



**Prayer** St John Paul II  
 Pope St John Paul II  
*Consacrated Life* in 1997. He compared the diverse expressions of consecrated life to a flourishing garden with many different plants rooted in the Gospel. This spiritual garden yields abundant fruit, enriching the Church throughout its seasons. In the kaleidoscope of veils – full, short, or no veils; of brown, gray, white, black, beige, and more, consecrated men and women are called to illuminate the world with the radiance of Jesus.

**Prayer** St John Paul II  
*Consacrated Life* 2024, we amplify the often-overlooked perspectives of individuals within the religious community, whose voices resonated during the inaugural years of the 20th century. While the charisms, practices, and communities may differ, their collective focus remains directed towards God and the vision of the Church, as reflected in

**66** **That's your story? What's your journey? Who's listening and who's discerning?**

This was Frim Dierckx, Tappan's top spiritual officer at Malaysia Religious Assembly which reflects a deep sense of gratitude, reflection, and a desire to connect to the context of the religious community.

Frim Dierckx, president of the Conference of Religious Major Religions in Singapore and Brunei encouraged the religious to support the Kaian mission, recognizing the significance of the present time and the interconnectedness of their stories.

He emphasized that despite diverse backgrounds, the religious community is united by

*Follow Jesus radically*  
of love on earth is a  
Marked by the love  
church, he acknowledged  
different nations  
discovers to  
Monks. Six  
"And this is  
her life, is  
being, is taking  
transformed the  
chart the story  
about, simply  
and prophetic

"This family has  
will gather for prayer  
toward by segment. No  
central religious mission  
MAJOD, a mission  
church but also for

and build this kingdom of God among men," Catholic theologian Hans Küng alleged the members of churches who have dedicated themselves to serving the people in the margins and the periphery, in this season of Christmas, in his discerning attack of what he called "the new factory for the rich" by contrast to the authentic "factory for the poor" of the church members, and conversation, service, we have the consequence of the new factory for the rich. The new factory for the poor for the Malaysian people is the consecrated community.

For their foresight and wisdom to have this Malaysia Pluralist Community and to include all the different religious in an integral part of this journey."

Friar Derrick spoke of the ongoing conversations and the necessity for religious authorities in sharing experiences. The religious communities are called to be heralds of the Gospel, embodying God's love wherever they serve. The importance of contemplative spirituality in sharing experiences of the Spirit's promptings was highlighted as an essential aspect of their journey.

The need for deep and contemplative listening is a challenge to continually exercise, especially in our religious communities," he said.

The mission of the PMPC is to listen to the voice of the people within the context of community living. Friar Derrick challenged the re-

Only with this deep horizon look at our personal journeys, our communal journeys, our ecclesial journeys, can we see where the Lord is leading us into the fullness of life, which what the Lord desires for us! That these journeys are not separate journeys, but the sole path in the growth of holiness, which is (the) mission of the PMPC.

"And by our very being as consecrated laymen, we embolden and enfold the real of the fullness of life and growth in holiness. Let's listen from *Professio Caritatis*, the VC on Consecrated Life.

"Although the religious state constituted the profession of evangelical counsels do not belong to the hierarchical structure of the Church, nevertheless it belongs inseparably to her life and holiness."

"My dear friends, we are graced and pri-



**Get a copy of the  
12-page supplement on  
Malaysia Religious Assembly  
in this issue.**

For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!

*1 Cor. 9:16*



## KK Archbishop celebrates 25th sacerdotal anniversary



## A unique way of evangelising ■ P6



**Come and see to experience Jesus** ■ P16



# ‘therapy’ of love

**VATICAN:** The “first therapy” that must be offered to the sick, and to the world, is a dose of closeness, friendship and love, Pope Francis said in his message for the World Day of the Sick.

"We came into the world because someone welcomed us; we were made for love; and we are called to communion and fraternity," he wrote in his message for the annual observance February 11, the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes.

A connection with other people “is what sustains us, above all at times of illness and vulnerability,” the 87-year-old Pope wrote. “It is also the first therapy that we must all adopt in order to heal the diseases of the society in which we live.”

The theme chosen for the 2024 observance is from the *Book of Genesis*, “It is not good that man should be alone.” It was subtitled, “Healing the Sick by Healing Relationships.”

In his message, released Jan. 13, Pope Francis said Christians believe that “from the beginning, God, who is love, created us for communion and endowed us with an innate capacity to enter into relationship with others.”

"We were created to be together, not alone," he wrote. "Precisely because this project of communion is so deeply rooted in the human heart, we see the experience of abandonment and solitude as something frightening, painful and even inhuman."

Pope Francis recalled the horrible pain of loneliness endured by those who were sick or in nursing homes during the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic and had no contact with their loved ones.

"I share too in the pain, suffering and isolation felt by those who, because of war and its tragic consequences, are left without support and assistance," he said. "War is the most terrible of social diseases, and it takes its greatest toll on those who are most vulnerable."

But even in rich countries at peace, he said, "old age and sickness are frequently experienced in solitude and, at times, even in abandonment."

When a culture emphasises the individual, “exalts productivity at all costs, cultivates the myth of efficiency,” he said, it “proves indifferent, even callous, when individuals no longer have the strength needed to keep pace.”

"It then becomes a throwaway culture, in which 'persons are no longer seen as a paramount value to be cared for and respected', especially when they are poor or disabled, 'not yet useful' — like the unborn — or 'no longer needed' — like the elderly,'" he said, quoting his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, on *Fraternity and Social Friendship*.

The Pope said such thinking is reflected in "certain political decisions that are not focused on the dignity of the human person and his or her needs, and do not always promote the strategies and resources needed to ensure that every human being enjoys the fundamen-

tal right to health and access to health care.”

But, he said, the human dignity of the sick and vulnerable also is abandoned when health care is seen simply as the provision of procedures and medication, rather than as caring for the whole person and involving the family in creating a network of support.

“Brothers and sisters,” he wrote, “the first form of care needed in any illness is compassionate and loving closeness. To care for the sick thus means, above all, to care for their relationships, all of them: with God, with others — family members, friends, healthcare workers — with creation and with themselves.”

Addressing those who are ill, Pope Francis said: "Do not be ashamed of your longing for closeness and tenderness! Do not conceal it, and never think that you are a burden on others."

And he called on all Catholics, “with the love for one another that Christ the Lord bestows on us in prayer, especially in the Eucharist,” to “tend to the wounds of solitude and isolation” found particularly among the sick.

“In this way,” the Pope said, “we will cooperate in combating the culture of individualism, indifference and waste, and enable the growth of a culture of tenderness and compassion.” — **By Cindy Wooden, CNS**  
*(Photo: Pope Francis embraces a young person with an illness (Vatican Media Divisione Foto))*

● To read the full text,  
go to: <https://bit.ly/47W2N3f>



# HERALD

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## OPINION

## Will Artificial Intelligence change the way we practice our faith?

**A**re you wondering about the meaning of your life? How to have faith when you feel nothing? Or how to escape from a distressing personal situation?

In the ever-evolving landscape of technology and spirituality, the intersection of faith and artificial intelligence (AI) raises intriguing questions about the role of technology in our spiritual journeys.

HelloBible, the brainchild of Pastor Éric Célérier, stands at the forefront of this technological evolution, aiming to provide solace, encouragement, and references to the Gospels through its beta version conversational agent.

Sébastien Fath, a specialist in evangelical Protestantism, sees the potential for AI to evolve as a responsive partner in the faith journeys of the 21st century.

Across denominations, AI tools like Magisterium and CatéGPT offer Catholics a similar digital companionship, drawing from religious texts to provide answers to theological questions. Pastor Célérier emphasises that AI is not meant to replace pastors but to assist them, especially in providing quick and accessible access to religious texts. These applications field questions ranging from theological concepts to real-life predicaments, prompting considerations about AI's role as a spiritual guide.

However, ethical considerations come to the forefront as we embrace these technological advancements, as articulated by Mathieu Guillermin, a philosopher and researcher. While AI can assist in reflection and judgement, the risk lies in anthropomorphizing these digital entities, potentially overshadowing the human aspect of spirituality. Pastor Célérier acknowledges this concern and stresses the importance of regulating chatbot development to avoid misrepresentation of spiritual figures.

Pope Francis shares concerns about the broader implications of AI in the realm of communication in his recently released message for the 58th World Day of Social Communications. While recognising the potential of AI to enhance connectivity and accessibility to knowledge, the Pope highlights its limitations in providing the wisdom essential for human well-being. He calls for a spiritual perspective to counterbalance the growing "rich in technology, poor in humanity" phenomenon.



The Pope's concerns about the dark side of AI, such as cognitive pollution, biased algorithms, and the potential erosion of societal diversity, underscore the need for ethical guidelines. He advocates for regulations to prevent the misuse of AI and emphasises the importance of discerning between real and simulated events.

As we grapple with these profound questions, the dialogue between faith and AI prompts us to reconsider fundamental questions about spirituality. Can AI serve as a spiritual guide, or does it risk diluting the genuine human experience of faith? As believers, we must navigate this technological terrain with caution, ensuring that AI complements, rather than replaces, the core tenets of our faith. The ethical trajectory of AI will determine whether it becomes a force for liberation or an instrument of control in shaping collective thoughts. — *LCI/Vatican Media*

## We all have a purpose in life

**W**hat is your purpose in life? Have you even wondered why you are here on this earth? Why are you working in a particular job or performing certain tasks? Are the things we are doing, sometimes, routine tasks? Is that all there is to life?

Some may feel as if life is becoming more and more of a drudgery, and they feel more and more disillusioned and tired of doing the same things over and over again. Those who feel this way may identify with Job in today's first reading, where he lamented: "Is not man's life on earth nothing more than pressed service, his time no better than hired drudgery?"

The danger we must watch out for is when we allow ourselves to begin to feel as if our lives no longer have any purpose or any direction. When we allow ourselves to feel this way, some of us may begin to contemplate suicide, thinking that life is no longer worth living, has no purpose, and there seems to be no more reason for us to carry on.

However, today's readings give us a significant reason and purpose for living; and that purpose is God. We live because we believe in God and seek to maintain a close relationship with Him: in good times or in bad, in all that we do, in our efforts to do good and avoid evil; all these mean something special and matter only because we believe that God will be our providence and guide.

In the Gospel, Jesus could have easily rested on His laurels and be carried away



with doing wonderful work and helping so many people. He could have been tempted to continue doing this good work with the excuse that He was doing it out of love and compassion for the people. But was this God's will? No. Jesus was aware that His mission was to preach the Good News of the Kingdom of God to other neighbouring country towns also, not just settle down at one place. What He wanted to do personally wasn't important. The only thing that mattered was the will of God: and that was to preach the Kingdom of God and to glorify God.

Likewise, St Paul knew of his life's purpose to preach the Gospel, as he tells us in the second reading: "I do not boast of preaching the Gospel, since it is a duty

which has been laid on me; I should be punished if I did not preach it! If I had chosen this work myself, I might have been paid for it, but as I have not, it is a responsibility which has been put into my hands. Do you know what my reward is? It is this: in my preaching, to be able to offer the Good News free, and not insist on the rights which the Gospel gives me." This too is our mission and our purpose in life, that is: in all things, to glorify God.

Some of us think that the devil would tempt us into doing something which is bad or evil. However, this is not always the case. The devil could also tempt us into doing something which seems good, and when we do so, some of us may begin to think that without us, the task at hand

### Reflecting on our Sunday Readings

with Fr Andrew Kooi

#### 5th Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)

**Readings: Job 7:1-4, 6-7;**

**1 Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-23;**

**Gospel: Mark 1:29-39**

would collapse. We begin to do things for our own personal gratification, for our own popularity, to feed our ego. We begin to drift away from our true purpose: that is, to preach the Good News and to glorify God in all we do. We become more concerned with what others think of us; and so, we do things that we hope would make them like us. We become more concerned with what makes us happy, even though that happiness is only temporary, whether it be riches, popularity, or power. If our life's purpose is based on these factors rather than on God, we will soon find ourselves disillusioned and tired.

Thus, let us always remember that we have a purpose in life, and that is to preach the Good News and to glorify God. Let us continue to strive towards building God's Kingdom and not our own, as we beseech God to help and guide us; as we hear the words of the "collect" or opening prayer: "Keep your family safe, O Lord, with unfailing care, that, relying solely on the hope of heavenly grace, they may be defended always by Your protection."





ARCHDIOCESE OF  
KUALA LUMPUR

CHAN/CD/04/2024

## Chancery Notice

### New Parish — Christ the Light Parish, Desa Jaya, Kuala Lumpur

In accordance with Can. 515 of the Code of Canon Law (1983), Archbishop Julian Leow has on January 22, 2024, decreed the establishment of the new territorial parish of Christ the Light, Desa Jaya, Kuala Lumpur, in the Kuala Lumpur North District of the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur.

The establishment of this new parish, effective 2 February 2024 on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, will serve more effectively the growing population and the community of the Christian faithful that is stably constituted currently at the Chapel of Christ the Light, Jalan 53, Desa Jaya, 52100 Kuala Lumpur.

This parish church will now be called the Church of Christ the Light and Rev Fr Peter Anthony has been

appointed as its parish priest (cf. Can. 521).

The following chapels will be under the pastoral care of this new parish:

- Chapel of Christ the King, Selayang Baru, Selangor
- Chapel of Our Lady of Lourdes, Sg Buloh, Selangor

May the blessings of God the Father be always upon this new parish community of the Christian faithful through Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Rev Fr Dr Clarence Devadass**  
Chancellor  
Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur  
January 22, 2023



DIOCESE OF  
MALACCA JOHORE

Chan/LN/2024/002

## Chancery Notice

### Parish and Ministry Appointments

His Lordship, Rt. Rev. Bernard Paul DD., Bishop of Malacca Johore Diocese (MJD), has made the following appointments:

#### Parish Appointments

With effect from January 18, 2024:

1.1 Rev Fr Martinian Lee Hock Chuan is appointed as parish priest of the Church of the Holy Family, Ulu Tiram and parish administrator of Church of St Elizabeth, Kota Tinggi.

1.2 Rev Fr John Anandan OFM Cap is appointed as assistant parish priest of the Church of the Holy Family, Ulu Tiram.

1.3 Rev Fr Aaron Alammalay is appointed as assistant parish priest of Church of St Andrew, Muar.

With effect from March 1, 2024:

1.4. Rev Fr William Pillai, currently assistant parish priest of Church of St Theresa, Masai, is appointed as assistant parish priest of Church of St Louis, Kluang.

#### Ministry Appointments

1.5. Rev Fr Edward Rayappan is appointed as the Priest-in-Charge and Bishop's Delegate to the Villa Paulos Board of Management.

1.6. Rev Fr Moses Rayappan Paul Raj is appointed as Priest-in-Charge and Bishop's Delegate to the Fatima Home Board of Management. Additionally, he is appointed as the chairperson of the Church of St Francis Xavier Restoration Committee.

1.7. Rev Fr Ryan Innas Muthu is appointed as the chairperson of the Holy Family Church Building Committee.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

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

January 19, 2024

## IMPORTANT DATES

**February 1-7:**  
World Interfaith Harmony Week

**February 4:**  
International Day of Human Fraternity

**February 11: Ash Wednesday**  
Day of fast and abstinence



KUALA LUMPUR  
ARCHDIOCESE

Diary of Archbishop  
Julian Leow

February

- 4 **Feast — Chapel of the Holy Infant Jesus, Kuala Selangor**
- 6-7 **Clergy Recollection**



MALACCA JOHORE  
DIOCESE

Diary of Bishop  
Bernard Paul

February

- 7 **1st Caritas Malaysia Board of Management Meeting via Zoom**
- 15 **MAJODI Centre Reporting Meeting – Bishop's Office**
- 17-18 **2024 MJ Catechumenal Recollection & Rite of Election – Church of the Immaculate Conception, JB**



## Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #162

**F12**  
NEWS  
MJD  
UPDATES

**Greetings to you.** A new governor for Sarawak soon. The water tariffs are going up. Expect bigger energy bills too. More border benefits between Johor and Singapore can be expected. It's too expensive to go abroad or pursue studies overseas. The MACC and the Immigration are seen to be at work. Is English going to make a comeback? "Gostan" practice is not new to our policy makers.

**"Paradoxical Times:** The former PM only saw one race, one religion. That was unity for him. Laughingly, avoided the interviewer's query on "unity in diversity. Doesn't racism, religious intolerance and all forms of discrimination, reflect the inability to hold in tension and live with paradoxes? The parable of wheat and the weeds (Mt. 13: 24-30) invites us to hold seemingly contradictory truths in tension. One: evil is real, harmful and among us. Two: our response to evil must include both acknowledgment and restraint. Rather than get worked up about weeds in one's life, and weeds in other people's, or become zealous for the purity of the field, or impatient for a quick, clean harvest, or over confidently "let me clear everything for you, Lord", but Jesus says "no" and "wait."

Jesus insists on patience, humility, and restraint; acknowledging the reality of evil, and to accept His timing instead of ours when it comes to destroying it. Why? Because there is no way we can police the wheat field without damaging the wheat. There is no way we can rid ourselves of everything bad without distorting everything good. When we rush ahead of God and start yanking the weeds ... we do harm to ourselves and to the field. Our sincerity devolves into arrogance. Our love devolves into judgment. Our holiness devolves into hypocrisy. The field suffers.

Many fear ambiguity but God is too big for our one-dimensional truths, and this is a good thing. Though we might fear paradox, God does not. Reality is paradoxical. If we're honest, everything is a clash of contradictions, and there is nothing on this created earth that is not a mixture at the same time of good and bad, helpful and unhelpful, endearing and maddening, living and dying". -Richard Rohr-

A big majority, even good church-goers, struggle with this inclusive, bridge building and creative view of life. They opt for a black and white world.

#### Thought For The Week: One Step At A Time

The boy was saying: I cannot see a way through." The horse said: Can you see the next step? The boy responded: Yes! The horse said: Just take that.

(Charlie Mackesy: *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse*)

Lesson from the horse: It is easy to become overwhelmed and frustrated by happenings and non-happenings in your life and lose track of the path. It's easy to fall into a routine and lose heart when faced with challenges, obstacles and the unknown. In such moments, all that one can really do — knowing that the future will unfold no matter what — is to take the next step. "Just take the next step that you can see. "Just take that."

Remember: "You don't have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step." —Martin Luther King Jr. I Have a Dream speech (1963)

"Every journey begins with a single step." — Lao Tzu

#### Announcements for this Week

1. The Deutero-Canonical Books as companion to the AVB is now available. Get your companion copy. The full AVB Catholic Version

will be appearing later. The AVB, a Malaysian translation, the work of many Malaysian translators, is an alternative to the Indonesian version.

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

3. Montfort Youth Centre offers Culinary Arts (pastry arts, food & beverage service, barista) for the young ones, aged 16-19 years, boys and girls, and physically challenged youths. Contact Pauline 06-3510114/5 or forms available at the website (<https://montfortyouthcentre.org>)

#### This weeks QnQ: Q asks? What can we BUY BACK? Can we buy back TIME?

The obvious way to buy back your time is to pay someone to do something for you. Pay the mechanic to change your oil or a dry cleaner to press your suit.

The less obvious way to buy back your time is to say no. Passing on a promotion might "buy" you more time with family. Declining the dinner invite might "pay" for the time you need to exercise. We buy back our time not only with the money we spend, but also with the opportunities we decline.

The more clearly you know how you want to spend your days, the easier it becomes TO SAY NO to the requests that steal your hours."

Never stop doing good. That's who we are. We are born to do good. Let's continue to make a difference. Take care. Be safe.

Just to tickle you: DON'T PUT A QUESTION MARK WHERE GOD PUTS A PERIOD.

**Bishop Bernard Paul**





ARCHDIOCESE OF  
KUALA LUMPUR  
CHAN/CD/03/2024

## Chancery Notice

### Leave of Absence

At the request of Rev Fr Alan Pereira, the parish priest of the Church of the Divine Mercy, Shah Alam, Selangor, Archbishop Julian Leow has granted him a leave of absence from active ministry starting February 1, 2024.

During his personal leave, Rev Fr Alan Pereira will not be exercising any priestly functions except in danger of death situations.

In the meantime, Rev Fr Michael Dass, the assistant parish priest of the Church of the Divine Mercy, Shah Alam, Selangor, will be the acting parish priest until further notice.

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

January 20, 2024

# KK Archbishop celebrates 25th sacerdotal anniversary

By Christina George

KOTA KINABALU: The parish communities of the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, Church of Mary Immaculate and St Paul, Dontozidon came together to organise the 25th sacerdotal anniversary of their beloved shepherd, Archbishop John Wong.

The Eucharistic celebration, held on January 21, was celebrated by Cardinal William Goh of Singapore; Archbishop Simon Poh and Archbishop Emeritus John Ha of Kuching; Archbishop Julian Leow of Kuala Lumpur; Bishop Bernard Paul of Malacca Johore; Bishop Richard Ng of Miri; Bishop Cornelius Piong of Keningau; Bishop Julius Gitom of Sandakan and clergy from Kota Kinabalu, Sandakan and Keningau dioceses.

Expressing gratitude in his speech, Archbishop John thanked God for his calling and guidance, extending appreciation to those who have journeyed with him over the past 25 years, including his family members.

Born on June 6, 1968, in Sandakan, Archbishop John was ordained a priest on January 21, 1999. Following his studies in Rome, where he obtained a licen-



Archbishop John Wong cutting his cake as some of the arch/bishops and clergy look on.

tiate in Spirituality, he assumed roles as the director of aspirants at the Catholic Diocesan Centre and vice-director of the Initiation Year at St Peter's College, Karamunsing.

Up until his episcopal ordination, he was serving as the spiritual adviser to the Youth Commission, exercising his priestly ministry at the cathedral and its sub-parish Church of Mary Immaculate, especially among the Chinese-speaking parishioners.

Currently serving as the President of the Regional Episcopal Commission for Family, Laity, and Life of the Catholic Bishops' Con-

ference of Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei, he was ordained as bishop on October 1, 2010, and later installed as the second archbishop of Kota Kinabalu on January 24, 2013.

Archbishop John's episcopal ordination at the age of 42 marked him as one of the youngest bishops in the Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei region. His motto, grounded in the theological virtues of faith (iman), love (kasih), and hope (harapan), emphasises the importance of nurturing faith, working through charity, and abounding in hope, rooted in the sacraments and traditions of the Catholic Church,

while fulfilling the mission and vision of the Archdiocese.

Citing *Proverbs 8:35* as his guiding verse for priestly ordination, Archbishop Wong emphasised its relevance, stressing the urgency for today's generation to embrace the Word of God. In an interview with *Catholic Sabah*, he underlined the significance of incorporating the Word of God into one's life, enabling the sharing of blessings with others. Reflecting on his priestly journey, Archbishop Wong acknowledged challenges but emphasised the numerous moments of joy, expressing gratitude to those who inspired and guided him.

## Social mission at core of Penang Diocese Lenten campaign

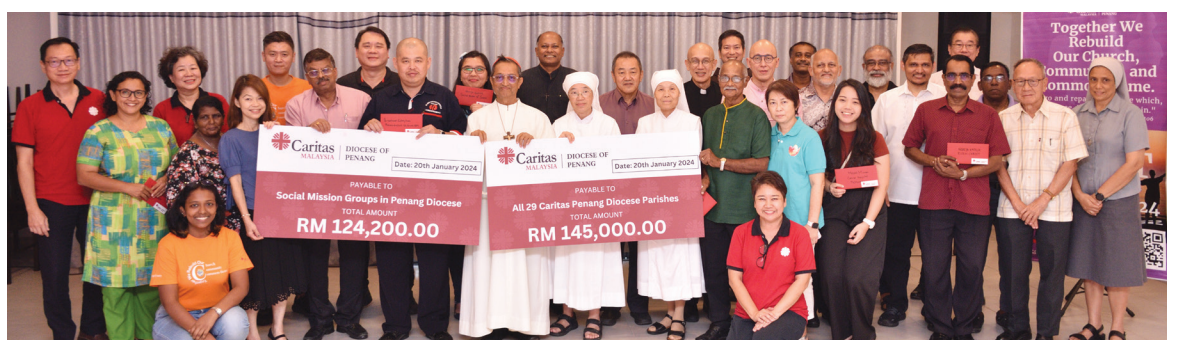
PENANG: In conjunction with Lenten Campaign 2024, Caritas Penang presented a total of RM269,200 to 29 parishes and 10 Social Mission organisations in the diocese of Penang for their Kempen Kasih initiatives.

Cardinal Sebastian Francis launched the Lenten Theme for 2024 *Together We Rebuild Our Church, Community, and Common Home*, at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit.

During the event, representatives from various social mission organisations and Caritas parishes shared

their plans for the upcoming year. The primary objective of the gathering was to foster collaboration, support, and joint efforts in the field of social mission.

Among the participating organisations were Persatuan Kebajikan Haemodialisis St Anne, BM; Fr Julien Agape Centre; Mercy Home; Penang Diocese Aids Ministry; Mount Miriam Cancer Hospital; NTA Schools for Refugee Children; St Joseph's Home; Home for the Aged (CWS) Simee Care Centre; Tenaganita, and Little Sisters of the Poor.



Representatives of social mission organisations and parishes receive donations from Caritas Penang.

Some key issues highlighted by the representatives included a shortage of volunteers and challenges in

recruiting staff.

Caritas Penang Chairman, Fr Joachim Robert in his closing ad-

dress reminded all present of the need to work together, appreciate, collaborate and support one another.

## Formations for parish Love Squad members

PENANG: As Lent approaches, Caritas Diocese of Penang organised Lenten Love Squad formations at the deanery level. The inaugural Lenten Campaign formation took place on January 13 at the Church

of the Assumption, drawing participants from students, youth, ministry coordinators, and parish Caritas representatives from Penang Island parishes, as well as USM Catholic students.

Subsequent formations occurred on January 14 at the Church of St Anthony, Nibong Tebal, and on January 20 at the Church of Christ the King, Sungai Petani. The formation on January 21 at the Church of

Our Lady of Lourdes, Ipoh involved 12 parishes from the Perak deanery.

In total, around 200 participants from various ministries eagerly attended the Lenten Campaign 2024 formations, seeking insights into meaningful activities for the upcoming Lenten season. Caritas Penang delved into the spiritual significance of the theme *Together We Rebuild Our Church, Community, and Common Home*.

Francis Tan presented the focus on the Church, Rachel Maria addressed the Community aspect, and Magdalene Chiang from the Creation Justice Commission, along with Dr Mary Bharathy, covered the Common Home focus.

Caritas Penang initiated preparations for the Lenten Campaign

in August 2023, conducting visits to places in need and gathering real-life stories of struggles in the church and community. Nine carefully researched stories are now part of the Lenten Kit, curated by Caritas Penang and Caritas Parish. This comprehensive Lenten Kit includes resources for parishes or ministries to explore various aspects of Lent, both spiritual and temporal. All parishes in the Diocese of Penang have received both softcopy and hardcopy versions of the Lenten Campaign materials in all four languages, facilitating the commencement of parish-level Lenten initiatives.

More insights, videos, testimonies and stories can be found in <https://caritaspenang.com/>



PDLC formation at Church of St Anthony, Nibong Tebal.



# KL clergy reflect on Synod outcomes and reaffirm priestly commitment

By Fr George Packiasamy

SEREMBAN: Each year in January, the clergy of the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur convene for their Clergy Annual Pastoral Assembly (CAPA). This year, the assembly took place at Glory Beach Resort in Port Dickson, spanning the evening of Sunday, January 14, to the afternoon of Thursday, January 18.

Approximately 60 priests and the archbishop participated in this four-day event, where our focus was on reviewing the outcome of Synod 2023 and delving into the latest issues and documents of significance. Throughout CAPA, a variety of topics were discussed, shared, and presented.

Fr Simon Labrooy led a session during which he reviewed the 2023 CAPA Report, which provided a comprehensive analysis of challenges and satisfaction levels experienced in the preceding year.



Another noteworthy session was conducted by Fr Clarence Devadass, who addressed the results of the Synod on Synodality 2023 and outlined preparations for the upcoming Synod in October 2024. As one of the Malaysian delegates present at the Synod 2023 in the Vatican, he shared his firsthand experience as a participant and member of the drafting committee. In a subsequent

session, he emphasised the importance of our readiness at the Malaysian Church Conference level for the impending Synod in October 2024. He explained on how the Church could evolve into a Synodal Church in Mission, emphasising the fulfilment of missionary commitments while preserving unity and diversity.

Archbishop Julian Leow and Fr Philip Tay, OCD guided us through an exploration of two recent declarations/documents: The Pastoral Meaning of Blessings (*Fiducia Supplicans* dated December 18, 2023) and the Participation of Transgender and Homosexual Persons in the Sacraments of Baptism and Matrimony (*Dicasterium Pro Doctrina Fidei* dated October 31, 2023). This exercise provided clarity on issues related to the blessing of same-sex unions, the synodality of the Church's mission, the significance of repentance, and other matters highlighted during Synod 2023. Insights gained during this study helped to clarify our doubts, enabling us to comprehend better the declarations and issues that had previously caused confusion.

A forum facilitated an open conversation with Archbishop Julian, who has been our shepherd in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur for nearly ten years. We, as priests, expressed satisfaction with his governance and pledged our commitment to work alongside him, embracing a co-responsible attitude in building the Church and serving its people. Our unanimous support for Archbishop Julian and our collective dedication to advancing the mission of the Church were reaffirmed during this interaction.

In addition to discussions and forums, we engaged in prayer, silent adoration, and the celebration of the Eucharist to reflect on the challenges confronting us. This spiritual reflection aimed to equip us with clarity, charity, and a heightened sense of responsibility as we serve the Church. The priestly ministry entrusted to us holds the mission of the Church at its core, and this year's CAPA has enlightened our minds, fostering productive and enriching discussions, strengthening relationships, and enhancing our commitment to priestly ministry.



Klang District clergy.

## A transformative experience for students

KUANTAN: The Catechetical Ministry of the Church of St Thomas organised a transformative experience, aptly named *Transformed*, for catechism students aged nine to 17.

Approximately 100 students attended the camp, held on Saturday, 20 and Sunday, 21 January.

The camp welcomed Norman Bismar and Michelle Antony from ABLAZE Ministry, known for their mission centred around God's Word, the Holy Spirit, Evangelisation, and community living. ABLAZE is on a passionate journey of responding to the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) equipping young hearts to become disciples and, in turn, make disciples — a mission embraced by the vibrant contingent of 11 young

individuals from the St John Paul II Youth Ministry from the Church of Jesus Caritas, Kepong.

The goal of *Transformed* was to open the hearts of these young participants to the influence of the Holy Spirit, fostering personal transformation as they prepared themselves to become exemplary individuals in their schools and future endeavours.

Structured around engaging activities like games, moments of worship, and insightful sessions led by Norman and Michelle — thoughtfully categorised for primary and secondary age groups — the camp aimed to imprint a lasting impact on their lives. The focus was beyond mere education and feeding information, rather, shaping these young minds to understand their roles as cherished

Children of God.

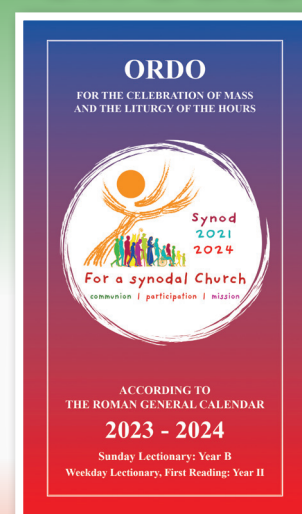
The vision for this transformative experience will extend beyond the camp's duration. Organisers hope that the fire of the Holy Spirit, kindled during *Transformed*, will continue to burn brightly as these children embark on a new Catechetical year. The aspiration is for them to emerge as resilient ambassadors, bringing Jesus to every corner of the earth.

As the camp's echoes fade, the ripple effect of *Transformed* is anticipated to follow through the lives of these young participants, empowering them to embody courage and compassion. May they, as beacons of faith, carry the torch of transformation into the future, lighting the way for others on their spiritual journeys. — *By Malcolm Solomon*



The participants and presenters during the camp.

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# A unique way of evangelising

By Jennifer Duarte

IPOH: There are numerous approaches to evangelising, ranging from simple gestures like offering a smile or a greeting, to more explicit expressions of faith. Some individuals feel compelled to engage in direct conversations about their beliefs, quoting from religious texts like the Bible, while others integrate their faith into their daily decision-making and share those experiences with others.

At the Church of St Michael, a unique opportunity for evangelising arose through a set of empty boards that have been positioned in the funeral parlour for a couple of years. When an idea was mooted to evangelise with a poster on the empty wall inside the funeral parlour, parish priest Fr Anthony Liew suggested that the boards be used instead.

What initially started as a modest A4-sized sheet outlining Catholic beliefs evolved into a series of posters spanning 20 panels across the boards that separated the two funeral parlours. These posters, presented in both

English and Mandarin, articulate the core tenets of the Catholic Church and extend an invitation to those interested to reach out to the nearest Catholic Church for further information.

"Quite often, the departed, resting in the parlour, often draws relatives from various corners of the world, not necessarily from Ipoh. Some come to support the grieving family, and many among them belong to different faiths, with some even having lapsed in their religious beliefs. "While spending time in the parlour, they have the opportunity to read information about the Catholic faith and gain insights into our perspectives on death and dying," said Ivan, a parishioner of St Michael's.

The process of putting up the posters was no small feat, taking over six months. After the script was crafted, it underwent translation, and appropriate visuals were carefully selected for each poster. Evelyn, overseeing the layout, emphasised the preference for pastel colours to maintain a solemn atmosphere, recognising that death is a somber occasion.



The posters outlining Catholic beliefs at the parlour.

After meticulously whitewashing, painting, and varnishing the bare boards, the 20 laminated posters were finally put up in early 2023. Among them, four panels showcase exquisite flower paintings skilfully crafted by Pauline Eu.

We hope that many will be touched by the little information given on these boards in the spirit of evangelisation, and make attempts to get to know more about the Catholic faith and fall in love with it!



## Rebuilding a missionary SFA Church

CHERAS: The Church of St Francis of Assisi (SFA) hosted its annual Parish Pastoral Assembly (PPA) on January 20, drawing an attendance of around 200 participants comprising parish council leaders, ministry leaders and parishioners.

This year's PPA centred around the theme *Rebuilding a Missionary SFA Church*, aligning with the overarching theme of the KL Archdiocesan Pastoral Assembly 2023, *Rebuild our Church*.

The assembly began with a praise & worship session, led by the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Ministry. Parish priest Fr Paul Cheong, OFM Cap, extended a warm welcome to the participants, emphasising that their presence was not coincidental but led by the Holy Spirit.

Following this, a video titled *Our Journey Together 2023, from Feedback to Action* was presented, providing a visual overview of how the leadership team has actively responded to valuable feedback collected last year through the implementation of new initiatives and strategic steps.

William Cheong, the Parish Pastoral Council chairman, then presented the 2024 plan, outlining the parish's five-year rebuilding plan from 2022 to 2026. The jour-



The participants during the spiritual conversation.

ney, initiated in 2022 with the building of a Participatory SFA Church, focusing on 'finding workers for the vineyard' and 'building a vibrant community.' The subsequent year saw the commencement of the synodal process, actively addressing grassroots concerns.

Looking forward, leaders and parishioners were encouraged to adopt a missionary mind set. Nineteen strategic plans were devised to transition from a maintenance-oriented church to a missionary one, guided by the 'SFA Eight Habits of Effective

Christian Living.'

Danny Nesan, the chairman of the Parish Coordinating Council, then provided a briefing on Spiritual Conversation using the See-Judge-Act method. He reminded the participants of the significance of seeing through the eyes of Jesus, judging with the discerning spirit of God, and acting as Christ would.

Participants were then divided into discussion groups, each focusing on three key topics: *Participatory Church*, *Synodal Church*, and *Missionary Church*. Each group engaged in the Spiritual Conversation rounds,

tackling questions about the joys, obstacles, and proposed solutions of belonging to a Participatory/Synodal/Missionary SFA Church.

The gathered feedback was synthesised and presented after the tea break. General sentiments revealed that parishioners feel blessed to be part of a vibrant church with systematic management, effective leadership, and well-equipped facilities. The diverse needs and interests of the community are catered for through numerous programmes. However, some areas still need addressing, such as BEC participation, youth involvement, and succession planning.

In his closing remarks, Fr Paul urged the participants to embrace Jesus' great commandment to 'Love God and our neighbour' and the great commission to 'Go and make disciples'. It was a call to action, an invitation for each participant to actively engage in the life and mission of the parish, collectively contributing to the transformation of SFA into a vibrant community of effective missionary disciples.

The assembly concluded with Fr Paul leading the participants in the hymn *Spirit of the Living God*, invoking the Holy Spirit to guide the community on its spiritual renewal journey. — **By Anne Ng**

## Inaugural Santo Nino feast held in Penang

GEORGE TOWN: It was a historical first for the Filipino Catholic Community of Penang (FCCP) in organising the inaugural Santo Nino feast at the Church of Our Lady of Sorrows (City Parish) on January 21.

This feast day was celebrated for the first

time within the Diocese of Penang, and was well received, with the attendance of more than 200 Filipino Catholics residing within the diocese.

Santo Nino is a title used for the Holy Child, with the icon originating from Cebu

in the Philippines in the year 1521 and the feast day traditionally being commemorated on the third Sunday of January every year.

The Eucharistic celebration was presided over by Fr Desmond Jansen (assistant parish priest) with Fr Edmund Woon (parish priest) as the concelebrant.

In commending the faith of the local Filipino community in preparing for the feast, Fr Desmond shared in his homily on the importance of prayer that leads to deeper faith in the Lord.

"It is therefore necessary to keep praying until something happens, and to see that God will surely do what is best for us as His children," he said.

Reflecting on the celebration of the Infant Jesus, Fr Desmond urged the faithful to be childlike on their faith journey, constantly being aware of the need to have open hearts that are receptive towards God's way for their lives.

"To be childlike in faith is to be pure in

heart, sincere in our deeds and love unconditionally as God has loved us," he said.

The highlight of the celebration took place after Mass, with the Sinulog procession that includes the carrying of the Santo Nino statue around the church compound.

With exclamations of *Viva Pit Senor* (meaning "Hail the Lord Holy Child"), it was a carnival-like atmosphere with the Filipino parishioners dancing and singing to joyous tunes in a profound expression of faith and love.

FCCP chairperson, Ophel Ilagan, was touched by the unity and support of the Filipino parishioners through their tenacity and dedication in bringing life to the celebration for the first time since the establishment of the group more than 20 years ago.

"We are grateful to be able to celebrate this feast on a large scale here in Penang, and to showcase the richness of our culture to the local community," she said. — **By Aaron Lim**



The statue of the Holy Child leading the procession.



# Catholics lawyers celebrate anniversary

By Christina Param

SHAH ALAM: The Catholic Lawyers' Society of Kuala Lumpur celebrated their 30th Votive Mass of the Holy Spirit, more commonly known as the Red Mass, January 13 at the Church of Divine Mercy.

This Mass, which is celebrated annually to consecrate and pray for the Society and all its members and all practitioners of the Law and administration of justice, carried the theme *Teach me your law...* which was apt to commemorate the memorial of St Hilary of Poitiers, another patron saint of lawyers and champion of orthodoxy, "the Hammer of the Arians" and a Doctor of the Church.

As the Society marks its 30th year as a registered society this year, it continues its focus on creating public awareness and protecting children's rights and interests in



Catholics lawyers after the Red Mass at the Church of the Divine Mercy, Shah Alam.

Malaysia enshrined in the Federal Constitution, the supreme law of our beloved nation, as well as in many statutes.

The main celebrant was the Apostolic Nuncio to Malaysia, Archbishop Wojciech Zaluski, who touched the hearts of the congregation and lawyers and encouraged them by his uplifting homily. The archbishop

exhorted the congregation to focus on the person of Jesus, and keep the strong faith demonstrated by the Lord Jesus Christ in the Gospel, while carrying out the mission of upholding and dispensing justice in their daily lives, and emphasised on the concept of democracy in a community and advocating for world peace.

Concelebrating with the nuncio was Archbishop Julian Leow, ecclesiastical assistant Fr Gregory Chan, Fr Michael Dass and Fr Simon Labrooy.

The Mass was planned and enthusiastically animated by a few lawyers themselves, some comprising the Executive Committee members of the Society/Past Presidents of the Society and even Young Catholic Lawyers' taking on roles as reader, cantor, hospitality ministers and offertory bearers.

The Society's hope is that all its members will continue to support the Society in all of its significant causes, programmes and initiatives.

The Red Mass concluded with a photo session at the main entrance with all the lawyers and celebrants followed by a fellowship at the Wisma CNI within the church's vicinity.



IPOH: Rock gardens worldwide showcase diverse materials and designs. In Japan, these gardens often feature dry water elements such as a dry pond, a dry waterfall, and even a dry stream. Some incorporate a mix of plants, shrubs, and cacti for added variety. The Church of St Michael initiated the creation of a unique rock garden named Mary's Rock Garden – the Rock Garden of Grace, during the Advent season of 2023.

The rocks are actually factory-made stones that were painted by the members of the SMC Evergreens Art and Craft Class. With Pauline Eu and Mary Jo Moh as their instructors, they managed to paint a number of rocks with the Christmas theme to decorate the area around the shrine of Our

## SMC's Rock Garden of Grace

Lady of Fatima for Christmas.

'Rocks hold a special meaning for many. God Himself is known as the Rock of Ages, an immovable constant. Besides being used to beautify and landscape, the rocks can be creative and inspiring,' said Mary Jo.

'Rocks are healing,' said Pauline, 'and painting them can be very therapeutic and motivating. SMC parishioners were encouraged to paint their own rocks and after the weekend Masses on December 17, 2023, parishioners of all ages were seen painting the rocks before placing them in designated areas below the wooden Christmas trees near the Shrine of Mother Mary.'

When Christmas was over, more rocks

were painted and placed on the ground. A wooden board with a poem was also put up. It welcomed people to the Rock Garden of Grace where they could gather rocks of mercy, compassion, courage and forgiveness and harvest rocks of understanding, friendship and kindness. In short, the rocks would help them remove negativity and experience healing.

The day after Epiphany, the Christmas theme was changed to the Chinese New Year theme, to the delight of the Chinese parishioners. The themes will be changed from time to time and it is hoped that more parishioners will contribute to the rocks to make the Rock Garden grow! — **By Jennifer Duarte**

## Workshop for mental health first responders

SETAPAK: The Archdiocesan Mental Health Ministry (AMHM), at the invitation of the Family Life Ministry of the Good Shepherd Church, conducted an empowering workshop titled *Understanding and Assisting: First Steps to Mental Health Support for the first responder team* recently.

This workshop addressed mental health issues and emphasised the importance of being a good listener among first responders. It provided a platform for attendees to engage in open discussions, share experiences, and acquire practical strategies for active listening and maintaining personal mental well-being.

Participants engaged in practical exercises to develop effective communication and active listening skills, learning to identify alarming symptoms associated with mental health issues. The workshop highlighted the crucial role of a first responder in helping the community, underscoring their significance in providing timely support.

The AMHM Team extends sincere gratitude to all participants and contributing organisations for their commitment to the success of this event. By breaking the stigma associated with seeking help, the workshop has taken a significant step towards promoting mental health awareness.



Participants during the practical exercise.

### Letters to Editor

## Self-care important for our clergy

Dear Editor,

It's time we turn our attention to the unsung heroes of the spiritual realm – Catholic priests. Yes, it's time for all of our beloved priests to embrace a holy trinity of fitness, nutrition, and self-care. They work tirelessly to ensure that their parishioners are well taken care of, but who is taking care of them?

Let's get down to some serious facts on why our priests need to start taking their health seriously:

- Keeping up with the groupies – priests need to have an oversight on all the church activities e.g. RCIA, liturgy, altar servers, EMHC, choir, etc. As such, they need to have balanced mental health when it comes to dealing with all the characters each individual group holds, as well as look into the many demands that need their approval.

- They need to be able to resist the devil – The devil is always lurking around the corner, trying to tempt people into sin.

Priests need to be strong in guts and healthy in mind so that they can resist the devil's advances and stay true to their faith.

- Confessional a.k.a. Holy Venting – Priests have all the latest inside scoop on the holy hush-hush. Without them, honestly, where do we turn to and complain about that annoying parishioner that won't stop asking for extra blessings after each Mass or how about that other irritating parishioner that keeps gossiping about people's

lives yet claims to be holier than thou. Yet we claim, 'Love thy neighbour as yourself'. The patience that our priests have in listening to our daily sins is beyond any church's annual collection. At this rate we will eventually start seeing our priests ageing.

Bottom line is this; priests are no different from the rest of us, except they are oftentimes idealised and held to a certain standard where they feel that they can't seek help though, realistically, they do have health

insurance that is paid for regardless, it seems to be mission impossible every time they want to schedule check-ups.

Let's embrace a supportive nature towards our beloved priests. Let's give them the time, space and energy to rest, relax, recuperate and get their health taken care of.

At the end of the day we know that a priest has a tough job, but somebody's got to do it!

**Connie Stephen**  
Kuala Lumpur

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# Discern annulment cases 'with prayer, on your knees'



Pope Francis meets with members of the Tribunal. (Vatican Media)

VATICAN: Pope Francis inaugurated the Vatican's judicial year and urged officials of the Tribunal of the Roman Rota to pray fervently as they discern cases that hit their docket.

In a speech delivered to mark the inauguration of the Judicial Year in the Vatican City State on January 25, the Pope discussed the process of discernment as it applies to annulment cases.

He discussed the tension between justice and mercy, the importance of prayer for the judges' work, and the close relationship between judicial discernment and synodality.

"Without prayer," Pope Francis stressed, "one cannot be a judge. If any of you are not praying, please resign... That would be better."

He went on to underline that "discernment is done on one's knees, imploring the gift of the Holy Spirit; only in this way can decisions be reached that promote the good of individuals and the entire Church community."

als and the entire Church community."

"I ask each one of you," Pope Francis said, "Do you pray? Do you feel with the Church? Are you humble in prayer, asking the Lord for light?"

"I come back to this," the Pope emphasised. "A judge's prayer is essential to his task. If a judge does not pray or cannot pray, he had better go and do another job."

The Pope then went on to stress the importance of the responsibility facing the judges of the Rota, who must decide whether to grant annulments when they have been contested in lower courts.

Achieving the "moral certainty" necessary to make such decisions, the Pope said, is no easy feat.

Officials of the Tribunal, he noted, have thus been entrusted with a "great responsibility" by the Church, because these decisions "powerfully influence the lives of individuals and families."

and families."

Pope Francis also commented on his 2015 reform of annulment proceedings, which implemented various measures to speed up the process.

This move, he said, was "inspired by mercy towards the faithful in problematic situations."

At the same time, however, he said, it ought not to be misunderstood: its aim was to favour "not the annulment of marriages, but the speed of processes."

This led the Pope to discuss the tension between justice and mercy, a theme he has often returned to during his pontificate.

"Highlighting the importance of mercy in family pastoral work, as I did in particular in the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*,"

he said, "does not diminish our commitment to seeking justice in annulment cases."

Rather, he noted, quoting St Thomas Aquinas: "Mercy does not take away justice, but is the fullness of justice."

Finally, Pope Francis stressed that the process of judicial discernment is "supported and guaranteed" by synodality.

"When the tribunal is collegial," he said, "or when there is only one judge but he consults with those in authority, discernment takes place in an atmosphere of dialogue or discussion in a common search for truth."

The Pope brought his address to a close by entrusting the work of the judges to *Most Holy Mary, Virgo prudentissima* and *Speculum iustitiae*, the Most Wise Virgin and Mirror of Justice. — **By Joseph Tulloch, Vatican News**

## Vatican to protect internal whistleblowers

VATICAN: Pope Francis has taken further steps to fight corruption within the Holy See and Vatican City State by issuing new norms to protect internal whistleblowers who report financial misconduct.

The new measures, published on January 24, stipulate that the Office of the Auditor General must protect the identity of individuals who report irregularities, whether in person or in writing, including by email.

Even professional secrecy, particularly strict within the Vatican, is lifted if reports concern malfunctions that could pose a threat or "harm to the common good". It may also involve irregularities in the awarding of public contracts, codified in the Vatican since 2020.

Among examples of irregularities, the explanatory document accompanying the new Vatican rules mentions "accounting irregularities" and "false statements".

"Reports should not concern complaints of a personal nature" or "complaints falling under the discipline of employment relationships" with a hierarchical superior. Anonymous letters are also excluded, which, in fact,

are not uncommon within the Vatican.

In any case, according to the new norms, a whistleblower's identity can only be disclosed to the Vatican's justice system. A whistleblower can be any employee of Vatican City, the Roman Curia, or other institutions affiliated with the Holy See, such as pontifical institutes or, for instance, an entity like the Bambino Gesù Children's Hospital in Rome. A subcontractor working for the Vatican can also report irregularities.

With these very concrete measures, Pope Francis furthered his efforts at cleaning up the Holy See's financial practices, a project that was actually begun by Benedict XVI, but is especially seen as a top priority of the Argentine pope. Francis, in fact, is the one who created the Office of Auditor General in 2014, specially entrusting its head with the task of fighting corruption.

The current Auditor General is Alessandro Cassinis Righini, a lay economist specialising in business administration and corporate strategy. He formerly worked for the Deloitte Group. — **By Loup Besmond de Senneville, LCI** (<https://international.la-croix.com/>)

## Indonesian diocese to build church after 15-year wait

JAKARTA: A Catholic diocese in Indonesia started the construction of a church 15 years after its construction license was withheld because of resistance from local Muslims.

Holy Cross Bishop Antonius Subianto Bunjamin of Bandung, the president of the Indonesian Bishops' Conference, led a groundbreaking ceremony for the construction of St Benedict Church in Padalarang sub-district, West Bandung Regency January 22.

Local Catholics and government officials attended the event.

"We hope that this church can be used by around 4,000 Catholics around Padalarang, Cipatat, Batujajar, Ngamprah and Cisarua," said Tri Basuki Joewono, chairman of the church construction committee.

"So, the people will no longer need to travel far away to worship," said Joewono, the rector of Parahyangan Catholic University in Bandung.

Until now local Catholics had to go to faraway places, including the one in the neighbouring Cimahi municipality for church services.

The church officials in 2009 proposed the construction of St Benedict church, the first Catholic church in West Bandung Regency but failed to get the construction license.

According to a government rule, written consent from local residents, including Muslims, is needed to get a construction permit for a worship place.

The 2006 joint regulations of the Home Ministry and Ministry for Religious Affairs require religious communities to obtain 90 signatures from their own community and 60 signatures from local residents to get permits for places of worship.

The rule was widely criticised by rights groups for making it difficult for minority religious groups to establish places of worship.

Muslim groups, a majority in most areas, often oppose the construction of churches.

In 2015, they put up posters at the proposed site of the church saying a Christian worship place cannot be allowed in a Muslim-majority area.

Joewono said for the past 15 years they



Holy Cross Bishop Antonius Subianto Bunjamin of Bandung, the president of Indonesian Bishops' Conference leads a groundbreaking ceremony for the construction of the Church of St Benedict in West Bandung Regency January 22. (UCA News Photo/Bandung Diocese)

have interacted with the residents to get support.

The process took a long time because people had to get to know each other and live side by side first, he said.

"Because we know each other and help each other, we are now appreciated and they are grateful to us," he said.

Arsan Latif, acting Regent (district chief) of West Bandung, said he supports the construction of the church because the constitution guarantees the protection of citizens' rights to religion.

He said the government permitted the construction after all conditions were met.

"The government guarantees the safety and comfort of worship," he said.

However, there are still many churches that have not received permission and have been waiting for years, Church sources say.

In November last year, St Theresa Catholic Church in Cikarang, Bekasi Regency received permission after 18 years. — **ucanews.com**

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# Password for a lively and joyful life

VATICAN: "Love is the primary reason for the existence of the Church," Pope Francis begins the letter accompanying the new edition of *YouCat*, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* written for adolescents and young people.

The full text was published by the Italian newspaper *La Stampa* and is titled *The Password for Joy*, which, according to the Pope, is found precisely within the catechism.

The Pope explains that this "love" of which he speaks is primarily the love that God the Father revealed to the world through Jesus.

However, he also points out that there is another love that comes from each person: the love that believers, in turn, profess for Jesus Christ.

"He is the centre of our heart. How, in fact, can we not have feelings of true affection towards Him who has made us partakers of a love, that of the Father, a love about which it is impossible to imagine a greater one?" the Pope wrote in his letter. "The believer is,



Young people at the World Youth Day in Lisbon, Portugal, Aug 3, 2023. (World Youth Day facebook)

therefore, always in love with Jesus."

The pontiff also noted that it is the duty of "adults in faith" to make Jesus Christ known to those who have not yet had the opportu-

nity. This encounter, the Holy Father said, must be proposed through the catechism, which reveals the love that Catholics feel for the Lord.

"This beautiful book that you now have in your hands has its origin precisely in such a love: the love for Jesus that we believers hold within us," he said.

Regarding the importance of the catechism for young people, Pope Francis recalled his predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI, who wrote in the preface to the first edition of *YouCat*: "This book is compelling because it speaks to us of our very destiny and therefore concerns each of us intimately. Because of this I ask you: Study the catechism with passion and perseverance!"

Pope Francis referenced these words and also recommended that young people frequently read the Gospel and pray daily to "transfer" the attitudes of Jesus from the mind to the heart.

"Here is the password for a truly lively and joyful life," the Pope said, "to look at and judge what happens to us and the decisions we are called to make with the same eyes, with the same feelings, with the same attitude that embodied Jesus." — **By Andrés Henríquez, CNA**

## Rome celebrates Christian unity week with joint prayers, and a woman preaching

VATICAN: Just next to the Basilica of Sts. Celso and Giuliano — a popular spot for the traditional Latin Mass here in the Eternal City — is Ponte Sant'Angelo Methodist Church, an English language congregation that proudly boasts, "Everyone is welcome, whatever their background."

And on January 21, the Church gave

lived expression to that when Xavière Sr Nathalie Becquart (*pic*), a No. 2 official at the Vatican's synod office, preached during its Sunday service.

Becquart's invita-



tion to preach was part of a flurry of events that took place in Rome during the annual *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity*, an octave-long celebration that's been taking place for over a century.

As the Rev Matthew Laferty, director of the Methodist Ecumenical Office in Rome, explained, the congregation has a custom of inviting a preacher or preachers from non-Methodist Christian traditions to preach on the Sunday of the annual week dedicated to praying for Christian unity.

That may be tradition, but there was a novelty about it, too.

"It certainly would have been the first time that a high-ranking Vatican official, who is a woman, preached at Ponte Sant'Angelo," observed Laferty.

During her remarks, Becquart, a French sister, reflected on the Gospel passage of the good Samaritan.

Laferty recalled that Becquart reminded the congregation that the Gospel asks the question: "Who do we identify as our sister and brother?"

"In recognising each other in our common baptism as Christians, and seeing the text from that perspective ... that leads us into the action of the Good Samaritan," said Laferty, adding that Becquart's words served as a reminder that "the path of Christ is also the path of unity." — **By Christopher White, NCR**



Pope Francis meets Anglican Archbishop Ian Ernest, the archbishop of Canterbury's representative in Rome, and Orthodox Metropolitan Polykarpos of Italy, the Ecumenical Patriarchate's representative in Rome, during an ecumenical evening prayer service marking the end of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity at the Basilica of St Paul Outside the Walls in Rome January 25, 2024. (CNS/Vatican Media)

## Pope Francis meets with President of Timor-Leste



The exchange of gifts during the audience.

VATICAN: Pope Francis met with East Timorese president José Manuel Ramos-Horta in the Vatican's Apostolic Palace recently.

At the audience with Pope Francis, which lasted for about 45 minutes, the Holy Father presented President Ramos-Horta with a bronze sculpture representing fraternity, along with several volumes of papal documents and this year's Message for Peace.

The President, for his part, offered the Pope a typical "tais" cloth with an image of Pope Francis painted by a local craftsman; a rosary made with sandalwood stones; and some East Timorese coffee produced from beans consumed by native marsupials.

He also gave the Pope a copy of the *Document on Fraternity* signed by the parliament of Timor-Leste. — **Vatican News**

## Vatican insists preparations for Jubilee 2025 well underway

VATICAN: There is less than a year to go before the start of the Jubilee 2025. And the Vatican official in charge of organising the holy year has sought to reassure the nearly 35 million pilgrims and visitors who are expected to come to Rome for the event that preparations are well underway.

Archbishop Rino Fisichella, pro-prefect of the Dicastery for Evangelisation, told journalists on January 23 that "773 people are involved" in helping his office prepare for the jubilee. "No one can say that we are a ghost that does not exist," insisted the 72-year-old Italian theologian.

His remark was clearly aimed at those, including some officials inside the Roman

Curia, who have criticized the poor state of preparations for the upcoming jubilee, an event the Vatican organises every 25 years. Archbishop Fisichella said his office has already held numerous meetings with the more than twenty committees that are helping to prepare for Jubilee 2025.

"The jubilee is not just about the construction projects happening in the city of Rome," he said, emphasising that it is primarily a "spiritual event".

In fact, Pope Francis officially launched a "Year of Prayer" on January 21 to precede the jubilee's opening, and Fisichella's office is preparing an eight-book series called *Notes on Prayer*. They will be issued in Italian by

the Vatican Publishing House but could also be translated into other languages, although no one has provided any details on this matter.

"The Year of Prayer, therefore, fits into this context as a way of fostering the relationship with the Lord," explained Archbishop Fisichella. "It is like an oasis sheltered from daily stress where prayer becomes nourishment for the Christian life of faith, hope and charity."

Jubilee 2025 is expected to officially begin in late December 2024 with the opening of the Holy Door at St Peter's Basilica. It will feature a series of gatherings organised in Rome throughout the year for various categories or

groups of people. For instance, families, artists, the sick, Catholics recently confirmed, political leaders, journalists, and members of the Curia, will be invited to take part in their own special pilgrimage in the Eternal City. This will include walking through the "Holy Door" at St Peter's, a gesture that is often associated with conversion and salvation.

Archbishop Fisichella said that the Pope still has to provide guidance on how this jubilee can be experienced, noting that the Pope's "bull of indiction" to officially launch Jubilee 2025 will only be published on the Feast of the Ascension. That is on May 9. — **By Loup Besmond de Senneville, LCI (<https://international.la-croix.com/>)**



# Let the synodal consultations continue

In the next few months, American Catholics will be consulted in preparation for the second and final session of the Synod on Synodality, which will take place in October this year.

The first session of the synod took place last October after extensive consultations over more than a year. Local churches, dioceses and other institutions held listening sessions and other events where Catholics could air their hopes and concerns about the Church. The new round of consultations must be completed in a couple of months so the input can be processed by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops and sent to Rome in a timely fashion.

The American bishops were invited to hold two or three diocesan listening sessions in a January 2 letter from Bishop Daniel Flores of Brownsville, Texas, who, as chair of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee on Doctrine, has acted as the bishops' point man on the synod.

A three- to five-page report on the listening sessions must be sent by each diocese to the bishops' conference by April 8, with the US bishops' conference summary of those sessions due in Rome in May.

This gives bishops little time to organise and hold these meetings, especially if there is going to be any parish participation. It is likely that the bishops will simply invite the same people who participated in the diocesan consultations that took place before the first session of the synod, with very little parish-level input.

If the listening sessions are done properly,

they will take a whole day each, not just an hour or two.

Pope Francis would like the entire Church to use the same methodology of "conversations in the Spirit" that was used in the synod itself. This involves prayer and presentations by experts on the issues, followed by roundtable discussions in 10-person small groups, which then report their results to the entire assembly.

The roundtable discussions involve three steps. First, each person shares their experience and thoughts on the issue. Then, after a period of silent prayer and reflection, each person shares how they were moved by what they heard. Finally, another period of silent prayer and reflection is followed by an open exchange of views.

The American temptation is to rush the process. We tend to focus on what we individually want to say rather than patiently listening to the Spirit as expressed by others.

According to Flores' letter, the synod secretariat in Rome wants participants to focus on two guiding questions: "Where have I seen or experienced successes — and distresses — within the Church's structure(s)/organisation/leadership/life that encourage or hinder the mission?" and "How can the structures and organisation of the Church help all the baptised to respond to the call to proclaim the Gospel and to live as a community of love



**Should we focus on other people's sex lives or on the hungry, the thirsty and the displaced?**

and mercy in Christ?"

Notice two things about these questions.

First, the focus is on "mission" or how to "respond to the call to proclaim the Gospel and to live as a community of love and mercy in Christ?" For Francis, the Church is not simply a place where we hold hands and feel good about ourselves; it is outward-looking, a sign and instrument of communion with God and the world. This is the mission of all Catholics, not just the clergy.

We also need to discuss mission priorities. Should we focus on other people's sex lives or on the hungry, the thirsty and the displaced? Is part of the Church's mission to be a leader in saving the planet from global warming?

Second, the focus is not on doctrine but structures, organisation, leadership and life that encourage or hinder the mission. Perhaps Rome is hoping to avoid controversial debates by presenting the question this way, but in the United States, it will be difficult to discuss "leadership" without facing the issues of women's ordination to the diaconate and priesthood, let alone priestly celibacy.

For example, since priestly celibacy was hardly discussed at the first session of the synod, those in favour of optional celibacy need to express their concerns in the diocesan sessions about a less sacramental Church —

with fewer priests to celebrate the Eucharist, anoint the sick and hear confessions — if they want it on the agenda of the synod.

Discussion of structures and leadership also must focus on the role of the laity in the life of the Church. Laypeople are already performing pastoral, charitable and justice ministries, but the decision-making is still tightly controlled by clerics, who too often do not respect the consultative structures of the Church. Getting clerics to let go and listen involves conversion and training as seminarians and priests. No wonder the synod put reforming seminary formation on the agenda of the Church.

In addition to the diocesan listening sessions, Flores reports that "the USCCB will be holding additional listening sessions at the national level with a focus on participation, social justice, and vocations." Is this an attempt to remove these topics from diocesan discussions? I hope not, but certainly some bishops will use these national discussions as a way of cutting off local discussions.

Little has been revealed about these national discussions. We do know that those involved in the US bishops' conference discussions will be selected from those participating in the diocesan listening sessions.

Flores is aware of the challenges of having such diocesan and national listening sessions. "We all know time is short," he wrote, "but even modest efforts at the local level can bear much fruit. Let us do what we can, as well as we can and trust the Lord to accomplish beyond what we can foresee." Amen. — **By Thomas Reese, NCR**



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

## Maverick Pope scrambles the Vatican's communications operation (again)

From the beginning, Pope Francis has taken a decidedly maverick approach to the use of the media, often bypassing institutional channels of communication in order to express himself directly through personally arranged interviews, in-flight press conferences, phone calls and messages, and off-the-cuff remarks in settings both public and private.

Thus, it probably should be no surprise that Francis once again has ignored the standard playbook, creating a brand-new position of "director of communication" for St Peter's Basilica on January 19 and naming as its first occupant Franciscan Fr Enzo Fortunato (*pic*), a well-known personality in Italian media who previously ran the press office of the basilica and Franciscan friary in Assisi.

At the same time, the pontiff also named the 57-year-old Fortunato as the coordinator of the World Day of Children, which is scheduled to be celebrated in the Vatican May 25-26.



Last Nov 6, Fortunato was the principal organiser of an event titled "Children Meet the Pope" which brought 7,000 children from around the world to an encounter with Pope Francis in the Vatican's Paul VI Audience Hall.

Given that a papal basilica never before has had its own spokesman, especially one with the high media profile of Fortunato, it's not entirely clear what his responsibilities will be, or

how they will be coordinated with the existing Dicastery for Communication and the Holy See Press Office under its director, Italian layman Matteo Bruni.

Many observers believe that bringing Fortunato to the Vatican may be part of the pontiff's preparations for the Great Jubilee of 2025, and the additional demands from the world's media the event is expected to create.

Fortunato is the co-host of a weekly programme on Italy's national television broadcaster, RAI, called *In Cammino*, or "On the Way."

He's long been an admirer of Pope Francis, and his most recent book, *Processo a Francesco (Francis on Trial)*, compares judgments faced by St Francis of Assisi during his lifetime, including internal tensions that led to his resignation as head of the new Franciscan order, to the criticism that has dogged the pontiff over the course of his papacy.

Fortunato has an active Facebook account with more than 231,000 followers, and is in the habit of frequently posting live messages, referring to his viewers as *brava gente* (good people), which is also the title of Fortunato's personal web site.

The phrase *brava gente* is also evocative in the history of St Francis. Tradition holds that when he took refuge in the Italian community of Poggio Bustone in 1208/1209 after renouncing his father's inheritance, he was in the habit of taking walks through town and greeting people by saying *Buongiorno, brava gente!*

Over the summer, the pontiff agreed to an impromptu Facebook live with Fortunato from his residence in the Vatican's Domus Santa Marta. According to the Italian newspa-

per *Corriere della Sera*, the video marked the first time a pope has taken part in a live social media broadcast that wasn't conducted by one of the Vatican's own official platforms.

In recent social media posts, Fortunato expressed enthusiasm for his new assignments.

"I thank the Holy Father for the faith and the affection he's shown me, on a day in which he's asked to serve the Church with these delicate commitments and to live my vocation through the communication of the Christian message," he said.

"I'm grateful to Pope Francis and his collaborators," Fortunato said. "I'll live [the new situation] with the same spirit as at Assisi, knowing that for each one of us the Lord reserves pages of our lives to be written in service."

Originally from Italy's Amalfi coast, Fortunato was ordained to the priesthood in 1994. In his new role he'll work closely with the Archpriest of St Peter's Basilica, Cardinal Mauro Gambetti, a fellow Franciscan and a former colleague from when Gambetti served as the custodian of the basilica and friary in Assisi from 2013 to 2020. — **Cruz**



# For persons who are seriously ill

## Pope's prayer intention for February

When I mentioned the Pope's prayer focus for February, which is praying *for the terminally ill*, Datuk Seri Dr T. Devaraj expressed concern about the term 'terminally ill,' finding it ambiguous and restrictive. Dr Devaraj, soon to be a centenarian, serves as chairman of the Penang Hospice Society and vice-chairman of the National Cancer Society of Malaysia, Penang Branch, reflective of his truly altruistic contribution to society.

The term "terminally ill" is often used to describe individuals diagnosed with medical conditions which cannot be cured. While the term is widely understood and commonly used in medical and healthcare contexts pertaining to the inevitable outcome of the medical condition, focusing on the endpoint of life, some feel that it may not fully capture the complexity of the situation, as its genesis usually is one of many years, or convey the full range of experiences, emotions, and challenges that individuals facing a life-limiting illness, and their loved ones go through.

Additionally, using person-first language, such as "individuals with serious illnesses" or "people facing critical health challenges," emphasises the person rather than the condition. It's essential to be mindful of the language used to ensure respect and empathy for those experiencing difficult health situations.

Hence, I am going to refer to the prayer intention as praying *"for persons who are seriously ill"*. I believe that it is vital to reflect on how we 'categorise' persons who are seriously ill. This will determine not only our prayer for them but also our relationship with them.

Dr Devaraj also discussed the challenges of caring for patients in hospice and how it can



### PRAYER PRISM

Fr Fabian Dicom

be tough for everyone involved — patients and families, medical professionals, other caregivers. Shortage of volunteers makes the situation more demanding. On why he chose this path, Dr Devaraj credited his family, especially his father, who cared deeply about the wellbeing of individuals and society. This made me think about our families, BECs and parish communities as essential places to nurture and empower persons to care for persons who are seriously ill. It should not be the work of just a few; everyone in the community must be involved. Persons facing serious illness should also be at the heart of the Church's story, not pushed to the margins/peripheries. It's a call for all of us to pray for and be present to those who are seriously ill, making our communities places of comfort and support.

From the time I was a seminarian right until today I have found it very challenging to visit, pray and support individuals facing serious illness and approaching the end of their lives. While relying on The Roman Ritual with the set prayers for the sacrament of the anointing of the sick and Viaticum, the difficult task was always to find meaningful ways to pray for, pray with, or pray over these persons and to just be with them. In these moments, it was important for me to remember what we learnt during the Clinical Pastoral Education programme and that is to avoid clichéd expres-

sions, such as "I know how you feel," "I can imagine how you feel," "Live for today," "You're so brave," "Everything happens for a reason," "It's God's will" "God doesn't give us more than we can handle," and "You are going to a better place." The goal is to offer genuine and comforting words that do not inadvertently upset the person who is unwell.

Prof. Xavier Pereira, psychiatrist and psychotherapist, brought to my attention the five stages of dying, commonly known as the Kübler-Ross model. Initially identified by psychiatrist Dr Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, these stages represent a framework for understanding the emotional and psychological experiences that individuals may go through when facing serious illness or the prospect of death. The stages are:

1. Denial: The initial stage involves disbelief and a refusal to accept the reality of the diagnosis or prognosis.
2. Anger: As the gravity of the situation sets in, individuals may experience frustration, resentment, and anger. This can be directed towards themselves, family members, others, or even a higher power.
3. Bargaining: In this stage, individuals may attempt to negotiate or make deals in an effort to postpone or change the outcome. This can involve seeking alternative treatments, making promises to a higher power, or trying to find ways to extend life.
4. Depression: As the reality of the situation becomes more apparent, a sense of sadness, helplessness, and mourning may set in. This stage involves coming to terms with the impending loss.
5. Acceptance: The final stage involves acknowledging and accepting the inevitabil-

ity of death. It doesn't necessarily mean that the individual is happy about it, but there is a sense of peace and readiness to face and even plan for the end. Within the family there is more openness and bonding.

Prof Xavier emphasised that individuals, whether they are medical professionals, caregivers, priests, chaplains, or family members, can enhance their ability to discern the appropriate pastoral care for those facing serious illness. By understanding and acknowledging the five stages of dying, we can cultivate greater empathy and provide optimal care to those in need.

The Kübler-Ross model serves as a general framework rather than a rigid roadmap for everyone facing the end of life. Its stages can also vary with the ill person.

In responding to the Pope's call to pray for persons who are seriously ill, we are called to embody the essence of compassion. This entails advocating for comprehensive physical care, acknowledging the significance of spiritual support, and actively participating in the accompaniment of those facing the end of life. As a society, we have the power to shape an environment that values every life, regardless of its duration, and that ensures that no one walks the path of serious illness alone.

May this prayer serve as a catalyst for change, inspiring individuals, communities, and policymakers to work together in creating a world where the persons who are seriously ill, and their families, find solace, dignity, and love in the midst of life's most profound challenges.

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

## Introduce Vatican II to new generation

To understand how the Catholic Church interacts with the contemporary world, young people must learn the significance and historical context of the Second Vatican Council, the head of the Vatican office for new evangelisation said.

Overlooking Vatican II would mean failing to communicate to future generations "something that was truly an event that changed the face of the Church," Archbishop Rino Fisichella, pro-prefect of the Dicastery for Evangelisation's section for new evangelisation, said while opening a conference on Vatican II and millennials at Rome's Pontifical Lateran University recently.

Instead, millennials and other young people need to understand the council's coherence with the Church's history and take up its teachings to develop them within the magisterium, he said.

The council "was not a revolution," he said, but a "normal, decisive development that must be present in evangelisation." Quoting St Paul VI, he said that Vatican II was "nothing more than the presentation of a new face of the Church in the contemporary world."

For young people who feel disconnected from God, the documents of the Second Vatican Council articulate Christ's centrality in the Church and His close relationship with each person, Msgr Andrea Lonardo, director of pastoral outreach to university students for the Vicariate of Rome, explained.

He said that young people would benefit from understanding Christ as the "mediator and fullness of revelation" as stated in the council's Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*).

With ready access to information at their fingertips, millennials and other young people often think in terms of "immediacy," he

said, and "for them, something is true when it is not mediated," even love.

Such a mentality makes it difficult for them to feel God's love, which is mediated through Christ, he said, noting that for young people, having a mediator "means that there is something between me and God that I don't understand."

Yet, he said, *Dei Verbum* is a "personal" document that explains how one can form a relationship with God through Christ and His "charity, His words, the cross, the blood, the sweat, the food, the bread, the wine, the resurrection."

Presenting Christ as the fullness of revelation can speak to the hearts of many young people who are constantly active but are not fulfilled in their lives, he said.

And, Msgr Lonardo said, more than describing the liturgical reforms promulgated by St Paul VI, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*) also expresses the personal component of one's relationship with Christ during liturgical celebrations.

"It's secondary that the priest is over here and the people over there; Christ is present," he said. "Christ speaks to each person" during the liturgy, and the "personal presence of Christ is the development that the council gives us even today."

Oratorian Fr Maurizio Botta said that millennials, raised in a world saturated by technological advancement, can often be disoriented by the acritical acceptance of progress in society, but they can find refuge in the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)*.

"The social context (of the world), says

*Gaudium et Spes*, can lead to the bad, not only the good," he said. Yet "today when it comes to innovation, to technology, the attitude is preconditioned to be positive" and people unquestionably adopt technological advancements.

While he said he did not want to "demonise technology," Fr Botta said young people respond well when he encourages them to develop a healthy criticism toward new developments which are often designed to capture and retain a person's attention.

However, Niccolò Reale, a Catholic blogger and social media content producer, said that engaging with the digital world is essential to evangelisation with millennials and young people.

While priests dedicated to evangelisation used to go out into the streets to spread the Gospel to children and young people, "today the street has become Instagram, it's become TikTok," he said.

Reale shares Catholic ideas through his blog and Instagram pages, where he posts content ranging from personal testimonies of faith to memes promoting Catholic teachings. He said that as a layperson, he is able to communicate the faith to people in an uncomplicated way that resonates with his followers. Several of his videos on Instagram have gained more than 1 million views.

Although he noted that discussing the faith on social media does not mean one cannot be critical of social media, he said if Catholics "want to reach people's hearts today, because of the way the system works, we have to go to where young people spend their time," namely, on social media. — By Justin McLellan, CNS



Archbishop Rino Fisichella, pro-prefect of the Dicastery for Evangelization's section for new evangelization, speaks at a conference titled "Vatican II in the age of Millennials" at Rome's Pontifical Lateran University January 12, 2024. (CNS photo/Lola Gomez)





# Unity among Christians 'Is key for peace in the world'

**Newly consecrated shepherd of Helsinki, Bishop Raimo Goyarrola Belda shares his hopes for the local Church, discussing unity among Christians during his recent visit to Rome for the week of Prayer for Christian Unity.**

The journey of Fr Raimo Goyarrola Belda, a Spanish priest of the personal prelature of Opus Dei, to becoming the fifth bishop of the Diocese of Helsinki, began almost 20 years ago.

As Bishop Goyarrola tells it, Bishop Józef Wróbel in 2005 invited many bishops, including Bishop Javier Echevarría Rodríguez, the prelate of Opus Dei, to Helsinki for the anniversary of the diocese.

"After the Holy Mass, there was a lunch in the bishop's house during which the bishop asked the prelate of Opus Dei: 'Please send me one priest,'" the new bishop, 54, recalled. "And I don't know why, but he thought of me."

Although he had been hesitant at first to send any of his priests, the prelate of Opus Dei eventually called Fr Goyarrola to ask him whether he would consider moving to Finland.

"I answered very fast: 'Yes; yes!'" Bishop Goyarrola recounted. Even though the prelate of Opus Dei told the young priest to pray and think about his decision, since moving to Finland not only meant moving to another country but also getting accustomed to "another culture and another language," Bishop Goyarrola explained that he knew it was God's will: "I was ready to go to Finland."

The Opus Dei priest, in his 30s, arrived in Finland in 2006, where he began his pastoral work as a university chaplain, military chaplain and religion teacher in public schools. In addition to administering the sacraments in Finnish parishes, Fr Goyarrola was also entrusted with the particular mission of serving the Spanish-speaking community in Finland. In 2011, he was appointed Helsinki's diocesan vicar general.

## 'An Ecumenical Feast'

On September 29, 2023, during a Mass celebrated at St Henry's Cathedral in Helsinki, the apostolic nuncio to the Nordic countries, Archbishop Julio Murat, announced Father Goyarrola's appointment as the new bishop of Helsinki. Then, on Nov 25, Fr Goyarrola was consecrated bishop of Helsinki in St John's Lutheran Church (known locally as Johanneksen kirkko). Owing to the ecumenical dialogue in Finland, the Diocese of Helsinki is allowed to use Lutheran and Orthodox church buildings in 25 cities around the country for Catholic worship.

"Our cathedral in Helsinki is very small," Bishop Goyarrola said. "Perhaps there are enough seats for 200 people, but in Lutheran church Johanneksen kirkko, there are seats for

over 2,000 people."

Cardinal Anders Arborelius of Stockholm presided over the ordination, which many ecumenical representatives attended.

"Over 2,000 people attended my consecration," the bishop recalled. "It was amazing; it really was an ecumenical feast. There were many Catholics, of course, but also many Lutherans, Pentecostals, Orthodox, Methodists and Anglicans. It was like a council in the church!"

Present at the ordination service was also Benedictine Fr Augustinus Sander, an official of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, who presented a special greeting from Cardinal Kurt Koch, prefect of the dicastery. Sharing the joy for the Catholic Church in Finland but also that of the entire Finnish ecumenical contingent, Cardinal Koch encouraged the new bishop of Helsinki in his service to unity, saying that the new bishop's "truly Catholic heart beats for ecumenism."

Recalling the many graces that the Church in Finland has received in its ecumenical efforts, Bishop Goyarrola argued: "I think ecumenism is a key for peace in the world. In fact, I think that the present and future of the world depends on this unity among Christians."

## Christian Unity Since the Reformation

Despite the numerous and growing denominations nationwide, unity among Christians is not something foreign to Finnish history and culture, the bishop explained.

"During the first four centuries [after its Christianisation], Finland was Catholic," Bishop Goyarrola underlined, pointing out that Finland was at that time a part of Sweden.

"Then came the Reformation. But it was a, let's say, political reformation," Bishop Goyarrola argued. In fact, when King Gustav Vasa of Sweden — which at that time included Finland — broke away from the Catholic Church in 1527 and violently established Lutheranism as the state religion, historians have argued that it wasn't so much about his religious convictions as much as it was about freeing Sweden from foreign economic and political interests such as the Kalmar Union with Denmark, the Hanseatic League in Lübeck and



*Bishop Goyarrola with high-schoolers at a summer camp. He has served as a school chaplain and teacher during his time in Finland.*

the Catholic Church in Rome.

Because of the non-religious, political nature of the Reformation, "Finland remained very Catholic, even after the Reformation," the bishop continued, explaining how even decades after the Reformation, there was still a strong devotion to the Virgin Mary and various saints among Finns and Eucharistic adoration in churches around the country.

Because of this, Bishop Goyarrola explained, "there was and still is a very fine line between the Lutheran church and the Catholic Church in Finland. Actually, I think that the Lutheran church in Finland is the Lutheran church closest to the Catholic Church in the entire world."

"We are very close in both theology and liturgy, but also in heart and in mind," the bishop said.

## A small but growing Church

Comparing the size of Finland to that of Italy, the new Finnish bishop pointed out that while Italy today counts 225 dioceses and archdioceses, Finland only has one diocese. Further, in contrast to the 25,000 parishes dispersed across Italy, Finland only has "eight parishes and 25 priests."

"We travel a lot by car and by train," Bishop Goyarrola explained, "since it is a very large country, and there are many Catholics around the country."

On Sundays, he shared, each priest may have to celebrate three or four Masses in churches that are sometimes up to 125 miles apart.

Officially, there are about 18,000 Catholics in Finland, representing 0.3 per cent of the population. While the numbers are small, the Catholic Church in Finland is "a growing Church," Bishop Goyarrola emphasised. "Each year, [the Church welcomes] 500 to 600 new Catholics, either through baptism or immigration."

Like the Church in other Nordic countries, the Catholic Church in Finland is an "immigrant Church" — only half of the registered Catholics are native Finns.

"It is truly a Catholic Church because there are more than 115 nationalities," the bishop added. "The key is to understand that Catholicism unifies," he added, explaining that despite being so different, Catholics in Finland are united in and by virtue of Christ. "For this reason, the Catholic Church in Finland is really Catholic because it is one."

At the end of the day, where we come from is not as important as where we are going, the bishop pointed out. "We all want to go to heaven. And this also unifies us."

## 'Preach the Gospel with your life'

Reflecting upon the challenges of evangelis-

ing in such a large country with such a diverse Catholic population and so few priests, Bishop Goyarrola pointed out that everyone, regardless of their state of life or vocation, is called to preach the Gospel.

"It is with our testimony, our witness of faith, our friendship with friends, our love, our advice to someone who needs our advice, our prayers for them, our conversations about God, about family, about life," the new bishop shared, that we can evangelise today's society.

While being the only Catholic at school or work might be a hard reality for many, Bishop Goyarrola said, it is also "an opportunity to preach the Gospel with your life, your hope and your joy, just as the first Christians did."

Comparing the Church's evangelising efforts in Finland to those of the first Christians who gave a witness of Christ with their faithful lives, the bishop added: "In a way, every Christian is a church since every Christian belongs to the body of Christ," and as such, "every Christian is called to evangelisation."

"And in Finland," the bishop continued, "where we are so few [Catholics], evangelisation is very important, because if you don't preach the Gospel with your life, there is no one else to do it."

## Problems to solve and dreams to achieve

"I usually say that on my table there are two very long lists," Bishop Goyarrola said. "One list is the list of problems and challenges, and it is very, very long. But on my right side, I have a list of dreams, and it is longer than the list of problems."

Among his many hopes for the Church in Finland, the new bishop mentioned vocations to the priesthood and religious life, but also to the sacrament of holy matrimony.

"Often, when we talk about vocations, we only think about the priesthood," the bishop said. "But faithful matrimonies are as important. If there are faithful matrimonies, there are children, and if there are children, there are vocations."

Retirement homes for the elderly, palliative care units for the sick, and Catholic schools and summer camps for children also top the bishop's list of dreams.

"We have to pray and work together to make those dreams become reality," the bishop said enthusiastically.

The Finnish Catholics are a "people that are faithful to the Gospel and faithful to Our Lord, Jesus Christ," the bishop added. "And if you are faithful, wherever you are, you can change the world." — **By Bénédicte Cedergren, Register**



*Bishop Raimo Goyarrola exits St Henry Cathedral in Helsinki after celebrating his first Mass as a bishop November 26, 2023.*





## ON THE FENCE

Jacelyn Johnson

As a Catholic baptised as a baby, one tends to take all the rules and regulations of the Catholic Church for granted. I was born into a staunch Catholic family, who did all things Catholic by the book, went for catechism for at least 10 years, and knew all the prayers, responses and hymns by heart before I could even read.

While most teenagers, and young adults were out partying and dabbling in the latest in music, movies and fashion, I was one of those who hung out at church, doing everything from plays, to musicals, to feast days, to reading, OHP girl, decorating the whole church, the works. The church was my playground. However, this was my social life, not in any way spiritual.

It wasn't until my early 20s that I started questioning religion, and the practices of the Church. I started questioning the meaning of the prayers that easily came out of my mouth without thinking... I started wondering where in the Bible did this prayer or ritual come from, and somehow amidst these doubts, with career and different priorities, I literally strayed from the church for a while.

### Do we still need to go for confession?

Being a cradle Catholic, who somewhat loves the Catholic Church, but struggle to find a balance between doing everything the Church says you should do, and doing what I think is necessary (or rather just what I feel like doing), I find myself having taken bits and pieces of the Church's teachings that makes sense, and not worry too much about the multitude of traditional and ancient teachings of the Church which does not seem practical at this day and age. For example, I absolutely do not feel sinful or guilty if I do not attend weekly Masses, or Masses on days of obligation.

If that wasn't bad enough, I recently sat through an RCIA session which was on the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Apparently, not going for confession is also a sin, and

you should not be going up to receive Holy Communion at Mass if you have not gone for confession. I have probably not gone for confession since my Confirmation, or perhaps a church camp shortly after that time — that comes up to about a good 20 years. It has never crossed my mind that I needed to go for confession. The thought of going into a confessional and uttering the words 'Bless me Father for I have sinned,' sounds almost too grave and dramatic for my comfort.

Why? This got me thinking — is it because our definition of sins has changed, or have become diluted — and a lot of what constitutes a 'sin' are pretty acceptable by general standards. I mean, I may be a little more obliged to go for confession if I did something really, really bad, but my laundry list of benign misbehaviours have very little impact on my moral conscience. In fact, I actually asked the priest 'what if you have no sins?' and the response was, 'that in itself is a sin — the sin of pride!'

### What constitutes sin?

The Catholic Church defines sin as 'an utterance, a deed, or a desire contrary to eternal law' (CCC 1849) and a rejection of God's love and the refusal of an opportunity to accept God's love and to pass it on to others. (CCC 1850)

The Bible has various examples of sins peppered throughout different eras, delivered by prophets of the time, each focusing on the need for those 'sins' or rather 'acts of immorality' to be addressed in the given period, or aimed at a specific audience. Most of the grave acts of sin would be a crime if committed today, punishable by law, given that the law of the church formed the law of the land.

However, that RCIA session got me pondering on what exactly is a sin for the normal person. Let's say that normal person is me — I swear, I do not attend Mass regularly, I will fight for the rights of my gay friends, I will stand up for the person who

needs to have an abortion, I do not believe I should be denied contraceptives, and I very often use the name of God in vain (OMG!) — well, if I were to go to confession with this list of sins, I would not be able to keep up with the 'I promise to not sin again.'

That said, I do acknowledge sin as being that time I got angry and shouted at my husband, or that time I ignored a friend's plea for help, or that time I spoke ill of someone for absolutely no reason, or judged another person, or said something that intentionally or unintentionally caused hurt to another person, or neglected my responsibilities as a daughter, a sister, a wife, a friend, an employee or a member of the community.

Perhaps if I shift my thinking about sin as living in accordance to a set of rules, and all the 'thou shalt nots,' to reflecting on if I have embraced a culture of loving and giving in all my actions, words, thoughts and deeds across all my relationships, it would create a more constructive self-examination of my transgressions. I would feel extremely guilty if I have failed to be that loving and giving person to everyone around me — and I would want to be absolved from these kind of sins.

Absolution and penance are given so you can reflect on your sins, with the aim of not repeating them again. It makes sense if I go for confession and talk about my failure to be a kind person, and come out feeling free, and to move forward being conscious to always exude kindness to everyone around me.

### The Sacrament of Reconciliation

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that one must confess serious sins at least once a year (CCC 1457). I must admit, I never knew this. Not even from my standard 3 class in catechism when they taught us about original sin, mortal sin and venial sin.

Having pondered on the practice of Confession, and of course coming to understand how confessions are carried out these days, I have come to have a different view of the whole process. I used to think,

why should one confess their sins to another human being, it should be between us and God, just like how a prayer would work.

I now see Confession as, for lack of a better word, free therapy. You would pay a lot of money to have a 30-minute session with a therapist, who would just ask you a few questions, and provide you no solutions — they are just there to listen. The confessional provides Catholics this opportunity, a listening ear that you could vent all your thoughts, good or evil, talk about your anger and frustrations. I don't know if the priest would provide a solution, but at the very least, you will be absolved of your sins, or guilt, or anger, and come out feeling lighter and free.

The practice of penance and absolution (which comes with confession) is not confined to Catholics. Polytheistic religions, Hinduism and Buddhism do perform rituals as penance to obtain absolution — the concept is the same, to be free of guilt, and continue living a life free of entanglements to sin, but also to do good in the world.

The act of going for confession, may be driven by guilt, for some, with the promise of redemption. I would personally view confession as an annual check and balance to keep on top of things, generally and spirituality, as the act of being able to have an open and free conversation, by humbling yourself and admitting your weaknesses to another person would psychologically make one stronger and more confident in their daily lives, and to be able to live your true self, even when no one is looking.

That said, looks like, I will be going for confession this Lenten season — for my husband who is currently attending RCIA, and will be going for his first confession before Easter, but mostly, for myself.

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



## WORD MADE FRESH

Nicholas Lye

In my recent mission trip to Thailand, I got the chance to visit a school for the blind together with my mission team. After introducing ourselves to some of the blind students of the school, we asked them if they had any questions for us. Soon, many hands shot up, along with questions such as: *What were we interested to see or do in Thailand, what food did we like, how big is our country, what currency did we use, what is it like to live in our country?*

What struck me was how keen and eager they were to take a closer look at our lives, our likes and our experiences despite their limited physical sight. What surprised me was how much they were filled with awe and wonder at our answers, and some even wanted to come to our country to have a 'glimpse' of our lives. Their physical disability did not stop them from wanting to look further beyond themselves. In fact, it might also be the very impetus for them to look deeper and beyond what their physical eyes could not capture. Through them, I was seeing the deeper truth of what could be far more important than what our physical eyes can tell us.

## When the blind brought me sight

How often do we seem to focus only on what we can see and understand before us? How often have we allowed the very things before us to limit our vision of what lies beyond us? How might we have even allowed certain unfortunate situations in our lives put a stop to greater possibilities, or blind us from the greater things God is doing for us? What if the very limitations or failings we face in life are the very things that can bring us deeper and further into the greater plan of God, if only we see through eyes of faith, awe and wonder?

*"I know what my plans are for you, plans to save you and not to harm you, plans to give you a future and to give you hope" (Jeremiah 29:11)*

As we got to know the students a little more, we found out that some were born blind, while others got into accidents that caused them to go blind at a later stage in life. Yet, despite their physical challenges, it was heartening to see them not giving up, and learning skills to sustain their livelihood or even provide massage services to others. It was also inspiring to hear of their dreams to go places or sing for people. Through them, I got to witness how they learnt to trust in people they could not see to take care of them or even receive from them. Through their eyes, I got to catch a glimpse of God's greater

invitation to trust in His ways and plans, even if we cannot see or understand them in that moment.

Growing up, I may not have suffered from a physical limitation, but I have often felt judged and rejected for being different, for being too 'sensitive' with my emotions, for being too unconventional in the way I do things. Such 'limitations' almost prevented me from seeing myself the way God sees me, and celebrating myself the way God created me. Even when things did not seem to go my way in life, it was easy to give up hope and see no future ahead of me. Still, through the love and grace of God, He eventually opened my heart and my eyes to what was possible beyond my sight and imagination. He led me to places and possibilities that my mind could not yet fathom in the early stages. He even used my very 'limitations' to bring about greater hope and transformation in the many lives I got to encounter in my missionary journey. Never would I have seen all that God was doing and wanted to do in and through me, had I not kept my eyes open towards His face.

*"You will see greater things" (John 1:50)*

In Scripture, Jesus often chooses the poor, the blind, the tax collectors, the prostitutes, or the rejected to reveal greater truths for people who may seem to be materially rich,

physically well, or well accepted in society, but may actually be spiritually poor or spiritually blind to the more important things in life. Perhaps God allows limitations in our lives, whether external or internal, to reveal greater truths about the kingdom of God. Whether it may be our own limitations or those of others, perhaps if we take a closer look at what God is revealing to us through these limitations, it may bring newer sight to His greater plans and promises for us.

Through my encounters with the blind students, I am affirmed that regardless of our physical or internal limitations, all of us have a deep yearning for something beyond us. Even if we cannot see or understand what that might look like for the moment, perhaps we can take inspiration and encouragement from the blind to trust in a God we cannot see to not only take care of us, but bring us places. Through the eyes of the blind, perhaps we can look beyond our current situations, and allow eyes of faith, awe and wonder to lead us to what is beyond us, and experience God's greater plan and promise unfold before our very eyes.

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





Fr Ron Rolheiser

# The spirituality of Eugene De Mazenod

During the years I have been writing this column, I have rarely mentioned the fact that I belong to a religious order, the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. That omission is not an evasion, since being an Oblate of Mary Immaculate is something of which I am quite proud. However, I rarely flag the fact that I am a priest and a member of a religious order because I believe what I write here and elsewhere needs to ground itself on things beyond titles.

In this column, however, I want to speak about the founder of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, St Eugene de Mazenod, because what he had to say about Christian discipleship and spirituality is something of value and importance for everyone, like the legacies that have been left us by other great religious founders like Bernard, Francis, Dominic, Angela Merici, Ignatius of Loyola, Vincent de Paul, and others.

St Eugene de Mazenod (1779-1861) was a French bishop of aristocratic origins who some popular myths identify as the bishop in *Les Misérables*. He was a man whose personality ran somewhat naturally in the direction of the stern, the introverted, the strongly inner-directed, the mystical, and the single-minded. He wasn't the type of person most people would choose as their first choice for light dinner conversation, but he was the type of person who is often God's first choice to found a religious order.

Soren Kierkegaard once stated that to be a saint is to will the one thing. Eugene de Mazenod clearly did that and, in his case, that one thing had a number of aspects which, taken together, form the basis of a very rich, balanced spirituality — one which emphasises some salient aspects of Christian discipleship that are often neglected today.

What shaped the spirituality of Eugene de Mazenod and the charism he left behind?

First, he emphasised community.

For him, a good life is not just one of individual achievement, fidelity, or even greatness; it is a life that links itself to the power inherent within community. He was a firm believer in the axiom: what we dream alone remains a dream, what we dream with others can become a reality. In his view, compassion only becomes effective when it becomes collective, when it issues forth from a group rather than from just one individual. He believed that alone you can make a splash but not a difference. He founded a religious order because he deeply believed this.

In the face of all the issues confronting the world and the Church today, if someone



were to ask him: "What's the one single thing I might do to make a difference?" He would reply: Connect yourself with others of sincere will within community, around the person of Christ. Alone you cannot save the world. Together we can!

Second, he believed that a healthy spirituality makes a marriage between contemplation and justice. Judged in the light of our contemporary sensitivities, his exact expression of this is perhaps linguistically awkward today, but his key principle is perennially valid: only an action that issues forth from a life that is rooted in prayer and deep interiority will be truly prophetic and effective. Conversely, all true prayer and genuine interiority will burst forth in action, especially in action for justice and the poor.

Third, in his own life and in the spirituality he laid out for his religious community, he made a strong preferential option for the poor. He did this not because it was the politically correct thing to do, but because it was the correct thing to do; the Gospel demands this, and it is non-negotiable. His belief was simple and clear: as Christians, we are called to be with and work with those whom nobody else wants to be with

and work with. For him, any teaching or action that is not good news for the poor cannot claim to be speaking for Jesus or for scripture.

Fourth, he put all of this under the patronage of the mother of Jesus, Mary, whom he saw as an advocate for the poor. He recognised that the poor turn to her, for it is she who gives voice to the Magnificat.

Finally, in his own life and in the ideal he laid out, he brought together two seemingly contradictory tendencies: a deep love for the institutional Church and the capacity to prophetically challenge it at the same time. He loved the Church, believed that it was the noblest thing for which one might die; but at the same time, he wasn't afraid to publicly point out the Church's faults or to admit that the Church needs constant challenge and self-criticism... and he was willing to offer it!

His personality was very different from mine. I doubt that he and I would spontaneously like each other. But that's incidental. I'm proud of his legacy, proud to be one of his sons, and convinced enough of his spirituality to give my life over for it.

● **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)

## The Year of Prayer: An invitation to communion with the divine



As I was  
contemplating

Fr Gerard Theraviam

Prayer is definitely going to be a hot topic in the Church, now that Pope Francis has just inaugurated a Year of Prayer ahead of the 2025 Jubilee, calling on the faithful "to pray more fervently to prepare ourselves to live properly this grace-filled event and to experience the power of hope in God." The Year of Prayer is dedicated "to rediscovering the great value and absolute need for prayer, prayer in personal life, in the life of the Church, prayer in the world."

Of course, prayer should obviously be a part of our daily lives but often, people struggle with it. Some may find it dry and others may wonder why bother at all when God doesn't seem to answer their prayers. But surely this kind of thinking seems to look at prayer in utilitarian terms — in terms of what I can get out of God? Often, our prayer consists of setting our 'shopping lists' before God and hoping that they are answered according to our will and desires. Surely, prayer is much more than that! Prayer is about our communication and relationship with a loving God who wants to embrace His daughters and sons. It is about laying our lives before God, knowing that God provides for all our needs. Prayer

involves an orientation of our entire being toward God.

A helpful acronym is ACTS, which is adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication (or petition). Interestingly, supplication comes last of all. Yet for many, that seems to be the main reason to pray — and often when all is well, our need to go to God in prayer seems diminished and we can easily set aside our prayer time for other pursuits. Prayer will not make life easier, but certainly we will cope better as we come to realise we are not alone in our journey — God accompanies us. Indeed, God draws us closer into His embrace.

The Year of Prayer will likely allow us to examine our motivations as well as to, perhaps, learn new ways of praying. Certainly, we need to move away from merely 'saying prayers' towards actual prayer, involving not just our minds and lips but also our hearts and our whole beings. Some of us might discover that prayer methods which have served us well in the past no longer have the same appeal. Perhaps our lives and personalities have changed with time. From my own personal experience, Charismatic praise and worship with exuberant singing and clapping have made way for quieter, contemplative prayer. That might be due to age or even movements in my spiritual life. What had earlier brought a sense of warmth and goodness now leave me cold. It forced me to consider my motivations. In prayer, had I been looking for the consolations of God, rather than the

God of Consolations?

"Pray as you can, not as you can't." These wise and comforting words are credited to Abbot John Chapman (1865 – 1993), an English Benedictine monk, abbot, and scholar. Many people wrote to him for advice in the area of prayer, including laypeople, monks, nuns, and priests. They worried that their tried and trusted ways of prayer were no longer 'working', in that they no longer felt the consolations or positive feelings that accompanied prayer. Their prayer now had become dry and unfulfilling. They seemed to be encountering what spiritual authors call the 'dark night'. The good abbot invited them to follow the promptings of the Spirit and allow God to lead them to new contemplative ways of praying, perhaps also with guidance from a spiritual guide/director. Their old ways of prayer had involved much effort on their part but now they were invited to adopt a more passive form of spirituality, allowing God to do it all, while we wait and wonder, rather than to determine our own path. Obviously, this also involves listening to God. Contemplative prayer is "one long act of love, not of my love to God, but of His love to me."

May this Year of Prayer also help us to be more disciplined in the area of prayer. It is not enough to merely wish to improve our prayer lives. We need to take concrete steps to move along to the Spirit's promptings. Discipline must be employed if we truly want to make a change. Let us not also be anxious about dryness in prayer.



It is in dryness that our faith is tested and strengthened. St Mother Teresa of Kolkata said that "it is more important to be faithful than successful."

Underlying all this is the fact that we are all unique individuals who cannot be pigeon-holed and dealt with in the same way. Each of us has a different journey of prayer to make and it is futile to compare ourselves with others. Ultimately, we all hope to be in greater union with God, just as God also desires this greater union. As we are led by the Spirit this year towards new forms of prayer, may we allow them to help us be in closer communion with God and all creation.

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



# Little Catholics' Corner

Dear children,  
In today's Gospel reading, our Lord went to Simon and Andrew's house, where He spent the evening healing the sick and casting out demons. But early the next morning before the sun came up, He went away into

the wilderness to pray.  
At first, we wonder why Jesus would have to pray. He is God, after all! But He was also human so He needed to take some time to be with His Heavenly Father.  
And that is what real praying is

- it's being with God and talking to Him and listening to Him.  
Like Jesus, we also need to spend time with God.  
Even if we are always doing His work, like helping people or studying His truths, we still need to take

some time to talk with Our Father in Heaven.  
Starting today, take a few minutes every day to go to a quiet place and talk with God.  
Love  
Aunty Eliz

## LET'S COLOUR

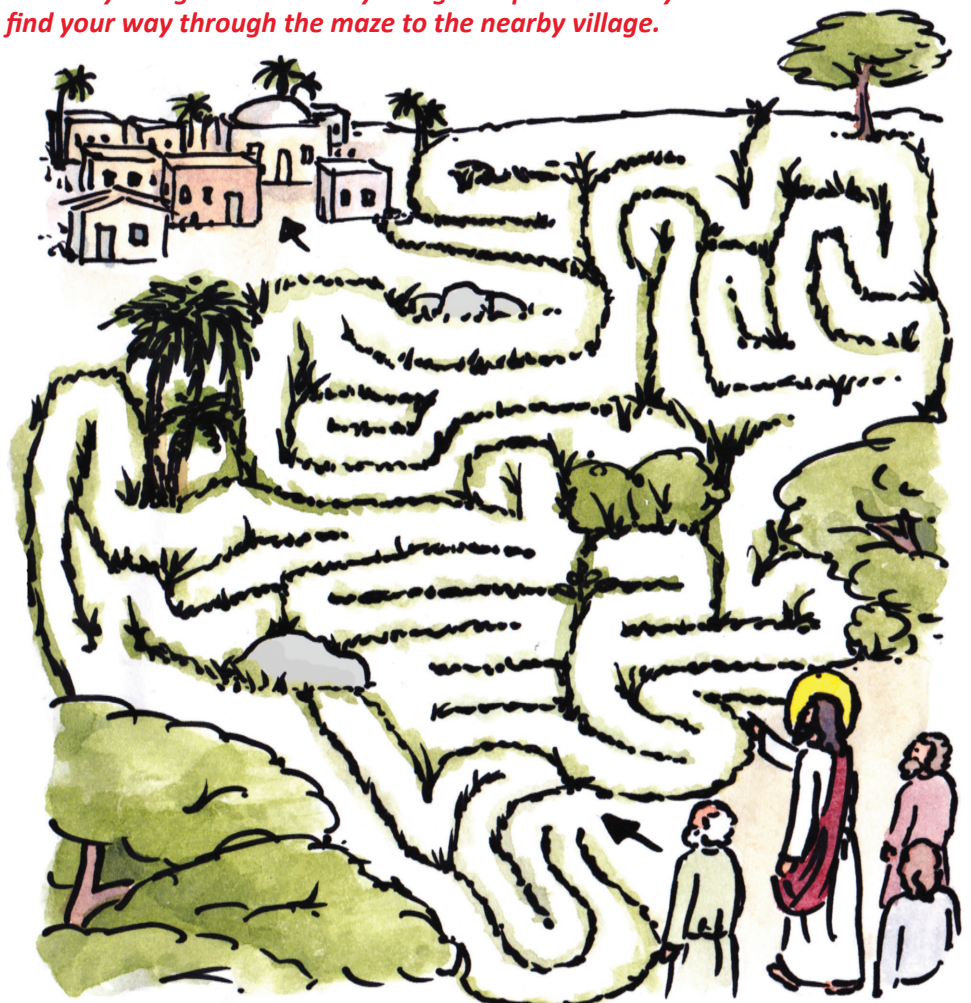
Jesus healed Simon's mother in law  
(Mark 1: 30-31)



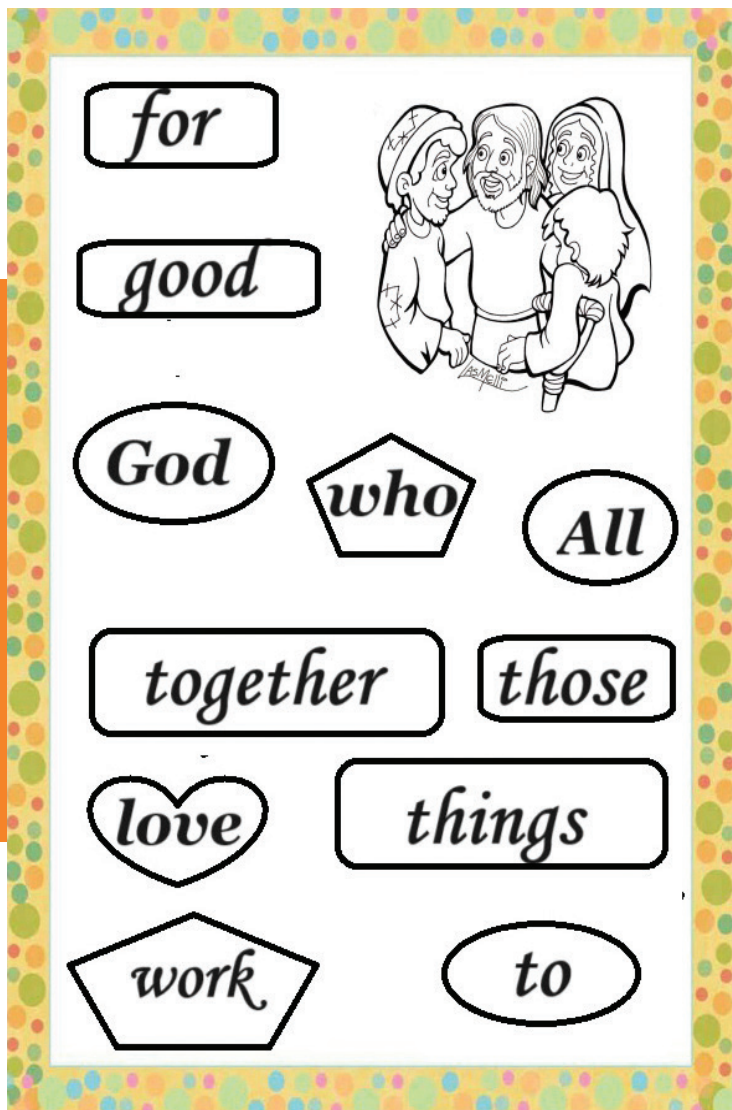
What happened in today's Gospel reading? See if you can sort out the order of these pictures by putting the numbers 1 to 6 in the boxes.



At the end of today's Gospel reading, Jesus tells Simon that they will go to the nearby villages to preach. Can you find your way through the maze to the nearby village.



Rearrange the words in the picture below to read the complete Bible quote taken from Romans 8:28





# YOUTH

February 4, 2024

## Come and See

## to experience Jesus

*So he said to Samuel, "Go to sleep, and if you are called, reply, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'" When Samuel went to sleep in his place, the Lord came and stood there, calling out as before: Samuel, Samuel! Samuel answered, "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening." 1 Samuel 3:9-10 (NABRE)*

**I**n this time and age, it can be challenging to hear the Word of God. In this struggle we can be led into believing that we are doing God's work when we could be doing the total opposite. Hence daily discernment is crucial in our lives.

Seventeen young men, aged 17 to 25, from the Diocese of Malacca Johore, took up the challenge to find out their calling in life, either to the priesthood, the religious life, to the married state or to remain single. "Come and See" was the invitation to these young men to experience Jesus with Fr Adrian Francis, Vocation Director, together with five seminarians from College General, Penang and St Peters College, Kuching.



*Pastores dabo vobis* (I shall give you shepherds) was the focal point of the camp. It is an apostolic exhortation released on March 25, 1992, by Pope John Paul II. It concerns the formation of priests and was addressed to both clergy and the lay faithful of the Catho-

lic Church. Seminarians disclosed their vocation story on how they had responded to the calling. They spoke about the realities of life, both joyful and desolate, that each one of them had to go through and how they depended on Christ. The evening was filled with physical activities, since God has made us embodied creatures, the physical body has an important role to play in our spiritual and holistic health.

On the second day there was a visit to Miriam Home, residence for the aged, run by the Canossian Sisters for the past 30 years. Starting the day with Holy Mass with the residents, the aspirants spent their day in conversation. They were blessed also to serve the seniors during lunch and fed some of them. Deepening their awareness of life, it was a profound experience. The seniors reminded them that age is not a barrier to happiness, knowledge, or the capacity for love. They witnessed also the te-

nacity and unyielding spirit in the elderly who treasured each day, respected relationships, and valued the lessons that came from their experiences through their daily lives.

As the camp came to an end, these men revealed how they had come to recognise Jesus in a refreshing way. Through the sessions, sharing, games, visitations and most importantly the Holy Mass, they were refreshed, recharged to refocus on discerning God's call in their lives. The call to the priesthood that echoed in some men was received with great joy by all. Even as they realised that there would be many hurdles in following Christ, they embraced the exhortation "Be not afraid!" by Saint Pope John Paul II. As everyone parted ways, this became a new beginning for these men who will stay in contact to support each other under the guidance of the vocation director. They were encouraged to stay in contact with the seminarians for a "fraternal accompaniment" in their lives.

This era has become extremely challenging with regard to vocation. However, as history has shown, the Church flourishes best when she meets with crisis. Today, as we encounter the challenges of our time, the Church needs her priests to bring Christ everywhere. Perhaps such camps are opportunities for us to pray for more vocations in the world. — *By Jerome Lingam*



**Pray for Vocation**



The young men visit the elderly at Miriam Home.

## MiDYC Servants' Retreat Night

MIRI: The Miri Diocese Youth Commission (MiDYC) collaborated with Jude Antoine and Kasih House of Missionaries (KHOM) to hold a MiDYC Servants' Night with the theme *PUT OUT INTO THE DEEP* on January 14.

Around 100 people came to experience praise and worship as well as to strengthen their calling to serve others. It was held at Madonna Hall, Church of Mater Dei Lutong.

It began with group introduction,

then Grace Cassilda Terry accompanied by a band from St Dominic led the praise and worship.

Patrik Prevuznak shared on the Bible and his experiences while Lavinia Antoine shared her experience with MiDYC youth. Jude ended the night with prayer. Leah, coordinator for MiDYC presented a gift of love to Jude and his entourage. Everyone sang *Kasih Jesus* to end the night. — *By Andrian Enggkin, President of MiDYC*



## Fire Fresh Praise and Worship

MIRI: Regardless of age, race and work background, 600 people came to build a deeper relationship with God and give glory to Him in the Fire Fresh Praise and Worship led by Jude Antoine and Kasih House of Missionaries (KHOM) on January 13 at St Dominic and Rosary Church.



Jude Antoine with the Kasih House of Missionaries.



# Gearing up for CHARIS Peninsular Malaysia Youth Day

PENANG: The CHARIS Peninsular Malaysia Youth Day is set to take place from May 30 to June 1 at the Minor Basilica of St. Anne in Bukit Mertajam. Anticipated to attract a vibrant assembly of 3,000 spirited youths and parents, this transformative event is poised to strengthen the Church's mission and evangelisation efforts.

Through the initiative of CHARIS Peninsular Malaysia Service of Communion (CPMSC), several young adult ministries throughout Peninsular Malaysia and the Catholic Charismatic Renewal came together recently to plan for the upcoming event. This dynamic collaboration unveiled a profound commitment to the spiritual growth and empowerment of the youth.

Present at the meeting to offer encouragement and support was Cardinal Sebastian Francis, the episcopal advisor to CHARIS Peninsular Malaysia.

Cardinal Sebastian echoed the significance of enlarging one's tent, symbolising the universality of our Church, a divine revelation on Pentecost. The image painted is clear – the youth at the centre of the narrative, a key interpretation that resonates with the broader themes of Pope Francis' papacy: inclusivity, mercy, and unity.

In this dynamic one day working meeting, Cardinal Sebastian's involvement added a new dimension to the mission of the Church. His call for collaboration between the young and the old, fostering an inclusive approach, echoes the spirit of the upcoming CHARIS Peninsular Malaysia Youth Day.

The cardinal emphasised that the objective of CHARIS and CPMSC is service and communion, not control. This aligns with Pope Francis' vision of an inclusive, respectful dialogue within the Church, where every voice is valued.

Reflecting on the theme for the youth day, *ARISE Together in Christ*, the cardinal highlighted that it draws inspiration from Luke



Cardinal Sebastian Francis with the CHARIS youth leaders from Peninsular Malaysia.

7:14, which is in line with Pope Francis' writings in *Christus Vivit, Christ is Alive*, where the Holy Father encourages the young people,

"Christ is alive! He is our hope, and in a wonderful way He brings youth to our world, and everything He touches becomes young, new, full of life. The very first words, then, that I would like to say to every young Christian are these: Christ is alive, and He wants you to be alive," said Cardinal Sebastian.

"He is in you, He is with you and He never abandons you. However far you may wander, He is always there, the Risen One. He calls you and He waits for you to return to Him and start over again. When you feel you are growing old out of sorrow, resentment or fear, doubt, or failure, He will always be there to restore your strength and your hope.

"With great affection, Pope Francis addresses this Apostolic Exhortation to all Christian young people. It is meant to remind you of certain convictions born of our faith, and at the same time to encourage you to grow in holiness and in commitment to your personal vocation. But since it is also part of a synodal process, I am also addressing this message to the entire People of God, pastors and faithful alike, since all of us are challenged and urged to reflect both on the young and for the young. Consequently, I

will speak to young people directly in some places, while in others I will propose some more general considerations for the Church's discernment," said the prelate.

Cardinal Sebastian then concluded by reminding all present that the Word of God says that young people should be treated "as brothers" (1 Tim 5:1), and warns parents not to "provoke your children, lest they become discouraged" (Col 3:21).

"Young people are not meant to become discouraged; they are meant to dream great things, to seek vast horizons, to aim higher, to take on the world, to accept challenges and to offer the best of themselves to the building of something better. That is why I constantly urge young people not to let themselves be robbed of hope; to each of them I repeat: "Let no one despise your youth" (1 Tim 4:12)," he added.

## Creating an inclusive inspiring platform

Simon Matthew, the CPMSC chairman, was instrumental in bringing together representatives from the various young adult ministries within Peninsular Malaysia to gather, listen and exchange ideas, share perspectives, and develop a comprehensive programme that would resonate with the vibrant and diverse youth renewal ministries in the Catholic Church of Peninsular Malaysia.

The one day working meeting began with an atmosphere of enthusiasm with Paul Julianose, from CHARIS Malaysia and SEEDS ministry, leading a praise and worship session.

Simon then announced that John Paul Felix is appointed as the chairperson to head the working team. The objective for the Youth Day is for the youth to grow in communion and spirituality and develop a closer relationship with Christ. The team aims to create an inclusive and inspiring platform where young people can express themselves, learn from each other, and harness their potential to grow in missionary discipleship, personally and collectively.

The main speaker, Fr Rob Galea, brings a unique dimension to the Youth Day programme with his background as a singer and songwriter. Recognising the power of music, the team aims to foster a deeper spiritual connection with the Holy Spirit through Fr Rob's inspiring musical contributions.

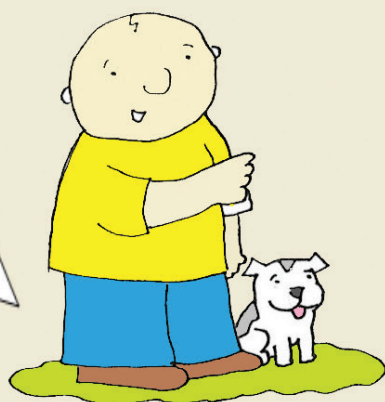
Understanding the tech-savvy nature of the youth, the planning team explores innovative ways to integrate technology and social media to promote the event. Social media platforms will amplify the reach and impact of the CHARIS Peninsular Malaysia Youth Day, making it accessible to a broader audience and enhancing the overall participant experience.

In this journey towards renewal and spiritual awakening, CHARIS Peninsular Malaysia is unwavering in its commitment to empowering and inclusivity, recognising the youth as the driving force behind positive change and as future witnesses and ambassadors for Jesus in the world. As we anticipate the *ARISE Together in Christ* Youth Day, let us embrace the spirit-filled journey of faith, unity, and empowerment. The Holy Spirit will not fail the Church, and together, we shall arise in Christ. — *By Felicia Samuel and Christopher Felix*

## THE SIMPLE LIFE...

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

For the Church in Peninsular Malaysia, the focus for the month of February is "**Creating Human Fraternity**". The month is filled with important observances and celebrations that help promote harmony and build fraternity in the family, among people of different faiths, and humanity at large.



StevenS 2/24



The "World Interfaith Harmony Week" is from 1st - 7th February. Its aim is to foster harmony between people of different faiths and beliefs.



On 4th February, the United Nations observes the International Day of Human Fraternity in order to promote mutual respect and understanding in the world.



The Church observes the World Day of the Sick on 11th February. The theme is: "It is not good that man should be alone: Healing the Sick by Healing Relationships".



Chinese New Year is celebrated on 10th - 11th February. A wonderful time to gather with family and friends, and also with our neighbours. May we have a blessed year ahead!



Ash Wednesday is on 14th February. It marks the start of Lent, a sacred season given to us by God to renew our lives and our relationship with God and neighbour.

Let's work together to create human fraternity.

I agree.



"Now is not the time for indifference: either we are brothers and sisters, or everything falls apart."  
- Pope Francis

"You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself" (Luke 10: 27).



## MEMORIAM

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**4<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

*In Loving Memory of*

**Dr Sheila Lopez née Moreira**  
Paediatrician, Tawakal Hospital  
who returned to the Lord on **5th February 2020**.  
A much loved Wife, Mother, Grandmother and Sister.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son,  
so that everyone who believes in Him may not  
perish but may have eternal life.”  
John 3:16

You will always be remembered & loved by  
Mohan,  
Ray, Prithi, Rekha & their families



**In Ever Loving Memory**  
**10th Anniversary**  
**Indra Josephine Albert Fenelon**  
**27.11.1944 - 3.2.2014**

Our Mother is Always With Us...  
She's the whisper of leaves as we walk by  
She's the smell of the flowers in bloom  
She's the cool breeze on a warm day  
She's the sound of the rain,  
peaceful and calming  
She's the strength of the waves that crash at sea  
She's the quiet butterfly perched on the wall  
Wherever we feel her, we know we are home.  
Our first love, and first friend.  
Nothing can separate us - not time, not space  
- not even death.

Forever cherished and missed by  
her family and loved ones.  
May her soul rest in peace.

**Remembering You With Love On Your**  
**15th Death Anniversary**



**MASLAMONEY SOOSAY**  
**3 October 1951 - 9 February 2009**

Fifteen years have come and gone and every moment would have been more wonderful if you were still here with us. Missing you everyday of our lives. Until we meet again someday, Keep watching over us. Dearly missed by Wife & Children.



**1st Anniversary**  
**In Loving Memory of**  
**Andrew Wong Pak Goon**  
**Born: 28-10-1941**  
**Departed: 3-2-2023**

Jesus said:  
I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.  
John 11: 25-26.

"I thank the Lord for sending you into my life. I miss you but there are more than 50 years of wonderful memories to sustain me. Till we meet again." Christine

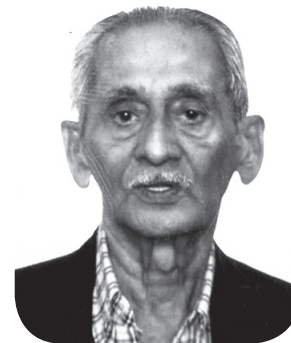
**4<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**  
**In Loving Memory of**



**Alicia Lai Keow Moy**  
**(07.09.1941 - 03.02.2020)**

*Dearly missed and remembered by family members.*

**In Loving Memory on his**  
**10th Death Anniversary**



**Benedict Doraisingam A/L Nicholas George**  
**(25th January 1931 - 10th February 2014)**

"A decade has passed since we last saw your smiling face. It feels like just yesterday that we said goodbye, but your memory lives on in the depths of our souls. We often wonder if you're watching over us from heaven, guiding us with your gentle touch and whispering words of comfort. You were our rock, our guiding light, and though we can't see you, we feel your presence in the moments that bring us joy and in the tears that fall when we miss you most.

Though we long to embrace you again, we find solace in the scriptures that remind us of the eternal love and promise of God:

'Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me! - Psalm 23:4.

We know that you are now our guardian angel in heaven, watching over us and keeping us safe.

Always remembered in our prayers.

From Your Wife,  
Children, Sons-in-law and Daughter-in-Law,  
Grandchildren, and Great grandchildren.

**In Loving Memory of**

**23rd Anniversary**

**40th Anniversary**

**12th Anniversary**



**R. Antoine Canagarayen Pillai**  
**Departed: 25-02-2001**

**Mary Anthonysamy Pillai**  
**Departed: 03-02-1984**



**R. C. Anthony Perianayagasamy**  
**To the Lord: 16-7-2012**

"I am the resurrection and the life;

he who believes in Me will live even though he dies." - Jn 11:25

Holy Masses offered at the Church of Our Lady of Fatima, Brickfields, Church of Christ the Light, Desa Jaya and Our Lady of Madhu Shrine. Mannar at 6.00pm on the 3rd February 2024.



**13th Anniversary**  
**In Loving Memory of**  
**Steve Jeremiah Pakiesamy**  
**Departed: 4th February 2011**

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:16

Deeply missed by:

Family, Relatives & Friends

Memorial Mass will be celebrated at the Church of Holy Family, Kajang, on 4 February 2024 @ 9:30a.m.

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**8th Anniversary**  
**In Loving Memory of**  
**ANN VIRGINIA RAYMOND**  
**Called home to be with the Lord on 6 February 2016**

Those we love don't go away,  
they walk beside us everyday.  
Unseen, unheard, but always near;  
still loved, still missed and very dear.

Always remembered and forever cherished by  
mum, brothers, sisters-in-law, nieces,  
relatives and friends.

**10th Anniversary**  
**In Loving Memory of**



**Luke Massang**  
**Departed 3rd February 2014**

I have fought the good fight,  
I have finished the race,  
I have kept the faith  
2 Tim: 4-7

Dearly loved and missed by  
your sons, daughter,  
daughters-in-law, son-in-law,  
grandchildren, siblings,  
relatives and friends.



## Christian unity must be rooted in prayer

VATICAN: Marking the conclusion of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Pope Francis hosted an ecumenical solemn vespers at Rome's Basilica of St Paul Outside the Walls on January 25.

In attendance at the vespers were Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby; Metropolitan Polycarp of Italy, representing the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople; and representatives from several other churches and ecumenical movements, as well as members of the Roman Curia and lay faithful.

About 2,500 faithful filled the Roman basilica for the solemn vespers for the solemnity of the conversion of St Paul.

During the ceremony, Francis preached on the parable of the Good Samaritan and the example of St Paul in allowing God's love to transform one's will and to work toward Christian unity.

"The people who failed to do good, who proved callous, were the priest and the Levite, who were more concerned with respecting their religious traditions than with coming to the aid of a suffering person," he said. "The one who demonstrates what it means to be a 'neighbour' is instead a heretic, a Samaritan. He draws near, he feels compassion, he bends down and gently tends to the wounds of that brother. He is concerned for him, regardless of his past and his failings,

and he puts himself wholly at his service."

"All efforts to attain full unity are called to follow the same route as Paul, decentralising our own ideas in order to hear the Lord's voice and give Him the space to take the initiative," the Pope continued. "Only a love that becomes gratuitous service, only the love that Jesus taught and embodied, will bring separated Christians closer to one another. Only that love, which does not appeal to the past in order to remain aloof or to point a finger, only that love which in God's name puts our brothers and sisters before the ironclad defence of our own religious structures, will unite us."

"Each baptised person is a member of the one body of Christ; what is more, everyone in this world is my brother or my sister, and all together we compose that 'symphony of humanity' of which Christ is the firstborn and redeemer," the Pope added.

Francis called to mind the work of Paul Couturier, a priest and 20th-century ecumenical leader who was largely responsible for the establishment of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

Following Couturier's example, the Pope said that prayer must hold a preeminent place in efforts to restore unity to the Christian Church.

The Pope quoted the Second Vatican Council, saying: "The closer their union with the Father, the Word, and the Spirit, the more



Pope Francis leads an ecumenical solemn vespers at the Basilica of St Paul Outside the Walls in Rome on the feast of the Conversion of St Paul, January 25, 2024. (CNA photo/Daniel Ibañez)

deeply and easily will they be able to grow in mutual love."

"As we pray together," he went on, "may we acknowledge, each of us starting with himself or herself, our need for conversion, for letting the Lord change our hearts. This is the path before us: journeying together and serving together, giving priority of place to prayer. For when Christians grow in the service of God and neighbour, they also grow in reciprocal understanding. Prayer for unity is the primary responsibility in our journey together."

Welby also gave an address during the ceremony in which he said that "our hatreds, our anger imprisons us. Our rivalry, dislike of our brothers and sisters, cuts us off from the freedom that God offers His Church. It is a freedom that can come at any time. All it takes is

that we obey the Lord's command to love one another, to wash each other's feet."

"The Church of Christ is called to be free because it is in love with God, with each other, and, receiving the gift of freedom, is able to be a hospital, a hope, a place of healing for those who are suffering the sins of the world today," he went on. "Let us, on this feast of the Conversion of St Paul, see that he was moved from chains of hatred to the energy and the love that comes with freedom."

Welby and many other leaders in the Church of England as well as ecumenical representatives from various other churches have been in Rome this week for "Growing Together," a weeklong summit of ecumenical discussions coinciding with the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Jan 18-25. — By Peter Pinedo, CNA



Pope Francis and other Christian leaders pray at the tomb of St Paul during an ecumenical solemn vespers at the Basilica of St Paul Outside the Walls in Rome on the feast of the Conversion of St Paul, January 25, 2024. (Vatican Media)

## Venezuelan bishops' commitment in 'year of grace 2024'

VENEZUELA: The 121st Ordinary Plenary Assembly of the Venezuelan bishops concluded in mid January, during which the prelates analysed the current national situation and the greatest challenges the new year presents to the country and the Catholic Church.

Following the meeting, the bishops published a pastoral exhortation asking all Venezuelans to work for peace, justice, and fraternal solidarity as well as make an effort that allows "opening doors and building bridges of understanding and coexistence."

The bishops also called attention to the "urgent national problem" in economic, humanitarian, immigration, education, and corruption matters. "The most serious thing

about this situation," they commented, is "that there is no interest in a solution at the institutional level."

The prelates called for "a serious, sincere, and committed dialogue and negotiation between the government and the various sectors of national life," in reference to the presidential elections scheduled for this year in the country.

"Once again we extend our best wishes so that this year 2024, with the effort and participation of each person and all the country's institutions, we may travel the route of dialogue, encounter, and the type of country that we all want," the bishops concluded. — CNA

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