 at Stella Maris Penang Road, the programme included Fr Michael Raymond OFM Cap and Martin Jalleh as presenters, who guided participants to effectively witness and present the Good News in the modern age.

Fr Michael was on hand to share on the *Kerygma* and 'Evangelisation through Inculturation', in which he exhorted all to proclaim and bear witness with the clarity that comes through one's own concrete Christian life.

He also invited participants to undergo a process of *Metanoia*, which involves the changing of one's way of life that will lead to a spiritual conversion.

"It is important for us to identify the seeds of the Word present in other cultures, and to be attentive

listeners by enlarging the space of your tent," he said.

The context of the law of attraction was used by Fr Michael, stressing on the importance to reach out to non-believers and peoples of other faiths, as well as those lapsed and separated from the faith.

"Our story is also God's story as we bear witness to the goodness and greatness of God," said Martin Jalleh as he touched on faith being a personal relationship that leads to bearing witness by sharing one's encounter of Christ with others.

He also shared that the fruits of encounter will enable a disciple to be an imprint of God's image that imbibes and imitates that spirit of Christ which allows them to impart and inspire others to accept the invitation to experi-

ence the Lord.

Martin then reminded the participants of the significance of the Holy Spirit being the protagonist of mission, whose fire spreads rapidly amongst all believers so that they can go on and go forth in the work of evangelisation.

The Pentecost Experience marked the climax of the weekend, with sisters from the Congregation of Putri Karmel leading everyone in an evening where many experienced renewal and healing through worship and praying over.

Cardinal Sebastian Francis then led participants in the Rite of Commissioning, in which he sent them forth by urging them as Church of Asia to "be story-tellers through the inculturation and evangelisation of cultures through the Holy Spirit." — **By Aaron Lim**



Lay faithful formed, renewed and commissioned to share their faith.

Celebrating Christian Unity Week

To coincide with the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (January 18 – 25, 2024), various initiatives were launched to organise ecumenical gatherings, uniting leaders and followers from diverse Christian denominations. This round-up highlights some of the notable gatherings that transpired during this period.

The Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM) hosted a prayer service at the Cardijn House Chapel in Bukit Nanas, KUALA LUMPUR on January 23. The 40-minute event was also broadcasted live on YouTube.

Present were the Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur and CFM hon. treasurer, Most Rev Julian Leow; CFM vice-chairman and the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship (NECF) Malaysia chairman Rev Dr Eu Hong Seng; Bishop of the Lutheran Church in Malaysia and CFM hon. secretary, Bishop Thomas Low; CFM executive secretary Tan Kong Beng; CFM exco members, Rita Wong, and Dato' Varghese George.

Those who joined the prayer service online included Most Rev Simon Poh, the Archbishop of Kuching and CFM vice-chairman, along with CFM exco members Arokiadass Anthonysamy and Pastor Samuel Ang.

This year's globally recognised prayer service for Christian unity drew inspiration from a text prepared by the churches in Burkina Faso, West Africa. The chosen Scripture was from the Gospel of St Luke 10:25-37, with a special focus on verse 27: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself."

Addressing the congregation, Rev Dr Eu emphasised the foundational importance of genuine love for God in achieving Christian unity. He urged, "If we are serious about Christian Unity, we must have this true love for God first. When there is love for God, then there's love for neighbours and brothers, and only then can unity prevail. We must be careful not to put the cart before the horse."

Dr Eu concluded with a heartfelt plea, "May God help the Malaysian Church rekindle its love for God, for only then will we recognise the imperative to love our neighbours. Only then can Christian Unity manifest itself in our nation." — *By Gwen Manickam*



Rev Dr Eu Hong Seng.

In Kuantan



The Church of St Thomas the Apostle hosted an ecumenical gathering for the neighbouring Christian churches.

The ecumenical liturgical service, which commenced at 7.30pm, was led by the parish priest, Fr George Packiasamy, who extended a warm welcome to the congregation, pastors, and church members gathered, urging them to unite in prayer for Christian unity.

The event, held on January 25, was organised by the Parish Ecumenical Ministry spearheaded by Frederick Lim, who had invited pastors, elders, and members of the Christian churches to participate in the ecumenical celebration. Among those present were Reverends Tham Eng Cheng (Grace Charismatic Centre), Wee Hoe Cheong (Victory Assembly), David Ratnam (Tamil Methodist Church), Christopher Rao (Wesley Methodist Church) and Simon Soh Wei Ming (Anglican Church), together with their respective church members and approximately 60 parishioners from St Thomas.

The liturgy included the Penitential Prayers, a Litany of Praise and Thanksgiving, as well as Scripture readings and sharing the Word of God. During the sharing session, Fr George emphasised the importance of unity among

Christians in spreading the Gospel of Christ Jesus and being evangelists through our daily interactions with our families, friends, and people of other faiths.

Pastors Simon Soh and Christopher Rao were invited to share their insights on the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37) and the ecumenical gathering's significance within the Catholic Church, aligning with the chosen theme by the Universal Church.

The church leaders expressed gratitude for the initiative taken by the Church of St Thomas in bringing them together for the inaugural gathering. Recognising the importance of regular meetings, especially in challenging times, they emphasised the need to practise Christian unity. Anticipating more such gatherings, they eagerly look forward to opportunities for collective prayer and collaborative efforts, aiming to nurture unity amidst their diverse beliefs. Inspired by the principles illustrated in the Good Samaritan's story, they aspire to be good neighbours, embodying the spirit of compassion and cooperation.

Following the ecumenical celebration at the church, all attendees were welcomed to join a fellowship meal at the Parish Breakfast corner. — *By Francis Leong*



At the Diocese of Malacca Johore

A Prayer Service for Christian Unity was held at the Church of the Immaculate Conception on January 25.

Pastors, church leaders, and Christians from various backgrounds came together to pray with one heart.



In Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur

Over a hundred parishioners from diverse churches in the Klang Valley gathered at the Evangelical Lutheran Church on January 25 to pray for Christian unity.

Present were pastors and leaders from the Presbyterian, Anglican, Catholic, Methodist, Syrian Orthodox, Mar Thoma, Salvation Army and Lutheran churches, along with elders and pastors from the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship (NECF) and the Council of Churches Malaysia (CCM).

A poignant moment during the celebration involved the symbolic sharing of water from an earthenware vessel by Evangelical Lutheran Bishop Steven Lawrence with the heads of the participating Churches. This

act, occurring during the procession from the church entrance to the sanctuary, signified welcome, hospitality, and fellowship, marking the official commencement of the prayer celebration.

The prayer service was further enriched by heartfelt presentations and messages from the heads and lay leaders of the different churches, underscoring the theme of loving God and one's neighbour.

The choir and hymns, performed by *Cantus Musicus* and the Myanmar Children's Choir from a refugee learning centre, added solemnity and joy to the celebration, creating a unique and resonant atmosphere. — *By Maria Yan*

Negeri district organises two-day Eucharistic Congress

By Sabrina Smith

SEREMBAN: The district of Negeri Sembilan recently hosted a Eucharistic Congress on January 26 and 27 at the Church of the Visitation. The event centred on the celebration and understanding of the Eucharist, a central sacrament in the Catholic faith.

The congress saw active participation from the Church of St John Marie Vianney, Tampin, Church of the Immaculate Conception, Port Dickson, Church of St Theresa, Nilai, Church of St Aloysius, Mantin and the host parish.

The Eucharistic Congress commenced on the evening of January 26 at 7.30pm

with Mass presided over by Fr Christopher Soosaipillai. Concelebrating were Frs Xavier Andrew, Albet Arokiasamy, and members of the OCD community – Frs Kenneth Gopal, Philip Tay, and Nicholas Hoh. The Mass was followed by a holy hour and various spiritual activities and reflections led by different ministries and BECs until 6.00am, the following day.

The morning of January 27 kicked off with a breakfast at 7.00am, marking the beginning of language-specific sessions. English, Tamil, Mandarin, and Bahasa Malaysia sessions were conducted simultaneously in different venues within the church premises. The language sessions were led by designated priests, offering

diverse perspectives and engaging experiences for participants.

Vocation booths from the different religious congregations such as the Daughters of St Paul, Infant Jesus, Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, Order of the Discalced Carmelite, Order of Friars Minor Capuchin, Congregation of the Disciples of the Lord, and the Women's Apostolate provided additional information and engagement opportunities, allowing for a diverse and enriching experience.

The programme continued with a 20-minute video showcasing a detailed presentation on the history of churches in Negeri Sembilan, spanning their establishment to the present day, with a subsequent 10-minute input from the priest in charge. Different members of the clergy then led the "Mass Explained" session, enabling the faithful to ask questions and deepen their understanding of the Mass. Liturgical songs and dances performed by youth from the different parishes, added a cultural and linguistic flair to the proceedings.

Just before lunch, participants watched an hour-long video presentation on the *Miracles of the Eucharist*, featuring miraculous occurrences from around the world. The priest in charge further elaborated on some lesser-known miracles.

The afternoon session included the Liturgy of the Word through skit groups and Praise and Worship, incorporating Bible passages, skits, reflections, and a closing song. A prize-giving ceremony recognised participants from



Fr Xavier Andrew lifts up the monstrance during the procession.

all language sessions for various activities, fostering a sense of accomplishment and celebration.

The day concluded with a Mass celebrated by Bishop Bernard Paul of Malacca Johore, followed by a Eucharistic procession through Seremban town. The 3.2m procession featured stops at seven locations, where the monstrance was raised. The procession concluded with benediction outside the church entrance. Dinner was served thereafter, bringing together nearly 2,000 parishioners from the various parishes of the Negeri district and fostering a sense of community and unity.

The Eucharistic Congress was a spirit-filled and fruitful event, reflecting the collaborative efforts that contributed to its success. Such gatherings play a crucial role in fostering community spirit, deepening spiritual connections, and celebrating shared faith. The impact of this event is expected to resonate within the community, leaving a lasting impression on all participants.



Bishop Bernard Paul celebrates the closing Mass.



PENANG: The Diocese of Penang hosted a Catholic Women's Conference, January 20 - 21 at the Church of the Immaculate Conception. This empowering event was organised by the Shekinah Glory Renewal Group (SGRG), a Catholic Charismatic Renewal group, in collaboration with KASIH House of Mission (KHOM).

A diverse group of 143 women, hailing from various locations including Kulim, Sg Petani, Kuala Lumpur, Kuching, Miri, and even two from New Zealand, participated in the conference. Over the course of two days, attendees engaged in four enlightening plenary talks and 16 tailor-made workshops.

The theme *Unstoppable* was chosen to remind the participants that nothing should stop them from sitting at the feet of Christ, just like Mary did in Luke 10: 38-41. It is only by sitting at the feet of the Lord will we be able to understand what our purpose is and how we are to approach the situations that we face in life. It is also by His feet that we pour out the burdens and pain in our hearts for Him to take so that He can fill us with new wine, as stated in Luke 5: 37-39, to rejuvenate our spirits and give us the grace to endure the trials and tribulations of life.

The main speakers for the conference

Empowering women to be 'Unstoppable'



were Veronica Antoine from the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, and her two daughters Lavinia and Alicia Antoine, who are full-time missionaries with KHOM.

The most interesting part of the conference was the workshops. Each participant would attend four workshops over the two days. They could choose which workshops to attend based on the topics that were provided for the day. Among the topics presented included *How to pray for the salvation of your children*, *How to discern for the right partner*, *How to step into the new thing God is doing in your life*, *How to increase the oil of intimacy*

in your relationship with God and *How to overcome burnout in ministry*.

In an interview after the conference, Sharon Cornelius-Xavier of SGRG explained that the workshop topics were inspired by the feedback received from past faith-formation programmes. The women's evident hunger for spiritual support and guidance prompted the decision to host a conference exclusively for them.

Plenary talks and uplifting praise and worship sessions interspersed with workshops, reinforced the central message that Christ should always be at the core of

their lives. Msgr Jude Miranda, the parish priest of the Church of the Immaculate Conception, delivered a general absolution to participants before Mass, emphasising the spiritual significance of the event.

Testimonies shared towards the conference's conclusion revealed the profound impact it had on the women, providing spiritual validation, comfort, and instruction for their daily struggles. Emotional healing was palpable, offering fresh perspectives on life and leaving the participants empowered to be 'Unstoppable' in the face of whatever challenges lie ahead. — *By Carmel Dominic*

Reflecting on Christ in the 'Quiet and Unseen'

By Stephanie Cheong

PENANG: The Risen Christ Catholic Church parish community has undertaken a meaningful project aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of the global refugee crisis, both on a global scale and within their country and the specific context of Penang.

This initiative was sparked by their participation in a forum addressing the refugee crisis organised by Caritas Penang. Additionally, they conducted two 'needs assessment visits' alongside their parish priest, Fr Esmond Chua, OFM, to the Rohingya Community Classroom in Jelutong, further solidifying their commitment to addressing the challenges faced by refugees.

Parishioners were provided with an opportunity for spiritual reflection, gaining insight into the compelling reasons for extending assistance to Rohingya refugees. The focus was particularly on the undocumented children who lack access to education in our country, confined to rudimentary classrooms with minimal facilities and dependent on community

teachers.

Guided by Fr Esmond, the weekly reflections centred around the overarching theme, *Christ in the Quiet and Unseen: Is Your Heart Ready to Receive Him?* These reflections encouraged parishioners to contemplate specific questions based on video clips and the celebrant's homilies during the Advent season, exploring themes of Hope, Love, Joy, and Peace. The *Quiet and Unseen* theme encompassed migrants, itinerants, and refugees, emphasising those living among us or within our family and friends.

The reflection questions prompted parishioners to consider words of hope for Christ in the Quiet and Unseen, encouraging concrete expressions of love, joy, and the role of being an "instrument of peace."

Our project, supported by Caritas Penang, Risen Christ parishioners, donors, and youths, enabled the purchase of essential supplies such as school bags, stationery, colour/activity books, a cabinet, working tables, linoleum for flooring, and a printer. Additionally, contributions from friends, both within and beyond Risen Christ parish, included English story



Parishioners coming together to help refugees.

books, laying the foundation for a children's library.

We also successfully distributed 33 boxes of rice and lentils from the Rise Against Hunger initiative, a growing global movement dedicated to eradicating hunger, to support these refugees.

All the above mentioned were presented on the Feast of the Epiphany, a most meaningful and memorable day as this is the day that the

Infant Jesus was visited and presented gold, frankincense and myrrh by the three Wise Men.

Gratitude is extended to our Heavenly Father, whose grace and mercy ensured the project's success. Many parishioners expressed newfound awareness of the lives of the Quiet and Unseen, realising that these individuals are not merely a few but, in fact, dwell among us in significant numbers.

ME couples explore the enduring power of love

KUALA LUMPUR: The National Convention of Worldwide Marriage Encounter (WWME) took place on January 27-28 at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre. Serving as a vibrant nexus for shared experiences, the convention showcased the enduring power of love through the convergence of 30 encountered couples hailing from various regions across Malaysia, such as Penang, Perak, Negeri Sembilan, Johor, Sarawak, Selangor, and Kuala Lumpur.

Friar Joe Matthews OFM, Cap, the National Ecclesial Team priest and Fr Gerard Theraviam, the State Ecclesial Team priest for Selangor/Wilayah, were also present at the convention. This gathering served as an opportunity for the clergy to contemplate their vocation and strengthen their relationship with God's people.

Under the theme *Where There Is Love*, the convention explored the depths of love in the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony and Holy Orders. The dynamic sessions, led by the WWME National Ecclesial Team, Ivan



Couples during one of the sessions at the Worldwide Marriage Encounter national convention.

and Jenny Ngoh, and Friar Joe, delved into various dimensions, incorporating the Japanese concept of "Ikigai". The five essential tools for a healthy Catholic marriage — Communication, Couple Prayer, Sexuality, Community and Re-evaluation — were highlighted, offering practical insights for

couples to strengthen their bonds.

The convention proved to be a lively and interactive experience, providing couples and priests with opportunities to grow closer and renew their commitments. The testimonial from Albert and Angela from Sarawak echoed the sentiment of many

attendees, expressing gratitude for the chance to rediscover and deepen their understanding of each other.

The concepts of the Treasure Box and Ikigai left them feeling blessed to be part of the WWME community. Jeffery and Agnes, from Johor, shared a powerful testimony which demonstrated their dedication and commitment to the WWME amidst various challenges that truly inspired everyone at the convention. Participants universally praised the convention, emphasising its role as a unique opportunity to make friends and refresh relationships. The meticulously prepared formations were lauded for their quality and impact.

For couples yet to embark on any marriage preparation, mark your calendars for the upcoming Marriage Encounter Weekend in English, scheduled from March 1 to 3, 2024. For more information, contact James at 019-3562321 or Mandy at 012-3718756 or register at https://bit.ly/ME_ENGLISH_1-3_MARCH_2024.

Follow us on: <https://bit.ly/3SH0X1Z>

Hospitality ministers go on pilgrimage to Perak

KAJANG: A group of forty-three hospitality ministers from the Church of the Holy Family recently undertook a spiritually enriching pilgrimage to the towns of Batu Gajah and Ipoh in Perak.

Commencing with a morning Mass and a blessing from Fr Philip Chua, the Bahasa and English-speaking hospitality ministers, started making their way to the Church of St Joseph in Batu Gajah.

Upon arrival, we were warmly welcomed by Fr Michael Dass, the parish priest, who shared a captivating history of the church and its various chapels. Noteworthy was the mention of UniPetronas students from Tronoh attending Masses there, reflecting the church's diverse community. Fr Michael Dass expressed pride in the local parishioners for their generous care of the church, fostering a sense of unity and devotion.

Our pilgrimage continued to the Church of St Michael, Ipoh, where the parish office administrator provided a detailed briefing

about the church. The highlight was the prominent display of the relic of Padre Pio, situated alongside the spiral staircase and the bustling activity centre. A refreshing downpour followed, blessing the atmosphere with a cool ambiance conducive to silent meditation and prayer.

Our journey also took us to the majestic Church of Our Lady of Lourdes in Silibin, Ipoh's largest church. Grace, the parish office administrator, shared insightful details about the church's history and its various chapels. The impressive architecture, particularly the backdrop painting of the Last Supper, depicting 12 chairs and eleven apostles, left a lasting impression. The floating crucifix added a unique touch to the spiritual ambiance.

At each church, we recited the Rosary, offered petitions, and made offerings. The spiritual experiences were complemented by explorations of historical sites, including Kellie's Castle and the charming Kampung



Hospitality ministers from the Church of the Holy Family during their pilgrimage to Perak.

Kacang Putih. Street murals in Concubine Lane, the pre-war architecture of the Railway Station, St Michael's School, and Batu Gajah Hospital provided glimpses into the rich history of the region. We also had the privilege of wandering through the vibrant Indian Street in Ipoh town.

Our pilgrimage was a blend of spiritual enrichment and cultural exploration. Returning to Kajang at midnight, we expressed gratitude to God for a safe and enlightening journey, eagerly anticipating more such pilgrimages in the future. — **By John Pragash**

Taiwan President supports Pope's call for regulating AI

TAIPEI: President of Taiwan Tsai Ing-wen (*pic*) sent a letter to Pope Francis recently, joining the pontiff in calling for greater regulation of artificial intelligence, reaffirming what Ing-wen said was Taiwan's commitment "to promote peace and improve the quality of life of all humanity."



Noting that Taiwan "is eager to work with the international community to build a more stable society," the January 31 letter reflected on the country's position as a "world leader in the semiconductor industry."

"As the wave of AI sweeps across the world, Taiwan will continue in its endeavour to be a highly reliable, effective, and secure partner in the international community," the president continued.

Taiwan is a vital player in the global development of AI. The growth in demand for accelerator chips produced by Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co., the country's largest company — and the world's second-most-valuable semiconductor company —



Pope Francis said he welcomes the regulation of artificial intelligence so that it might contribute to a better world. (NCR photo/everythingpossible/Shutterstock)

has helped fuel an economic rebound for the island, according to Bloomberg.

Investing and developing AI tools also plays a critical role in maintaining Taiwan's national security apparatus amid growing threats of military intervention and economic sanctions from Beijing.

Tsai highlighted these themes and under-

scored the broader ethical considerations of developing emerging technologies in her letter to the Pope.

"As Your Holiness has warned, the growing scope of AI applications and its implications for human values engender grave ethical risks, such as invasion of privacy, data manipulation, and illegal surveillance, which

all have serious consequences for free and democratic societies," she wrote.

"For Taiwan, as for other democracies, one major challenge has been disinformation campaigns," the president continued. "Taiwan will deepen cooperation with the Holy See across many areas as we work toward exercising good technological governance, maintaining social harmony and stability, and jointly creating a peaceful future for humanity."

Tsai sent the letter in response to the Pope's message marking the 57th World Day of Peace, a celebration that is observed by the Catholic Church on Jan. 1, the solemnity of Mary, Mother of God.

The Pope's message for the 2024 World Day of Peace was titled "Artificial Intelligence and Peace." In it, the pontiff called on policymakers and international stakeholders to direct the development of AI toward "the pursuit of peace and the common good."

The Holy See is a vital diplomatic partner for Taipei as it is the only sovereign European entity that maintains diplomatic relations with the democratically governed island. — **By Matthew Santucci, CNA**

Archbishop Paglia stresses community's role in palliative care

NEW DELHI: Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia (*pic*), president of the Pontifical Academy for Life, has emphasised the role of families and communities in providing palliative care.



The 78-year-old Vatican official said this recently while addressing the staff and students of Delhi's Vidyajyoti College of Theology on Ethics about the End-of-life issues.

The archbishop was in India recently where he met the laity, seminarians, clergy, religious, and bishops. While the major focus of his talks were on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the way the Indian Catholic Church has to prepare itself to wrestle with its benefits and threats, the archbishop also discussed issues such as Family, Technology etc., during this visit.

Fr Andrea Ciucci, the coordinating secretary of Pontifical Academy for Life, accompanied the archbishop on his India visit.

Archbishop Paglia also spoke to the laity of the Delhi Archdiocese on the importance of AI and how to appreciate the blessings it brings into people's lives and how to know when and where to draw the line, thereby avoiding the harm it can do to people, to communities, institutions and structures.

Exploring the end-of-life issues at the meeting at Vidyajyoti and referring to the fact that several millions are in need of palliative care

in India today, the Italian archbishop lauded the Church's personnel and institutions who are involved in caring for the needy through this unique ministry.

Making a distinction between usefulness and value, he reminded the gathering that humans have irreplaceable value, derived from being made in the image and likeness of God, rather than whether

one is useful or not. The elderly, the sick, the abandoned, the terminally ill, are in need of attention and accompaniment, the prelate noted.

Imitating the virtues of the Samaritan, who was recognised and identified as 'Good' by the others, Christians are challenged to be close to those who are at their end-of-life.

Like a virus, individualism is spreading very quickly, the archbishop reminded, but since we are made for families and communities, our lives find meaning and fulfilment only in such cultural contexts. Institutions do play a vital role in providing palliative care but families and communities are indispensable in caring for the abandoned, it was remarked.

Employing the fraternity-paradigm exhorting by Pope Francis, Archbishop Paglia urged all to move away from a culture of isolation and promote a culture of fraternity, assuring that the palliative care is received best in such a caring and fraternal atmosphere. — **By Stanislaus Alla, Matters India**



Cardinal Ignatius Suharyo of Jakarta (centre) with the Ursuline sisters during the celebration of the 165th anniversary of St Ursula convent and school.

Order of St Ursula celebrates 165 years in Jakarta

JAKARTA: The Order of St Ursula commemorated the 165th anniversary of the establishment of its convent and school in Jakarta, Indonesia on January 18.

Cardinal Ignatius Suharyo, the Archbishop of Jakarta, officiated the Holy Mass to celebrate the legacy of the Sancta Ursula monastery and the St Ursula Catholic School.

Spanning from early childhood education to high school, Sancta Ursula Schools cover playgroups, kindergarten, elementary, middle, and high school levels.

The nationwide acclaim it has garnered stands as a testament to the institution's unwavering commitment to providing quality education.

The success of Sancta Ursula extends beyond academic achievements, playing a pivotal role in shaping young Indonesian females into individuals characterised by nationalism, integrity, and influence across various societal sectors. Graduates have emerged as leaders in business, education, media, social services, and more.

A significant chapter in the school's history unfolded during a critical period, as alumni rallied to initiate a free vaccination

program that originated in Jakarta and extended across Java through mobile vaccination services. This altruistic move significantly impacted the nation's fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

Cardinal Suharyo publicly acknowledged the contributions of Sancta Ursula, expressing gratitude on behalf of the Catholic community and the Jakarta Archdiocese. He praised the Ursuline Sisters and Sancta Ursula School for their profound impact on Indonesian society.

Recognising the long history of the Sancta Ursula monastery and educational institution, Cardinal Suharyo expressed gratitude to the alumni, highlighting their diverse roles in society guided by the spirit of Serviam. He commended Sancta Ursula's mission to educate young people, fostering a learning community that integrates faith and human values into society.

Drawing inspiration from Rabindranath Tagore's biography, Cardinal Suharyo expressed hope that Sancta Ursula would continue providing its students with a clear vision to navigate the world and make decisions for the greater good. — **By Mathias Hariyadi, LiCAS News**



The staff and students of Delhi's Vidyajyoti College of Theology.

No perpetual vows in most US Orders in 2023

NEW YORK: Of the 508 American religious communities which responded to a new survey on the number of men and women who professed perpetual vows in 2023, a total of 438, representing 87 per cent, reported that they didn't have a single member who did so, and only 23 reported that they had more than one.

That tally reinforces other recent data confirming declines in the number of men and women religious in the United States, including a recent projection from the US bishops' conference that the total will drop 50 per cent over the next decade, from 33,000 in 2023 to approximately 17,000 in 2033.

Aside from declines, the new survey also profiles the new men and women making perpetual vows today.

The survey found that the average age of new religious professing perpetual vows is 36, with half of the responding individuals being age 33 or younger.

The most unanimous finding was that nearly all, or 99 per cent, of those 101 men and women who were surveyed were raised by their biological parents during what the survey calls "the most formative part of their childhood."

Women and Men Professing Perpetual Vows in Religious Life: The Profession Class of 2023, was researched and published by the Centre for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University. It was publicised by the US Bishops' Conference, January 26.

To compile the survey, researchers contacted 737 religious institutes, of which 508 responded.

Professing perpetual vows is considered a milestone moment in a religious order, because it signifies the point at which membership in the community becomes permanent.

A news release from the USCCB publicising the report notes that the study — commissioned annually since 2010 — was done



Sisters of the Servants of the Lord and the Virgin of Matara are seen after the ceremony where they professed vows at Holy Comforter-St. Cyprian Catholic Church in Washington. (CNS photo/Tyler Orsburn)

in preparation for the World Day of Prayer for Consecrated Life by the Catholic Church on Feb 2.

In a statement, Bishop Earl Boyea of Lansing, Michigan, on behalf of the Committee on Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations for the US bishops, highlighted the contributions these men and women make.

"In their work, ministry, and community, men and women in consecrated life make

a direct and tangible contribution to building up of the body of Christ," said Bishop Boyea.

"Whether it be serving the poor, teaching, providing medical care, or assisting with professional administration, consecrated men and women, in the rich array of their vocations, bring the light of the Gospel into the hearts of all those they encounter," he said.

— By John Lavenburg, *Crux*

India's bishops launch Catholic Connect App for faithful



BANGALORE: The Catholic Bishops Conference in India (CCBI) has inaugurated a new smartphone app, the Catholic Connect Mobile App, which will help the faithful in the country.

The App was officially launched during the plenary assembly at St John's National Academy of Health Sciences in Bangalore on January 31.

The President of India's Bishops' Conference, Cardinal Filipe Neri Ferrão, Archbishop of Bombay; Cardinal Oswald Gracias, Archbishop of Hyderabad; Cardinal Anthony Poola, and several others within the Conference's leadership did the honours.

In a statement, the Bishops' Conference explained that the App serves as a comprehensive platform, offering access to spiritual resources, relevant news and a range of Catholic life services, including health insurance, education, jobs, and emergency assistance.

Additionally, users can conveniently locate nearby churches and access various services provided by the Church in India.

The App aims to keep users informed about local developments, a feature intended to enhance a sense of community and connection among users, regardless of their geographical location.

The tool will also help the Catholics to con-

nect with their respective parishes and dioceses, as the App provides a page for "My Parish" and "My Diocese" with sections for information, events, notifications, announcements, and obituaries.

The App's users can select their parish and dioceses during registration.

In addition, the App provides a dedicated space for CCBI Commissions, showcasing their activities, training sessions, and programmes.

The interactive platform allows commission secretaries to directly feature their initiatives, thereby maximising the reach and impact of CCBI's various programmes. — By Deborah Castellano Lubov, *Vatican News*



Holy See Mission celebrates World Day of Peace in Geneva

VATICAN: At this year's celebration of the 57th World Day of Peace held on January 31, Cardinal Miguel Angel Ayuso Guixot reflected on Pope Francis' Message for the Day, emphasising that technological progress must be accompanied by an ethical framework to ensure the flourishing of a culture of peace and the building of a better world.

The annual prayerful gathering, now in its 15th year, was hosted by the Holy See's Permanent Mission to the United Nations and International Organisations in Geneva, and brought together numerous ambassadors, leaders of international organizations, and representatives of various religious communities.

Guests at the event heard short reflections from representatives of the different religious communities present in Geneva, including

Jews, Buddhists, Sufi Muslims, and Protestant and Greek Orthodox Christians.

A press release from the Holy See's Mission noted that the reflections were interspersed with prayerful invocations in Arabic, Chinese, French, English, Russian, and Spanish, with music provided by the Filipino and African choirs of St John XXIII Parish, where the event was held.

"The interreligious guests were each then gifted with an olive branch, as a memento of the occasion and a sign of our common efforts for peace," according to a press release.

After a final prayer led by Bishop Charles Morerod, OP, the Bishop of Lausanne, Fribourg, and Geneva, participants gathered for a reception in the parish hall. — By Christopher Wells, *Vatican News*

Korean Church bans Catholic spirituality group

SEOUL: The Seoul Archdiocese in South Korea recently took decisive action against the God's Will Spiritual Research Society, a Catholic spirituality group, and revoked the publishing permission for over ten books due to alleged doctrinal and spiritual errors.

Archbishop Peter Chung Soon-taick issued a decree on January 25, citing the opinion of the Committee on the Doctrine of the Faith of the Korean Bishops' Conference.

In the decree, Archbishop Chung banned the group from organising future gatherings and revoked licenses for books such as *The Book of Heaven*, *The Virgin Mary in the Kingdom of God's Will*, and *When God's Will Rules the Soul*. The decision was rooted in the assertion that these publications contained doctrinal and spiritual errors inconsistent with Catholic teaching.

The banned books also include *Collection of Prayers for the Will of God*, *Thy Kingdom Come*, *The Hours of Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, and *Holy Mass*. Archbishop Chung expressed concern that the dissemination of these materials might lead to false piety among the faithful and contribute to confusion and division within the Church.

The God's Will Spiritual Research Society, influenced by the works of Italian Catholic mystic Luisa Piccarreta, faced criticism for its teachings. Piccarreta, declared a Servant of God in 2005, had her beatification process



Luisa Piccarreta (1865-1947) was an Italian Catholic mystic and author known for her spiritual exercises centered on union with the will of God. (UCA News Photo/Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton, Canada)

hindered by the Vatican's Dicastery for the Doctrine of Faith due to concerns about her writings.

In 2023, the Korean Bishops' Committee for the Doctrine of Faith cautioned priests and laity to distance themselves from the spiritual group. While acknowledging the piety and value in Piccarreta's writings, the bishops expressed serious reservations about claims that elevated her to a position surpassing Jesus and the Virgin Mary. They warned against the assertion that Piccarreta initiated a new era of salvation, emphasising that such claims diminish the significance of Christ's salvation. — *ucanews.com*

Message of His Holiness

Through the desert God



Dear brothers and sisters!

When our God reveals Himself, His message is always one of freedom: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Ex 20:2). These are the first words of the Decalogue given to Moses on Mount Sinai. Those who heard them were quite familiar with the exodus of which God spoke: the experience of their bondage still weighed heavily upon them. In the desert, they received the “Ten Words” as a thoroughfare to freedom. We call them “commandments”, in order to emphasise the strength of the love by which God shapes His people. The call to freedom is a demanding one. It is not answered straightaway; it has to mature as

part of a journey. Just as Israel in the desert still clung to Egypt – often longing for the past and grumbling against the Lord and Moses – today too, God’s people can cling to an oppressive bondage that it is called to leave behind. We realise how true this is at those moments when we feel hopeless, wandering through life like a desert and lacking a promised land as our destination. Lent is the season of grace in which the desert can become, once more — in the words of the prophet Hosea — the place of our first love (cf. Hos 2:16-17). God shapes His people, He enables us to leave our slavery behind and experience a Passover from death to life. Like a bridegroom, the Lord draws us once more to Himself, whispering words of love to our hearts.

Opening our eyes to reality

The exodus from slavery to freedom is no abstract journey. If our celebration of Lent is to be concrete, the first step is to desire to open our eyes to reality. When the Lord calls out to Moses from the burning bush, He immediately shows that He is a God who sees and, above all, hears: “I have observed the misery of My people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey” (Ex 3:7-8). Today too, the cry of so many of our oppressed brothers and sisters rises to heaven. Let us ask ourselves: Do we hear that cry? Does it trouble us? Does it move us? All too many things keep us apart from each other, denying the fraternity that, from the beginning, binds us to one another.

During my visit to Lampedusa, as a way of countering the globalisation of indifference, I asked two questions, which have become more and more pressing: “Where are you?” (Gen 3:9) and “Where is your brother?” (Gen 4:9). Our Lenten journey will be concrete if, by listening once more to those two ques-

tions, we realise that even today we remain under the rule of Pharaoh. A rule that makes us weary and indifferent. A model of growth that divides and robs us of a future. Earth, air and water are polluted, but so are our souls. True, Baptism has begun our process of liberation, yet there remains in us an inexplicable longing for slavery. A kind of attraction to the security of familiar things, to the detriment of our freedom.

In the *Exodus* account, there is a significant detail: it is God who sees, is moved and brings freedom; Israel does not ask for this. Pharaoh stifles dreams, blocks the view of heaven, makes it appear that this world, in which human dignity is trampled upon and authentic bonds are denied, can never change. He put everything in bondage to himself. Let us ask: Do I want a new world? Am I ready to leave behind my compromises with the old? The witness of many of my brother bishops and a great number of those who work for peace and justice has increasingly convinced me that we need to combat a deficit of hope that stifles dreams and the silent cry that reaches to heaven and moves the heart of God. This “deficit of hope” is not unlike the nostalgia for slavery that paralysed Israel in the desert



(Vatican News photo)

and prevented it from moving forward. An exodus can be interrupted: how else can we explain the fact that humanity has arrived at the threshold of universal fraternity and at

levels of scientific, technical, cultural, and juridical development capable of guaranteeing dignity to all, yet gropes about in the darkness of inequality and conflict.

Lenten Campaign initiations

Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur

This year’s Lenten theme, *Church Celebrating Human Fraternity*, reflects the ideals of Pope Francis’ *Fratelli Tutti*, emphasising social friendship and community outreach for the betterment of humanity. The theme underscores the importance of unity, highlighting the human fraternity’s significance and promoting the idea that, despite differences, individuals share a common humanity, belonging to one large family.

The Lenten Campaign kit includes a redesigned general banner and modifications to the envelopes, intended for reuse



in the years to come.

All the resources poster, calendar, slides for the Way of the Cross, children’s activity and the reflections for the Sundays of Lent including Ash Wednesday and Good Friday will be available online. There will also be a thematic video sent to all parishes to be viewed on Ash Wednesday and nine other videos depicting the communities they work for.

There are also programmes organised in the districts involving the different ministries under AOHD.

For more information, visit: www.aohd.org/lent

Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur

The main theme for this year’s Lent reflection for the Diocese of Malacca-Johore will follow the Holy Father, Pope Francis’ proposal for 2024 to be marked as a year dedicated to prayer (Year of Prayer). This is to prepare the Church for the Jubilee year, the following year in 2025.

1. Lenten Reflections

These reflections will be sent weekly thought the period.

2. Lenten Banners

Two Lenten banners (in the four major languages) will be given to each parish which serves as a visual focal point at each parish, drawing attention and serving as a constant reminder to parishioners about the three pillars of Lent.

3. New Lenten Envelope Design:

The redesigned Lenten envelopes aim to



effectively communicate the spirit of Lenten almsgiving and encouraging acts of charity for the less fortunate.

4. List of Lenten Activities in the diocese

To complement these materials, each parish is urged to list out proposed Lenten activities they plan to carry out which will be compiled by Caritas MJD and made available online.

These will help to create awareness, mobilise action, and provide accessible information for those who wish to participate, ensuring parishioners are actively engaged in charitable activities throughout the Lenten season in their parish and beyond.

For more information, go to <https://caritasmjd.mjdiocese.my>

Pope Francis for Lent 2024

leads us to freedom

Season of conversion, time of freedom

God has not grown weary of us. Let us welcome Lent as the great season in which He reminds us: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Ex 20:2). Lent is a season of conversion, a time of freedom. Jesus Himself, as we recall each year on the first Sunday of Lent, was driven into the desert by the Spirit in order to be tempted in freedom. For forty days, He will stand before us and with us: the incarnate Son. Unlike Pharaoh, God does not want subjects, but sons and daughters. The desert is the place where our freedom can mature in a personal decision not to fall back into slavery. In Lent, we find new criteria of justice and a community with which we can press forward on a road not yet taken.

This, however, entails a struggle, as the book of Exodus and the temptations of Jesus in the desert make clear to us. The voice of God, who says, "You are My Son, the Belov-

ed" (Mk 1:11), and "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Ex 20:3) is opposed by the enemy and his lies. Even more to be feared than Pharaoh are the idols that we set up for ourselves; we can consider them as His voice speaking within us. To be all-powerful, to be looked up to by all, to domineer over others: every human being is aware of how deeply seductive that lie can be. It is a road well-travelled. We can become attached to money, to certain projects, ideas or goals, to our position, to a tradition, even to certain individuals. Instead of making us move forward, they paralyse us. Instead of encounter, they create conflict. Yet there is also a new humanity, a people of the little ones and of the humble who have not yielded to the allure of the lie. Whereas those who serve idols become like them, mute, blind, deaf and immobile (cf. Ps 114:4), the poor of spirit are open and ready: a silent force of good that heals and sustains the world.

Pause in prayer

It is time to act, and in Lent, to act also means to pause. To pause in prayer, in order to receive the Word of God, to pause like the Samaritan in the presence of a wounded brother or sister. Love of God and love of neighbour are one love. Not to have other gods is to pause in the presence of God beside the flesh of our neighbour. For this reason, prayer, almsgiving and fasting are not three unrelated acts, but a single movement of openness and self-emptying, in which we cast out the idols that weigh us down, the attachments that imprison us. Then the atrophied and isolated heart will revive. Slow down, then, and pause! The contemplative dimension of life that Lent helps us to rediscover will release new energies. In the presence of God, we become brothers and sisters, more sensitive to one another: in place of threats and enemies, we discover companions and fellow travellers. This is God's dream, the Promised Land to which we journey once we have left our slavery behind.



A time of Communitarian decisions

The Church's synodal form, which in these years we are rediscovering and cultivating, suggests that Lent is also a time of communitarian decisions, of decisions, small and large, that are counter-current. Decisions capable of altering the daily lives of individuals and entire neighbourhoods, such as the ways we acquire goods, care for creation, and strive to include those who go unseen or are looked down upon. I invite every Christian community to do just this: to offer its members moments set aside to rethink their lifestyles, times to examine their presence in society and the contribution they make to its betterment. Woe to us if our Christian penance were to resemble the kind of penance that so dismayed Jesus. To us too, He says: "Whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting" (Mt 6:16). Instead, let others see joyful faces, catch the scent of freedom and experience the love that makes all things new, beginning with the smallest and

those nearest to us. This can happen in every one of our Christian communities.

To the extent that this Lent becomes a time of conversion, an anxious humanity will notice a burst of creativity, a flash of new hope. Allow me to repeat what I told the young people whom I met in Lisbon last summer: "Keep seeking and be ready to take risks. At this moment in time, we face enormous risks; we hear the painful plea of so many people. Indeed, we are experiencing a third world war fought piecemeal. Yet let us find the courage to see our world, not as being in its death throes but in a process of giving birth, not at the end but at the beginning of a great new chapter of history. We need courage to think like this" (Address to University Students, August 3, 2023). Such is the courage of conversion, born of coming up from slavery. For faith and charity take hope, this small child, by the hand. They teach her to walk, and at the same time, she leads them forward.

I bless all of you and your Lenten journey.

in Peninsular Malaysia

Diocese of Penang

This Lent we invite you to contemplate on the connection of our own sins and the sufferings in the world today with the videos and stories prepared. Reflect and try to understand why Jesus had to suffer and die on the cross for all of us to save us from eternal death in order to give us eternal life. Once you understand His love for you, make heartfelt repentance to change.

Rebuild Our Church

"Francis, rebuild my church, which, as you see, is falling down." Jesus appeared and spoke this to St Francis de Assisi. St Francis understood that he was not supposed to put up stones and rebuild the structure of the church of San Damiano that was falling down but the Church that Jesus meant was the Church. Church that Jesus built on St Peter (Matthew 16:18).

Brokenness in ourselves, broken marriage leads to a broken family which is a fall of the Church. Separation and competition among

the ministries of church is the downfall of discipleship. Lack of unity among the people of God shakes the faith of the Church.

Lent is a season to urge the rebuilding of faith within the family by putting Christ amidst the family, within ourselves and to live His way that rebuilds the Church.

Rebuild Our Community

Families are the components of a community, each and everyone of us are accountable for what we do as a community.

Individuals make up a family where we come as a community at workplaces, neighbourhood, society and ultimately a nation. The spiritual growth we carry as individuals from within us generates our contribution to the community.

A broken nation means it was caused by the divisions, unfairness, injustices, threats of war, immorality and events that disrupt the peace and unity in our society.

Are we allowing God to fix the brokenness in us for us to be rebuilt? This season, as a community let us allow God to fix us and we

seek the strength to rebuild what is broken in our common home.

Rebuild Our Common Home

The earth is a home for everyone; a gift from God to us. Pope Francis promulgated *Laudato Si'* which means "Praised Be" that focuses on care for our common home. The Pope addressed every living person on this planet as the significant being to care for creation. "And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good" Genesis 1:31.

As a community we take from the bounty of the earth for whatever we need for our subsistence but are we serving the duty to protect the bounty? We are responsible to protect the earth to ensure its fruitfulness for the future generations.

St Francis cared deeply for creation in order to live an authentic Christianity. St Francis preached to both people and birds, he travelled through the countryside studying plants, animals and trees because he felt all plants and animals are part of God's Kingdom.

Testimonies, climate change, real stories of the poor, Kempen Kasih Guide, Parish Fundraising Ideas and more.

LENTEN KIT

TOGETHER WE REBUILD
OUR CHURCH, COMMUNITY
AND COMMON HOME

Visit <https://caritaspenang.com/lent2024/> for all the resource materials.

Faith and 'Greatest Prayer Ever' help Catholic parents forgive son's killer

When they learned of their 23-year-old son's murder in March 2022, John and Sharon Echaniz fell to the ground in prayer.

"We hit our knees," said John Echaniz. "It was almost indescribable."

"It was profound sorrow and ... a super deep anguish," his wife, Sharon Echaniz, added.

Michael Echaniz, a teacher at a classical preparatory academy in San Antonio, had been shot to death while leaving his apartment on March 10, 2022. Days later, the killer — Mathew Wiessing, 25, a former colleague — was arrested and charged with the slaying, an ambush motivated by jealousy over Echaniz's relationship with Wiessing's ex-girlfriend.

On Jan 10, John stood in a San Antonio courtroom to deliver a victim impact statement at Wiessing's sentencing hearing, at which Wiessing expressed remorse and a desire to take responsibility prior to the judge's imposition of a 40-year prison term.

John also read a handwritten reflection from his wife, who had remained at the couple's home in Front Royal, Virginia, due to chemotherapy treatment.

In their respective statements, each parent shared the agony their son's murder had inflicted, and the raw anger and heartache that had seared their souls.

And they also had a parting wish for their son's killer.

"As for me, I forgive you for what you've done. I earnestly desire for you to be with Michael, my son, in paradise one day. And I mean that from the bottom of my heart," John said. "Along with justice, I seek God's mercy for you. And I pray for your heart to be open to the unconditional love of the Almighty."

"I want you to know, Mathew Wiessing, that despite all this, I forgive you," wrote Sharon. "I wish no evil upon you. I pray you choose to dedicate your life, which is a gift to you, to making amends for the devastation you have

caused, and in doing so (to) find peace."

Now, John and Sharon are living out the reality of that offer of forgiveness, relying on their deeply held Catholic faith to implement what John called in his statement "those pesky words near the end" of the Lord's Prayer — "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

"The first thing to say here is that it is not done," John said. "This is something that I continue to pore over. It's not a light switch."

"I think that you immediately know, because of your faith, that it needs to be done," Sharon said. "But humanly speaking ... you have to pray ... that you can do it, because everything about it ... you're kind of repelled. You want justice. And you're just like, 'OK, well, there's mercy that needs to be involved here. But I want justice.'"

Like grief — the stages of which John traced in his 22-minute courtroom statement, which has become a viral video — forgiveness is a process, the Echanizes said.

Denial and anger are the first steps, they said.

"My sweet, harmless, schoolteacher son is dead?" John said in his statement, holding up a picture of his son Michael tenderly kissing the head of his newborn niece, his hair tousled and his glasses askew.

John said his wife's "deep, painful, sorrowful sobs" and "the howls of my children" that burst forth upon confirmation of Michael's death echo in his mind to this day.

"You murdered my son in cold blood," he told Wiessing. "You crushed my whole family with one blow."

He asked Wiessing what his son's last words had been, and recounted the laying out of his son at the funeral home.

"Our Lord Jesus ... said, 'I tell you there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance.'"

Luke 15:7



John, left, and Sharon Echaniz are seen with their son Michael at his graduation from Christendom College in this undated photo. (OSV News photo/Christendom College)

"I'll never forget when I saw my son's dead body for the first time back in Virginia ... how the morticians had to patch up the holes you made in his skull and his right hand," he said, noting, "It made me think of how the Virgin

Mary might have felt, beholding her crucified Son."

"Before you acted on your hatred and despair, I believe you had many opportunities to reflect, to change course, to repent of the evil intended, to cry out for God's grace to come out of the darkness," wrote Sharon. "You chose not to."

The Echanizes recalled in their statements the many ways in which Michael — who had just taken what Sharon called "his first 'real' job" after graduating from Christendom College in Front Royal — had impacted all those he knew through "acts of kindness, small courtesies and considerations, and a ready willingness to aid and serve."

Wiessing had deprived countless others of the chance to know and love Michael, both parents said.

They pointed to their family's deeply held Catholic faith, which had led their son to wear a rosary around his wrist as a matter of course.

John even held up a rosary in the courtroom, offering it to his son's killer; he said that he gave a rosary to another family present at the courthouse for a hearing on their loved

one's murder.

Reciting a daily family rosary with their seven children was a family tradition, with each member invoking their patron saint at the end.

"I'll never forget ending that first family rosary (after the murder) when we came to St Michael," John told the courtroom. "I don't do a whole lot of crying in front of my children, but I sure did then."

Their longtime spiritual regimen — prayer, Mass, Eucharistic adoration and Scripture study — has been crucial in sustaining them as they navigate life without their son, the Echanizes said.

Sharon concluded her message to Wiessing with two Scripture verses: "O, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; for His mercy endures forever" (Ps 107:1) and "We have this confidence in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us" (1 Jn 5:14).

John quoted Luke 15:7 in his address to the court: "Our Lord Jesus ... said, 'I tell you there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance.'"

The Echanizes said they were grateful for what Sharon described as the "wonderful faith community" of their parish, St John the Baptist in Front Royal.

"It's a lot of grace coming your way," she said.

John said that over the past two years since his son was killed, he has felt as if "somebody had a hand on my back and was keeping me from falling down."

The couple's pastor and other priests have "basically encouraged us to take our time" and work through the forgiveness process authentically, he added.

"I know that God, if He knows that that is my goal ... will help me get there," Sharon said. "It's just that faith in God (that says), 'Yes, I want this and I want to be able to do it. Please help me there; I know I'm not there yet.'"

John said he draws particular strength from St Cyprian of Carthage's meditations on the Our Father, extolling it as "the greatest prayer of all time ... because Jesus wrote it."

He said the third-century martyr, whose name was Michael's middle name, "expounds in great depth on each line" of the Lord's Prayer, shedding light on its most challenging phrase — the call to forgiveness.

In the courtroom, John stressed that the call to forgiveness was more urgent than ever.

"Anger begets anger. Misery begets more misery; violence begets more violence," he said in his statement. "That cycle can only stop one person at a time, one heart at a time. And each of us can only start with ourselves."

— By Gina Christian, OSV



Michael Echaniz was a faithful Catholic, a dedicated teacher, and a wonderful friend to many. (Chelsea Academy pic)



WORD IN PROGRESS

Karen-Michaela Tan

A Catholic friend who had had a tumultuous 2023, messaged me in the early days of the new year, saying though she had hoped that 2024 would bode better, she had found herself swamped by more bad news already. “Do you have any mantras to help me?” she texted.

As my head went through numerous portions of comforting Scripture, I also made a mental note to speak to her when she was not as distraught.

Often, well-meaning Catholics, in their bumbling attempts to evangelise or bring a ‘lost one’ back to the fold, approach requests for comfort in pedantic, didactic ways. Not knowing the Bible as well as other Christians, and being even less schooled in dogma and apologetics, we shoot from the hip and target the one thing we think we understand. For my part, the trigger was the word ‘mantra’.

A mantra — in its purest word use — is a sacred utterance from Buddhist or Hindu scripture; a numinous sound, a syllable, word or phonemes, or group of words believed by practitioners to have religious, magical or spiritual powers. While the word is now used colloquially as an affirmation or slogan, when used in her context and current challenges, my friend desired something to take her to God.

If I did not know better, I would have jumped to the conclusion that my friend

was seeking a spell to make her feel better, or to change her life circumstances. I would have possibly told her not to look for quick fixes, and to remind her that we Catholics are famed for our tight-lipped, dogged bearing of suffering. Not for us the Gospel of prosperity! And while we aren’t Bible-belt Christian fire-and-brimstone-and-smiting-God, we definitely are not in the business of mantras. Or are we?

The short answer is yes, we are. In fact, in Australia, in the Archdiocese of Brisbane, kids in Year Five Catholic education classes are already taught about the practice of praying with mantras. Christians who want to use a mantra to pray can repeat a short prayer, a short passage from Scripture, a religious word or name for God.

But I digress. The true need of my friend was communion with God. She wanted His blessing on her new year, she craved for His assurance of His presence, especially in the storms she was going to go through. She wanted proximity to a sheltering Lord who could be counted on to never let her hand go.

Sometimes though, when a person has not walked with the Lord for some time, they forget the familiarity they used to share, and the value of that relationship. It is here that those who have walked more consistently with God, and for perhaps longer, need to step up to be a sort of intermediary.

We should deem it an honour when someone asks us to pray for them. For a long

time, I winced when I received this request, thinking, “Friend, I can’t even pray for myself, what makes you think God will listen to me on your behalf?” Then I remember the paralytic who was lowered down through the roof by his friends (Mark 2:4) because the crowds who had thronged to Jesus for healing had blocked every conventional entrance to the place where He ministered. The paralysed man was not an important personage, or he would have ordered his coterie to clear the way by force. He may have had just enough money to hire men to carry his stretcher, but I doubt four paid men would have agreed to clamber up a roof with a dead-weight body, also bearing in mind roofs of those days were thatched with straw and scaffolded mostly with tree branches or planks of very little weight-bearing capability. The only thing that could have motivated his friends to brave the roof was care and concern — love — for their friend.

When I explained to my friend that Catholic meditation was a process (see <https://catholicworldmission.org/catholic-guide-to-meditation/>), not just a word or phrase, she told me that her mental challenges did not allow this kind of long quietude and inactivity. What she required was something she could immediately say to stop impulsive, potentially self-harming tendencies (as an aside, the person is on medication, in the care of a trained mental health professional, and it was the practitioner who suggested Christian

meditation).

Immediately I knew then that whatever I suggested needed to be short and powerful. A recitation of Psalm 23 was out of the question for a mind wired for violent action. After dismissing conventional Scripture verses and prayers, we settled on “Jesus is bigger than this!” as her battle cry. Not biblical, not profound, but quick, effective, and to the point.

I engraved a metal disc with these words, and gave it to her on a leather cord long enough that she can seize the piece in her hand without strangling herself. Like a fidget toy, she soothed herself with it, turning the small piece of stainless steel over and over when anxious, fingers twisting the hardy cord when she felt stressed.

It has been a month since that gift. My friend sent me a text a few days ago which read, “Remember how you told me that our God was a God of all seasons, times and phases? I get it, but I understand it better when I think of God like the seasonings salt and pepper. Salt purifies, protects and preserves. Pepper adds life, vitality and warmth. I don’t cook, but you are the chef that brought those two ingredients out of the spice cupboard for me.” May we all be salt and pepper to the lives which need us.

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

BE OUR GUEST

How about an eco-Lent?

By Elena Mei Yun

This year, Lent commences on February 14 and we will be celebrating Easter on March 31. Why are we talking about Lent when we have not finished the Chinese New Year celebrations, you may ask?

It is not too early to think about what plans and campaigns to undertake for Lent. If you are thinking of doing something different this year, here are 10 Eco-Lent ideas you could do:

Eco Lent #1 Plant a seed

Planting a seed is synonymous with the new beginnings of January and February, the sacrificial element of Lent and the long-awaited arrival of the lunar new year. And it’s not just symbolic — this is a great time of the year to begin sowing and growing if you’ve ever considered it. If you start now, you might get a fruit tree harvested within three months’ time. Growing a garden can be a rewarding pastime, as well as providing a bounty of sustainable food. Look for peat-free compost at your local garden centre or even better, pop a composter in your garden and make your own!

Eco Lent #2 Be a swapper where you reuse, repurpose and recycle

Why not join a swap event where you could swap clothes, items that you no longer use, spring cleaning your house ‘Marie Kondo’ style? Start by joining The Swap Project (<https://www.facebook.com/theswapproject/>) where you could swap your item that you no longer use. Just ensure they are still in good usable condition. Buy pre-loved items instead from thrift shops or bazaars like the ones organised by the Church of St Francis of Assisi, Cheras every Sunday to save items from landing in landfill. If you have young children, why not opt for hand me downs instead? Children grow up quickly and it is friendly to the pocket.

Eco Lent #3 Turn down the AC!

Why not turn down the air-conditioning during the 40 days of Lent? Use a stand fan and you may get used to it before you know it. If it is too warm, set your air conditioner to a timer to conserve energy. Air conditioning units consume a lot of energy, creating pollution in the form of greenhouse gas emissions. They are referred to as greenhouse gasses because they are released into the atmosphere, which in turn then causes a planet’s warming. These greenhouse gases lead to global warming.

Eco Lent #4 Bring your tiffin, shopping bags and flask!

Get yourself a cool take-away tiffin carrier from Auntie’s Tiffin or those old-fashioned hardy Eagle brand tiffins to *ta pau* your food. Some cafes even have cheaper promotion if you bring your own flask! A sustainable way to reduce plastics and from ending into the sea; killing thousands of sea turtles.

Eco Lent #5 Use fossil fuel, use public transport and carpool!

There are many ways to cut down fuel consumption. Biggest pollution emissions in Southeast Asia comes from industry emissions, power generation and vehicle emissions. Road transport contributes over 70 per cent of air pollution in urban areas and is the second largest contributor to the total carbon dioxide emissions in Malaysia at 21 per cent in 2016. In Malaysia, private cars, motorcycles, light, and heavy vehicles are major contributors to deterioration in air quality, especially in urban areas. (Source: <https://aaqr.org/articles/aaqr-20-02-0a-0074>)

Try carpooling to church, events and places. Use the MRT, LRT and buses. Get the monthly My50 bus pass if you are a regular public transport user. You could

apply for a concession card if you are a senior citizen, student or person with disabilities. Check out <https://myrapid.com.my/our-products/concession-cards/>

Eco Lent #6 Switch to cloth wipes, nappies and menstrual pads

This is one of the biggest changes I’ve made over the years; especially since having our first baby and wanting to tread as lightly as possible. Cloth nappies and wipes are comfy, effective and simple to use (they look beautiful too). Our favourite brands of nappy are: Alva baby, Patpat and Holabebe which are all ethical Malaysian businesses. For grown-ups, cloth menstrual pads are also growing in popularity, with many people finding that chemical-free pads help to lessen pain and lighten periods. SERUM aims to provide reusable sanitary pads for 500 beneficiaries from underserved communities across Malaysia. For every RM15 donated, one reusable sanitary pad is provided. We aim to provide a minimum of two reusable sanitary pads to each beneficiary.

Eco Lent #7 Review your spending – who/what do you fund?

Do a quick search of your spending and you will be able to find a wealth of information. Be an ethical consumer by looking up on the company <https://www.ethicalconsumer.org/company-profile/makro-cash-carry-malaysia>.

Also, don’t be afraid to ask. A truly ethical company will already have a mission statement in place and will have full traceability in all its products. If a brand doesn’t know where the raw materials for their products come from, they probably aren’t very ethical. Be particularly demanding with clothes, coffee and chocolate, where modern-day slavery is still rife in the mainstream industry.

**Eco Lent #8 Go vegetarian or vegan**

This may seem easy-peasy to those who avoid animal products all the time, but for people who are in the transition phase — learning about the horrors of animal agriculture and the environmental effects — Lent might be the perfect time to dive into meat-free eating.

Eco Lent #9 Learn to compost your organic waste!

How many of us take separating our rubbish seriously? Why not collect all your organic waste when you cook and turn it into a compost? Send to your nearest compost bin, urban community garden or the church, if the church has a community compost bin. It makes the soil fertile and you would be able to grow edibles!

Eco Lent #10 Do a digital detox

Set strict parameters for use of personal devices, i.e. phones off during the workday or during evenings when you’re with family, no TV except on weekends, checking email and social media at designated times each day, etc. This is hard especially with work demands and family demands in these modern times but digital detox lessens anxiety. You would have more conversations with family and friends and you might be surprised after the 40 days’ challenge!

As we head towards the lighter and brighter days of Easter, make a positive change for the planet this Lent by trying out one or some of these eco-friendly swaps. With six weeks of reflection and small actions and baby steps, you might be surprised at what you can achieve by Easter!

● Our guest columnist this week is **Elena Mei Yun**, a mother, hiker, kombucha brewer and bicycle commuter who rides to work.



Fr Ron Rolheiser

Breaking faith with each other

Is this new or are we just more aware of it? Hatred and contempt are everywhere. They are in our government houses, in our communities, in our churches, and in our families. We are struggling, mostly without success, to be civil with each other, let alone to respect each other. Why? Why is this happening and intensifying?

Moreover, on both sides, we are often justifying this hatred on moral grounds, even biblical grounds, claiming that the Gospel itself gives us grounds for our disrespect — *My truth is so right and you are so wrong that I can disrespect you and I have biblical grounds to hate you!*

Well, even a cursory look at Scripture should be enough to enable us to see this for what it is; rationalisation, self-interest, and the farthest thing from Jesus.

Let's begin with something already taught long before Jesus. In the Jewish scriptures, we already find this text: "I have made you contemptible and base before all the people, since you do not keep My ways, but show partiality in your decisions. Have we not all the one Father? Has not the one God created us? Why do we break faith with one another?" (Malachi 2,8-10) Long before Jesus, Jewish spirituality already demanded that we be fair and never show partiality. However, it still gave us permission to hate our enemies

and to take revenge when we had been wronged — "an eye for an eye".

Jesus turns this on its head. Everywhere in His person and in His teaching, most explicitly in the Sermon on the Mount, He challenges us in a radically new way, telling us that, if we want to go to heaven, our virtue needs to go deeper than that of the Scribes and the Pharisees. What was their virtue?

The Scribes and Pharisees of His time were very much like the church-going Christians of our time. They were sincere, essentially honest, basically good people, who kept the commandments and practised strict justice. But, according to Jesus, that isn't enough. Why? If you are a sincere person who is honest, keeps the commandments, and is fair to everyone, what's still missing? What's still missing lies at the very heart of Jesus' moral teaching, namely, *the practice of a love and forgiveness that goes beyond hatred and grievance*. What exactly is this?

In justice and fairness, you are still entitled to hate someone who hates you and to extract an appropriate vengeance on someone who has wronged you. However, Jesus asks something else of us: "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour' and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of

your Father in heaven. ... If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? *Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*" (Matthew 5, 43-48)

This is the very essence of Christian morality. Can you love someone who hates you? Can you do good to someone who wishes you evil? Can you forgive someone who has wronged you? Can you forgive a murderer? It's this, and not some particular issue in moral theology, which is the litmus test for who is a Christian and who isn't. Can you love someone who hates you? Can you forgive someone who has hurt you? Can you move beyond your natural proclivity for vengeance?

Sadly, today we are failing that test on both sides of the ideological and religious spectrum. We see this everywhere — from the highest levels of government, from high levels in our churches, and in public and private discourse everywhere, that is, people openly espousing disrespect, division, hatred, and vengeance — and trying to claim the moral high ground in doing this. Major politicians speak openly and explicitly about hating others and about exacting revenge on those who oppose them. Worse still, churches and church

leaders of every kind are lining up behind them and giving them "Gospel" support for their espousal of hatred and vengeance.

This needs to be named and challenged: anyone who is advocating division, disrespect, hatred, or revenge is antithetical to Jesus and the Gospels. As well, *anyone supporting such a person by an appeal to Jesus, the Gospels, or authentic morality, is also antithetical to Jesus and the Gospels*.

God is love. Jesus is love enfleshed. Disrespect, hatred, division, and revenge may never be preached in God's or Jesus' name, no matter the cause, no matter the anger, no matter the wrong. This doesn't mean that we cannot have disagreements, spirited discussions, and bitter debates. But disrespect, hatred, division, and revenge (no matter how deeply they may in fact be felt inside us) may not be advocated in the name of goodness and Jesus. Division, disrespect, hatred, and vengeance are the Anti-Christ.

● **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

SOCIAL JUSTICE



Making a Difference
Tony Magliano

'Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented'

In his 1986 Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, the late Elie Wiesel, reflecting on the Holocaust, and his personal experience of it — being in the same World War II Nazi concentration camps where his mother, father, and sister were murdered, and coming very close to being executed himself — voiced these profound words:

"I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented. Sometimes we must interfere. When human lives are endangered, when human dignity is in jeopardy, national borders and sensitivities become irrelevant. Wherever men or women are persecuted because of their race, religion, or political views, that place must — at that moment — become the centre of the universe" (see: <https://mediaplayer.nobelprize.org/media/player/?id=2028>).

Several years ago, I interviewed Bishop Thomas Gumbleton, retired auxiliary bishop of Detroit. Bishop Gumbleton, 94, was one of the principal authors of the US bishops' prophetic 1983 pastoral letter *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response*.

During our conversation the following point jumped out at me, and continues to remain with me, Bishop Gumbleton said, "Most Catholics are more influenced by the culture than the Gospel." I then asked him, "Would you say that about your brother

bishops as well?" Without hesitation, he replied, "Absolutely!"

Clearly it appears that most Catholics are not actively engaged — from a Gospel/Catholic social teaching perspective — in the life and death issues facing humanity like hunger and poverty, the arms trade and war, environmental degradation and climate change, the death penalty and abortion.

The late founder of the US annual "March for Life," Nellie Gray, once told me that "If Catholics alone would stand up and demand an end to abortion, it would end!"

For many years, ministering in several dioceses, I have found it extremely difficult to persuade the vast majority of Catholics to speak up and act out on behalf of our countless suffering brothers and sisters, and that of our wounded earth home.

Furthermore, rarely do we hear challenging, countercultural social justice and peace homilies from the clergy.

Pope Francis has often called this sad reality the "culture of indifference" where solid commitment to non-violently protecting and enhancing the life and dignity of all human beings — especially the vulnerable and poor — is of little concern. He recently said that in societies often polluted by a culture of indifference and of waste, "as believers, we are called to go against the



tide with a culture of tenderness, that is, of caring for others as God has cared for us: for me, for you, for each one of us" (see: <https://bitly.ws/3aQTz>).

Encouragingly, there does exist a relatively few prophetic souls who refuse to allow the "culture of indifference" to silence their words. An example here is the recent joint statement by Cardinal Robert McElroy of the Diocese of San Diego, and Archbishop John Wester of Santa Fe, New Mexico calling for an immediate cease-fire to the Israel-Hamas war (see: <https://bitly.ws/3aVpu>).

And fairly recently, seven Catholics known as the "Kings Bay Plowshares 7" (pic) even put their words of peace into courageous action by placing signs of Christian non-violence inside the Kings Bay Naval Base in Georgia — where at least five nuclear submarines are based. And consequently, they did jail time for their acts of non-violent resistance (see: <https://kingsbayplowshares7.org/>).

Another encouraging act of faithful, courageous Gospel-based witness was the non-violent blocking of doors and locking of gates at a Washington, D.C. abortion centre by veteran pro-life Catholic activist Joan Andrews Bell, along with several other Christians. Consequently, Bell (a friend of mine), is now in jail (see: <https://bitly.ws/3aVuD>).

It does us good to reflect again on the profound words of Elie Wiesel, "I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented."

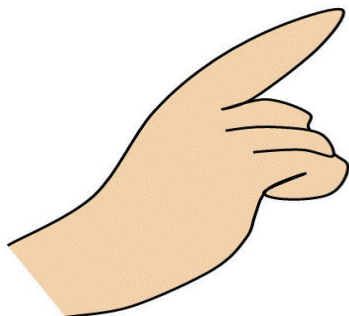
● **Tony Magliano** is an internationally syndicated Catholic social justice and peace columnist. He is can be reached at tmag6@comcast.net

Little Catholics' Corner

Jesus Heals Leprosy Word Search

E	Z	V	A	S	U	A	C	C	Y	Z	P	P	U	L
L	S	D	W	A	Q	L	F	S	X	R	I	T	T	U
B	P	A	I	A	E	C	O	D	I	O	I	B	K	A
M	P	K	E	A	T	R	D	E	M	A	H	S	A	F
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N	O	T	I	C	E	C	X	E	D	E	L	A	E	H
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AFRAID
ASHAMED
CLEANSED
CROWDS
DISEASE
EXCITED



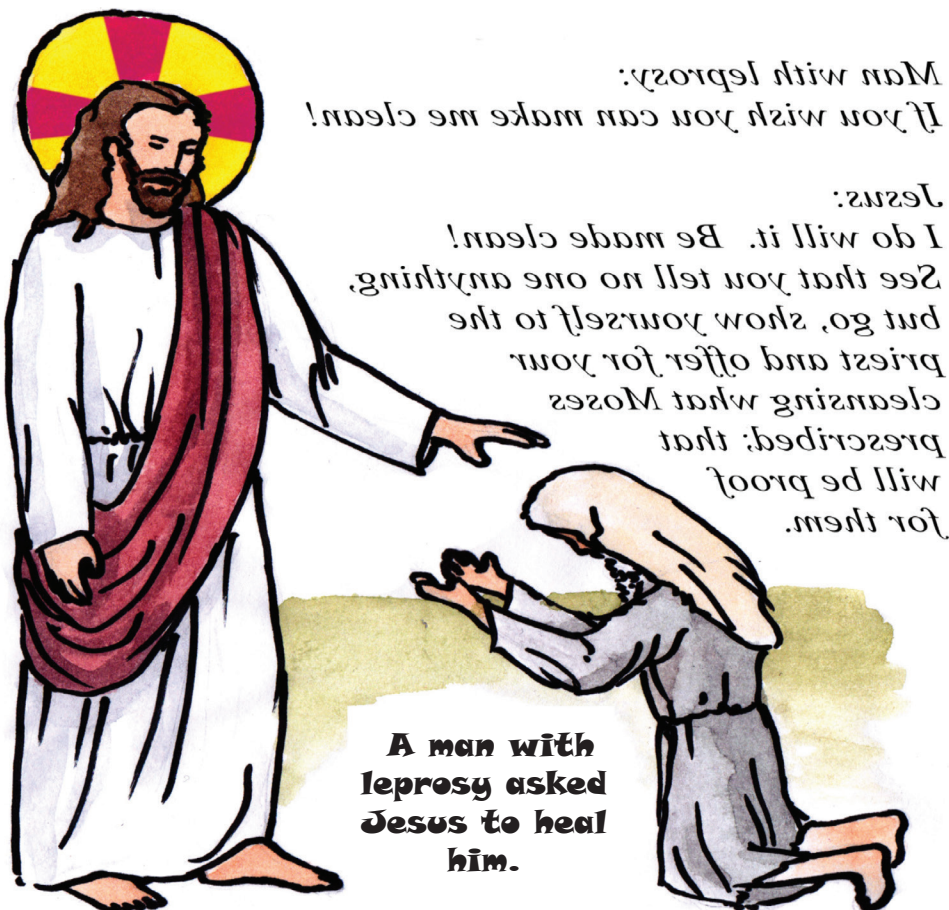
HEALED
HUMBLE
LEPROSY
MIRACLE
NOTICE
PRIEST
TOUCHED

CAN YOU CRACK THE CODE TO READ JESUS' MESSAGE?

𐀀𐀁 𐀂𐀃𐀄𐀅𐀆𐀇𐀈𐀉𐀊𐀋𐀌
 𐀍𐀎𐀏𐀐𐀑𐀒𐀓𐀔𐀕𐀖𐀗𐀘𐀙𐀚
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 𐀶𐀷𐀸𐀹𐀺𐀻𐀼𐀽𐀾𐀿



A B C E F H I L N O P R S T U V Y
 𐀀𐀁𐀂𐀃𐀄𐀅𐀆𐀇𐀈𐀉𐀊𐀋𐀌𐀍𐀎𐀏𐀐𐀑𐀒𐀓𐀔𐀕𐀖𐀗𐀘𐀙𐀚𐀛𐀜𐀝𐀞𐀟𐀠𐀡𐀢𐀣𐀤𐀥𐀦𐀧𐀨𐀩𐀪𐀫𐀬𐀭𐀮𐀯𐀰𐀱𐀲𐀳𐀴𐀵𐀶𐀷𐀸𐀹𐀺𐀻𐀼𐀽𐀾𐀿



A man with leprosy asked Jesus to heal him.

What did Jesus reply to him?
Look at this page in the mirror to find out!

To all our HERALD friends who are celebrating ...
Happy Chinese New Year!



Let's Colour

Dear children,

This coming Wednesday is Ash Wednesday, which is the first day of Lent.

Lent is a special time in which we prepare to celebrate Jesus' death and resurrection on Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

Lent is a time of repentance. We

make sacrifices and try to improve our lives to become more like Jesus.

Jesus never sinned but He gave up His life to pay for our sins.

That is why we make sacrifices out of love for God and to make up for our sins.

We offer our sacrifices to God



the Father, just as Jesus on the cross offered up His life to God the Father.

On Ash Wednesday, if you go for Mass you can receive ashes on your

forehead.

The ashes are a sign of repentance. They remind us that without

God we are nothing and that someday we will die and be buried.

But they also remind us that if we do have God living in us, after we die, we will rise from the dead, just as Jesus did on Easter, after He died on the cross.

Love
Aunty Eliz

YOUTH

February 11, 2024

Students gather in Holy Land

JERUSALEM: During the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, a group of young people in their 20s actively participated in various ecumenical prayer services in the Holy Land.

They were German-speaking theology students enrolled in the annual programme of ecumenical studies (called “Studienjahr”), which has been offered for 50 years at the Benedictine Abbey of the Dormition in Jerusalem.

Daniel Kargm, 21, was one of these students who had come to live an immersive experience in the interfaith environment of the Holy Land. Hailing from a small village near Augsburg, Kargm said, “I grew up in a very traditional Catholic family. Faith has always been very important to me. At 17, after

graduating, I decided to enter the seminary to become a priest.”

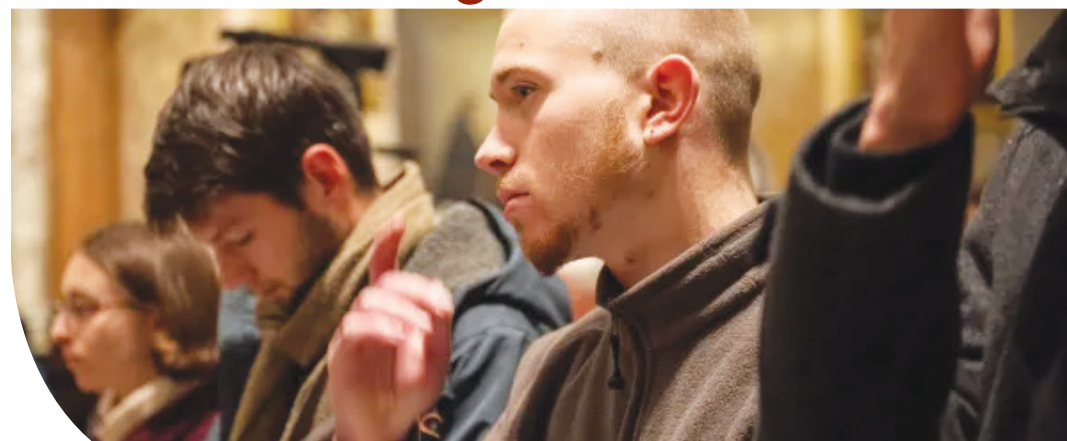
After a rigorous selection process, Kargm was admitted to the Studienjahr. “I wanted to apply to this programme because I’m interested in the Old Testament, in the Holy Land, and in the topic of the historical Jesus of Nazareth,” he said.

In these months, Kargm has not only connected with his fellow budding theologians but also immersed himself in the richness of Christian and religious traditions of the Holy Land. He attends the Arabic-speaking Catholic community, plays the organ at the Lutheran church, prays with the monks of the Dormition Abbey, and participates in liturgies of the Eastern Christian churches.

The students engage with colleagues and professors from local universities — both Israeli and Palestinian.

“I thought Judaism would have been a big topic for me, but in fact, Islam is now a very big question mark. I know many Muslim people who have a deep spiritual life and rich spiritual history. [I am asking] questions like, ‘Which religion is the truth?’ and ‘How can truth and faith be in more than one religion?’” said Kargm.

He continued: “I began to wonder what it means to belong to a religion and, in fact, what a religion is. I’m planning my life, thinking of becoming a priest, and these kinds of questions are very present within me.” One of Kargm’s closest friends in the student residence



for Christian unity

is a Protestant young man. Both of them are big fans of the German soccer team Bayern Munich, which brought them together from the very beginning.

For the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, on January 25 the students of the Studienjahr enlivened the prayer in the Upper Room — which is just a few metres from the Dormition Abbey and where Jesus is believed to have shared the Last Supper with His apostles before His passion — with song and music. Passed down through the generations, the room has been incorporated into the Jewish complex of the “Tomb of David” and is available for Christian use only a few days a year.

“Music is a very good approach to ecumenism because it is universal: Everybody can relate to it and the feeling that the music con-

veys brings us all together,” Johanna Wirth, a member of the choir of students, said after the ecumenical prayer, adding: “In this room, listening to the same music or singing the same songs brings us together.”

Wirth, a Lutheran, attends the Studienjahr programme. She said that being in contact with different Christian and religious traditions in Jerusalem “challenges me, because I have to go out of my comfort zone and question my own faith, because it is questioned by others — by their traditions, by their prayers ... In the end, all that makes me go back to my own tradition even more than before: I learn to appreciate what I have in my own tradition and I also gain a lot of positive things from other traditions and religions.” — **By Marinella Bandini, CNA**



(CNA photo/Marinella Bandini)

Empowering youth for a brighter future

The Montfort Youth Centre in Melaka is currently introducing an inclusive culinary programme open to both male and female candidates. Complemented by its recently constructed disability-friendly training workshop and dormitory, the programme welcomes youth who are wheelchair bound, those who are physically challenged (on a case-by-case basis), as well as individuals with mild autism.

The inaugural session of the culinary programme is set to commence on March 8. Students will not only master the art of cooking and baking but also gain expertise in serving food and beverages. Our state-of-the-art training workshop includes a dedicated café for hands-on practice. We encourage aspiring and talented young individuals to apply promptly, as interviews are currently underway.

Application forms can be downloaded at <https://montfortyouthcentre.org/admission/> or call 06-351 0114/5 for further inquiry.

In July, our Centre will introduce an exciting new course in Digital Printing. This programme covers essential skills such as designing, image editing, and printing. Interested individuals can visit our website to download the application form. Furthermore,

additional courses, including modular programmes (short courses), will be introduced gradually.

Bro Peter K, sg, the Director of Montfort Youth Centre, extends his heartfelt gratitude to the clergy, religious, friends, and the faithful for their unwavering support towards the Centre’s holistic educational mission.

“If you are aware of any deserving youth aged 16-19 years, please encourage them to apply. A disciplined and skilled youth will never go hungry. Let us unite to eradicate poverty and progress towards a better nation,” emphasised Bro Peter K.

Since its establishment in 2001, the Montfort Youth Centre in Melaka has empowered over 900 young boys from impoverished backgrounds.

Offering a range of technical skills and character-building programs, the Centre initially introduced its TVET programme in Automotive After Sales Service. Over the years, it expanded its offerings to include courses in Computer System Operation, General Maintenance (Electrical and Welding), and Agriculture.

Supplementary to the core curriculum, students also engage in Communication English

Inclusive Culinary programme at Montfort Melaka



(Photo/montfortyouthcentre.org)

and ICT skills, fostering comprehensive skill development. The Home programme prioritises students’ physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and social well-being, complemented by diverse activities such as skills and language competitions, sports, Fear Factor challenges, and other enriching endeavours.

To know more about Montfort Youth Centre, you may scan the following links:



Website



Video

Archdiocese of Seoul wastes no time on WYD 2027 plans

SEOUL: Barely able to contain its excitement over hosting the next World Youth Day, the archdiocese has already started to organise an inspiring and impactful event.

Although it's still three years away, the Archdiocese of Seoul cannot contain its excitement over hosting the upcoming World Youth Day 2027. The archdiocese recently shared in a press release that it had already convened the Preliminary Research Team, which will begin laying the groundwork for organising the global youth event. Their main goal is to ensure a profound and impactful experience for all youth participants.

The team is composed of a diverse group of 40 members, including clergy, consecrated individuals, and "dynamic young minds" from within the Archdiocese of Seoul. Unified in their dedication to the mission, this is the team that will contribute the most to the spiritual and organisational dimensions of WYD 2027.

On January 25, the team held its inaugural meeting, where they began to share discussions and insights about shaping the trajectory of youth ministry in the years leading up to WYD 2027. They also started the task of establishing the "foundational principles" of the event. The team will meet for many sessions between January and June 2024.

Fr Peter Ju-yul Yang, the executive secretary of the Local Organising Committee (LOC), the archdiocese group that organised the Preliminary Research Team, remarked

on the inaugural meeting:

"In bringing together this dynamic team, we are not only laying the groundwork for WYD Seoul 2027 but also fostering a space for profound spiritual reflection and collaboration. The diverse perspectives and expertise within the Preliminary Research Team will undoubtedly enrich our preparations, ensuring that World Youth Day in Seoul becomes a transformative experience for all participants."

The Archdiocese of Seoul has wasted no time in its preparations since it was named as the host location for WYD 2027 at the end of the Lisbon 2023 event. It swiftly formed the LOC in order to begin the lengthy process of organising and executing the event and now the committee is poised for progressive growth and development over the coming months.



Excited participation in the Preliminary Research Team's sub-team discussion. (photo/Archdiocese of Seoul)

To accomplish this massive undertaking, the committee has divided up the workload into three integral components: the Pastoral Office, spearheading spiritual and pastoral

considerations; the Planning Office, managing strategic planning; and the Foundation Secretariat, overseeing foundational and administrative aspects. The Preliminary Research Team will act as a proactive body that will lay the groundwork for an inspiring and transformative WYD 2027, while providing vital perspective from young Catholics of Seoul.

In December 2023, Archbishop Chung reiterated the theme of WYD 2027, *Rejoice in Hope*, which was announced by Pope Francis. He said of the theme:

"Pope Francis says that Christian hope is the certain knowledge of God's presence among us, and it is this hope that gives us the strength to move forward, even when we face difficulties" — *Aleteia*



(World Youth Day facebook)

HOW AMERICA'S YOUNGEST BISHOP REACHES YOUTH



NEW YORK: At the age of 25, Joseph Espaillat was ordained a priest. Now, at the age of 45, he serves as an auxiliary bishop in the Archdiocese of New York, making him America's youngest Catholic bishop.

He currently serves as the pastor at St Anthony of Padua Roman Catholic Church in the Bronx, as well as the director of the Hispanic Catholic Charismatic Renewal for the archdiocese and at the Hispanic Catholic Charismatic Centre in the Bronx.

In an interview with Montse Alvarado on "EWTN News In Depth," the bishop admitted that previously he "was not charismatic at all."

"I was the St Paul, or rather Saul, because I was like 'These charismatics! What's up with that?'"

He shared that when Cardinal Timothy Dolan came to the Archdiocese of New York, he named Espaillat the director of youth ministry. However, after several years working in the ministry, Dolan had new plans for the young bishop.

Espaillat recalled: "All of a sudden it was like, 'Hey, I want you to go to St Anthony of Padua Church. Have you heard of it?'"

"I'm like, 'El Centro?' And he's like, 'Yeah.' And I'm like, 'With the charismatics?' And I'm like, 'Oh no, you got the wrong guy!' And then he says to me, 'No, I got the right guy.'"

After receiving the news, Espaillat decided to go on a retreat at Franciscan University of Steubenville, not realising that they, too, were charismatic. It was there that he was "baptised in the Spirit."

He said that his time at the Hispanic Charismatic Centre has been "beautiful and edifying."

"These last eight years have been just wonderful here because it's changed the trajectory of my spirituality ... and I've grown exponentially," he added.

Hispanic ministry, language, and idioms

For several decades, Latino Catholics have been a steadily growing segment of the Catholic Church in the United States. Earlier this year, the United States bishops released their new National Pastoral Plan for Hispanic Ministry, with evangelisation and mission topping the pastoral priorities for the country's growing population of 30 million Latino Catholics.

Espaillat believes that in order to reach this demographic, as well as the youth, "we have to speak the language of the people."

"Let's follow the example of Jesus. Jesus spoke in the language of the people and He used the images that they knew and He used the analogies that they would understand," he explained.

"Are we speaking the language of the people?" he asked. "And I'm not just referring to English. Spanish. I'm talking about the idioms as well."

Espaillat shared that when he is introduced, people say he speaks three languages — English, Spanish, and street.

He explained that in order to evangelise, one must be willing to understand the culture.

"I know what the young kids are saying out there ... You got to understand the culture if you want to understand the young people."

Meet people where they're at

He added: "Not that you have to agree with it. Not that you're going to be rocking to their music or whatever it is, but at least it's a starting block. Meet them where they're at."

Throughout his time working with the youth, Espaillat has seen that "they are hungering" for the faith but the Church has "been fearful" of ministering to them.

"They want to hear the truth," he said. "They want more. So, we have to do a better job as Church and not be afraid, not be afraid of approaching them and ministering to them and being with them and accompanying them because that's what they want."

Espaillat gave one example on how he talks to the youth about Mass being a celebration and the importance of the Eucharist. He gave the analogy of going to a party and not eating or seeing your mother cooking all day in the kitchen and then telling her you are not going to eat.

"How do you think God the Father feels when He offers us His Son, when He offers us the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Jesus, and we reject Him?"

"When you speak in that manner to young people, it clicks. They get it," he added. "They want to hear more. They want to be engaged. And as Church we need to do a better job helping young people come back to the feet of Jesus."

"Since being named bishop, I've had a lot of young people just say, 'Hey, you know what? I can relate to you. I can see myself in you.' And that's a positive. That's a great sign because then they know, 'Hey there's more, or there can be more,' and that's what we're called to do, right?" — **By Francesca Pollio Fenton, CNA**



MEMORIAM

To Jesus, the Holy Spirit and Mother Mary. Thank you Jesus, for loving Patrick, 9-01-2007. Thank you, Jesus, for keeping him in your light. 18-02-2007. Thank you, Jesus, for sending your angel to take him home. 19-02-2007. Thank you, Lord, for keeping Patrick in heaven with you. 21-02-2007.

Thank you, Mother Mary for your intercessions and answering all our prayers and sending Patrick home in peace. 19-02-2007.

~ Wee-Lim family



Patrick Wee
Returned to the Lord
19-2-2007

17th Anniversary In Ever Loving Memory of

"May Patrick's soul
rest in peace.
May his body rest in peace.
May his spirit live for all
eternity in the Lord,
in the Holy Spirit,
in the company of Mother
Mary, all the Angels and
Saints, Amen."

Forever Deeply
Loved in our hearts,
Wife Bertha,
Son Edmund,
Daughter and Son-in-law
Angela & Jit Fu

We long for our heavenly dwelling

Therefore we are not discouraged.
On the contrary, while our outer beings waste away,
the inner self is renewed from day to day.
The slight affliction which quickly passes away
prepares us for an eternal wealth of glory
so great and beyond all comparison.
So we no longer pay attention to the things that are
seen, but to those that are unseen,
for the things that we see last but a moment,
but that which cannot be seen, is eternal.
We know that when our earthly dwelling, or rather our
tent, is destroyed, we may count on a building from God,
a heavenly dwelling not built by human hands,
that lasts forever.

Corinthians: 4:16-18, 5:1

3rd Anniversary In Loving Memory of



Arulnathan a/l Sebastian
3.3.1940 – 15.2.2021

3 years have passed so quickly and we miss you dearly.
You are forever in our hearts.
Psalm 73:26

*My flesh and my heart may fail but
God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.*

Forever loved and dearly missed by
Wife Madam Selvanayagam, Children, Grandchildren,
Daughters in Law, Relatives and Friends.



**In Loving
Memory of
Hazel Renee**
16.04.1958 – 14.02.2014
10th Anniversary

*Mum, you may be out of sight,
but you're forever in our hearts.
Though it's been a decade,
it still feels like yesterday
when your laughter filled our home.
We still miss you; we still love you and
we still remember every moment with you.
Your absence is a silent conversation
we carry on in our hearts.
Deeply missed and forever loved.*

SEVENTH ANNIVERSARY



Joseph Nathan
Came from the Lord on
26th February 1931
Called by the Lord on
11th February 2017

And God will raise us from the
dead by his power, just as he
raised our Lord from the dead:
(1 Corinthians 6:14)

*You were called to the Lord
though we want you here
But we are rejoiced when you
returned to the Lord's House
in peace and love.
You are always in our prayers
and forever in our hearts and
minds. Your comforting songs
and your strength
will live in us all
For we were truly blessed
when the Lord gave you as our
beloved Dad and Grand dad
We love you and miss you always
our beloved father, our beloved
Grand dad.*

Missed dearly by
children, grandchildren,
great-grandchildren, in laws,
relatives and friends.

10th Death Anniversary In Loving Memory of



Lena Culas
Departed:
17-2-2014

Fondly remembered by
your loving children
and their families
and loved ones.

Celebrating 3rd year Anniversary

Joseph A. Gomes

6 January 1945 – 12 February 2021



*This day is remembered
and quietly kept,
No words are needed,
we shall never forget,
For those we love
don't go away,
They walk beside us
everyday.
Unseen and unheard,
but always near,
So loved, so missed
and very dear.*

Sadly missed, lovingly remembered
by wife Dora Gomes,
son, daughters, grandchildren and all loved ones.



From the Lord: 25-11-1984
To the Lord: 12-02-2016

In Loving Memory of Christie Aloysius

*The Day God Took You Home
A million times, I've needed you
A million times I've cried, If love alone
Could have saved you, you never would have died.
In life I loved you dearly, In death I love you still.
In my heart you hold a place,
No one else can ever fill.
It broke my heart to lose you, But you didn't go alone
Part of me went with you, The day God took you home.*

In your love:

Wife: Stephanie Angelina

Masses for this repose soul of Christie Aloysius on
11th February 2024 at the Church of St Joseph at 9.30am (E),
Church of St Anthony at 9.45am (E) and
on 12th February 2024 at the Minor Basilica of St Anne,
Bukit Mertajam at 7.00am (E).

5th Year Cherished Memory

*The love of a mother is the veil
of a glistening light between the
heart and the heavenly Father.
— Samuel Taylor Coleridge*



Thresa Morais
Returned to the Lord on
20th February 2019
*Etched in our hearts
you will stay.*
Fondly remembered by
Loved Ones.

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'Super Pope' artist gets Vatican stamp of approval

ROME: Street artist Maupal, whose cartoon-like depictions of Pope Francis as a "Super Pope" have graced buildings around the Vatican for a decade, got an official stamp of approval on February 1, when he appeared at a Vatican news conference.

Maupal, in life Mauro Pallotta, designed a series of posters to illustrate Francis' 2024 Lenten message, which this year emphasises the need for the faithful to let go of hopelessness and bondage to find a path of inner freedom. The posters will be released weekly over the course of this Lenten season leading up to Easter.

Sitting next to one of Francis' closest advisers, Cardinal Michael Czerny, Maupal said he never sought out official recognition from the Vatican but was "proud and honoured" to have been asked to depict Francis' message in art.

message in art.

"Representing Christian values via art has always been one of the greatest goals of painting and sculpture," Maupal told reporters. "I have tried to synthesise the profound concepts expressed by the Holy Father through pictorial language in a simple, easily readable style."

In the first poster released on Feb 1, Francis is shown walking through a desert field of upturned nails, hauling a wheel barrel with a heavy sack and the word "Faith" written on the sack. "Through the desert, God leads us to freedom," reads the text, taken from the title of the Pope's message.

Maupal gained broad attention a year after Francis was elected in 2013, with the first graffiti art of the Pope as a flying, white caped "Super Pope," — a spinoff on Hollywood's

Superman — clutching his black satchel with the word "Values" on it. The graffiti appeared on buildings of the Borgo Pio neighbourhood near the Vatican.

Initially, Rome's "decorum" police scrubbed the images away.

But they continued to appear, each more embracing of Francis' message than the last.

In one, Francis is shown on a ladder playing a game of tic tac toe, using peace signs for the zeroes, as a Swiss Guard peers around the corner to keep watch. In another, Francis is shown dangling from a harness like a window-washer, trying to clean the sky of pollution.

Over time, Maupal became somewhat part of the establishment as far as the Vatican was concerned. In 2022, Francis met with him, and



Mauro Pallotta with one of his street art. (Street Art Utopia photo)

that same year, Maupal started collaborating with the Vatican newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano*. On Feb 1, in addition to his place on the podium, the Vatican released a short biographic note about his art and his work in schools and prisons.

Asked about his evolution, Maupal said he never considered himself a "rebel artist," or the type of graffiti artist who remains anonymous because his artwork is, legally speaking, defacing a public space.

Each mural is signed "Maupal," but the artist has never hidden his identity.

"If I do something on the street, I recognise that it's an invasion, because the street belongs to everyone," he said. "So convinced of this, from my very first work, everyone knew my first name and my last name."

"Without seeking out 'officialness', I've followed my path, and now I find myself here," he said. — *America*

Vatican holds first-of-its-kind mental health conference

VATICAN: Catholic mental health ministers from across the globe convened at the Dicastery for Communication for a groundbreaking workshop on mental health and pastoral care, marking the first-ever initiative of its kind organised by the Vatican.

The workshop featured poignant testimonies, including that of Deacon Ed Shoener, who shared the tragic story of his daughter Katie's battle with bipolar disorder, leading to her suicide at the age of 29. Prompted by this loss, Deacon Shoener became an advocate for mental health awareness within the Church, founding the Association of Catholic Mental Health Ministers, a non-profit supporting mental health ministries in parishes and dioceses.

The Vatican conference, held on January 30, brought together participants from various corners of the world, including Vatican officials, representatives from the Association of Catholic Mental Health Ministers, and individuals actively involved in



The conference in the Vatican. (Vatican Media)

mental health ministry in Moldova, India, South Africa, and beyond.

Msgr Anthony Ekpo, undersecretary at the Vatican's Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, addressed the gathering, highlighting mental health as a priority for the Dicastery. He expressed concern about human rights abuses faced by individuals with mental health challenges and emphasised the link between mental health and climate change.

Msgr Ekpo suggested a counter-

measure known as the "ecology of daily life," drawing inspiration from Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*. This approach involves paying attention to the environments influencing thoughts, feelings, and actions.

Bishop John Dolan from the US Diocese of Phoenix, emphasised the Church's role in accompanying individuals with mental health problems, acknowledging the shortage of mental health professionals worldwide. He shared initiatives in his diocese, including educating priests about

mental health issues and supporting mental health professionals in finding affordable housing.

Fr Frédéric Fornos discussed the partnership between the Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network and the Association of Catholic Mental Health Ministers, emphasising the importance of prayer for mental health.

Dr Nunziata Comoretto, from the Pontifical Academy for Life, addressed the conference, stressing the need to care for those struggling with

mental health challenges, to prevent them from feeling euthanasia is the only option.

The conference also featured insights from individuals on the frontlines, such as Anastasia Miranova from Caritas Moldova, Edwin Walker from India, and Dr Melese Shula from South Africa.

Sr Isabel Cantón of the Sisters Hospitaliers shared her experience in caring for those with mental illnesses, emphasising the challenges faced by her congregation, including fewer priests and sisters and the need to adapt spiritual care in diverse contexts.

Bryana Russell of Sanctuary Mental Health Ministries discussed the Sanctuary Course, a study guide aimed at raising awareness about mental health in local churches. The conference concluded with a prayer invoking St John of God, a 16th-century saint who experienced a mental health breakdown in mid-life. — *Vatican News*

National Prayer Breakfast brings US politicians together 'in the spirit of Jesus'

WASHINGTON, D.C.: At the 2024 National Prayer Breakfast on February 1, the nation's top political leaders prayed for guidance, safety, reconciliation, and unity.

The annual event, organised by the National Prayer Breakfast Foundation, is held to bring America's political leadership together to pray for the nation, the president, and the world.

The convocation, now in its 72nd year, was attended by President Joe Biden and high-ranking members of both major parties.

Singing three numbers, Italian

tenor Andrea Bocelli was the event's featured singer and offered comments to the attendees at the event, being held for the first time in the US Capitol building's Statuary Hall.

First speaking in Italian, the renowned Catholic artist then had a translator offer the message in English.

"In ancient Rome, one 'great' man recommended that Roman soldiers not be permitted to listen to music because music 'softens one's heart and makes soldiers not prepared to battle,'" Bocelli said.

"That's why I'm extremely

pleased to be here today, to bring my own small musical contribution because I think that you, like me, are hoping and dreaming of having an army of soldiers not ready to battle, but very efficient to bring peace in the world," he said, to a round of applause.

Offering the event's keynote address, Biden commented that he is an "unadulterated fan" of Bocelli.

Referring to the artist's performance at the White House during Biden's first year in office, the president said that his singing was a "gift" for the Biden family following

the 2015 death of their son Joseph "Beau" Biden III.

"Your wisdom then, and now, this morning is deeply moving," he said.

In his remarks on current events and the need for prayer, Biden noted he's attended "many" prayer breakfasts in the past and has been "humbled by the prayers of so many when we needed them badly."

"It means everything to us. And we're all blessed to live in a nation where we can practise our many faiths and practise them freely, and when we can come together and lift up our nation and each other in our

own prayers, especially in tough times," he said.

"I've long believed, we have to look at each other even in the most challenging times, not as enemies but as fellow Americans," Biden said. "Scripture tells us the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, [and] faithfulness. I believe that's our collective calling today."

The event was marked by several sets of prayer and Scripture readings by the bipartisan assembly of elected officials and chaplains. — *By Joseph Bukuras, CNA*