

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

TERHAD

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Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised.

1 Cor. 15:12, 16



**Celebrating the Feast of the Holy Infant Jesus**

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**A journey of faith, dialogue and media**

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**A life of service, and ecological commitment**

■ P12

# Love, protect and listen to them



(Vatican Media)

**VATICAN:** Pope Francis has reiterated his passionate plea for the protection of children suffering from conflict, poverty, migration, and a “throw-away culture,” including abortion and neglect, stressing the urgent need to listen to their voices. He said this in a recent address to world leaders at the first global Summit on Children’s Rights in the Vatican.

The event, themed *Love Them and Protect Them*, featured panellists from around the world discussing children’s protection from violence and exploitation, access to resources, education and health care, and their right to a family.

In his address, Pope Francis highlighted the ongoing struggles faced by children worldwide, emphasising that despite global progress, many children still suffer from poverty, war, lack of education, injustice, and exploitation.

The Pope drew attention to the particularly dire conditions of children in war-torn and impoverished regions but also stressed that even in wealthier societies, children face vulnerabilities such as mental health struggles, violence, and social marginalisation.

“To a much greater extent than in the past, schools and health services have to deal with children already tested by many difficulties, with anxious or depressed youngsters, and adolescents drawn to forms of aggression or self-harm. Moreover, a culture of efficiency looks upon childhood itself, like old age, as a ‘periphery’ of existence.”

He observed that young people, who should symbolise hope, increasingly struggle with despair and a lack of optimism for the future. This, he said, is “sad and troubling.”

One of the most alarming issues he addressed was the devastating impact of war

on children. “What we have tragically seen almost every day in recent times, namely children dying beneath bombs, sacrificed to the idols of power, ideology, and nationalistic interests, is unacceptable,” he said.

Pope Francis denounced what he termed the “pathological individualism” visible in developed nations, where children often face abuse, neglect, or even infanticide by those meant to protect them.

He again decried the loss of young migrant lives, as countless children die at sea, in deserts, or on dangerous journeys driven by desperation. This too is “unacceptable,” he said.

“A childhood denied is a silent scream condemning the wrongness of the economic system, the criminal nature of wars, the lack of adequate medical care and schooling,” the Pope insisted, warning against becoming desensitised to these tragedies, “losing what is noblest in the human heart: mercy and compassion.”

Pope Francis went on to recall the suffering of displaced children, highlighting staggering statistics: over 40 million children displaced by conflict and 100 million homeless. He also decried the persistence of child

slavery, forced labour, trafficking, abuse, and child marriages, citing the heartbreaking reality that 160 million children are victims of these injustices.

He further drew attention to 150 million “invisible” children who are unregistered at birth, making them vulnerable to abuse and exploitation due to their lack of legal identity. “This phenomenon of unaccompanied minors is increasingly frequent and serious,” he said, citing the example of Rohingya children fleeing Myanmar.

“Sadly,” the Pope noted, “this history of oppression of children is constantly repeated” in wartime, as elderly people who lived through wars tell us. “Also listening to those children who today live in violence, exploitation, or injustice serves to strengthen our ‘no’ to war,” the Pope remarked.

A particularly forceful part of the Pope’s speech was his condemnation of the “throw-away culture,” where human lives, including the unborn, are discarded without consideration.

“In the name of this throwaway mentality, in which the human being becomes all-powerful, unborn life is sacrificed through the murderous practice of abortion,” which

the Pope emphasised “cuts off the source of hope for the whole of society.”

Pope Francis therefore urged world leaders to listen to children, not only through their words but also through their silences, expressions, and experiences. “With their looks and their silences, too, they speak to us, so let us listen to them!” he urged.

“How important it is to listen, for we need to realise that young children understand, remember and speak to us.”

He expressed hope that the Vatican-hosted Summit will contribute to building a better world for children, reaffirming the moral duty to place children, their rights, and their dreams at the centre of global concerns.

Concluding, Pope Francis encouraged participants to make the most of the opportunities afforded by this meeting and expressed his hope that their contributions will help to build a better world for children and, consequently, for everyone.

“For me, it is a source of hope that we are all here together to put children, their rights, their dreams, and their demand for a future at the centre of our concern.” **Lisa Zengarini, Vatican News**

● See also Back page

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# What does the Vatican know about AI?

## A lot actually

The Vatican's role in the evolving discussion around artificial intelligence (A.I.) may surprise some. It might seem unexpected to consider the Church as a leader in a field so closely tied to technology, but the Vatican has, in fact, been at the forefront of shaping AI ethics for over a decade. The Vatican's newest document, *Antiqua et Nova*, released January 28, marks the latest step in its long-standing commitment to guiding the ethical development of A.I.

The Vatican's journey into AI ethics began as early as 2007, when Pope Benedict XVI warned that modern science and technology, including AI, could lose sight of its true purpose: to safeguard humanity and promote goodness. Over the years, as AI evolved—particularly with the breakthrough of deep learning—the Vatican continued to engage in conversations about its role in society. In 2015, the Pontifical Academy of Sciences hosted a workshop focusing on data processing, followed by another in 2016 that looked specifically at AI and its limitations.

In the subsequent years, Vatican representatives regularly participated in tech discussions, including at major events like the Web Summit in Lisbon and the South by Southwest festival in Austin. By 2018, Pope Francis' AI advisor, Franciscan friar Paolo Benanti, had become a key figure in AI ethics. That year, Microsoft's senior executives began collaborating with Vatican officials to create a shared vision for ethical AI. This partnership, which resulted in the *Rome Call for AI Ethics* in 2020, became a foundational document that would influence the development

of international AI standards. Signed by Microsoft, IBM, and other global institutions, it calls for AI that promotes human dignity and the common good.

The Vatican's collaboration with tech giants has been multifaceted. In 2024, the Vatican and Microsoft revealed a joint project to create an AI model of St Peter's Basilica. Meanwhile, the Vatican's use of AI extended to its own archives, where it worked with tech experts to develop tools to read ancient Latin manuscripts. These innovations are part of the Vatican's broader commitment to ensuring that AI serves humanity, not the other way around.

Pope Francis has been vocal about the potential dangers of unchecked AI. He has repeatedly warned against AI systems that could manipulate people's opinions or undermine democracy. In 2019, he addressed the dangers of "false data" being generated by AI, stressing the importance of truth and integrity in technology. The following year, he called for a treaty on AI that would protect people from exploitation and ensure that AI enhances human flourishing rather than replacing human agency.

One of the Vatican's most significant initiatives in AI ethics was the publication of the *Rome Call for AI Ethics* in 2020, a document that drew global attention. The call emphasised AI as a tool that must respect human dignity, privacy, and rights. It laid out guiding principles for the ethical development of AI, encouraging collaboration across the

public, private, and civil sectors. It has since been signed by nearly 70 organisations, from tech giants to governments and civil society groups.

The Vatican's influence on AI also extends beyond religious institutions. In 2023, the European Commission drew from the Rome Call to inform its own AI code of conduct. The Vatican has also become a regular presence in global AI discussions, influencing policies and strategies aimed at safeguarding humanity in the age of intelligent machines.

In 2024, the Vatican hosted two more AI conferences, with Pope Francis addressing the G7 summit on AI ethics. His message was clear: AI should never replace human decision-making. He warned that if humans were relegated to being mere bystanders in the decisions shaping their lives, it would "condemn humanity to a future without hope." The message was a reiteration of the Vatican's long-standing position that human dignity must be at the heart of all technological advancement.

The Vatican's latest document, *Antiqua et Nova*, takes this message further, emphasising the need for international cooperation and legal frameworks to govern AI's ethical development. With its historical commitment to safeguarding human dignity and promoting the common good, the Vatican is uniquely positioned to continue shaping the conversation around AI ethics in the years to come. As AI becomes increasingly ubiquitous, the Church's role as a moral compass in the technological age will only grow more vital. **America**

## Trusting in God: The key to true prosperity

If you've participated in team-building exercises that were popular 10 to 15 years ago, you might be familiar with an activity called the "Trust Fall." In this exercise, one person stands on a raised platform, arms crossed over their chest, facing away from the rest of the team. The rest of the group stands below the platform, ready to catch them as they fall backwards. This activity requires a significant amount of trust from the person falling, as they must rely on their team to catch them. If even one person were to step back or not pay attention, they could fall. Though it seems simple, the "Trust Fall" highlights how trust—something so fundamental—can either safeguard or cause harm.

So, what exactly is trust? One definition is a strong belief in the reliability, truth, or ability of someone or something. For me, two key elements stand out: firm belief and reliability. If we don't believe in the reliability of someone or something, our instinct is not to trust. A great example of this is when we make a purchase. These days, no one buys anything without first checking reviews. We only commit to buying a product once we're convinced of its reliability.

We can partially apply this logic to faith. While faith is rooted in conviction and firm belief, it doesn't depend solely on public reviews. We can listen to testimonies and witness others' experiences, but in the end, the decision is ours to make. With products, we typically only become

convinced of their reliability after using them over time. Faith, however, is not a product; it's a commitment. So, even when things get tough, our faith should remain steadfast and unwavering.

The first reading and the Gospel today share a common theme. The Prophet Jeremiah speaks about the blessings and curses that a person will receive, depending on what or who they place their trust in. The word "curse" typically refers to a solemn utterance meant to invoke a supernatural power to bring harm or punishment. However, in Jeremiah's case, it's not about causing harm, but rather, the consequences of one's choices. Trusting in God, he reminds us, helps us grow in virtue and strengthen our spiritual lives. This idea is reflected in the Responsorial Psalm, which tells us that those who trust in the Lord will find happiness. But what does it mean to be truly happy?

The Beatitudes gives us this answer. The passage gives us a series of blessings and curses. Those who put their trust in the Lord will receive a great reward in heaven. This is the true treasure that we need to look out for and not for the things of this world. I think it is fair to say that by now, all of us know that material things do not bring us happiness. After all, once we are gone, we cannot bring physical things with us. This is why the pursuit of happiness is never about material wealth or property, it is about non-tangible things like spiritual health, our mental health etc. This is also

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

### 6th Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)

**Readings: Jeremiah 17:5-8;**  
**1 Corinthians 15:12, 16-20;**  
**Gospel: Luke 6:17, 20-26**

echoed in the Responsorial Psalm, those who place their trust in God is like a tree that is planted beside flowing waters that yields its fruits in due season, whose leaves shall never fade and all that they do shall prosper. Notice it says, "all that they do" and not "all that they possess."

When we put our trust in created things, even in humanity, we are bound to get hurt at some point. However, I need to make this very clear—this does not mean that we do not trust anyone at all. That is not what I am trying to point out here. Solely putting our trust in created things can lead us away from God. While we put our wholehearted trust in God, we also need to learn to trust the people and things around us so long as they assist us in this journey of life. The road that we are travelling on can sometimes be lonely and full of distractions. When we have someone whom we can trust and rely on, the journey will be less difficult.

As we continue this pilgrimage of life, let us continue to put our trust in God, firmly believing that He knows what is best for us and granting it to us when we truly need it. Then, we shall truly be prosperous in everything that we do.



## KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

### Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

#### February

- 18-19 Clergy Monthly Recollection
- 19 Meeting - FCMSM Exco
- 21 Meeting - Archdiocesan Finance



## PENANG DIOCESE

### Diary of Cardinal Sebastian Francis

#### February

- 17 Meeting – Chairman of the Board of Governors and Headmaster from College Stonyhurst UK, Catholic Diocesan Centre at 11.00am
- 17 CG Inaugural Mass for Academic Year 2025 & Blessing of Initiation Year Residence at 6.00pm
- 18-19 Council Of Priests (COP) & Clergy Monthly Recollection (CMR)
- 19 Fr Jacob Wong Haw Ran, MI, Delegate Superior of the Order of the Ministers of the Infirm (Camillian), Taiwan at 3.00pm
- 20 Mass – 49th Anniversary of Mt Miriam Cancer Hospital at 1.00pm
- 22 Mass – Feast of Chair of St Peter, Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam at 6:00pm
- 23 Mass – closing of Seeds - EQUIP, MASC Penang Road
- 25 Meeting – Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM) – Penang Branch, Catholic Diocesan Centre



## MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

### Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

#### February

- 18 Anniversary of the Dedication of the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Johor Bahru
- 18-19 Clergy Monthly Recollection – MAJODI Centre
- 20 Meeting – Diocesan Finance Committee MAJODI Centre
- 22 MJ Professional Standards Office 1st Gathering – MAJODI Centre
- 25 Meeting – Deliverance & Exorcism Office Team 1st Quarterly at MPI
- 25 Meeting – South Johor Vicariate Cemetery Committee with all South Johor parish priests at MAJODI Centre

# Celebrating 144 years of faith and dedication

SARIKEI, SIBU: A grand celebration took place in Sarikei on February 5, as the Catholic community gathered to mark a significant milestone in the history of the Church of St Anthony. The event, described as an “All in One Celebration,” highlighted the grand opening and blessing of the church’s new infrastructures, as well as the 144th anniversary of its establishment.

The occasion was filled with grace, reflecting on 144 years of faith and dedication in the Mighty Rejang Basin, and honouring the memory of Fr Edmund Dunn, the first Mill Hill Missionary priest who arrived in the region in September 1881.

The ceremony was graced by Bishop Joseph Hii of Sibu, who served as the main celebrant. He was joined by Archbishop Simon Poh of Kuching, and Fr James Ting, the Rector of the parish, as concelebrants, together with 14 members of the clergy. Making a rare appearance was Bishop Emeritus Dominic Su, the first Bishop of Sibu, who, at the age of 86, attended the event in a wheelchair, embodying a living testament to the long legacy of the Church in the region.

In his homily, Bishop Joseph expressed gratitude to God for granting Fr James the leadership and strength to persevere in his role despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Under Fr James’ leadership over the past eight years, the community has seen remarkable growth, with people coming



Welcome cultural dance by the children. (Diocese of Sibu Facebook)

together to carry out what is now referred to as a “Work of Wonders” (WOW).

The celebration also marked the achievements of the church and its surroundings, with parishioners proudly displaying nine symbolic “WOWs” on their white T-shirts. These included the St Anthony Heritage Centre, House of Emmaus, Tomb of Jesus, Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes, and more.

Fr James, in his speech, exclaimed, “Wow! You make our dreams come true!” as he reflected on the growth of the Catholic community, likening it to a mustard seed blossoming into a great tree. He also took a moment to acknowledge the many contributors to the church’s success,

from parishioners to local authorities, and the support of both financial backers and workers who made the celebration possible.

The evening was filled with vibrant cultural dances and performances from children and teenagers of the parish, adding to the festive spirit of the occasion. More than 1,500 people were treated to a grand feast of food and drinks, as the community gathered to celebrate their shared faith.

The event was a true testament to the living synodality in action within the community of the Church of St Anthony. The grand celebration not only honoured its past but also looked forward to continuing its journey of faith, unity, and service for generations to come.



## Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #210



**Dear friends and pilgrims of Jubilee Year 2025 (JY25),** travel to pilgrimage centres as seekers of the Lord.

**Hopes are fired up.** But the return and the recovery is going to take a long time. It is not going to be easy. The survivors of Auschwitz returned to mark the 80th anniversary of their liberation from the death camps. The Palestinians are finally returning to a devastated northern Gaza after a ceasefire dispute delay. In Congo, thousands are fleeing the fighting, and the rebels take over. Guatemalans who were arrested under Biden, and deported under Trump were welcomed home with cookies. Trump renames the Gulf of Mexico to the Gulf of America on the Google map. The US planned to dominate the AI World, but China’s DeepSeek sends shockwaves. Ipsos Survey 2025 predicts that AI will cause job displacements in Malaysia. The Pope called on professional communicators to “step outside ourselves a bit to give something of myself to another”. Do you know what the “i” in iPhone or iPad stands for? Steve Job called it the 5 i’s: internet, individual, instruct, inform, inspire. Return to yourself, to the gift of God that you are to others.

**“Being There” Times:** Ernest Hemingway once said, “In our darkest moments, we don’t need advice.” *What we truly need is the power of human connection: a quiet presence, a gentle touch, or the smallest gesture that reminds us we’re not alone.* These acts of love and solidarity become the anchors that hold us steady when

life feels overwhelming. Pain is a deeply personal burden, and difficulties are uniquely ours to face — but your silent presence tells me I don’t have to face them in isolation. It’s a quiet reminder that, no matter how lost I feel, I am still worthy of love and connection. Sometimes, words aren’t necessary; your silent support speaks louder than anything else. Love, in its purest form, has the power to help us rediscover ourselves, even when we’ve forgotten who we are. Let’s remember the importance of simply being there for one another.

### A Thought for the Week: Small Frying Pan

A woman was fishing all morning and never caught anything. But a man in the next boat was reeling in a fish every time she glanced over. Then, to make matters worse, he kept the small ones and threw the large ones back into the water! She couldn’t stand it any longer. She called over to him, “How come you’re throwing the big ones back?” He answered, “because my frying pan is not big enough”.

**The lesson from the big fish:** Get a bigger frying pan. Find another way to handle the larger matters. Why limit your catch, the opportunities, or your goals? Expand your capacity.

### QnQ! Q asks? Did Jesus modify the disabled physically?

1. Zechariah, the blind man in John 9, received a physical cure when he emerged from the pool, his true healing does not occur until much later in the chapter when

he declares, “Lord, I believe,” and worships Jesus (Jn 9:38). That’s the moment he’s restored through a conversation with the living God and is finally able to reach the place of worship he’s been excluded from.

2. Jesus is always tearing down the boundaries we put up, and here Jesus reveals the unnecessary barriers of kingdom exclusion. Everyone is now welcome at the table!

3. A disabled shared: “To assume that my disability needs to be erased in order for me to live an abundant life is disturbing not only because of what it says about me but also because of what it reveals about people’s notions of God. I bear the image of the Alpha and the Omega. *My disabled body is a temple for the Holy Spirit. I have the mind of Christ.... I don’t have a junior holy spirit because I am disabled.* To suggest that I am anything less than sanctified and redeemed is to suppress the image of God in my disabled body and to limit how God is already at work through my life. Maybe we need to be freed not from disability but from the notion that it limits my ability to showcase God’s radiance to the church.

**The Holy Spirit @ work:** The Holy Spirit helps us to view others with fresh eyes, seeing them always as brothers and sisters in Jesus, to be respected. **Pope Francis**

**Something To Tickle You:** Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God. **Corrie Ten Boom**

Bishop Bernard Paul

## Walking in the footsteps of Christ



Msgr Peter Ng with his anniversary cake (Gwen Goo facebook)

KLUANG: The parishioners of the Church of St Louis had a special celebration recently, to mark the 25th sacerdotal anniversary of their beloved parish priest Msgr Peter Ng. The event commenced with a Thanksgiving Mass at the church, where Msgr Peter was the main celebrant with assistant priest Fr William Pillai concelebrating and assisted by both the two parish deacons.

After Mass, parishioners gathered in the parish hall for a Thanksgiving dinner to honour the significant milestone in Msgr Peter's ministry. The celebration also featured several song performances, making it a heartfelt and meaningful event as parishioners came together to express their love and gratitude for their dedicated priest, who has faithfully served his ministry for many years.

The parishioners prayed for Msgr Peter, offering congratulations on his 25 years as a priest. They prayed that his life in the Lord be filled with joy and blessings, that God continue to grant him wisdom and grace, and that he remains steadfast in his priestly mission, sharing the Gospel of Christ and the love of God with all.

Msgr Peter was ordained a diocesan priest on December 27, 1999, the feast of St John the Evangelist, at his hometown parish, the Church of St Henry in Batu Pahat. His ordination motto, *Follow in His Footsteps* (1 Peter 2:21), has been a guiding theme throughout his life. Reflecting on his 25 years of priesthood, Msgr Peter expressed in his prayer card, distributed after a Thanksgiving Mass on Dec 27, 2024, at the Church of St Henry, his deep gratitude to God for blessing him with a fulfilling vocation. He prayed that he may continue to walk in the footsteps of Christ in his ministry.

Since March 2016, Msgr Peter has served as the Vicar General of the Diocese of Malacca Johore and is also the parish priest of the Church of St Louis, overseeing several outstation chapels under its care. **Bernard Anthony**

# KK archbishop acknowledges role of religious in the archdiocese

KOTA KINABALU: "Religious life or consecrated life is a gift from God, enabling us to witness His presence among His people. Imagine if there were no religious brothers or sisters serving in schools, missions, or rural areas. There would be confusion. For this, I want to thank you for your service and love for the People of God," said Archbishop John Wong during his speech after Mass to the religious representatives from various congregations serving in the Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu.

The World Day of Consecrated Life was celebrated on February 2 at the Carmelite Monastery of Our Lady of Mt Carmel and St Therese of the Child Jesus. Around two hundred people gathered to join in the celebration.

The Mass began at 7.00am, with Archbishop John blessing the candles. A short procession of the religious, carrying lighted candles, moved from the entrance to the altar of the chapel, symbolising the light of Christ.

The Sisters from different congregations took part in the liturgy – commentating and reading while a Carmelite Brother led the prayer of the faithful. The choir was led by the cloistered Carmelite Sisters.

During the homily, Archbishop John invited the congregation to reflect on their first encounter with the Lord. He pointed out that the Presentation of the Lord was the first time God's people encountered the Messiah, represented by two elderly figures, Simeon



Archbishop John Wong with the religious congregations in Kota Kinabalu. (FSIC Sabah facebook)

and Anna, who longed to meet the Saviour. Prompted by the Holy Spirit, both Simeon and Anna recognised Jesus as the Messiah and the Light of the world. Archbishop John reminded the faithful that through Baptism and Confirmation, we too receive the Holy Spirit, enabling us to recognise God's presence in our lives and in the lives of others. Following the homily, the religious renewed their vows.

After the Mass, the Religious Council Chairperson, Mother Francisca Wong, delivered a speech expressing gratitude to the Carmelite Sisters for hosting the celebration at the Carmelite Chapel and to the OCDS (Secular Carmelites) for organising the breakfast fellowship, which was held after Mass.

During the fellowship, a simple cake-cutting ceremony was held to mark the 26th Sacerdotal Anniversary of Archbishop John,

coinciding with the celebration of the World Day of Consecrated Life.

After the fellowship, the religious gathered in the parlour for a half-hour meeting with the Carmelite nuns. A fruit hamper was presented as a gift to the nuns. Their joyful interaction concluded with a song, *I Found a Treasure in the Field*.

The religious serving in the archdiocese include the following congregations: the Franciscan Sisters of Immaculate Conception (FSIC), Religious of the Good Shepherd (RGS), Daughters of St Paul (FSP), Brothers of St. Gabriel (SG), Marist Brothers of the Schools (FMS), the Clerical Society of the Most Holy Trinity (SST), represented by Bro Miquel, Order of Friars Minor (OFM), and the Carmelite Sisters of Our Lady of Mt Carmel and St Therese of the Child Jesus (OCD).

## Sibu diocese celebrates 29th World Day of Prayer for Consecrated Life

SIBU: Twenty-three members from four religious communities in the Diocese of Sibu gathered to celebrate the 29th World Day of Prayer for Consecrated Life. The event took place at the Sacred Heart Cathedral, where members of the Sisters of St Francis of Sarawak (SSFS), the Order of Franciscan Minor Capuchins, the Marist Brothers, and Putri Karmel took part in a recollection and sharing session. The event also involved the Holy Trinity Covenant Community and parishioners.

The celebration culminated in a 5.30pm Mass to give thanks for the gift of religious life, in conjunction with the Feast of the Presentation

of the Lord, known as Candlemas Day. The Mass was concelebrated by Bishop Joseph Hii; Fr Alphonsus Tang; Fr David Lau; Fr Francis Go, OFM Cap (Guardian of the Franciscan Friary in Sibu), and Fr Raphael Samosir, OFM Cap, Ecclesiastical Assistant of the Commission for Consecrated Life of Sibu Diocese.

During the Mass, Bishop Joseph blessed the consecrated members' candles, which symbolised their commitment to the radical following of Jesus. In his homily, the bishop reminded the faithful that consecrated life is a response to "a call within a call," a profound commitment to follow Jesus with radical devotion. He referenced the example of St Anthony, Abbot,

whose feast day falls on January 17. In the 3rd century, St Anthony chose to live in the desert to fully dedicate himself to following Christ, recognising that the world around him posed no challenge to his commitment.

Bishop Joseph emphasised that the vows of chastity, obedience, and poverty taken by consecrated persons are extraordinary, making the Church richer. He urged the faithful to thank God for consecrated life and to pray that many young people would be inspired to follow this path. Reflecting on his own journey, he shared that, like the consecrated, he too had been called to live radically through his vocation as a priest and later as a bishop.

In his homily, Bishop Joseph also reflected on the biblical tradition of consecrating the firstborn male, recalling the ritual of purification and the offering of the firstborn to God. However, he encouraged the congregation to view themselves from a biological perspective, considering that each individual, from the moment of conception, is a "firstborn" and "champion" of God's creation. In God's eyes, every person is unique and special, consecrated for Him and others. The prelate called on the parishioners to embrace their uniqueness in diversity, as one body with many parts, united in God's love.

The celebration highlighted not only the importance of consecrated life but also the call for all to live radically in devotion to Christ, fostering unity within the Church and the world. **Eta Ting**



The four religious communities in the Diocese of Sibu with their lighted candles

## KUALA SELANGOR

Hundreds of Catholics from near and far gathered at the Chapel of the Holy Infant Jesus in Kuala Selangor for the parish feast, celebrated from January 29 to February 2. The chapel, known for its dedication to children, welcomed pilgrims who came to take part in the spiritual observances and reflect on the themes of faith, salvation, and devotion to the Holy Infant Jesus.

The preachers for the first three days were Fr Xavier Andrew from Seremban, Fr Bonaventure Rayappan from Kajang and Fr William Michael from Kuala Lumpur. The final two days were led by the chapel's administrator, Fr James Gabriel.

The celebration reached its peak on the evening of Feb 1, with around 1,200 faithful in attendance. Fr James highlighted the significance of the day, noting that forty days after the birth of Jesus, the Church celebrates the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord — an occasion also observed at the Chapel of the Holy Infant Jesus in Kuala Selangor.

The blessing of candles took place after the recitation of the Rosary and chaplet of the Holy Infant Jesus. The chapel, which had been beautifully decorated, provided an opportunity for pilgrims to pray, adore the Lord, and offer their written petitions.

The Masses were celebrated in a large tent set up on the chapel grounds. Fr James led the candle blessing ceremony at the main entrance, where nine children dressed as the Holy Infant Jesus led the procession.

In his homily, delivered in both English and Tamil, Fr James emphasised that salvation comes only through Jesus Christ. Reflecting on the Gospel of Luke (2:22-40), he quoted



# Celebrating the Feast of the Holy Infant Jesus

Simeon's words: "My eyes have seen the glory of the Lord." He also highlighted Jesus' invitation: "Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Fr James explained that true rest is found only after our work is done, symbolising the salvation and victory found in Christ, stressing that Jesus alone is Lord and God.

Encouraging the faithful to open their hearts to the Holy Spirit, Fr James urged them to fully immerse themselves in Christ, the source of fulfilment and salvation. He reminded them that Jesus is the beginning, middle, and end of everything and urged them to strengthen their faith, rooted in love and hope, while being empowered by God's wisdom and knowledge.

He also addressed the importance of child-like faith, explaining that to enter the Kingdom of God, one must become like a child. He reassured those doing God's work that He would strengthen and restore them. He also emphasised that with Jesus, the faithful receive everything — freedom from fear and death, and the promise of salvation.

Concluding his homily, Fr James called for repentance and the forgiveness of sins, encouraging the faithful to receive the Holy Spirit. He assured them that responding to God's call would lead to salvation and protection. He reminded the congregation that they were created by God and through Jesus, could receive whatever they asked for

in prayer, as long as they had faith in Him.

After the Mass, a 40-minute candlelight procession took place, featuring a float carrying a statue of the Holy Infant Jesus, with Fr James kneeling in reverence with the Blessed Sacrament. The procession made its way through the nearby roundabout before returning to the chapel grounds, where the faithful solemnly honoured Jesus.

The evening ended with the congregation adjourning for dinner and fellowship at the chapel grounds.

Many pilgrims came with hope in the Lord, spending time in adoration and at the grotto, strengthening their faith and devotion to Christ. **Bernard Anthony**

## SG PELEK

The Chapel of the Holy Infant Jesus in Sg Pelek, Selangor hosted a beautiful celebration of the Feast of the Holy Infant Jesus with a triduum from January 31 to February 2, under the theme *Hope Does Not Disappoint*.

On Jan 31, Fr Nicholas Ho OCD from Seremban was the main celebrant for the evening Mass, which included the Chaplet and Adoration. The celebration on Feb 1 commenced at 10.00am and featured a special children's programme, with activities such as colouring, indoor games, and Holy Infant Jesus statue decorations led by catechism children from Tampin and Port Dickson parishes. Later at 11.30am, Fr Gnana Selvam Berentis, from Klang, celebrated Mass for the children, with Fr Edwin Peter, the chapel's administrator and parish priest of the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Port Dickson (CICPD) concelebrating.

The children joyfully participated in the Mass, filled with awe as they gathered in faith, hope, and unity to celebrate the Holy Infant Jesus. Their enthusiastic participation in hymns, prayers, and activities added a heartwarming spirit of delight and fun to the celebration. Each child received a gift and



blessing from Fr Gnana.

In celebration of the Jubilee Year 2025, four children dressed as *Luce and friends* made a special appearance, promoting pilgrimages to designated pilgrimage centres, especially CICPD.

In the evening, the blessing of candles took place, followed by a procession around the chapel. The sunset Mass was then concelebrated by Archbishop Emeritus Murphy Pakiam, Fr Gnana, Fr Michel Dass from Kuala Lumpur, Fr Christopher W. Soosaipillai from Mantin, and Fr Edwin.

The celebration reached its pinnacle on Feb

2 with Sunday Mass celebrated by Archbishop Julian Leow at 11.30am. The ceremony began with the blessing of candles outside the chapel, followed by a candlelight procession around the chapel as over 250 devotees prayed the Chaplet of the Holy Infant Jesus. Fr Edwin concelebrated the Mass, and seminarian Bro Alvin Lucas who assisted throughout the triduum.

In his homily, Archbishop Julian posed a thought-provoking question to the congregation: "What does this feast mean to us?" He reflected on how, despite being God, Jesus followed the law, teaching us the importance of obedience. Quoting Simeon's words, "I will not close my eyes until I see the Messiah," the archbishop emphasised the faith of both Simeon and Anna, who awaited the arrival of Jesus. He asked the faithful, "Is our faith like theirs?"

The archbishop urged the assembly to remain resilient and steadfast in keeping the Ten Commandments and upholding the resolutions made at the start of the year. He encouraged everyone to stand before God, seek forgiveness, and strive to become true disciples, drawing strength from God as Anna and Simeon did.

Archbishop Julian also highlighted the significance of the blessed candles, reminding the faithful that they represent Jesus as the Light of the World. He urged them to be a light in their homes and communities, guiding others and warning of the pitfalls of the devil.

He concluded by calling all to live out the message of the Feast of the Holy Infant Jesus by being the light of the world and the salt of the earth, making a positive impact in the lives of others.

Fr Edwin gave a brief translation of the archbishop's homily in Tamil for the congregation.

At the end of the celebration, the chapel's chairperson, Reagan Savarimuthu, welcomed everyone and expressed gratitude to the archbishop and all the preachers for their presence. He also acknowledged the contributions of those involved in the liturgy, including the Infant Jesus BEC from Damansara Kim, Petaling Jaya, the fellowship sponsors, and Fr Edwin for his guidance and support.

Fr Edwin thanked the archbishop for taking time out of his busy schedule to celebrate the feast day Mass. He also invited everyone to the chapel's weekly sunset Mass, held every Saturday at 7.30pm.

Archbishop Julian praised Fr Edwin for promoting the devotion to the Holy Infant Jesus, both in Sg Pelek, Sepang and previously in Kuala Selangor. Fr Edwin emphasised the importance of ministering to children and expressed hope that even more children would join next year. The archbishop added that children look to adults for guidance, urging everyone to protect and nurture them, never to harm them. As followers of Christ, we are called to be the light of Christ in the world. **Bernard Anthony**



The children participating in fun activities. (CIC PD facebook)

# Building bridges of friendship over 'chapati'

BAYAN LEPAS, Penang: The "Chapati Morning" gathering on January 27 embraced the spirit of Pope Francis' encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* on human fraternity and social friendship, as envisioned in the '2019 Abu Dhabi Declaration on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together'. Hosted by Lajnah Dakwah PAS Pulau Pinang, the event brought together leaders from both the Muslim and Catholic communities, demonstrating their commitment to building bridges and fostering mutual understanding.

Sharing a simple yet meaningful *chapati* meal together, served as a powerful symbol of unity. It highlighted how breaking bread can transcend differences, offering a space for dialogue and connection that strengthens the bonds of friendship and promotes a deeper sense of shared humanity.

YB Amir Hamzah warmly welcomed Cardinal Sebastian



The "Chapati Morning" gathering on January 27.

Francis, Bishop of Penang; Msgr Jude Miranda, Vicar General of Penang Diocese; Deacon Paul Kang, CEO of Mount Miriam Cancer Hospital; and Christopher Kushi, Legal Officer. The gathering was also attended by Ahli Majlis Syura Ulamak PAS, Tuan Guru Hj Ahmad Ali; President of Lajnah Dakwah PAS Penang YB Amir Hamzah Hashim; Vice-President of Lajnah Dakwah PAS

Pusat Tuan Hj. Abdul Rahman, and other PAS members.

In his welcome address, YB Amir Hamzah, who is also the ADUN of Permatang Pasir, emphasised the importance of strengthening the bonds of friendship with Cardinal Sebastian and members of the Catholic Diocese of Penang. He noted that this gathering serves as a model for younger generations,

showcasing the spirit of co-existence and the ability to work together. Tuan Guru Haji Ahmad Ali echoed these sentiments, stressing that Islam places great importance on fostering positive human relationships and nurturing love among all people.

Cardinal Sebastian expressed his joy over the strong friendship that has developed with PAS since his appointment as Bishop of Penang. He

highlighted the shared commitment to friendship, collaboration, and, given PAS's political role, the importance of good governance in Malaysia.

Tuan Abdul Rahman also reflected on these deep-rooted bonds, recalling recent meetings between Cardinal Sebastian and key PAS leaders, including Mursyidul Am Tuan Guru Dato' Hashim Jasin; PAS President Tan Sri Abdul Hadi Awang; PAS Vice-President Datuk Idris Ahmad, and Kelantan MB Dato' Panglima Dr Mohamed Fadzil Hassan.

The 2019 Abu Dhabi Declaration, signed by His Holiness Pope Francis and Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Sheikh Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, underscores the importance of building understanding and cooperation between all people — East and West, North and South — who share the belief that God created us. It calls for mutual respect, collaboration, and the pursuit of universal peace, where all can live as brothers and sisters in love.

## Kuching lawyers seek guidance for justice, peace

KUCHING: Catholic lawyers in the Archdiocese of Kuching came together for their annual Red Mass at the Church of the Blessed Sacrament on January 25, seeking guidance and blessings for their work in the legal profession.

Since 2015, the legal community has organised the Votive Mass to invoke the Holy Spirit's guidance and divine blessings.

The Mass was presided over by Archbishop Simon Poh, with Fr Leonard Yap, parish priest of the Church of the Blessed Sacrament, and Fr Eugenio Maglasang, parish priest of the Church of the Holy Trinity, concelebrating.

Among the attendees were prominent figures from the legal field, including Datuk Seri JC Fong, State Legal Counsel; Datuk Stephen Chung, a retired Court of Appeal judge, and Gabriel Gumis, former Registrar of the High Court of Sabah and Sarawak, who now serves in the Native Court of Sarawak. Their presence underscored the strong faith and unity within the local legal community.

In his homily, Archbishop Simon drew on the reading about the

conversion of St Paul, emphasising the themes of "justice" and "redemption" in relation to the Jubilee Year of Hope 2025. He described the Jubilee Year as a time of "grace, mercy, and reconciliation" and encouraged the congregation to reflect on their relationship with God, encounter Jesus, and bring His love and mercy to society to inspire change.

The prelate said that the Mass was to pray for the "preservation of peace and justice" as well as "the grace and development of people." He encouraged the congregation to give thanks to the Lord for His blessings and to pray that "the Lord may empower you to play a vital role in shaping the destiny of Sarawak and Malaysia as we strive for justice and peace."

Datuk Seri JC Fong, representing the legal congregation, presented mementoes to the altar servers, sacristan, choir and celebrants for making the Red Mass a meaningful and spiritually enriching occasion.

The event concluded with light refreshments at the Fr Dato Lawrence Chua Hall. **Today's Catholic**

## A joyful celebration of faith at CTL parish

KEPONG: The Church of Christ the Light (CTL) in Desa Jaya celebrated its feast and the first anniversary of its establishment as a parish recently. The momentous occasion was marked by a vibrant multilingual Triduum Mass and a solemn procession, held from January 30 to February 2, bringing the faithful together in prayer, devotion, and fellowship.

The first day of the Triduum Mass was presided over by Fr Simon Labrooy, with Fr Gnana Selvam Berentis and parish priest, Fr Peter Anthoney, concelebrating. Addressing the congregation of over 300, who had gathered with great enthusiasm despite the holidays, Fr Simon encouraged them to embrace their faith with joy and to celebrate their lives with God. The evening concluded with a warm and delightful dinner, lovingly prepared by Zone 1 and 2 BECs, fostering a strong sense of community at the church foyer.

On the second day of the Triduum, Fr Michel Dass, together with Fr Peter, led the celebration with the theme *Listening with the Spirit of God*. He urged the congregation to open their hearts to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to live with compassion, and to cultivate a forgiving heart, just as Jesus did. He reminded all that Jesus was presented in the temple as a sign that we ultimately belong to God. The evening's fellowship continued with a sumptuous dinner, generously provided by the BEC's from Zones 3, 4 and 5.

The third day carried the theme *Walking as Pilgrims of Hope* and was celebrated by Fr Surain Durairaj, alongside with our parish priest. The evening began with the blessing of candles at the grotto, as more than 500 faithful



The faithful lighting their candles before the procession.

gathered, their hearts filled with devotion. A sacred procession followed, leading into the church, where children were presented to the Lord and the Basic Ecclesial Community (BEC) leaders carried their BEC banners in reverence.

During his homily, Fr Surain reflected on the moment when Simeon took the infant Jesus into his arms and praised God, proclaiming, "Now, Lord, you can let me, your servant, go in peace." He called upon the congregation to emulate Simeon's faith and devotion. As it was also a day dedicated to consecrated life, he invited the community to pray for all religious congregations who have dedicated their lives to serving God.

The feast day celebration culminated in a deeply moving and prayerful silent procession through the streets of Desa Jaya. A beautifully decorated vehicle carried the Blessed Sacrament, held reverently by Fr Surain, while Fr Peter and the congregation walked in solemn devotion. As the procession wove through the main

streets, the rosary was recited, with each participant holding a candle that illuminated the night with a serene glow. At designated stops, the faithful knelt in veneration as the Blessed Sacrament was raised in blessing, while flower girls gently scattered petals along the path in a gesture of love and reverence.

Upon returning to the church, the celebration concluded with benediction, filling the hearts of all with peace and grace. Fr Peter expressed his heartfelt gratitude to all the presiders, the dedicated working committee, and every parishioner who contributed to the success of this beautiful celebration. It was a truly uplifting experience — a testament to the deep sense of faith, belonging, and love that unites the parish community.

The evening ended with a fellowship dinner in the church basement, where laughter, gratitude, and the warmth of togetherness marked the perfect conclusion to a blessed and unforgettable feast day. **Moses Sinnapen**



Archbishop Simon Poh receiving the Offertory gifts during the Mass.

# Journey together with hope on our pilgrimage

**Bernard Anthony**

PORT DICKSON: The 2025 Jubilee Year invites all Catholics to become *Pilgrims of Hope*, walking step by step in the footsteps of Jesus Christ and sharing the Christian hope with others.

As part of this special year of grace, reconciliation, mercy, and renewal, the Malaysian Church has designated pilgrimage centres for Catholics to visit. Pilgrims can obtain plenary indulgences while visiting these centres, further deepening their spiritual journey.

On February 2, the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, 42 Catholics from various parishes in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor set out on a pilgrimage of hope, seeking reconciliation and spiritual renewal. Their journey began in the morning at the Chapel of the Holy Infant Jesus in Sg Pelek, Sepang where they attended the feast day Mass. Along the way, they prayed the Rosary together as a group.

In the afternoon, the pilgrims continued their journey to the Church of Immaculate Conception in Port Dickson (CICPD), one of the five designated pilgrimage centres in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur. They were warmly welcomed by the CICPD Jubilee welcoming team, which guided them through a community prayer session and a reflection on "Gratitude." Before the reflection, the pilgrims learned about the significance of the Jubilee year, the



*Pilgrims going for the Rosary Walk at the Church of the Immaculate Conception Port Dickson.*

Jubilee logo, and how to obtain the Jubilee Indulgence or plenary indulgence.

Fr Edwin Peter, the parish priest, and seminarian Bro Alvin Lucas were present to support the pilgrims. Fr Edwin expressed his joy at seeing the pilgrims enthusiastically engage in adoration and prayer, emphasising the importance of repentance before passing through the Holy Door — a symbol of the grace available during the Jubilee year. "The Holy Door is not a magic door," he explained, but a call for repentance, forgiveness, and spiritual renewal.

The pilgrims also had the opportunity to write petitions and place them in the "Prayers of Hope" box, located near the statue of Mother Mary. The act of burning these petitions symbolised surrendering their prayers to God.

A key highlight of the pilgrimage was the Rosary Walk, which took place both

indoors and outdoors. During the walk, the pilgrims reflected on their faith and deepened their connection with the Lord and Mother Mary. Many participants purchased Jubilee-themed items, including caps, rosaries, and car stickers, which added to the sense of unity and purpose. Holy water was also distributed generously. Though the walk presented a slight challenge for some elderly pilgrims due to a small slope and staircase, the overall experience was a spiritual refreshment.

At the end of the two-hour programme, Fr Edwin offered a blessing to all the pilgrims. Bro Alvin also encouraged the pilgrims to pray for more vocations to the priesthood, urging young men in Malaysia to consider joining the seminary.

The pilgrimage was a profound time of renewal, faith, and unity for all who participated.



## What is a jubilee year?

A Jubilee Year is a significant and sacred event in the Catholic Church, a time of grace, mercy, and spiritual renewal. Typically celebrated once every 25 years, the Jubilee can also be declared by the Pope for extraordinary occasions. Its roots trace back to the Old Testament, specifically the Book of Leviticus, where every 50th year was designated as a Jubilee year. During this time, the land would rest, debts would be forgiven, and people would experience reconciliation.

In the Catholic tradition, the Pope proclaims a Jubilee Year as a special invitation for all believers to encounter God's abundant mercy, deepen their faith, and renew their commitment to living out the Gospel. It serves as a time for reconciliation, spiritual growth, and acts of charity, urging the faithful to return to the heart of God's love.

Jubilee 2025, with the theme Pilgrims of Hope, calls Catholics to embrace and share the message of hope that Jesus offers to the world. It invites the faithful to see themselves as "pilgrims"—journeying through life together, bearing Christ's light, and sharing His hope with others. This theme emphasizes both personal and communal transformation, reminding us that we are not isolated in our faith journey but united with others in a shared pilgrimage of hope.

The Jubilee also serves as a profound opportunity to reflect on the boundless mercy of God. The faithful are encouraged to engage in the sacrament of reconciliation, embrace acts of charity, and renew their commitment to fostering a more just and compassionate world, embodying God's love in all aspects of life.

Jubilee 2025 calls on Catholics to live with unwavering hope and to spread that hope to others, reflecting God's mercy and being a light in a world in need of renewal and reconciliation. It is a time for each believer to deepen their faith, experience the transforming power of God's grace, and share that grace with the world.



4y

## Newly renovated grotto at St Louis pilgrimage centre

KLUANG: The newly renovated grotto dedicated to Our Lady of Fatima at the Church of St Louis was blessed by Bishop Bernard Paul on February 2 – the feast of the Presentation of the Lord and the 29th World Day for Consecrated Life.

The blessing ceremony, which took place before the 10.15am Sunday Mass, was attended by parish priest Msgr Peter Ng, assistant priest Fr William Pillai, four religious priests, several religious sisters, Deacon Louis Martin, and parishioners.

After the prayer of blessing by Bishop

Bernard, the prelate blessed the grotto with holy water and unveiled a plaque on the left side of the beautifully extended grotto.

As the Church of St Louis is one of three designated pilgrimage centres in the Diocese of Malacca Johore for the 2025 Jubilee Year, Msgr Peter hopes that both pilgrims and parishioners will take time to visit the serene and exquisitely designed grotto on the parish grounds, whether for personal reflection or group Rosary prayers. **Bernard Anthony**

## Sekolah Menengah Stella Maris exist to make a difference

It's 6.45am on a typical Stella Maris school day, the church bell rings at the adjoining Church of St Anthony, signalling the call for Mass. The sound of the bell and the subtle glow emanating from the stained-glass façade make this enclave in the middle of Pudu, a proverbial sight to behold. This scenario at the start of the day brings vitality to the school like no other, setting it off on the right note. To the parents dropping off their kids, it gives them confidence in the Stella Maris mission; to be a place where faith, academic excellence, love and character converge.

Academic staff and counsellors at Sekolah Menengah Stella Maris know that among all of life's challenging decisions, the selection process and transition to a secondary school may well be top on the list for parents and students to overcome. Navigating choices in our education and schooling ecosystem, there is the inevitable concern of cost, location and accessibility to coincide with academics, ex-

tra-curricular programmes, sports, music and arts, and how best to nurture a student's unique personality in their education journey among fellow students.

Sekolah Menengah Stella Maris will balance out these concerns when students and parents talk to an admissions counsellor. As the first school founded by Yayasan Tan Sri Dominic Vendragon, a leading educational foundation, its mission is to be a beacon of faith in our nation's education landscape. A private school, SM Stella Maris is based on the Malaysian National Curriculum (KSSM) where Science and Mathematics are taught in English to empower students for a global future.

To the school principal, teachers, administrators and counsellors, the sound of the church bell is an encouraging reminder to lead the school in the spirit of Colossians 3:23 "... To work with all your heart as working for the Lord..." Sekolah Menengah Stella Maris extends this spirit to its students.



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Jubilee of the World of Communications — sharings from Malaysian participants

# A journey of faith, dialogue and media

The Jubilee of the World of Communications in Rome, held from January 24 to 26, was a powerful experience for Catholic communicators. It began with a Welcome and Penitential Liturgy at the Basilica of St John Lateran, followed by a Eucharistic Celebration on the feast of St Francis de Sales, the patron saint of social communication.

On Jan 25, speakers Maria Ressa and Colum McCann shared insights on media challenges and the power of storytelling. Pope Francis addressed us, urging commitment to truth in communication. The day ended with Vespers at the Basilica of St Paul Outside the Walls, concluding the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

The highlight of my time in Rome came on January 27, when I had a private audience with Pope Francis at the Apostolic Palace. Shaking hands with the Supreme Pontiff and looking into his eyes, I conveyed the love and prayers of the Malaysian Church and humbly requested his prayers for our nation. It was a moment of profound grace that will remain in my heart forever.

The following three days featured intensive discussions on the role of media in the Church. Maria Ressa opened the sessions by mapping out the current media environment and underscoring the importance of collaboration, fact-checking, and promoting media literacy. Fr Columban



From left: Francisco Overee, Daniel Roy Santiyagu, Alvinus Bryan and Fr Sixtus Pitah OFM.

Jordan, OFR, and Moisés Sbardelotto then explored the shift in communication paradigms, particularly the rise of Catholic influencers and social media's role in evangelisation.

A particularly thought-provoking talk was given by Fr Paolo Benanti, TOR, on artificial intelligence and its implications for Church communication. He spoke about AI's potential to reshape how we disseminate and receive information, prompting reflection on the ethical responsibilities of Catholic communicators. Eli Pariser, founder of New Public Network, followed with insights on fostering healthy online

communities that promote civic engagement and pluralism.

Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle led a spiritual reflection, guiding us to integrate faith into our communication work. Small group discussions using the Spiritual Conversation method allowed us to share our experiences and explore what it means to be Catholic communicators in today's world.

On Jan 28, Colum McCann returned with a session on storytelling as a tool for breaking stereotypes and fostering communion. A diverse panel of communicators shared inspiring

initiatives that have made significant impacts within and beyond the Church. Another forum explored engagement with youth, marginalised communities, and responses to misinformation and crises.

Afternoon workshops provided practical strategies, including *Best Practices for Liturgy Broadcasting* and *Effective Strategies for Communication Offices*. The day concluded with a Mass at St Peter's Basilica, presided over by Cardinal Pietro Parolin.

The final day (Jan 29) featured Spiritual Conversation sessions where language groups identified key themes from the conference. Reports were then presented, summarising insights and proposals for the future of Catholic communication. Paolo Ruffini, Director of the Dicastery for Social Communications, closed the conference with heartfelt gratitude to all participants and organizers.

As I left Rome, I carried with me a renewed sense of purpose. The Jubilee of Communications was not just an event — it was a transformative experience that reinforced the need for Catholic communicators to be bearers of truth, builders of dialogue, and witnesses of faith in the digital age. Our mission remains clear in an era of rapid information flow and evolving media landscapes: to communicate with integrity, compassion, and a deep commitment to the Gospel. **Fr Sixtus Pitah OFM**

## Building trust through truth

I had the opportunity to attend the Jubilee Year of Communication and the Meeting for Young Communicators in Rome. It was an enriching experience, bringing together young minds from various countries who share the same mission of working in the field of Communications. The event was professional exchange, building connections and understanding the profound role communication plays in shaping society.

One of the most striking moments of the gathering was the speech delivered by Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Maria Ressa during the Papal Audience. Her words resonated deeply: *Without facts, you can't have truth. Without truth, you can't have trust. Without these three, we have no shared reality, we can't begin to solve any problem.* This statement underscored the essence of ethical communication in our modern world, where misinformation and bias often cloud judgment and divide communities.

Communications is more than just the transmission of information; it is the foun-

dation of trust. In a time when social media and digital platforms have become primary sources of news, the responsibility to communicate with integrity has never been more critical. Truth in communication builds bridges, fosters understanding, and enables constructive dialogue. Without it, trust erodes, and society fractures into polarised groups, unable to work together towards common goals.

As young communicators, we hold the key to ensuring that trust remains at the heart of our narratives. This experience in Rome reminded me that our role goes beyond reporting events — it is about shaping perspectives, upholding ethical standards, and ultimately strengthening the bonds that unite us as a global community.

The Jubilee Year of Communication was more than an event; it was a call to action. A call to uphold truth, cultivate trust, and use our voices to inspire hope and unity in an era where communication defines the world we live in. **Alvinus Bryan**



Young communicators from Asia with the head of the Vatican's Dicastery for Communication, Prefect, Paolo Ruffini.

## A call to action

The Jubilee of the World of Communications brought together global Church communicators in an inspiring Conference of Presidents and National Directors of Episcopal Commissions for Communication from January 27 – 29. As the Chairman of the Episcopal Regional Commission for Social Communication of Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei, I was blessed with the privilege of representing our region at this significant event.

Hosted by the Dicastery for Communication, the conference convened bishops, clergy, religious, and lay leaders engaged in the Church's communication efforts. The event was an opportunity for reflection, dialogue, and renewal in our mission to bring the Gospel to the digital frontier.

Key discussions covered the impact of social media on faith formation, artificial intelligence in religious communication, and the vital role of storytelling in shaping narratives of hope. Renowned speakers, including Maria Ressa and Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, shared profound insights on how the Church can navigate the complexities of modern communication while remaining rooted in Gospel values.

A highlight of the event was the private audience with His Holiness Pope Francis, who imparted a compelling message on the responsibility of Church communicators. Addressing us on Jan 27 at Clementine Hall, the Holy Father emphasised the importance of fostering hope in a world often clouded by despair.

What are we doing to encourage others to look forward to a future that is not predetermined? Are we capable of communicating that hope is not an illusion? Hope never disappoints. Are we communicating this? Pope Francis challenged us. He urged us to avoid the pitfalls of division and sensationalism, reminding us that communication within the Church should not be dictated by corporate marketing strategies but must instead be inspired by prayer and



love.

Pope Francis left us with two keywords:

**together and network.** He called on Catholic communicators to work collaboratively across continents, emphasising that Christian communication must be a living witness of fraternity and unity, not an insular dialogue among ourselves.

"We must let the Lord out — He is knocking at the door to be let out," he remarked, inspiring us to ensure that our communication efforts reflect a missionary Church, engaging with the world beyond our own communities.

The Jubilee of the World of Communication was more than a conference; it was a call to action. As we return to our respective dioceses, we carry with us the responsibility to create narratives that build bridges, foster reconciliation, and testify to the Kingdom of God. In an age where misinformation and divisiveness threaten unity, our mission as Catholic communicators has never been more crucial.

The words of Pope Francis will continue to resonate as we strive to make our digital spaces a place of encounter, dialogue, and evangelisation. May our commitment to truth, love, and unity guide us as we communicate our faith in this ever-evolving digital age.

**Daniel Roy Santiyagu**

# Become Christ's followers, not his fans

BHUBANESWAR: Apostolic Nuncio to India and Nepal, Archbishop Leopoldo Girelli, urged India's Latin rite bishops to become the disciples of Christ and not just his fans.

When Jesus worked miracles, He had many fans watching Him, but only a few chose to follow Him, said the nuncio in his homily at the opening Mass of the 36th plenary assembly of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI).

The CCBI, the largest national episcopal conference in Asia and the fourth largest globally, represents 132 dioceses and 209 bishops in India.

The January 28 - February 4 plenary on the theme, *Discerning synodal pathways for mission*, was held at the Xavier Institute of Management University in Bhubaneswar, the capital of Odisha state in eastern India.

Reminding the bishops of their episcopal mission in India, the nuncio urged them to pray to the Holy Spirit for a greater opening to respond faithfully to the tasks and responsibilities of the Church.

The nuncio referred to the Gospel of the day, where Jesus denounces His sentimental attachments with His mother and embraces universal brotherhood, symbolically opening the door to people of all ethnicities and social status. He pointed out that unity comes from journeying together.

The nuncio applauded the Indian



*Bishops from across India gather in Bhubaneswar for the 36th Plenary Assembly of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI), underscoring their commitment to a Synodal Church and charting a path for faith, justice, and collaboration ahead of the Jubilee Year 2025. Photo credit: CCBI General Secretariat. (LiCas News)*

Church's contribution towards the development of society. The current challenge of the Church is to engage with those who are deeply afflicted through climate change, poverty, and digital media, and those who remain excluded from our ecclesiastical structure, he said.

Archbishop Girelli expressed his concern about the emerging challenges in India. He affirmed that India is a land of the young, but finding a job for all is a challenge, and that leads to migration. He stressed that the Church has a role to play in addressing the causes of migration.

CCBI president, Cardinal Filipe Neri Ferrão, reminded the bishops that the hierarchy is not for power but for service, and the Church has a responsibility towards mi-

grants and those in the periphery. There is a need to use the logic of encounter rather than the logic of confrontation as pilgrims of hope, he stressed.

Cardinal Ferrão, who is also the president of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, highlighted the growing challenges to Christian living and religious freedom in India.

"India faces significant challenges in Christian living and religious freedom," said Cardinal Ferrão. He noted the enactment of anti-conversion laws in 18 States and the increasing number of reported incidents of violence against Christians. He called for solidarity, prayer, and concerted action to uphold the dignity and freedom of the Church. **Tessy Jacob, Matters India**

## Clergy focus on inner reflection in a 'noisy and violent' world

NATITINGOU, West Africa: Nearly 640 priests from Benin's 10 dioceses met for the 50th General Assembly of the Union of Beninese Clergy (UCB), focusing on African priests' evolving role and mission amid the continent's growing challenges.

"How can one be a priest in Africa today?" This was the key question at the heart of the recent four-day assembly in Natitingou, northwestern Benin, under the theme: *Priestly Identity and Mission: Resolutions and Concrete Implications*.

For Fr Cyrille Miyigbena, one of the participants, the very wording of the theme suggests "if not a crisis, at least a desire to prevent one." He pointed to a "crisis of faith that spares no continent, no sphere of society — including the Church itself."

Fr Miyigbena highlighted emerging challenges in Benin and across Africa, including "the rise of an ideologically driven pan-Africanism and the resurgence of indigenous religions." These shifts, he argued, make it essential to reassess the priest's role in today's society. In response,

clergy members must take a step back and reflect on who they are to understand what they should be and do in a rapidly changing world.

To meet these challenges, UCB members emphasized the need for priests to renew their awareness of their identity as "men of prayer." The primary resolution from the assembly was a commitment to daily Eucharistic celebrations, spiritual exercises such as retreats and recollections, the Liturgy of the Hours, adoration, Lectio Divina, and devotions to Mary and the saints.

"These practices will help every priest cultivate an inner life of discipline and develop a culture of silence in a world that is so noisy and violent," explained Fr Hubert Kédowidé, the newly appointed UCB national delegate.

The organisation also urged its 1,200 members to embrace the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience — not as restrictions but as "a path to priestly fulfilment." In addition, the UCB called for greater solidarity among

priests and announced plans to work with Benin's Episcopal Conference to establish a financial support system for all dioceses. The long-term goal is to implement a national minimum monthly stipend for all priests and ensure they are enrolled in social security for a dignified retirement.

On the sidelines of the assembly, *La Croix International* spoke with lay Catholics in Benin about their expectations for priests in Africa today.

"The priest in Benin and across Africa must first and foremost be a man of prayer, close to his parishioners and accessible," said Athanase Gouhizoun, a member of the Diocesan Council for Catholic Education in Cotonou. "He must embody humility and never appear greedy for money. He should be a good listener and maintain discipline in his relationship with worldly pleasures."

Alain Hounyo, president of the National Council for the Laity and the Family, underscored the importance of priests remaining faithful to their sacred calling. He pointed to the rapid growth of churches and sects across Africa, which he attributed to widespread disillusionment among Catholics. "Many faithful leave the Church because they are disappointed by the lack of authenticity among some priests," he said, alluding to concerns over violations of clerical chastity and poverty vows.

As Benin's clergy seeks to navigate these modern challenges, the UCB's renewed focus on spiritual depth and community connection signals a commitment to preserving the integrity of the priesthood in an ever-evolving religious landscape. **Juste Hlannon, LCI** (<https://international.la-croix.com/>)



*Participants at the 50th General Assembly of the Union of Beninese Clergy. (Photo by UCB/LCI)*

## 2025 Zayed Awards celebrate 'our shared humanity'

ABU DHABI: The 2025 Zayed Prize for Human Fraternity has been awarded to World Central Kitchen, Prime Minister Mia Mottley of Barbados, and 15-year-old Ethiopian-American inventor Heman Bekele.

The prize was presented on February 4 at the Founder's Memorial in downtown Abu Dhabi, an awe-inspiring location surrounded by the serenity of ghaf trees and the towering skyscrapers that define the Emirate.

Now in its sixth year, the Zayed Prize is awarded annually on Feb 4, the date of the historic Human Fraternity Declaration signed in 2019 by Pope Francis and Ahmad al-Tayyeb, Grand Imam of Al-Azhar. This groundbreaking document inspired the creation of the Zayed Prize, a symbol of global unity and compassion.



*2025 Zayed Award recipients.*

At the ceremony, Prime Minister Mia Mottley of Barbados was the first to take the stage. Widely celebrated for her bold actions on climate change, Mottley has committed her country to 100 per cent renewable energy by 2030. She reminded the audience that "we cannot separate people and the planet"; human progress is only possible if we preserve the world that sustains us. She emphasised that the Zayed Prize's focus on "our shared humanity" calls us to focus on what truly matters in life.

Next, Erin Gore, CEO of World Central Kitchen, spoke with passion about her organisation's mission to provide food aid to communities suffering from humanitarian crises. Since the Israel-Hamas war began in October 2023, World Central Kitchen has delivered 100 million meals to Palestinians in Gaza. With deep emotion, Gore honoured seven of her staff members tragically killed by an Israeli drone strike in Gaza in April 2024. "Their dedication fuels us," she said.

Finally, 15-year-old Heman Bekele shared his inspiring journey. A brilliant inventor, Bekele created a cost-effective soap to prevent and treat early-stage skin cancer, currently being trialed at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in the US. With the Zayed Prize funds, Bekele hopes to expand his projects, including building a hospital in his native Ethiopia.

These remarkable individuals remind us that change is possible — through innovation, leadership, and compassion for our shared humanity. **Joseph Tulloch, Vatican News**



I began 2025 with abundant gratitude for the experiences of the past year and anticipation for the unfolding of new adventures. As I reflected on my resolutions and dreams, an exciting awareness surfaced.

In addition to my personal journey as a member of the Catholic Church, I enter an extraordinary year of intentional focus on faith and spirituality. The Church unites in celebrating the Jubilee Year, a celebration observed every 25 years to reconnect with the roots of our salvific faith as the universal body of Christ. The 2025 Jubilee Year extends an invitation to all Catholics to be “Pilgrims of Hope.” Step by step, we are called to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. As a Church, we journey together as the body of Christ.



The theme, *Pilgrims of Hope*, reminded me of my own experience as a pilgrim. Though I walked the Camino de Santiago (the pilgrimage through Spain also known as the “Way of St James”) in 2021, the seed for that pilgrimage was planted in 2011. At the time, I was discerning religious life while working in a fast-paced environment where planning, preparing and achieving expectations were essential. That year, I attended a preached retreat with Brian Pierce, a Dominican friar, and Dominican Sr Mary O’Driscoll, at the Heartland Centre for Spirituality, an experience that changed my life. It was my first silent retreat, requiring me to slow down, embrace silence, and listen to God with my whole being. Initially, I struggled with the stillness, but to my surprise, I loved it.

During their preaching, Brian and Mary introduced the idea of life as a pilgrimage with God — something I had never considered before. As I understood it, pilgrimage is a radical invitation to embark on a wild and exciting adventure with God. They emphasised that while the starting and ending points matter, the true essence of pilgrimage lies in the messiness, encounters and discoveries along the way. They spoke of the ancient pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, and I heard a challenge: “Mujer, pack your bags, become an always pilgrim, and put El Camino on your bucket list.”

#### Discernment Journey

Fast forward to 2021. My journey of discerning religious life had been affirmed, and I

embarked on a pilgrimage that heightened my awareness of God’s constant presence. I became open to God’s abundant love for me and all creation. My lifestyle shifted from one focused on doing to one centred on being — with God and with the people of God. In April 2021, I had the great fortune of uniting my discernment journey with the *peregrina* (pilgrim) journey of El Camino.

I was blessed to walk El Camino with two amazing Dominican Sisters of Peace: June Fitzgerald and Barbara Kane. Together, we prepared for our two-week journey — choosing our route, exploring options, and holding each other accountable as we trained for the trek. We were fortunate to travel with experienced companions who knew the route and its history. At the start of our pilgrimage, I felt overwhelmed by the thought of walking 275 kilometres to our destination.

Yet, my fellow *peregrinos* reminded me to take it one step at a time. The daunting numbers transformed: one step at a time, one mile at a time, one *cruceiro* at a time, one chapel at a time, one encounter at a time.

As I walked, I was awed by the millaria — Roman mile markers that bore witness to the footsteps of merchants, travellers and armies who had walked this path for centuries. With each step, I felt connected to countless *peregrinos* who had journeyed before me and to those who would come after me. Along the journey, the landscape shifted from urban settings to vineyards, forests, and medieval villages. With each change in scenery, my journey was enriched by encounters with fellow *peregrinos*. At first, the only thing we had in common was the shared journey. We came from different places and backgrounds, yet our pilgrimage united us. Walking together, we formed bonds of mutual support and care.

One of my favourite encounters was with the Musas, a group of five best friends whose love and commitment to each other deeply inspired me. Two years earlier, one of them had been diagnosed with an aggressive cancer. Throughout her treatment, she and her friends prayed for healing. As she continued her treatment, she made a *manda* — a sacred vow — to walk the Camino if she recovered. When she was declared cancer-free, her friends upheld her vow and walked with her. I was honoured to witness their story, celebrate her life, and walk alongside them. Encounters like this were abundant. Strangers became close friends. My pilgrimage was more than a physical journey — it was a deep, spiritual communion with my fellow travellers, the landscape, and God.

#### Embracing the Beauty

I hold my pilgrim experience in my heart as a powerful lesson in the beauty of the journey. My pilgrimage began in 2011 as I discerned religious life. In 2021, I walked as a *peregrina*. Now, in 2025, I embrace the call to be a “Pilgrim of Hope” with my Church. My hope for this Jubilee Year is that we, as a faith community, remain open to the wild and exciting journey where the Holy Spirit leads.

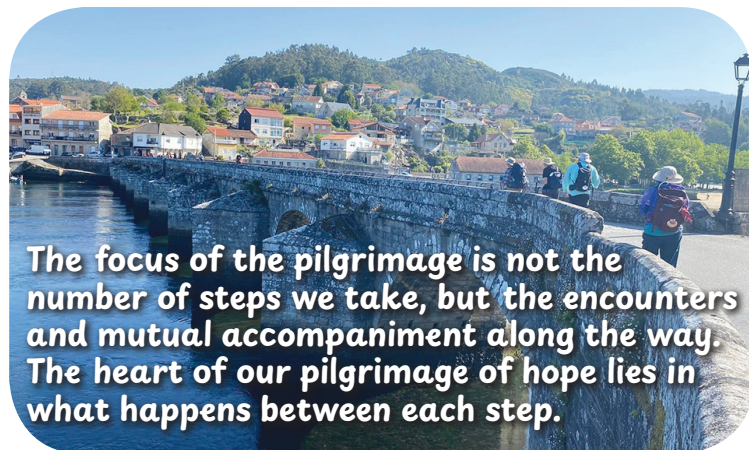


Sr Ana González and Sr June Fitzgerald at the start of their pilgrimage (Courtesy of Ana González)

As we walk together in faith, we do so with the awareness that we follow in the footsteps of many generations before us and hold in prayer those who will come after us. Our pilgrimage will lead us through diverse landscapes and bring us into communion with fellow travellers who will share in our joys, struggles and surprises. In this communal journey, I am challenged to walk with my faith community — not rushing, but allowing the Holy Spirit to guide us, ever attentive to God’s presence.

For the Catholic Church, 2025 is a pretty big deal and it seems fitting to remember that we walk together toward a future filled with hope. We remember the Church ancestors who convened 1,700 years ago at the Council of Nicaea to profess our faith. We recall St Francis who, 800 years ago, praised God’s creation in the “Canticle of the Creatures.” And we reflect on 10 years of *Laudato Si’*, which calls us to recognise God’s presence in all creation and our responsibility as sojourners to be good stewards in our journey.

Our Jubilee Year begins with a single step and a wide-open door. That step launches us into a pilgrimage of prayer. A journey where



our feet follow Jesus, guided by the wisdom of those who have come before us. The focus of this pilgrimage is not the number of steps we take, but the encounters and mutual accompaniment along the way. The heart of our pilgrimage of hope lies in what happens between each step.

May our hearts and minds remain open to transformative grace we will encounter along our journey. May we recognise the divine presence in every step we take. During this Jubilee Year may we remain attentive to the unfolding richness of our pilgrimage toward a future filled with hope.

*Buen Camino* my fellow pilgrims of hope!  
Ana González, OP, NCR

Ana Gonzalez is a Dominican Sister of Peace who grew up in El Paso, Texas. She first met the Dominican sisters while studying in New Orleans, and made her final vows in 2021.



Pilgrims reach the end of their journey at Santiago de Compostela. (Courtesy of Ana González)

# The role of religious in catechesis

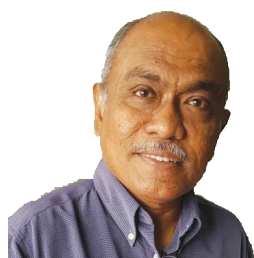
In my previous articles I examined the role of the bishops and priests in the ministry of catechesis. In this article, I turn my attention to the role of the religious.

## The dedication of the Religious to catechesis

A study of the history of the Catholic Church leaves no doubt as to the immense and important contribution made by the religious in the field of catechesis. In *Catechesi Tradendae* (1979), St John Paul II highlighted this point by stating that throughout history, men and women religious have been deeply committed to the catechetical ministry (CT, 65). According to the *Directory for Catechesis* (2020), in the history of the Church, the religious have been recognised “among the figures most dedicated to catechetical outreach” (DC, 119).

The contribution of the religious in catechesis is well-documented. Special mention has to be made of members of the Society of Jesus, such as, Peter Canisius (1521-1597), Edmond Augur (1530-1591) and Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621) who, by writing catechisms, played a prominent role in countering the teachings of the Protestant Reformers. In recent years, J.A. Jungmann (1889-1975) and Johannes Hofinger (1905-1984) helped re-discover the kerygmatic dimension in catechesis.

In Peninsular Malaysia, the contribution of the numerous religious congregations in the areas of education and catechesis among children and young people cannot be ignored. Here, many will recall with fondness and appreciation the dedicated work of the Brothers of the Christian Schools (De Salle Brothers) and Sisters of the Infant Jesus (IJ). The Canossian



## Echoing the Faith

DR STEVEN SELVARAJU

Daughters of Charity, Marist Brothers, Brothers of St Gabriel, Franciscan Missionaries of Mary and others also contributed to these areas.

Cassian Pappu (1927-2009), a La Salle Brother, wrote in his book, *Malaysian Catholic Schools at the Crossroads* (1996): “From the historical point of view, the schools run by the Brothers and Sisters were unique. They were fully integrated into the educational system existing

during that period. They had the distinction of welcoming children of labourers and those of lesser social status” (pg. 9). He also adds that in this context, Catholic parents were encouraged to send their children to religious classes “so that they might grow up as responsible and God-fearing citizens” (pg. 21).

Over the last few decades, much has changed with regard to the role and contribution of the religious to education and catechesis in their schools due to certain educational policies set by the government and other factors. As a result, the Church in Peninsular Malaysia has been deprived of a crucial context of catechesis, namely, the Catholic mission schools. The work of catechesis in schools is meant to complement the catechetical efforts in the home, parish, Basic Ecclesial Communities and other church communities. In spite of these challenges, the religious continue to make a valuable contribution to catechesis through their involvement in the diocese and parishes. It is a contribution which is still needed in the present times.

**The unique contribution of the religious**  
This why the *General Directory for*

*Catechesis* (1997) calls those in religious life to become involved in catechesis as much as possible, while according to the *Directory for Catechesis*, “Catechesis represents a privileged setting” for the apostolate of the religious (DC, 119). The Directory adds: “The Church summons persons of consecrated life in a particular way to catechetical activity, in which their original and specific contribution cannot be replaced by priests or laity” (CD, 119). Basically, it means that the religious have something unique to offer to the ministry of catechesis. So, what form does this unique contribution take?

## By bearing witness to the evangelical counsels

In *Vita Consecrata* (1996), a major document on religious life, St Pope John Paul II wrote, “The first duty of the consecrated life is to make visible the marvels wrought by God in the frail humanity of those who are called. They bear witness to these marvels not so much in words but by the eloquent language of a transfigured life, capable of amazing the world” (VC, 20). In this regard, said the Pope, the religious catechise others by their very lives, that is, by witnessing to the reality that the fullness of life in Christ is possible (DC, 119).

Therefore, the unique contribution of the religious to catechesis is based on their “specific condition”, that is, the profession and living out of the evangelical counsels of poverty, voluntary chastity and obedience which, according to the Church, is “a special path to holiness” (VC, 36). The *General Directory for Catechesis* states that the profession of these counsels is not only a gift to the community in which they serve but also to the ministry of catechesis because it is “born of public witness to their consecration, which makes them a living sign of the reality of the

Kingdom of God” (GDC, 228).

## By exercising their particular charisms

In addition, the religious also make a unique contribution to catechesis by the way they exercise their particular charisms. The *Directory for Catechesis* points out that while the religious often work together with the clergy and laity in the ministry of catechesis in the parish and diocese, they “inject” into this common task the particular charisms of their religious congregation or religious order as intended by their founders. As such, the Church draws strength from their “unique” service (CD, 119).

## Conclusion

Today, the Church continues to depend on the contribution of the religious in catechesis. As in the words of St John Paul II to those in religious life:

“I wholeheartedly exhort you, whose religious consecration should make you even more readily available for the Church’s service, to prepare as well as possible for the task of catechesis according to the differing vocations of your institutes and the missions entrusted to you, and to carry this concern everywhere. Let the communities dedicate as much as possible of what ability and means they have to the specific work of catechesis” (CT, 65).

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*The key ideas in the article are presented in an illustrated format below. The illustrations are by Dr Steven Selvaraju.*

## THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS IN CATECHESIS

**Panel 1:** In the history of the Church, the religious have always played an important role in the ministry of catechesis. A special mention has to be made of the contributions of the Jesuits, such as, Robert Bellarmine, Peter Canisius and JA Jungmann.

**Panel 2:** In Peninsular Malaysia, the contribution of religious congregations, such as, the Brothers of the Christian Schools and Sisters of the Infant Jesus, as well as, others were crucial in the introduction and development of education and catechesis among children and young people in their mission schools.

**Panel 3:** Over the last few decades, much has changed with regards to the role and contribution of the religious in the areas of education and catechesis. Inspite of these challenges, the religious have a unique role to play in the ministry of catechesis.

**Panel 4:** The religious make a unique contribution to catechesis by **bearing witness to the evangelical counsels** of poverty, voluntary chastity and obedience, which they profess and live out daily. In this way, the religious witness to the reality that the fullness of life in Christ is possible.

**Panel 5:** In addition, the religious also make a unique contribution to catechesis by **the way they exercise their particular charisms** as intended by their founders.

**Panel 6:** Today, the Church continues to depend on the contribution of the religious in the ministry of catechesis.

**Quote:** “I wholeheartedly exhort you, whose religious consecration should make you even more readily available for the Church’s service, to prepare as well as possible for the task of catechesis according to the differing vocations of your institutes and the missions entrusted to you, and to carry this concern everywhere. Let the communities dedicate as much as possible of what ability and means they have to the specific work of catechesis” – Saint John Paul II.

Dr. Steven S 2/25

# A life of faith, service, and ecological commitment

Elvina Fernandez

As Fr Andrew Manickam, OFM Cap, prepares to celebrate the 28th anniversary of his sacerdotal ordination this year, his journey reflects a profound dedication to the priesthood and an enduring passion for serving others.

Ordained on July 17, 1997, Fr Andrew's life has been marked by a deep sense of purpose and an enduring connection to his calling. From a young age, he was drawn to the priesthood, inspired by a priest in his own family.

Growing up in Butterworth, Penang and spending time at the Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, he had the opportunity to have personal encounters with priests like the late Fr George Belleville MEP, Fr Patianathan and the late Fr Alexander Edwin.

The sight of a priest celebrating Mass, particularly his granduncle, the late Fr Jonathan, OFM Cap, left an indelible impression on him. "I must be like him," Fr Andrew recalls thinking at the age of 14.

## A Change in Direction

Despite his interest, Fr Andrew initially pursued a different path, working with Malaysia Airlines for six years after completing his schooling. However, a sense of dissatisfaction and a yearning for deeper meaning led him to the Franciscan order.

"There was no sense of satisfaction in what I was doing in the corporate world, and I was searching to fill the void, which led me to the Franciscan order." His journey took him to training in various places, including the Philippines and to the old College General seminary in Jalan Kelawai.

Discerning his vocation was not without challenges. The journey required deep introspection, prayer, and the support of mentors. "My faith grew stronger through the guidance of key figures like the late Fr Jonathan and my time at College General."

He added that the wisdom and encouragement of various priests during his seminary days helped him navigate the uncertainties and solidify his calling.

## Fulfilment in Service

Fr Andrew's priesthood has been deeply fulfilling. Serving as an assistant priest for four years and later as a parish priest for ten years, he found inspiration in journeying with the people. As the administrator of a parish in Sungai Petani, he embraced pastoral care and formation, drawing satisfaction from his prayer life and the ability to minister to his parishioners.

The vibrant community at the Church of Our Lady of Fatima (OLF), Brickfields, where he currently serves, reflects his passion for pastoral care.

"With 2,000 parishioners and services in both English and Tamil, the parish is a hub of activity, we welcome visitors and provide support to migrants from Myanmar and the local underprivileged community in Kuala Selangor."

Fr Andrew's efforts extend to Kasih meals for street cleaners with the collective support from the parish BECs, PIHDM, and BECCOT.

## Strength from God and the Faithful

Strength, Fr Andrew notes, comes from the Lord and from the people who empower him through their prayers, faith, and dedication. Parish life can be challenging and demanding, but it is all part of the parcel of priesthood.

Witnessing the spiritual growth of parishioners as they pray the novena and rosary strengthens his own spiritual journey. "I try my best to be there for the Divine Office and the devotees of Mary," he shares. "Their faithfulness and willingness to go the extra mile inspire me."

## Embracing Change for the Future

When asked about the driving force for the Church moving forward, Fr Andrew shared that he believes in the importance of adaptability. "The Church must be flexible to meet the needs of its people, whether youth or seniors."

Brave changes, he asserts, are necessary for growth and transformation. "We must come to understand that the way our youths today express their love for God may not be similar to the previous generation and we must be open to embracing these expressions for the betterment of the community."

seminarians and bringing young people to witness the work of sisters with B40 communities or Orang Asli communities, as well as the efforts of priests with migrants and in ecology, are essential steps."

## Innovative Approaches to Youth Engagement

He shared that at OLF, catechism students were taken to Lake Gardens, where their classes were held outdoors. "I truly believe that in today's world, it's essential to continuously explore innovative and enjoyable ways to engage the younger generation in their faith."

## Caring for Creation: Ecology and the Church's Mission

Fr Andrew, who is the ecclesiastical assistant for the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur's Creation Justice Ministry, also proposed that every parish should have an ecology ministry, allowing young people to participate and understand the importance of taking care of Mother Earth.

His commitment to ecology is evident in his efforts at OLF. Inspired by Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*, he has spearheaded various initiatives in the parish, the surrounding neighbourhood, and in collaborations with government agencies and NGOs. He added that "the Church's spirituality is inherently connected to caring for creation."

"Our Creation Justice Ministry has planted over 1,000 mangrove trees with guidance from Jabatan Perhutanan Semenanjung Malaysia, and we note that many more individuals have responded to the call to care for creation, including those who had not previously been involved."

He shared that the OLF team has also conducted a palm oil education study in collaboration with the Malaysian Rubber Board and networked with government agencies to raise awareness on both sides — marking the first time the Church has joined such efforts.

"The ministry has also initiated used cooking oil collection and distributed brochures to neighbouring shops to encourage participation." Additionally, they have organised beach cleaning activities and school visits to create awareness about tree planting, including efforts with Tamil schools through Jabatan Perhutanan Semenanjung Malaysia, helping students learn to care for creation.

## Fostering Family Life and Strengthening Church Communities

Fr Andrew's vision for the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur includes fostering vocations through direct engagement and nourishing the faith of young people. Family life ministry plays a crucial role in his plans, aiming to establish strong connections within families and support those going through crisis.

"Ensuring all families come together is vital, as everything begins with family, whether they are widows, single parents, or those separated or divorced." The Church, he asserts, is also a family, sharing in its members' struggles and joys.

He emphasises the importance of fostering connections, spiritual affirmation, celebration, and support, particularly for families facing challenges. "Every parish must stress the significance of these aspects, ensuring that all members feel included and valued within the Church community."

Fr Andrew's story reminds us that the priesthood is not just a vocation but a profound calling to make a difference in the lives of those we touch.

Photo credit: Fr Andrew Manickam OFM Cap and Church of St Francis of Assisi Facebook



## Nurturing Vocations: A Hands-On Approach

To young people considering a vocation in the priesthood, Fr Andrew advises, "Seek a spiritual director, cultivate a prayer life, and explore monasteries to discern where the Lord is calling you."

He emphasises the importance of being content with oneself before taking on the responsibilities of priesthood. "Remember that hesitation is a natural part of the discernment process, and it is essential to explore one's calling thoroughly."

The vocation group at OLF with about six young people, serves as a nurturing ground for future priests. Fr Andrew's approach is experiential: "We invite young men to witness and participate in the work being done, from pastoral care to ecological efforts."

Fostering vocations, Fr Andrew said, requires a drastic approach, as merely talking about vocation is not enough. "We must invite young people to come aboard and experience first-hand what is being done." He added that efforts should start from school life, nourishing vocation from a young age.

"For example, organising road trips to seminaries to talk to

# Retirement or Re-Tyrement — What's next?

We have just celebrated the annual Spring festival in Malaysia along with many other peoples in East Asia and globally. The annual celebrations mark the beginning of the lunar new year. It is a time of renewal and new beginnings as families gather in reunions of joyful merriment with work colleagues, friends and neighbours.

For me, personally, it is a time to look anew at my own life since I retired at the end of May last year after serving almost 16 years with the Christian Federation of Malaysia. Family and friends have been asking me what I would be doing next. My reply to them was that I was waiting on the Lord to show me. I really have no idea but certainly, I was open to a new beginning, different from what I had been used to.

All I know is that I now have an opportunity to stop being “on call” 24/7 and can switch off my mobile phone and take the opportunity to have nothing on for each day. One or two close friends had mentioned to me that I was a workaholic. If I was, I knew I had to get out of that situation. So, I entered into a time of intentionally not taking on new commitments of my time and energy other than what I had agreed to previously like preaching in my own home church and in other churches. There was no scheduling of my days except for the things that needed to be done in the home and to just being around the family.

One former bishop and dear friend gave me

a great suggestion that perhaps it would be good to do up my biographical timeline and spot the occasions that the Lord God had directly impacted my life, and in remembering those occasions, I could then raise up prayers of thanksgiving to Him. This allowed me to recollect and to write down such significant moments where I had felt the wonderful hand of God upon my life, from my childhood days until the present.

I remember the many occasions our Triune God had saved me from a different life situation and gave me a redeemed life and new directions even before I came to faith in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Saviour. He had saved me from being unable to walk for many months and then on a Christmas Day, I got up and could walk again. I also faced death several times and each time I was saved. On one occasion it was a bomb going off just a few feet away in the train carriage my father and I were in. When I was six years old, I received a Children's Bible from my parents who were not believing Christians then. Both my parents had attended Christian mission schools in Penang and in Ipoh and they were much influenced by the education they had received and the life examples of the



## Growing in Christ

TAN KONG BENG

dedicated teachers.

At the end of my theological sojourn at Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia I received a direction of encouraging and building up of Christians from the Lord (1 Thessalonians 5: 11). To this I add such recent “word” gifts received from the Lord like “loving Him more deeply” and “transformative ministry”. I look forward to seeing God open new vistas for me to enter into by faith in the light of such continuing directions as He has given to me throughout these

many years of my life.

I do some scheduling of each day of my life with some activities for family life, personal growth, the local community, church and also carrying out such responsibilities as entrusted to me so I don't squander away the precious time God has granted to me each day. The most important part of my day has been the time spent with the Lord each morning in reading His Word, in prayer and being ready to His leading each day.

One area of concern for me has been the question of where and what the Lord wants me to do in my local church community. I believe many of us seniors have life experiences and skills sets which the Lord can

use for the growth and benefit of His people, young and old, in our church small groups (BECs), church and local community and even in our nation. All we need to do is make these gifts — natural and spiritual — readily available to Him and the church. As I did, perhaps you too could seek the counsel of your priest and other senior Christians in your church who could pray with and for you and seek the Lord's face to show you how you can serve in your church community and beyond.

For sure, you, and I, may not be able to do many things as we enter the autumn or even the winter of our lives. We may have physical and health concerns. These days we may no longer be able to run with the horses. However, let us pray for the Holy Spirit to imbue us with the spirit of a Caleb at age 85 (“give me this hill country”, Joshua 14:10-15) or a Joshua at the end of his leading of Israel (“as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD”, Joshua 24:15).

The late Rev Loh Soon Choy, a dear colleague and friend at Malaysia Bible Seminary, when he retired from the seminary, told me that we servants of the Lord never retired, it's only a *re-tyrement* for the next phase of our lives. How true!

*After many years in Christian service, Tan Kong Beng is seeking a new season of vocation and life lived in God's ways. He worships and serves in Subang Jaya Gospel Centre.*

## Monastery of Alcobaça

### A medieval Cistercian gothic splendour

Located just an hour and a half's drive from Lisbon, Portugal, the Monastery of Alcobaça is one of Europe's finest examples of the Cistercian style and a pioneer of Gothic design in the Iberian Peninsula.

Built by the first Portuguese king, Afonso Henriques, this monastery is a symbol of faith, resilience, and national identity, and was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1989.

The story of Alcobaça begins in 1153, when Afonso Henriques, with a vision to strengthen Portugal's independence, made a bold move by granting Bernard of Clairvaux — an influential figure in both religious and political circles — a vast 44,000 hectares of land stretching from the Serra dos Candeeiros to the Atlantic coast.

This was not merely a land grant but a calculated gesture to gain Bernard's influential support in Rome, which was crucial for securing international recognition of Portugal as an independent kingdom.

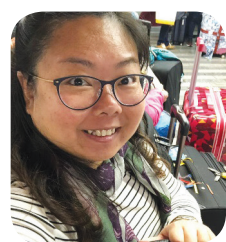
The monks, drawn to the potential of this abundant land, settled in Alcobaça and began cultivating it, blending their daily routines of hard labour with moments of deep spiritual reflection.

In 1178, construction of the monastery began, guided by Bernard's vision of simplicity fused with grandeur. By 1308, King Dinis commissioned the creation of an exquisite cloister, which remains the largest built during Portugal's early royal dynasty.

#### An unmatched example of Cistercian gothic architecture

As I wandered through the monastery grounds, I was struck by the austere, unadorned lines that reflect the core values of humility and devotion, characterising the Cistercian order's architectural style. The monastery's layout adheres to the traditional Cistercian model, featuring a church, cloister, dormitory, and refectory, with a distinct separation between sacred and secular spaces for monks and visitors.

The church's vast, long nave and towering



## GETTING SIDETRACKED

Agnes Ong

vaulted ceilings evoke both simplicity and grandeur. The elevated choir, where monks once sang the liturgies, further enhances the acoustics and strengthens the monks' connection to prayer. The open-air cloisters, with their graceful walkways, offer a serene, contemplative space, beautifully blending architecture with nature.

For architecture enthusiasts, the design of the church and cloisters is truly remarkable, particularly the large windows that bathe the interiors in soft, ethereal light. This natural illumination elevates the spiritual atmosphere, enhancing the sense of peace and reverence within. The design's expansive, vertical elements create a sense of unity and contemplation, making the monastery a perfect setting for reflection.

#### Alcobaça's star-crossed lovers

Amidst the tranquillity of the monastery, a poignant and tragic story of love, fidelity, passion, and betrayal unfolds, now immortalised in two remarkable tombs facing each other in the church's nave.

The story begins in the 14th century when a young Pedro, only 20 years old, met Inês, a 14-year-old lady-in-waiting and relative of his betrothed, Constanza of Castille. Their connection was instant and undeniable, but their love was forbidden. Pedro's father, King Alfonso IV, had arranged for Pedro's marriage to Constanza for political reasons, and the court deemed the relationship between Pedro and Inês unacceptable.

As their secret love affair grew, Constanza, painfully aware of the romance, decided to act. She bore Pedro a son, Infante Luiz, and invited Inês to be the godmother. The irony



was profound—by Church law, the act would make their relationship incestuous. Tragically, infant Luiz died just a week after birth, deepening suspicions against Inês.

Desperate to end the romance, Alfonso exiled Inês. A year later, Constanza died in childbirth, and Pedro, free from his political obligations, brought Inês back to court. Together, they had four children and began to live openly as a family. However, the court's increasing unrest over Pedro's favouritism toward Inês's family eventually led to a horrifying tragedy.

In a cruel twist of fate, Alfonso orchestrated Inês's assassination. Inês was dragged from her home and murdered before her young child's eyes. She was just 29 years old.

When Pedro discovered the horror, he was consumed by grief and rage. He declared war against his father, though ultimately unsuccessful. However, with Alfonso's death, Pedro became king. His first act as monarch was retribution — he hunted down Inês's assassins and had them executed brutally.

But Pedro's love for Inês did not end in vengeance. In a stunning act of devotion, he proclaimed that they had secretly married. Inês's body was exhumed and paraded from Coimbra to Alcobaça in a magnificent funeral procession. There, Pedro crowned her queen, dressing her in royal finery.

In a profoundly moving act, Pedro commanded the nobility to kiss her hem—an extraordinary gesture, making Inês the only queen in history to receive such honour despite never having been crowned in life.

#### The tombs of Pedro and Inês

The tombs of Pedro and Inês are celebrated for their intricate design and symbolic significance.

Pedro's tomb, a masterpiece of 14th-century Gothic art, is a grand marble structure with a recumbent effigy of the king in regal attire. Positioned in front of the high altar, it reflects his royal authority. The tomb's detailed carvings, including biblical scenes, reflect the religious devotion of the time.

In contrast, Inês's tomb, placed beside Pedro's, exudes a serene grace. Her effigy is more peaceful, and her tomb features symbolic elements such as lions at her feet, representing royalty and strength.

The placement of the tombs is deeply meaningful. Tradition holds that when Pedro's tomb is opened at the Resurrection, he will rise to see Inês, his beloved, first. This powerful symbol reflects the enduring love between the two, transcending even death.

To know more about the Monastery of

Alcobaça, scan the QR Code or go to Google Arts & Culture at <https://g.co/arts/qf7s7RLY2hsW7Qdc6>.



*Agnes Ong is a self-professed curious traveller and lifelong learner with a lamentable tendency to get into sidetracked experiences. She aspires to explore as many historical UNESCO sites as possible, funds permitting. Agnes has a travel-slash-work-slash-dump everything IG at @agnes\_gets\_sidetracked*



Fr Ron Rolheiser

# Jesus and the poor

I grew up a second-generation immigrant in the outback of the Western Canadian prairies. Our family was poor economically, subsistence farmers, with the necessities but seldom with much more. My father and mother were charitable to a fault and tried to instill that in us. However, given our own poverty, understandably we did not have much of a vision in terms of social justice. *We were the poor.*

Growing up in this way can deeply ingrain certain instincts and attitudes inside you, some good, some bad. Positively, you grow to believe that you need to work hard, that nothing is given to you free, that you need to take care of yourself, and everyone else should do the same. Ironically, that very ethos can blind you to some major truths regarding the poor.

I can testify to this. It took me many years, work that took me over many borders, some firsthand encounters with people who didn't have the basic necessities of life, and countless hours in theology classrooms before I even became aware of some of the basic biblical and Christian truths regarding the poor.

Now I am struggling to live them, but at least I accept that they are non-negotiable for a Christian, irrespective of denomination or political persuasion. In brief, as a Christian, we are given a non-negotiable mandate to reach out to the poor in compassion and justice. Moreover,

this mandate is just as non-negotiable as keeping the commandments, as is clear most everywhere in Scripture.

Here is the essence of that mandate ...

- The great Jewish prophets coined this mantra: *The quality of your faith will be judged by the quality of justice in the land; and the quality of justice in the land will always be judged by how "widows, orphans, and strangers" (biblical code for the weakest and most vulnerable groups in a society) are doing while you are alive.*

- Jesus not only ratifies this; He deepens it, identifying His very person with the poor. (*"Whatsoever you do to the least of My people, you do to Me."*) He tells us that we will be judged for eternal life based on how we treat the poor.

- Moreover, in both Testaments in the Bible, this is particularly true regarding how we treat foreigners, strangers, and immigrants. How we treat them is how we treat Jesus.

- Note that Jesus defines His mission with these words: *I have come to bring good news to the poor.* Hence, any teaching, preaching, or government policy that in not good news for the poor may not cloak itself with either Jesus or the Gospel.

As well, most of us have been raised to believe that we have the right to possess whatever comes to us honestly, either

through our own work or through legitimate inheritance. No matter how large that wealth might be, it's ours as long as we didn't cheat anyone along the way. By and large, this belief has been enshrined in the laws of democratic countries, and we generally believe that it is morally sanctioned by Christianity. It is not, as we can see from these truths in Scripture:

- God loves everyone. There are no favourite ones or privileged ones in God's eyes, and

God intended the earth and everything in it for the sake of all human beings. Thus, created goods should flow fairly to all.

- Wealth and possessions must be understood as ours to steward rather than to possess absolutely.

- No person or nation may have a surplus if others do not have the basic necessities.

- All people are obliged to come to the relief of the poor.

- The condemnation of injustice is a non-negotiable aspect of our discipleship.

- In all situations where there is injustice, unfairness, oppression, grinding poverty, God is not neutral. Rather God wants action against everything and everyone who deals with injustice and death.

These principles are strong, so strong

in fact that it is easy to believe that Jesus can't really be asking this of us. Indeed, if taken seriously, these principles would radically disrupt our lives and the social order. It would no longer be business as usual.

To take just one example: there are nearly forty-five million refugees in our world today, most of them looking to cross a border into a new country. Is it realistic for any country today, in biblical terms, "to welcome the stranger", to simply open its borders and welcome anyone who wants to cross? That's simply not realist or socially expedient regarding what it would mean practically in terms of our comfort and security.

While that may be granted, what may not be granted is that our (seemingly) necessary social and political pragmatism in dealing with "the widow, the orphan, and the immigrant" may cloak itself with Jesus and the Bible. It may not. This is antithetical to Jesus. Whether or not this upsets our security and comfort, God is always on the underside of history, on the side of the poor.

**Oblate Fr Ron Rolheiser, theologian, teacher, and award-winning author, is President of the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, TX. He writes a weekly column that is carried in over 90 newspapers around the world. He can be contacted through his website [www.ronrolheiser.com](http://www.ronrolheiser.com)**

## SOCIAL JUSTICE



### Making a Difference

Tony Magliano

I bet just like me, you too have experienced the empty feeling that you do not belong here, that you are an unwelcome person — *persona non grata*.

Now magnify that feeling many times. Imagine that you had to flee from your native country because of unbearable persecution and/or dire poverty conditions. Imagine that your journey to another, hopefully better country, poses constant risks of hunger, rape, and death.

Now imagine that when you finally reach the country you hope will have mercy on you, instead, you find a wall that screams at you, "Go back to where you came from — *persona non grata*!"

Imagine asking your exhausted, hungry, cold, homeless self, "What do I do now?"

You cannot go back to certain misery. So, you struggle to find a way, across the treacherous Mediterranean Sea on a packed small rubber boat towards Europe. Or you decide to journey, with no access to GPS, through the perilous Sonoran Desert to enter the US — without permission, that is, undocumented, because legal entry is almost impossible (see: <https://www.cato.org/policy-analysis/why-legal-immigration-nearly-impossible>).

Finally, you make it, still alive. Many do not.

Now that you have crossed the border



Migrants arrive at a reception station in Panama. Vatican News)

you learn of a church that offers you shelter, food, water, and Christian fraternal love. And they help you find work — "under the table," of course — for the government has deemed it illegal for you to work. So, the only jobs available are mostly the gruelling, dangerous, low-paying jobs that the vast majority of legal citizens will not do, like backbreaking farm labour in the scorching heat.

Now, after all of this, imagine that the country you are now living in has decided to massively, militarily, forcefully deport as many undocumented people as possible — falsely claiming they are only deporting dangerous criminals.

Well, imagine no more. This is exactly what US President Donald Trump has ordered the American government to do. He has ordered the Defence Department

to "seal the borders."

Recent reports from US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has stated that it is arresting an average of 710 immigrants daily from operations in places including Chicago, Dallas, and Atlanta.

Even places of worship, schools, and hospitals are in the crosshairs of ICE.

In his inaugural address Trump callously said, "I will send troops to the southern border to repel the disastrous invasion of our country."

Kristi Noem, the new secretary of homeland security, said that an 18-month extension of Temporary Protective Status for Venezuelans issued by former President Biden has been rescinded. Reportedly, she said "The people of this country [US] want these dirtbags out. They want their communities to be safe."

But research clearly demonstrates that undocumented immigrants commit far less crime than US-born people (see: <https://bit.ly/3CBRWsr>). Immigrants are nearly always wonderful assets to the communities they live and work in.

Millions of migrants seeking safety and work are not invaders! They are our brothers and sisters. And we have a moral obligation to welcome them.

The biblical word of God declares: "You shall treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you; you shall love the alien as yourself; for you too were once aliens in the land of Egypt" (Lev. 19:33-34). You too have felt unwelcomed — *persona non grata*.

Having grown up in a family of Italian immigrants in Argentina, Pope Francis has long prioritised the sufferings of migrants. He continues to often encourage governments, Catholics, and all people of goodwill to use four verbs as compassionate moral guides towards migrants: welcome, protect, promote, and integrate.

Let's put our Holy Father's four verbs into action. Let's welcome, protect, promote, and integrate our migrant brothers and sisters; and urge our governments to do the same!

**Tony Magliano is an internationally syndicated Catholic social justice and peace columnist. He is available to speak at diocesan or parish gatherings. Tony can be reached at [tmag6@comcast.net](mailto:tmag6@comcast.net).**

# Little Catholics' corner

Dear children,

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus tells us that people who are poor, hungry or sad are blessed!

Do they sound blessed to you?

Bad things that happen to us have hidden blessings in them.

If you are poor, then your family and friends are more important to you than money and things. If you are sad then sometimes it's easier to remember to pray.

But things that seem bad have another hidden blessing in them - when you are suffering, you can give your sadness or hurt to Jesus.

Tell Him you are offering it up along with Him on the cross.

He will give you the grace to make your soul stronger.

You can offer things up for other people too, and God will use your gift to help them!

Love, Aunty Eliz



Complete the paragraph by filling in the blanks with the correct words from the word bank provided below.



will be

Blessed

poor

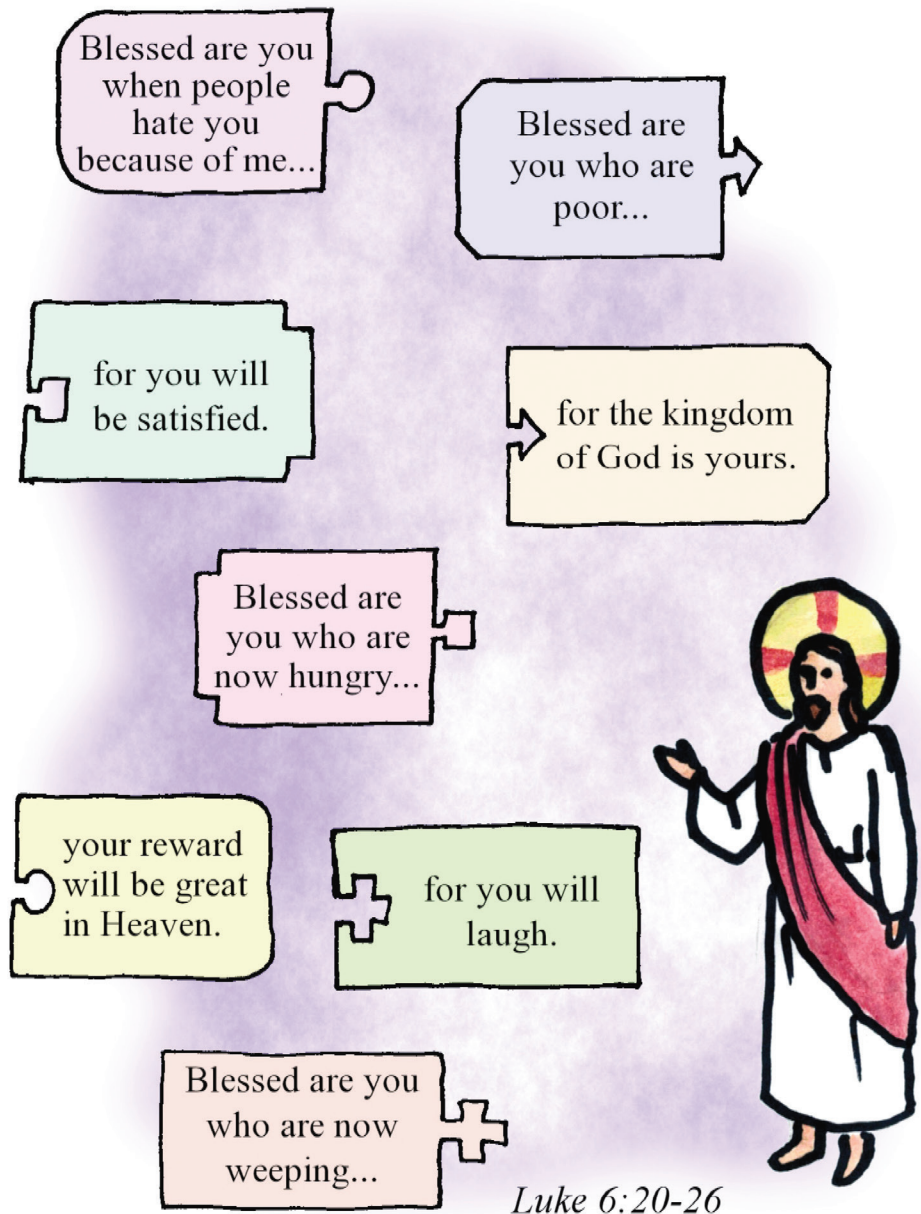
who  
hunger

the  
kingdom

Can you match up the pieces in this puzzle?

## The Beatitudes

Let's colour



Luke 6:20-26





## Young Professional Communicators

# Hope Telling

**VATICAN:** From January 24-26, the Dicastery for Communications hosted the inaugural major event for the Jubilee Year of Hope, the Jubilee of the World of Communications. For the celebration, 150 young professional communicators from 70 countries were invited to participate.

I count myself blessed to have represented Malaysia and the Diocese of Malacca Johore at this Jubilee held at different places around Rome and Vatican. It began with an introduction and orientation session at the Lateran Palace on Jan 24.

At the Lateran Palace, we heard from two Jubilee team members, John C. Byrd and Alexandra Carroll who shared their vocation of working in the field of Communications. The message that they shared was clear: the work that they do is not merely a day-to-day job but a way to live out their baptism; a vocation. We were then given a brief historical overview of the Lateran Palace and proceeded to move through the Palace to the Basilica of St John Lateran. At the Basilica, we joined other people of goodwill for a penitential service and an international Mass for the Jubilee.

After the Mass, we returned to our lodging, this was the first informal time for the participants and it was during this bus ride that the most meaningful connections of the Jubilee started. I had time to get to know participants from Venezuela, Mexico, Costa Rica and Malta, all young people, just like me, who work in different areas of communications. It was in them and in their stories that I saw the face of

the young Church, the 'now of God,' that Pope Francis talks about in *Christus Vivit*. It was an experience of courage and hope because even though we do not have a common language, we still tried to speak to one another, introduce ourselves and make jokes. During the orientation, the Dicastery for Communications encouraged that we share our pictures with the hashtag 'hope telling.' It was on this bus ride that I experienced this hope telling, in the new friends that I have made.

These friendships continued to grow as we arrived for dinner and were introduced to other young people, this time from Switzerland, Italy, the Philippines and Palestine. As we had dinner, we planned how we would go for the events the next day. We had to find our own way to St Peter's Basilica and most of us had never been to Rome before. We decided that we would walk from our accommodation the next morning to St Peter's together so that we would all arrive on time. On Jan 25, we started the day early with breakfast and then the slow walk down the Gianicolo towards St Peter's as a group. Others decided that they would take the bus, but our small collective decided that we should walk, despite the cold and having to rely on Google Maps. A few wrong turns were taken, but we arrived at Piazza Pia on time.

From Piazza Pia, we began our pilgrimage to the Holy Door at St Peter. One participant was asked to carry the Jubilee Cross to lead the group. During the 20-minute walk from Piazza Pia to the Holy Door, we listened to the Pope's Message for World Communications Sunday. Because the pilgrimage was in an open area, with many other groups walking in front of us and behind us, it was rather difficult to hear the reflection even though it was being read over a portable loud speaker. There was a group in front of us praying the Rosary and a group behind us singing the Litany of the Saints in French. This was a very



Francisco Overee (left) with the other young communicators.

moving experience, all of us, from different nations have travelled here for different reasons, but we were doing the same thing – the pilgrimage to the Holy Door.

After we passed the Holy Door, we entered the Basilica, I took some time to visit the tomb of St Pope John Paul II, the Blessed Sacrament Chapel and the tomb of Blessed John XXIII. We then exited the Basilica and proceeded to the Paul VI Hall for a cultural meeting and an audience with the Holy Father. The first speaker, Maria Resa, the founder and director of *Rappler*, an online news portal, was met with a three-minute standing ovation when she had finished her speech. She spoke about her experience being a journalist during the Duterte presidency in the Philippines and how she was charged with 10 different crimes for simply doing her job on reporting the truth of the presidency. Her courage and hope, despite all the obstacles she faced was inspirational and electric. Next, we listened to Collum McCann on the power of storytelling and how it can be used to communicate hope to listeners. After these two speeches, there was a small concert as we waited for the audience with the Holy Father.

The audience with the Holy Father was a vulnerable moment for communication. He spoke a mere five minutes, but he communicated a lot during that time. First, he joked about how he had a nine-page discourse to deliver that morning, which he chose not to deliver because he was not feeling very well and had decided to come to greet us and bless us. He passed his discourse to the Dicastery for Communications and said that we could read it by ourselves, he then spoke off the cuff encouraging us in our work in the field of communications and reminded us of the importance of truth, not giving in to sensationalising and gossip but communicating hope and beauty. He then apologised that he could not deliver his discourse saying that his arm was hurting and that he had a stomach ache. He proceeded to give us the apostolic blessing and then moved through the entire hall, greeting attendees.

After the audience, we went to the Vatican Canteen for lunch and then proceeded to the offices of the Dicastery for Communications for the afternoon programme. Here, we were presented with a panel of three speakers; Eli Pariser, Paterno Emasquel II and Chris Walter. Eli spoke about how we can create public spaces of the internet, "public parks" and "public libraries" of the internet in order to counter the current model of selling our attention to advertisements. Paterno spoke about how journalism could be practised in a synodal way and spoke mostly about his work as a journalist in the field of religion for the *Rappler*. Chris shared his work with producing documentaries. His style of documentary filmmaking is not one of excavating stories but rather allowing the storyteller to choose what stories they would like to share, how they would like to share it, and to which audiences. In his company, the storyteller has the power of the whole production rather than the company. This model of working might seem counterintuitive in the business sense but it has proven to be able to share stories in a more powerful way. Both Eli and Chris shared about how communications technology can be used and done in a synodal way even without using the word synod.

After this meeting, a few of us decided that we would take a walk before returning to our accommodation. We went to Castel Sant'Angelo and the Chiesa of Sant'Agnese in Agone to look at the beautiful artwork of Bernini and Michelangelo. This was a very light and refreshing time compared to the talks that we had to hear throughout the day. Even though the talks were good, I personally found that these times of informal communication which allowed the participants to share their own stories and lives with one another far more beneficial because it diverted from the traditional norms of communication, wasn't forced and did not have a directed goal or programme, it was simply about sharing life, being companions on a journey.



The pilgrims making their way to the Basilica of St Peter.

# INSPIRING YOUNG PEOPLE TO EMBRACE GODS CALL

SIBU: The Diocese of Sibu recently organised a vocation programme at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart. This three-day, two-night event, themed *Amare Et Servire (To Love and To Serve)*, took place at the *Laudato Si'* Centre. Nine young men and women, aged 18 and above, from various parishes across Sarawak participated.

The programme aimed to introduce young individuals to the path of priesthood and religious life, offering them insights into

serving God and responding to His call. It was jointly coordinated by seminarians from the Diocese of Sibu — Bros Stephen Suhaili; Charles Boromeo; Joseph Wong; Joseph Lee, and Zulio Song. In addition, Friar Francis Go OFM Cap, Fr Johanaz Ling, and members of Sister Putri Karmel and Sisters of St Francis of Sarawak (SSFS) contributed by sharing their personal experiences.

On the second day, Friar Francis

delivered a talk titled *What has God called me for?* He explored ways to recognise and respond to God's calling, emphasising that everyone has a divine purpose. Encouraging the participants, he hoped they would find greater clarity about their vocation.

For young women considering religious life, Sr Augustine of Putri Karmel *pic* acknowledged the challenges of answering God's call but emphasised the importance of serving through prayer to deepen one's relationship with Him. Sr Diana, SSFS highlighted the values of generosity and simplicity in serving those in need.

A question-and-answer session gave participants the opportunity to share their thoughts and concerns, helping them gain a clearer understanding of how to discern their vocation. In addition to these



The clergy and religious with the participants.

discussions, the programme included a variety of activities, such as Holy Mass, a barbecue night, a Praise and Worship party, and Eucharistic Adoration. Each day began with morning prayer and concluded with evening prayer, with the closing Mass on Sunday marking the programme's conclusion.

Many participants shared that although they initially felt a calling, they were hesitant. However, after attending the programme, they gained confidence and clarity in their faith journey. This vocation promotion initiative aims to help young people deepen their understanding of God's call, trust in His plan, strengthen their relationship with Him, and serve Christ with wholehearted devotion. **Barbara Simba Jampi**



The participants during the Eucharistic Adoration.

## A JOURNEY OF UPS AND DOWNS

● Continued from Pg 16

On Jan 26, we proceeded to St Peter's again for Mass (Sunday of the Word of God) that was presided over by the Holy Father. Pope Francis spoke of the importance of the Word of God in our lives and how God continues to communicate to us today in his Word. After the Mass, we joined others at St Peter's Square for the *Angelus*.

In the afternoon, the final activities for the Jubilee programme were conducted with the key-note speech by Colum McCann and then a group activity of sharing stories with one another. The programme officially ended with dinner.

The next day, most of the participants would be leaving Rome by flight, either in the afternoon or in the evening. A few of us who had time decided that we would take our own pilgrimage again to St Peter's Basilica, this time we climbed the 300 plus steps to the *cupola*. This was a beautiful experience. At the top of St Peter's, we shared with one another how this experience had been for us. One of our group members shared how life is like

that journey up the *cupola* – the journey begins with large steps at first but then the steps become windy and at times steeped at an angle, with certain areas where you have to walk alone and you will have to wait to reach the top if someone stops halfway because only one person can walk at a time. But then you reach the top and the whole world opens up to you. The time spent at the top is not long, just a few minutes and then the descend begins.

The experience at the Jubilee for Communications has been like the journey up the *cupola* for me. It has its ups and downs. It opened myself to new experiences and perspectives, but now it is time to come back down. The challenge now, or rather, the opportunity that is opened to me now is how am I to communicate this hope that has been nurtured in me? What is my own hope story? In what ways can I communicate this hope daily and point others to that hope as well? I am still figuring these questions out, but one thing is certain, hope does not disappoint (cf. Rom 5:5). **Francisco Overee**



## Stella Maris International School initiates Jubilee Year activities



School Chaplain, Fr Alvin Ho, SJ, commemorating the Jubilee Year with the primary and secondary students of Stella Maris.

KUALA LUMPUR: During the Jubilee 2025, aptly themed *Pilgrims of Hope*, the entire Catholic community is called to stand in solidarity with those suffering from poverty, injustice, and conflict, sharing a hope that is deeply rooted in God's love and taking bold action for a better world.

Stella Maris International School in Damansara eagerly embraced the opportunity to make the most of the Jubilee Year, which occurs once every 25 years. Plans were already set in motion last year when it was announced that the Holy Father would launch this special year, dedicating it to forgiveness and the renewal of our relationship with God through prayer, repentance, and a rekindled faith.

To start, the Jubilee Year Prayer is recited before daily weekday Mass at the chapel. Fr Alvin Ho, SJ, the school's chaplain, emphasised that it was crucial for Catholic students to be aware of the significance of

this special year. The recitation of the prayer not only connects them to the global Catholic community, but also fosters solidarity with Rome. "The prayer asks the Lord to awaken in us a blessed hope for the coming of God's Kingdom, seeking His grace to transform us into tireless cultivators of the Gospel seeds," said Fr Alvin. In his homily, he likened the students to pilgrims journeying towards a blessed hope, sharing with them the message that "hope does not disappoint."

Other initiatives are planned throughout the year, including a pilgrimage during Lent to the Church of St Francis of Assisi in Cheras, for both primary and secondary students. This church is one of the four designated pilgrimage centres in the archdiocese for the Jubilee Year. This initiative aligns with Archbishop Julian Leow's call to the faithful to deepen their understanding of the Jubilee Year, highlighting the spiritual signifi-

cance of pilgrimages, which mirror the journey of life. Other projects include a student performance reflecting the Jubilee Year theme, prayer sessions, and other activities that will unfold throughout the year.

Tyler Zachary Kasavan, a Year 6 student and regular altar server at Mass, shared that he felt "something special" stirring within him whenever he was reminded of the significance of this year. Lincy Ann Clare, the teacher-coordinator for the school's Catholic Society, said, "We look forward to this Jubilee with the hope that through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, all will be forgiven, that all will be made right, and that we can return home and begin anew."

Amid the evolving landscape of Christian Mission Schools today, Stella Maris International School is leading the charge in upholding its Catholic identity. The Jubilee Year offers a wonderful opportunity to reinforce this commitment.



## Dialogue needed to counter growing suspicion towards religion

ABU DHABI: Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle *pic* stressed the need for dialogue and fraternity to counter growing suspicion towards religion in an increasingly secular world.

Speaking at the Zayed Award for Human Fraternity ceremony in Abu Dhabi, he emphasised that “the only antidote to this is encounter and dialogue marked by friendship and respect between persons of different religious traditions.”

The Zayed Award was established in 2019 following the signing of the Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together by Pope Francis and Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Sheikh Ahmed al-Tayyeb.

Representing the Holy See six years later, Cardinal Tagle reaffirmed the Church’s commitment to fostering interfaith friendships, highlighting their importance in an interconnected world.

“Since, on the one hand, in a certain

sense the world has become ‘smaller’ than ever before, and, on the other, because the phenomenon of migration has increased contact between persons and communities from various traditions, cultures, and religions,” he told attendees at the Abrahamic Family House, a landmark structure inspired by the 2019 document.

He highlighted the challenges of coexistence in many parts of the world, where political and economic interests manipulate cultural and religious differences, exacerbating past conflicts and fostering an atmosphere of distrust and fear.

He called for dialogue as a crucial tool for unity, adding: “Indeed, whenever we take that route, the path outlined by the Document on Human Fraternity, we become ever more authentically human.”

In societies where religion is often dismissed, Cardinal Tagle warned against

excluding faith from public life: “Religion is looked upon as something useless or even dangerous, and it is frequently thought that coexistence is only possible if people relegate their own religious affiliation to the purely private sphere or meet in ‘neutral’ spaces, devoid of any reference to the transcendent.”

He stressed the importance of respecting all beliefs while remaining true to one’s own convictions: “It is impossible to think of fraternity as being ‘born in a laboratory.’

Naturally, it is necessary that everyone respect the sincere convictions of others, including unbelievers, but we must have the courage and patience to do so by holding true to who we are and what we believe.”

In his conclusion, he emphasised that upholding and affirming religious freedom in all its aspects is crucial for fostering global peace and harmonious coexistence. **LiCAS News**



## Pope to publish document on children’s rights

VATICAN: Wrapping up a Vatican summit on the rights of children, Pope Francis announced he was going to publish a papal document dedicated to children.

He called the February 3 summit venue in the frescoed halls of the Apostolic Palace, a kind of “open observatory” in which speakers explored “the reality of childhood throughout the world, a childhood that is unfortunately often hurt, exploited, denied.”

Some 50 experts and leaders from around the world, who shared their experience and compassion, he said, also “elaborated proposals for the protection of children’s rights, considering them not as numbers, but as faces.”

“Children are watching us,” he said, “to see how we are going about living” in this world.

The Pope said he planned to prepare a papal document “to give continuity to this commitment and promote it throughout the church.” Those in attendance applauded the Pope and his brief closing remarks and gave

him a standing ovation.

The one-day world leaders’ summit titled, “Love them and protect them,” discussed several topics of concern including a child’s right to food, health care, education, a family, free time and the right to live free from violence and exploitation. It was organised by the recently created Pontifical Committee for the World Day of Children, headed by Franciscan Fr Enzo Fortunato.

The invitees included Nobel Prize winners, government ministers and heads of state, leaders of international and nonprofit organisations, top Vatican officials and other experts.

Former US Vice President Al Gore, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007 together with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, said in his talk, “The threat of ecological devastation — which encompasses the climate crisis and also the biodiversity crisis — is a terrible burden that we are placing on our children.”

He praised the Pope for highlighting “the spiritual crisis we face as stemming in part from the willful blindness that prevents so many from seeing the way in which our economic system is driving us toward the exploitation of both people and the planet at the expense of our moral values and the future of children.”

“Those that hold power today must alter our ways of thinking; and our new thinking must result in deep changes that transform our current systems of economics and politics, giving way toward a more just and ecologically-minded system that puts environmental and social justice at the centre of our plans and efforts,” Gore said. “We have all the solutions we need.”

Kailash Satyarthi of India, co-winner of the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize and activist campaigning against child labour in India and advocating for the universal right to education, said in his talk that while he trusts everyone’s concern for children, he also feels ashamed.

“I am ashamed because we are failing our children every day. I am ashamed to listen to all these data and statistics that I have been listening” to and talking about for the past 45 years, he said.

“We know the problems, we know the solutions,” he said, but so far, everything has just been rhetoric and words.

The problem-solvers of the world “are not really honest (with) the problem-sufferers,” he said, when they lack any sense of “moral accountability and moral responsibility.”

“The solution lies in the genuine feeling and connection” to every child as if he or she were one’s own, he said. It is only when people feel genuine compassion will they feel “an honest urge to take urgent action.”

“We have to fight this menace (of child labour and poverty) and all other crises through compassion in action. We have to create a culture of problem-solving. Let us globalise compassion because they are all our children,” Satyarthi said. **Carol Glatz, CNS**

## Israeli, Palestinian, and American youth unite for peace

VATICAN: “For as long as I can remember, we were told not to speak to each other. There is a strong tendency to dehumanise the other side. Learning to talk and listen to different narratives is crucial,” said Abigail Szor from Israel, sharing her experience of participating in *Meaning Meets Us*, which brings together Muslim, Jewish, and Christian youth for interreligious and intercultural dialogue, emphasising the importance of encountering others in the pursuit of peace.

The *Meaning Meets Us* gathering, held from February 2 to 5 in the Vatican, was organised in response to the need for dialogue and mutual understanding and awareness following the Hamas attacks on Israel in Oct 2023.

Students from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem spearheaded the project aiming to foster understanding among young people from diverse backgrounds, while the international *Scholas Occurrentes* association coordinated the *Meaning Meets Us* event, culminating in the presentation of their conclusions to Pope Francis at the end of the General Audience in the Paul VI Hall.



**Participants in the Scholas Occurrentes-organised meeting “Meaning Meets Us” greet Pope Francis during the General Audience (Vatican Media)**

During their brief meeting with the Pope, participants handed him a letter and a sweatshirt, which he signed. In their message, they reflected on the difficult conversations they had engaged in, clarifying that their goal was not agreement but mutual understanding.

In this unique space, Israeli, Palestinian, and American youth chose to set aside divisive rhetoric and reject hate speech in favour of “sustaining complex dialogue” and learning to understand each other’s perspectives.

“I came because I want these numbers to

end,” Abigail said, pointing to the number of people killed in Gaza, a number written on a tag sewn to her T-shirt.

“I do not want the war to continue, nor for the hostages to die without returning home. I do not want more bloodshed in Gaza. I have friends on both sides whom I love and who matter to me,” she added.

For Isabel Gonzales, a student at the University of Notre Dame, the opportunity to greet Pope Francis on the final day of the meeting was profoundly meaningful. She hopes to return home to share the stories she heard, the experiences she lived, and the lessons she learned, contributing to efforts for reconciliation. “We all want to live in peace and be happy,” she affirmed.

Maysan Madi, a Palestinian Arab, describes the encounter as deeply moving. “I am not a Christian, yet I still felt the holiness and greatness of the place. Pope Francis’ words were incredibly powerful. I think everyone present, regardless of their background or beliefs, felt the same way,” she affirmed.

**Sebastian Sanson Ferrari, Vatican News**