

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

TERHAD

PP 8460/11/2012 (030939) ISSN: 1394-3294 | Vol: 31 No. 03 | January 21, 2024

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This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none

1 Cor. 7:29



We are stewards of God's creation

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In thanksgiving for a cardinal

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Ode to Laudato Si' at Stella Maris

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Sports unite, breaks down barriers

VATICAN: Pope Francis has expressed hope that the spirit of sports may foster peace in the world with war looming on all horizons, especially in this Olympic and Paralympic Year. The pontiff recalled the value of sports as a means to build peace and fraternity in a broken world, and to promote the values of solidarity and inclusion in society.

Sports "reminds us that, despite our differences, we are all members of the same human family," the Pope said recently, as he addressed the *Athletica Vaticana*, the official Vatican amateur multi-sports association founded in 2019 under the patronage of the then Pontifical Council for Culture.

The Pope also extended his greetings to Cardinal José Tolentino de Mendonça, the prefect of the Dicastery for Culture and Education. In line with the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*, the pontiff had specifically tasked Cardinal Mendonça with overseeing the dialogue with sports enthusiasts.

The goal is to ensure that individuals engaged in sports "may know and feel recognised by the Church as individuals dedicated to a sincere pursuit of the true, the good, and the beautiful" (154).

ful" (154).

"My grateful greeting also goes to the international and Italian sporting authorities who, with their presence, bear witness to the liveliness of the dialogue and collaboration with the Holy See.

"It is significant that this meeting of ours takes place in the first days of 2024, which is the Olympic and Paralympic year. Thinking back to the value of the "Olympic truce", my hope is that, in the particularly dark historical moment we are living, sports can build bridges, break down barriers, and foster peaceful relations," said the Pope.

In his address, the Holy Father praised *Athletica Vaticana* for its ongoing commitment to promoting "fraternity, inclusion, and solidarity," bearing wit-



Awesome display of friendship amongst Olympians. (Source/Reddit)

ness to the Christian faith among women and men of sports, amateurs and professionals alike.

"The initiatives of *Athletica Vaticana* — from the simplest and most spontaneous ones to participation in international sporting events — acquire their full meaning as an expression of a community made up of women and men who, linked by their common service to the Holy See, live their sporting passion as an experience of evangelisation," he said.

He recalled that in addition to sporting activities, the association also offers closeness to the most needy by promoting several initiatives for young people with physical and intellectual disabilities, prisoners, migrants, and poor families.

Pope Francis insisted on the word

"closeness," which, he said, through sports becomes "tenderness," the same tenderness God shows to us.

Pope Francis went on to remark that sports are not only "a means to express one's talents but also to build society," because it teaches us the values of universal fraternity as reaffirmed during the Second Vatican Council by the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*.

"We are not islands: on the pitch, it does not matter where a person comes from, what language or culture they speak. What counts is the commitment and the common goal. This unity in sports is a powerful metaphor for our lives. It reminds us that despite our differences, we are all members of the same human family. Sports has the power to unite people, regardless of their physical, economic or social abilities. It is an instrument of inclusion that breaks down barriers and celebrates diversity."

Sports, he added, also shows us that we can face our limits with patience and determination, and this "message of hope and courage is crucial, especially for young people."

While reminding the athletes of *Athletica Vaticana* that amateurism is the essence of sports, Pope Francis concluded by inviting everyone to view sport as a way of life that helps "build a more supportive community."

"I encourage you to bring forth the values of Christian life: loyalty, sacrifice, team spirit, commitment, inclusion, asceticism, and redemption." —

Agencies



HERALD

ESTABLISHED 1994

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

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



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Close to those who suffer

We are not neutral. We stand by the side of the many Palestinians who have died under the rubble of Gaza, 10,000 of whom are children. We stand by the side of the innocents killed in the *kibbutzim* on October 7 and the Israeli hostages. We stand, with full conviction, on one side: that of the victims and those who suffer.

Remembering the time elapsed since a tragedy is exceedingly sad. Remembering it when the tragedy is still ongoing is terrible. Since October 7, 2023, 136 men, women, and children remain as hostages at the hands of Hamas in tunnels under Gaza. Nothing is known about them or their conditions.

Today, we publish a moving article by Rachel Goldberg Polin (*see below*), which

is full of pain but also love. About her son Hersh, 23 years old, nothing has been known since that tragic morning, except perhaps that he lost an arm.

We are close to Rachel, not only for her dignified suffering but especially for what she says and writes. For her courageous awareness that on the other side of the barricade there are mothers like her who suffer. And many cry for the children they have lost.

Her brave voice, in a context where anger and revenge prevail, risks appearing solitary. But it is not so.

Only in the recognition of the pain of others, as well as one's own, can reconciliation and forgiveness grow.

Rachel's words are also ours. They are those of Pope Francis, who invites us to an

equivocanza, or "equi-closeness". Closeness to those who suffer, to those who die, to those who are left with nothing.

This closeness to the suffering on both sides is often interpreted as equidistance. We are not neutral in this war.

We stand, with full conviction, on one side: that of the victims and those who suffer.

We stand by the side of the 22,000 dead under the rubble of Gaza, the 10,000 children killed.

We stand by the side of the innocents brutally killed in the *kibbutzim* on October 7.

Because the sacrifice of every life is an unhealable wound. Rachel understands this. And so do we. — **By Andrea Tornielli, Vatican News**

Join me to unite our fractured world

Sunday, January 14 marked 100 days since my only son, Hersh, was stolen from me. Hersh is a civilian who was attending a music festival. Before being abducted, his arm was blown off at the elbow. He is a dual US-Israeli citizen.

There are no words that can appropriately describe what the past 100 days have been like for me and my family. Since his kidnapping, we know nothing about him.

But in this darkest of times, we have been showered with compassion, grace, love and support. What has been especially meaningful has been the outreach from the Christian community worldwide. We have received hundreds of thousands of messages from kind and caring Christians who send their blessings for Hersh to stay strong and come home to us. Photos of family Christmas dinner tables, with an empty plate with Hersh's name on it, and people lighting candles for Hersh at

Midnight Mass. To feel such beauty and tenderness from our Christian neighbours around the world has moved us to our core.

I was blessed with the unique opportunity to meet with the Holy Father as part of a small group of other families of hostages. He listened to us, and shared in our pain. The Holy Father said something that changed me. He said what we had experienced was terror, and that terror was "the absence of humanity." It was simple, wise and inspiring. Until then, I had started to question humanity. But since hearing these words, my hope for the world was restored.

Since Hersh was kidnapped, I have worn a piece of masking tape above my heart with the number of the days it has been since he has been gone. I use a black marker and write the number anew every morning. Recently, I began asking the world to join me in putting a tape on, just as I do. It is a symbol of solidarity in our fractured

world. I am calling on all people, of all religions, races, nationalities and ages to join me.

In our world that has so much suffering now, in so many places and in so many ways, this is a simple way for all of us to unite and say...enough. Enough suffering for people on both sides of conflict. Enough tears. Enough bloodshed. Enough pain. Enough.

The first step toward compassion is unity. The first step in unity is solidarity. And the first step to solidarity can be a symbol.

Join me in my symbol of a mother in pain. Just as Mother Mary cried, I too cry for our fractured world.

I pray and believe salvation for Hersh and the other beloved hostages will come soon; and for all the thousands of innocent people suffering in Gaza. The time has come. Amen. May it be so. — **By Rachel Goldberg Polin**

Some people abandon their nets because they hear good news worthy of their lives. Sensing God's kingdom drawing near, they reshape their lives in response to God's call. They drop everything and go another way.

Why do Simon and Andrew, then James and John after them, abandon everything to follow Jesus? Mark leaves no doubt as to the immediacy of their response. Seeing Simon and Andrew casting for fish, Jesus says, "Follow after me, and I will make you to be fishers for people." And immediately, Mark emphasises, they leave their nets and follow Jesus. Likewise, Jesus immediately calls James and John while they are mending their nets. These two abandon their father in the boat with his hired workers to come after Jesus.

Biblical stories often frustrate us by refusing to provide all the details we desire. Best selling authors would do better. If John Grisham had written Mark, we'd overhear a little dialogue between Simon and Andrew concerning Jesus. Stieg Larsson would have accompanied James and John through their morning routine. Patricia Cornwell would have clued us into the rumours that attend Jesus' arrival. Even the author of Luke's Gospel provides a little story that explains why the disciples find Jesus compelling. After a night of unsuccessful fishing, Simon, James and John allow Jesus to use their boat as a podium. Jesus tells the men to put out and fish again. Simon grumbles, but an overwhelming catch of fish convinces him that Jesus is the real deal (Luke 5:1-11). No wonder Simon and his colleagues leave

A call worthy of their lives



everything to follow Jesus! But Mark remains reticent.

We should honour the Gospels' reticence. The Gospels will reward our patience by supplying occasional details. When we learn that Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night, but the Samaritan woman encounters him at noon, we know to pay attention (John 3:2; 4:6). After all, the Gospel tells us to mind the distinction between those who love darkness and those who come to the light. Our ears likewise perk up when Jesus has the crowd recline on the green grass (Mark 6:39). "They were like sheep without a shepherd," Mark tells us (6:34), and we remember: "The LORD is my shepherd. ... The LORD makes me lie down in green pastures" (Psalm 23:1-2). So when Mark refuses to tell us just why Simon and his colleagues abandon their former lives to follow Jesus, we hold our questions for later. But we do not forget them.

If we choose to see it, Mark may

provide one clue. Jesus' encounter with His future disciples represents Mark's first report of an act in Jesus' ministry. It follows immediately after Mark's summary of Jesus' activity. Marching into Galilee, Jesus preaches a single distinctive message, the Gospel of God: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has drawn near. Repent and believe the Gospel!" (1:15, author's translation). Jesus is saying something like, "God has broken into the world" — that's good news — "you'd better shape up and believe it!" If Simon and his colleagues know what we know, they're aware that Jesus is calling everybody to "reshape" their lives. They're just receiving special attention.

Jesus' four new disciples lived in a tough world. Jewish aspirations for freedom confronted the grim reality of Roman imperial exploitation. Families lost their land. Children scattered in search of work and opportunity, often finding themselves enslaved by poverty. Traditional family

Reflecting on our
Sunday Readings
with Fr Dr Joseph Lubula

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)

Readings: **Jona 3:1-5, 10;**
1 Corinthians 7:29-31;
Gospel: Mark 1:14-20

and village structures crumbled under enormous cultural and economic stress. A very few people amassed incredible levels of wealth in Jesus' day, while countless others found themselves destitute. Those realities impinge upon Simon and Andrew while they fish; James and John sense them as they repair their nets.

And some people abandon their nets because they hear good news worthy of their lives. If things were just fine in the world, perhaps they'd stay with their nets. But sensing God's kingdom drawing near, they reshape their lives in response to God's call. They drop everything and go another way. Far too few churches ask this question, this vocational question, of their members: to what life is God calling you? And far too many of us domesticate the question, as if Simon and his colleagues were just volunteering for a single night at the winter shelter. The realities of our world press us with questions greater than how we'll spend a given night. Meanwhile, the kingdom of God lies right at hand. And what about those nets?

IMPORTANT DATES

January 21:

Sunday of the Word of God

Theme: Word of God is central to the life, faith and mission of the Church.

January 28: Catechetical Sunday

Theme: Like good stewards of the varied graces of God, use whatever gift each one of you has received to serve one another." (1 Peter 4:10)



KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

January

- 23 **Prayer for Christian Unity – 2024 Christian Federation of Malaysia**
- 25 **KL Central Prayer for Christian Unity 2024**
- 26-28 **Peninsular Malaysia Deacons & Wives Annual Gathering – Minor Basilica of St Anne, BM**



PENANG DIOCESE

Diary of Cardinal Sebastian Francis

January

- 23 **Meeting – Prefect of the Dicastery of Integral Human Development via Zoom**
- 26-28 **Peninsular Malaysia Deacons & Wives Annual Gathering – Minor Basilica of St Anne, BM**
- 27 **Catholic Formation for Evangelisers by Penang Diocesan New Evangelisation Commission at 9.00am – Stella Maris Penang Road, Penang**
- 28 **Catechetical Sunday & Closing Mass for Peninsular Malaysia Deacons' and Wives Annual Gathering at 8:00am – Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam**



MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

January

- 21 **Archbishop John Wong's 25th Sacerdotal Anniversary – Kota Kinabalu.**
- 23 **1st Caritas Malaysia Diocesan Directors & Ecclesiastical Assistants Meeting – Zoom**
- 24 **Christian Unity Week Prayer – Church of the Immaculate Conception, Johor Bahru**
- 26 **Confirmation Mass – Rumah Besar Katolik, Bekoh**

Called to be responsible stewards

Dear People of God,

CATECHETICAL SUNDAY 2024

Theme: *We Are Stewards of God's Creation (1 Peter 4:10)*

As we move towards the Malaysia Pastoral Convention (MPC) 2026, we have been journeying together as a Malaysian Church by contributing to the building of the areas of Family, Church, Ecology, and Society in parish communities, ministries, and BECs. In 2024, our key focus areas will be Church and Ecology. In view of this, for Catechetical Sunday 2024, the Malaysian Catechetical Commission (MCC) has selected the theme *We Are Stewards of God's Creation*.

Generally, a steward is a person who actively and wholeheartedly oversees or manages a household and everything in it, on behalf of the master. The master trusts the steward well enough to leave the household in his or her hands. Christian stewardship is the act of managing what belongs to God. Since we have received life and good things freely from God, we must use them for His glory and to care for His family. The Scripture verse chosen for Catechetical Sunday reminds us of this responsibility: "Each one of you has received a special grace, so, like good stewards responsible for all these varied graces of God, put it at the service of others." (1 Peter 4:10).

The Catechetical Sunday theme, therefore, emphasises that, as Church, we are called to become responsible stewards of creation, beginning with our care for human persons. As Pope Francis points out, "... environmental problems cannot be separated from... how individuals relate to themselves" (*Laudato Si'*, 141). As God's stewards, we are to respect and protect the dignity and well-being of all human beings, especially the poor, the marginalised and the oppressed. This includes ensuring that the natural resources from creation are equally distributed and shared so as to meet the basic needs of every man,



woman and child. As the Catechetical Sunday message states: "Our care for creation is not meant to be expressed for the sake of creation itself, but rather, for the sake of humanity for whom God created nature and all the resources contained within it."

At the same time, we are to care for creation, our *Common Home*. The urgency of the ecological issue is reflected in the latest publication of the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis at the opening day of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on 'Synodality' in Rome on October 4, 2023, *Laudate Deum* — a follow up to *Laudato Si'* published on May 24, 2015, eight years ago. In this regard, catechesis can play an invaluable role in creating an awareness among God's people about the responsibility of becoming good stewards of creation, as missionary disciples of Jesus Christ.

As we do every year, the MCC has prepared the Catechetical Sunday message and the Rite of Commissioning for Catechists. These are available in

Bahasa Malaysia, English, Tamil and Chinese. The e-poster is also ready. The Catechetical Sunday kit, which is being prepared, will be sent to the dioceses and parishes later. It is hoped that these materials will be used as a resource for reflection and study, celebration of the liturgy and activities organised in relation to Catechetical Sunday.

To conclude, on behalf of the Bishops of Malaysia, I wish to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude to parish priests, catechetical coordinators and catechists, parents and guardians and all who are involved in the ministry of catechesis. May Jesus Christ the Good Shepherd, lead and guide us.

Yours in Christ

Rt Rev Joseph Hii Teck Kwong D.D.
Malaysian Catechetical Commission

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**ARCHDIOCESE OF
KUALA LUMPUR**
CHAN/CD/01/2024

New appointments effective February 1, 2024

1. **Rev Fr George Harrison** is appointed as Parish Administrator of the Church of St Joseph, Sentul, Kuala Lumpur and Church of the Risen Christ, Jalan Ipoh, Kuala Lumpur.
2. **Rev Fr Edwin Peter** is appointed as Parish Priest of the Church of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Port Dickson, Negeri Sembilan.
3. **Rev Fr Eugene Benedict** is appointed as Parish Priest of the Church of Sts Peter and Paul, Banting, Selangor.
4. **Rev Fr Richard Anthonysamy SJ**, is appointed as Assistant Parish Priest of the Church of St Francis Xavier, Petaling Jaya, Selangor.
5. **Rev Fr Gnana Selvam Berentis** is

appointed as Assistant Parish Priest of the Church of the Our Lady of Lourdes, Klang, Selangor.

6. **Rev Fr Ferdinand Magimay** is appointed as Assistant Parish Priest of the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist, Kuala Lumpur.

7. **Rev Fr Gerard Theraviam** is appointed to the Ecclesiastical Team of Marriage Encounter in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur.

8. **Rev Fr Clarence Devadass** is appointed as the Ecclesiastical Assistant to the Social Communications Ministry of the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur.

9. **Dr Steven Selvaraju** is appointed as Acting Director of the Archdiocesan Pastoral Institute.

Archbishop Julian Leow and the faithful of the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, extend their heartfelt gratitude to Rev Frs George Harrison, Edwin Peter, Eugene Benedict, Richard Anthonysamy SJ, Gnana Selvam Berentis, Ferdinand Magimay, Gerard Theraviam, Clarence Devadass, and Dr Steven Selvaraju for generously accepting their new appointments.

Let us keep them in our prayers as they continue to serve in the Lord's vineyard.

Rev Fr Dr Clarence Devadass
Chancellor
Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur
January 8, 2024

Epiphany show by Neocatechumenal Way



The cast and crew of the 'Epiphany Show'.

SIBU: Catholic Church Neocatechumenal Way community organised an 'Epiphany Show' at St Teresa Chapel at Sungai Merah January 7.

Chief Responsible of Neocatechumenal Way, James Lau, said that the show is an annual celebration of the community to transmit faith to the children.

"Tonight, we will bring you back to 12 scenes in the history of Salvation, to help you appreciate the real meaning of Christmas, of the history that God has done with humanity. This is our history," he told the visitors who came to

watch the show.

About 120 people attended the play. Also present was Neocatechumenal Way Fr Edward Raymond.

He also pointed out that to appreciate Epiphany, Christians must begin with Genesis.

James said that about 50 people, including children were involved in the play. The team spent two months preparing for the play.

Fr Edward said such plays are a great way to catechise the children in helping them to understand the Christian faith.

The play ended with a buffet dinner. — *Soccom Sibu*

Fr Charles Chin celebrates 50 years of service

By Bernard Anthony

ALOR SETAR: Retired diocesan priest, Fr Charles Chin Juan Kong, aged 80, celebrated his sacerdotal Golden Jubilee on January 6. Fifty years ago on Jan 6, 1974, at the age of 30, he was ordained priest at the Church of Our Mother of Perpetual Help in Ipoh by the then Bishop of Penang, Rt Rev Gregory Yong.

Ipoh born Fr Charles, currently the priest in-residence at the Church of St Michael in Alor Setar, was surprised with an anniversary cake after celebrating the 7.30pm Mandarin sunset Mass. The event took place at the Church's foyer where the cake was later shared among the faithful present.

The parish's Facebook posted a congratulatory message on the occasion of Fr Charles' golden jubilee — praying for God's blessings, grace, favour and guidance to be with him always.



Fr Charles Chin at the Church of St Michael, Alor Setar.

Despite having retired at the mandatory age of 75 per Canon Law; Fr Charles still continues to serve the diocese, especially in celebrating Masses in Mandarin wherever needed. He has also been teaching the art of destressing for the past five years and is still continuing.

The next day, Sunday, Jan 7, the Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord, Fr Charles travelled to

Penang Island and celebrated two Masses in Mandarin; 8.00am at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit and 10.30am at Risen Christ Catholic Church. At both parishes, after Mass, a cake was brought for him to cut and celebrate his 50 years of priesthood. At the Cathedral, parish priest, Fr Joachim Robert was present. At Risen Christ parish, parish priest, Friar Esmond Chua, OFM and his assistant, Friar Crispus Mosinoh, OFM were present at the cake cutting ceremony.

Looking back at his 50 years as a priest, Fr Charles has only gratitude and praise for God the Almighty. For the Lord has been gracious and merciful to him with the numerous blessings, wisdom and guidance showered upon him, that gave him the zeal and zest in serving God and His people faithfully. Fr Charles continues to serve and hopes and prays that more young men will come forward to join the priesthood.

Celebrating Catechetical Sunday, January 28, 2024

Reflection on the theme

1 Peter 4:10: "Each one of you has received a special grace, so, like good stewards responsible for all these varied graces of God, put it at the service of others."

When God first created the world, everything contained within it was meant to be equally shared by all mankind so that everyone's needs would be properly taken care of and nobody would suffer lack (ref. CCC 2402). However, unequal distribution of these gifts among men has caused many people to suffer from severe lack. The Church calls us to exercise a preferential option for the poor, which means that we must intentionally always stand on the side of the poor. Sacred Scripture shows that God approaches the poor with precisely that same attitude: loving them, defending them, and speaking on their behalf (e.g. Isaiah 3:13-15, Luke 10, Luke 16, Matthew 25).

Since the Holy Catho-

lic Church teaches that every human person has a right to be treated with dignity, socioeconomic systems in society that compromise human dignity by keeping them poor and disadvantaged are considered unjust and must be changed (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 53). This includes the way human society exercises its role as stewards of God's creation.

Everything that God created was given to humanity. Natural resources from creation are meant to be equally shared so that people can live with a God-given dignity as human persons. Resources from creation should not just be given to meet the basic needs of every man, but also to help all people to be at their best. People in poverty are those who have little or no access to resources from creation while the rest of the world enjoys these resources excessively. Taking care of creation by being con-

cerned for equal distribution and eliminating wasteful usage is a crucial way of taking responsibility for those suffering from poverty. It requires more than just planting some vegetables in the parish garden. The Holy Father, Pope Francis, reminds us, "... we have to realise that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor" (*Laudato Si'*, 49).

Our care for creation is not meant to be expressed for the sake of creation itself, but rather, for the sake of humanity for whom God created nature and all the resources contained within it. An undue exploitation of creation would mean that there will be those among humanity who are deprived of the right to enjoy these natural resources, from this generation as well as the generations to come (*Laudato Si'*, 159). To exploit nature is to exploit our fellow mankind. "When we fail to acknowledge as part of reality the worth of a poor person ... it becomes difficult to hear the cry of nature itself; everything is connected (*Laudato Si'*, 117).

When we speak of environmental problems that arise from exploitation of creation, we are referring to problems with the planet's systems such as air, water, and soil, among others, that have arisen as a result of the way the planet has been mistreated by human beings. Our planet has now arrived at a point of severe environmental crisis because these problems have rendered our generation, as well as those to come, more vulnerable than ever to unnatural disasters and tragedies. But there is always hope: we can make a choice to "rise above ourselves"... to "choose again what is good"... and to "make a new start"! (*Laudato Si'*, 205)

A PRAYER FOR OUR EARTH

All-powerful God,
you are present in the whole
universe and in the
smallest of your creatures.

You embrace with
your tenderness all that exists.

Pour out upon us the power of
your love, that we may protect
life and beauty. Fill us with peace,
that we may live as brothers and
sisters, harming no one.

O God of the poor, help us to
rescue the abandoned and
forgotten of this earth,
so precious in your eyes.

Bring healing to our lives, that
we may protect the world and
not prey on it, that we may
sow beauty, not pollution and
destruction.

Touch the hearts of those
who look only for gain at the
expense of the poor and the earth.

Teach us to discover the worth of
each thing, to be filled with awe
and contemplation, to recognize
that we are profoundly united
with every creature as we journey
towards your infinite light.

We thank you for being with us
each day. Encourage us, we pray,
in our struggle for justice,
love and peace. Amen.

Taken from Pope Francis'
Encyclical Laudato Si'



In thanksgiving for a cardinal

By Patricia Pereira

BUKIT MERTAJAM: Cardinal Sebastian Francis commemorated his 100th day since being elevated to cardinal with a thanksgiving Mass on January 8 at the Minor Basilica of St Anne.

Nearly 2,000 individuals attended the Mass, joining the cardinal in expressing gratitude. He was conferred the cardinalate by Pope Francis during a consistory in Rome held on September 30 last year.

For many, it marked their inaugural participation in such a grand celebration, graced by the presence of Cardinals William Goh of Singapore and Giorgio Marengo of Mongolia, the apostolic nuncio to Malaysia, Archbishop Wojciech Zaluski, prelates of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei, bishops emeriti Most Rev John Ha and Rt Rev Antony Selvanayagam, bishops from the neighbouring countries of Thailand and Vietnam, clergy from the different dioceses in Malaysia, religious and dignitaries.

The celebration began with an entrance procession showcasing a harmonious mix of lay and religious participants proudly bearing flags symbolising each state in Malaysia. This meaningful display served as a tribute to Cardinal Sebastian's cardinalship encompassing the entirety of Malaysia. They were led to the church entrance with a captivating *Tarian Batak* by the Orang Muda Katolik, the Indonesian migrant community of the basilica.

Before the commencement of the Mass, Archbishop Julian Leow, the President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei, read out the Papal Bull which records the appointment of Cardinal



The bishops during the consecration at the Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam.

Sebastian to the College of Cardinals.

Cardinal Giorgio who, at the age of 50, holds the title of the world's youngest cardinal, delivered the homily during the Eucharistic celebration. The cardinal from Mongolia began by recounting his recent visit to Korea. While visiting the major seminary of the Archdiocese of Seoul, Cardinal Yeom Soo-jung highlighted to him the humble origins of the Church in Korea and the training of early candidates abroad, often to locations chosen by the missionaries, many of whom ventured to Penang.

Expressing his delight, Cardinal Giorgio remarked, "What a joy to hear that name! And here I find myself, in the heart of this blessed land of Penang. Thanks to the sacrifices of many, your locale has been a beacon of hope for the whole of Asia."

"Several centuries later, we find ourselves in the present day, witnessing a native son of this land ascending to the esteemed position of cardinal. His journey began with formative years at College General, followed by the attainment of academic distinctions from both Rome and the US."

As it was the Feast of the Baptism of the

Lord, Cardinal Giorgio reflected on the essence of the Church and the significance of the Baptism of Jesus, emphasising on the profound connection between the Church, its pastor, and the divine mysteries.

Drawing parallels between the baptismal narrative in the *Gospel of Mark* and the role of water, the dove, and the voice in symbolising purification, the Holy Spirit, and divine confirmation, the cardinal prompted introspection among the congregation. He encouraged contemplation on one's spiritual purity, openness to the Holy Spirit's guidance, and receptiveness to the voice of God in daily life.

He then referenced the three images to Cardinal Sebastian, indicating that these symbols were parallel to the latter's journey, highlighting his service as a priest since 1977 and as Bishop of Penang since 2012.

"As it is said in his coat of arms, he wishes that God's will may be done in his life, after the example of Mary: *Fiat voluntas tua* (Thy will be done). In this way, he wants to invite everybody to walk along the same path, because he knows that welcoming God's will in one's life is the secret of true happiness,"

said Cardinal Giorgio, emphasising Cardinal Sebastian's commitment to embodying God's will, invoking the Holy Spirit, and selflessly proclaiming the presence of the Lord among the faithful.

Acknowledging Cardinal Sebastian's role as a cardinal in strengthening unity with the Holy Father in Rome while maintaining communion with the local Church, Cardinal Giorgio celebrated the diversity within the Catholic Church, united in faith and mission.

He exhorted Cardinal Sebastian to embrace the mission of evangelisation, echoing the words of Pope Francis on the importance of inculturation of faith and evangelisation of cultures.

The young prelate expressed confidence in Cardinal Sebastian's ability to communicate the Gospel effectively and urged him to radiate the joy of the Gospel in Penang and beyond.

The homily concluded with a prayerful entrustment of Cardinal Sebastian to the guidance of our Heavenly Mother, Mary, in fulfilling the mission of spreading Christ's unconditional love to all.

Committed to sharing the Gospel

Cardinal Sebastian Francis in his speech expressed his heartfelt gratitude to Pope Francis for appointing him to the college of cardinals, as the second cardinal of Malaysia via the pontiff's letter dated July 9, 2023.

He then reflected on the three fundamental principles outlined in the Holy Father's letter, emphasising the Universality of the Catholic Church, founded on the Pentecost experience, the inculturation of faith, and the inseparable evangelisation of cultures.

The cardinal highlighted the significance of the Pentecost, where the spirit of universal brotherhood and sisterhood was born, fostering unity without uniformity within the Church. He acknowledged Pope Francis' declaration of 2024 as the Year of Prayer, preparing for the Jubilee Year of Hope in 2025, themed *Pilgrims of Hope*.

The prelate also mentioned the upcoming conclusion of the Synod on Synodality in October 2024 in Rome and the Malaysia Pastoral Convention in 2026, urging unity and collaboration guided by the Holy Spirit.

Cardinal Sebastian emphasised the missionary priorities in Asia and the Universal Church, emphasising engagement and dialogue with different religious traditions, addressing social issues, evolving understanding of faith's role, and environmental stewardship. He expressed a commitment to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with all Asians and beyond.

Acknowledging Asia's youthfulness, the cardinal urged the Church in Asia to proclaim the Gospel with a young and energetic spirit, thanking God for the sacrifices of Asians contributing to the planet's youthfulness through the gift of children.

In quoting St Catherine of Genoa, Cardinal Sebastian emphasised the importance of renewal with reform, stating that the



Cardinal Sebastian Francis with Cardinal Giorgio Marengo of Mongolia.

proclamation of the Gospel without a call to reform and repentance is superficial.

The cardinal then extended a warm welcome to everyone to St Anne's Shrine, aptly called "The Shrine of Harmony," where all are invited to worship freely, irrespective of nationality, faith, creed, race, or culture.

Earlier in his speech he acknowledged the presence of cardinals and archbishops from the Catholic Church, along with distinguished guests from Anglican, Methodist, and Syrian Mar Thoma churches. Additionally, he acknowledged the participation of representatives from the Christian Federation of Malaysia, Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference, and MCCBCHST (Penang).

In attendance were notable figures from

both state and federal government, including YAB Tan Sri Bernard Dompok, the first Malaysian ambassador to the Holy See; YB Tuan Lim Guan Eng, former Chief Minister of Penang; YB Puan Lim Siew Khim, Penang State EXCO for Social Development, Welfare, and non-Islamic Religious Affairs, representing the Chief Minister of Penang; and YB Tuan Daniel Gooi Zi Sen, Penang State EXCO for Youth, Sports, and Health.

Expressing gratitude, he extended appreciation to the dedicated individuals who contributed to the success of the thanksgiving Mass.

The celebration reached its culmination with a photo session, followed by a delightful dinner that was enjoyed by all in attendance.

Companion to AVB launched

BUKIT MERTAJAM: The *Kitab Suci Deutrokanonika* was launched on January 8 at the Minor Basilica of St Anne.

Bishop Richard Ng, the president of the Regional Biblical Apostolate headed the project when he was given the mandate by the CBCMSB on Oct 20, 2017.



Bishop Richard Ng showing the companion book to the Alkitab Versi Borneo which contains the seven deutrocanonical books.

He explained that the book is a companion to the *Alkitab Versi Borneo* and contains the deuterocanonical books – Tobit, Judith, Esther, Sirach, Wisdom and Maccabees 1 and 2 (seven books of the Old Testament, used by the Catholics and Orthodox).

This is the first major translation project of the CBCMSB. Bishop Richard shared that it was a complicated process and he is grateful to the 13 translators who worked hard with the AVB team in making this project a success.

He also thanked the AVB board of directors for giving the Church permission to produce the first Catholic edition of the BM Bible.

Celebrating harmony and love

By Aaron Lim

GEORGE TOWN: It was an unforgettable evening for the community of the Church of St John Britto as the Christmas celebrations closed on a joyous note.

More than 500 people turned up at a Christmas Open House, jointly organised by City Parish and the Office of the Member of Parliament for Jelutong on January 6.

State dignitaries who were present included the former Penang Chief Minister and Member of Parliament for Bagan, YB Lim Guan Eng, Member of Parliament for Jelutong, YB RSN Rayer, Penang Island City Council mayor, Dato' Ir A. Rajendran, Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM) Penang Chapter chairperson, Arokiadass Anthonysamy and Penang Harmony Corporation (Harmonico) general manager, Paul Au.

Parish priests Fr Edmund Woon and Fr Desmond Jansen were on-hand to



YB RSN Rayer presenting a RM50,000 cheque to the clergy of the Church of St John Britto in aid of the ongoing upgrading works of the parish's facilities.

welcome all who gathered for a night of fellowship which included an array of Malaysian delicacies, station games and performances reflecting the diversity of

the parish.

Fr Desmond, in his opening remarks, thanked YB Rayer and his team for the initiative in working together with the par-

ish for the event.

He also highlighted the importance of all parties; both religious and governmental organisations in working together to build a harmonious society.

YB Lim in his speech, quoted St Paul from the *Book of Corinthians*, "faith, hope and love – with the greatest of them being love" in exhorting all present to continue to spread love as fellow Malaysians, irrespective of race or religion.

In pledging his support for all religious places of worship, YB Rayer hoped that the message of peace would transcend to unity so that the nation can prosper and develop further.

He also announced a RM50,000 contribution towards the Church of St John Britto in aiding the ongoing upgrading works of its facilities.

The night also witnessed the handover of family aid to 14 families in need from the Sungai Pinang area and a lucky draw segment for all present.

Panels successfully installed at SMK Convent Ipoh

IPOH: A special gratitude Mass was held in the chapel of SMK Convent Ipoh last month to celebrate the installation of the five panel stained-glass window series which depicts the Joyful Mysteries. Fr Anthony Liew of the Church of St Michael celebrated the Mass and did the blessing rites.

The timing of the installation could not have been better as it was completed just before the annual Carolling by Candlelight event organised by Convent Girls Alumni (COGA) on Dec 17. The installation of these five magnificent panels generated much public interest and there was a good turnout during the Grand Old Lady's 117th anniversary celebration on Jan 6. The celebration on that day commenced with a special Mass celebrated at the chapel at 8.00am, followed by a simple cake cutting ceremony and breakfast in the school canteen. The event was open to all alumni and ex-teachers of the school.

COGA would also like to take this opportunity to inform all that a monthly Mass will be held on the first Saturday of each month in 2024 in the chapel. All are welcome to join in the Masses throughout the year.

The installation of these five panels was made possible through concerted fund-raising efforts led by COGA. The initial cost of the panels was estimated at RM140K but unforeseen material cost



Three of the five newly installed stained-glass panels bathed in natural light. (Ipoh Echo photo)

brought the total to RM156K. COGA has managed to raise RM130K thus far and is optimistic that God will move the hearts of generous contributors to help fill in the remaining RM26K.

Every contribution, regardless of amount, is vital to ensure its preservation. To those who have already contributed, COGA would like to take this opportunity to say 'Thank You' for your kind donation which has helped preserve a very hallowed and tangible part of our Convent heritage.



Agnes Wong, alongside Roster Wu's team, ensuring the chapel's transformation is nothing less than perfect. (Ipoh Echo photo)



Fr Anthony Liew celebrating the Mass, surrounded by a full house of joyous attendees.

Seniors bid farewell to Fr Gnana Selvam

KUALA LUMPUR: Golden Eagles celebrated Christmas and New Year with a fellowship and farewell for Fr Gnana Selvam, the assistant parish priest of the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist.

The fellowship on January 3 began with Mass, celebrated by Fr Selva (as he is known) and animated by Golden Eagles. Parish priest Fr Gerard Theraviam and Fr Robert Kham, priest-in-residence, were concelebrants.

After Mass the group of 70 elderly walked to a nearby restaurant for the triple celebration.

Nancy Emaung, 81, shared her thoughts about Fr Selva "from his days as Brother Selva, then Deacon Selva and eventually ordained as Fr Selva, I am reminded of his

unwavering dedication and passion".

Fr Selva, who joined the cathedral in 2022, always made it a point to participate in Golden Eagles pilgrimages and fellowships. "Indeed, he is leaving with an indelible mark on each one of us," Nancy said on behalf of the senior parishioners.

She described Fr Selva as having "a very good sense of humour, very approachable and he is a people's priest" to resounding applause. "His impact on us will be everlasting. May God bless you abundantly in this phase of your journey," she said, ending with a farewell song she wrote.

Fr Selva had everyone in stitches when he quipped "this is the only farewell where the person himself doesn't know where he is going". He thanked Golden Eagles for being

"eager to organise it".

Fr Gerard teased his flock, announcing "Fr Selva is going ... to ... a church ... in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur".

Earlier, three students from the University of Malaya enthralled a responsive audience with their rendition of oldies.

Golden Eagle Francis Ong presented Fr Gerard with a cheque for RM3,500, the amount raised at the fellowship for the Magnificat, the cathedral's community centre being built.

As per the chancery notice issued on Jan 8, Fr Selva is appointed as the assistant parish priest at the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes (OLL) in Klang effective Feb 1. Incidentally, he accompanied the Golden Eagles on their pilgrimage to OLL on Oct 6, 2022.



Fr Selva with Nancy after his sacerdotal ordination.

The long road to Christian unity in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: The general election is due in Pakistan this year, and Christian voters are expected to present their demands to political parties for a better, secure future in the elusive pluralistic state.

Some of their expectations are on display at the revamped St John Catholic Church, one of the 26 churches attacked by Muslim mobs on August 16 last year in Jaranwala, Punjab province. More than 80 Christian homes were also vandalised.

Some of their demands, posted in the form of sticky notes pasted under a Station of the Cross, range from the safety of young Christian girls who are abducted, forcibly married to Muslim men and converted to Islam, to restoring Christian institutions to their past glory and improving living conditions inside Christian colonies.

Stories of intolerance towards Christians, who make up just 1.27 per cent of the 230 million overwhelmingly Muslim population, have been well documented over decades. But are the Christian denominations themselves united?

Every year, the Prayer Week for Christian Unity is observed from Jan 18 to 25 with prayers, hymns, and ecumenical dinners for the church leaders.

"We will celebrate it as if all is well. Whereas the fact is nothing is well. We talk for eight days but for the rest of the days of the year, we remain divided," said Fr Bonnie Mendes, former executive secretary of the Catholic Bishops' National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP).

The reasons for the divisions are many, according to him. The divide within the Catholic Church of Pakistan was bad enough but now we have splinter churches making it worse. The split into very small neighborhood Churches has resulted in one preaching against the other.

The leaders of these small church groups spend time attacking each other on social media rather than doing something positive on the ground. Their followers can log on and watch the fighting. The Churches are divided so the faithful remain divided.

"There is no light at the end of the tunnel. It is the sad truth," Mendes regretted.

The NCJP was instrumental in restor-



Pakistan Army's Chief General Syed Asim Munir seen with church leaders and activists on September 25 at General Headquarters, Rawalpindi. (UCA News Photo/Courtesy The Pakistan Daily)

ing the 2002 joint electorate system, under which the country's some 4 million minority voters, mostly Christians and Hindus, are expected to elect their local representatives in the national and provincial assemblies at the elections. This year's elections are scheduled for Feb 8.

In the 342-seat National Assembly, only 10 seats are set aside for ethnic and religious minorities. The electoral system lets Muslim political parties select minority candidates in proportion to the general seats they have bagged in the elections. The party winning less than five per cent of the general seats does not have this right.

Archbishop Joseph Arshad of Islamabad-Rawalpindi has demanded direct voting to choose MPs in Pakistan. "The aspirations of religious minorities should be taken into account in elections. All political parties should bring forth minority candidates on general seats," he argued.

Many Christians would want the election commission and political parties to provide religious minorities a chance to participate as candidates in the national and provincial assembly elections rather than selecting them at their whims and fancies.

But Christians remain divided here as well. Some groups support the joint electorate system and see the demand for direct participation in elections as an attempt to grab power and money. This has weakened the will to forge unity for the collective good of the persecuted community.

"Unity is our biggest need. The goal for the year 2024 should be to collaborate. Let us set targets and achieve them together," said Bishop Azad Marshall, moderator of the Church of Pakistan, while addressing the annual Christmas Programme of Christian Journalists on Dec 14.

But despite suffering major attacks over the years, Christians remain divided. The clergy, intellectuals and activists from one denomination avoid attending other's events. Internal power struggles, competition to get overseas funding and a race for resources result in division.

Historically, the community was broadly divided in two. The English-speaking Goans, concentrated in Karachi Archdiocese were one, and the Urdu or Punjabi-speaking Christians, mostly descendants of former socially poor Dalits, were the other. Some of these socially poor managed to get higher education and became elites.

As one Christian leader put it, "The love for Prophet Muhammad unites the Muslims. We also have common grounds like our faith elements, but lack a national leadership."

The divide was no more conspicuous at the high-profile meeting of Church leaders with Pakistan Army's Chief General Syed Asim Munir at the General Headquarters, Rawalpindi last September to discuss the fallout of the Jaranwala attacks.

The delegates included leaders of all mainstream churches recognised by the Pakistan government, except Catholic bishops. I was told by the president of the

Pakistan Catholic Bishops Conference, that the Catholic bishops could not attend it as they had to attend the reception of Archbishop Germano Penemote, the Ambassador-designate of the Holy See, on the same day in Islamabad.

Participation of even a single Catholic representative could have sent a powerful message of solidarity, not only within the Christian community but also to the de-facto power centre of the security state.

The Rawalpindi-based Christian Study Centre remains the only ecumenical institution supported by both the Catholic and Protestant Churches. Similarly, the Ecumenical Commission for Human Development in Lahore is the only charity that works in partnership with five major denominations.

More such examples of visible Christian unity could set a good example. After all, a divided Christian community serves the interests of the religiously biased state.

Pakistani Christians lack the unity required to assert their rights and negotiate effectively with government authorities. Church leaders must find ways to break the schism and silence within. — **By Kamran Chaudhry, ucanews.com**

Letters to Editor

An awkward Christmas experience

Dear Editor,

My husband and I returned to our home town for Christmas to spend time with our 98-year-old dad, sister and loved ones.

We were glad that there was a 4.30pm Christmas eve Mass to enable the senior citizens and young children to be in attendance. The Mass celebration was filled with grace and joy. The homily amplified Mother Mary filled with grace and how that grace needs to reside in our hearts as we celebrate Jesus.

Later, as the Communion hymn echoed through the church, signalling the time for us to approach for Holy Communion, we began lining up along the aisle. However,

just as the solemn melody filled the air, the celebrant unexpectedly grabbed the microphone, halting the singing to make an announcement on who could not receive Holy Communion. He started with persons who had not been to church for the whole year, all spouses from mixed-marriages, and the list went on.

I was shocked upon hearing such an announcement. I could hear murmuring around me and saw some people leaving their pews and walking out of the church.

As I grappled to come to terms with what I heard, I asked myself the following:

1. What happened to the "grace" which was amplified at the homily?

2. Why were these announcements not made at the commencement of the Mass?

3. Whether everyone can go to church throughout the year given the prevailing social and health conditions, especially senior citizens who, despite their own predicaments, have come with great joy to church to celebrate Christmas?

4. What about those persons who diligently attend daily live-streamed Masses? Are they considered "out-casts" too?

5. What happened to the Synodal Church where all are welcome?

6. Is attendance being taken at all Masses?

7. Would the Lord Our Father ever turn

us away bringing to mind the Parable of the Prodigal Son?

While I concur that those persons who have yet to be baptised and persons of other faiths are not allowed to receive Holy Communion, I am in a quandary as to how conditions are being observed and / or implemented in some parishes.

As I reflect upon last year's Christmas experience, I realise that I still have lots to learn and understand about the ways of the Church. May I continue to be enlightened in the years to come.

Wishing all a wholesome New Year.

Theresa Ratnam Thong
via email

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Send your letters to ► letterseditor@herald.com.my

The Editor, HERALD, 5 Jalan Robertson, 50150 KL | Please include your name and address. Letters without name and address will not be entertained.

Mega-procession of Black Nazarene draws millions

MANILA: In one of the largest religious festivals in the world, the Catholic procession of the Black Nazarene in Manila brought millions to the streets, often causing chaos.

Even though early estimates said that 800,000 people attended, the final count said that 6 million people walked in the procession with the historic Black Nazarene statue of Christ in the Philippine capital, Manila January 9. It was the first procession with the life-size statue since 2020; during the COVID-19 pandemic the traditional event was cancelled.

The wooden statue, carved in Mexico and brought to Manila early in the 17th century, is cherished by Catholics, who believe that touching it can lead to a miracle.

More than 15,000 security personnel and medical staff were deployed along the 3.7-mile route from Rizal Park to the Minor Basilica of the Black Nazarene, also known as Quiapo Church. According to local media reports, there were chaotic scenes as worshippers repeatedly tried to climb onto the wagon carrying the statue of Jesus.



Pilgrims join the annual procession of the Black Nazarene during its feast day in Manila, Philippines, Jan 9, 2024. (OSV News photo/Eloisa Lopez Reuters)

"I am very pleased the old system is back and we get to do this again," said Jonathan Rancho, 52. He had travelled with his wife and two children from Bulacan province to Manila to join the procession.

"I prayed that, hopefully this year our livelihoods will get better, I hope that my work will be a success and we will be given a prosperous life so I may fulfil my obligations to my family," Rancho added.

There were chaotic scenes as the feverish march got under way before dawn, following an open-air Mass in a seaside park in Manila.

For the first time, the statue was transported in a bullet-proof glass case to protect it from damage. The procession, in which many participants walk barefoot, usually lasts 18 to 22 hours. It is one of the most popular religious festivals in the predominantly Catholic Philippines and is considered one of the largest religious events in the world.

The procession began in the rain in the early hours of the morning after a church service led by Manila's Archbishop Cardinal Jose Advincula, in Rizal Park. In his homily, Cardinal Advincula called on the faithful to be "models" of the life of Jesus Christ.

The centuries-old statue of the Black Jesus Christ is considered the greatest object of devotion for Filipino Catholics. The life-size statue, probably made by an Aztec artist in Mexico, was brought to the Philippines by Spanish missionaries in 1606 and is kept in Quiapo Church. — OSV

New major archbishop elected for India's Syro-Malabar Church

KERALA: India's Eastern rite Syro-Malabar Church has elected Bishop Raphael Thattil (*pic*) of Shamshabad Diocese as its Major Archbishop, amid the raging liturgy dispute that led to a serious division within the Church.

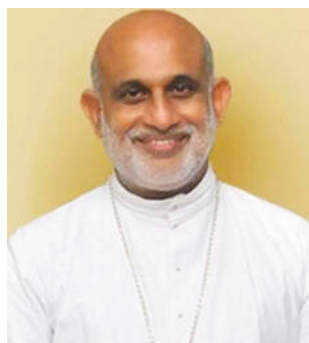
The election of the new head of the Church based in southern Kerala state, was announced at a press conference held at Mount St Thomas, its headquarters in Ernakulam district, January 10.

His election was necessitated following the resignation of the previous head, Cardinal George Alencherry, on Dec 7, 2023.

Bishop Thattil, in his brief address, stressed the need for unity among members of the Church, asserting that "my new role is to work with you."

The prelate also said, "A bishop is not a personal property but a public property. My duty is to be with you. Let us work together. The shortcomings of one need to be rectified by the other."

He called for mutual cooperation from



bishops, priests, and laity among others.

The priest also said that his style of functioning will involve "taking everyone into account" and added, "God will provide the required strength" to carry on with his new assignment in a very challenging time.

The new archbishop was the bishop of the Diocese of Shamshabad, one of the largest in the country spanning 22 states, since 2018.

Earlier, he was the auxiliary bishop of Trichur Archdiocese in Kerala state, which is also his home diocese.

The youngest of 10 children, Thattil was born on April 21, 1956, in Thrissur. He did his schooling at the local St Thomas College High School and joined St Mary's Minor Seminary, Thope in 1971.

He did his ecclesiastical studies in St Thomas Apostolic Seminary, Vadavathoor, and was ordained a priest by Mar Joseph Kundukulam on Dec 21, 1980. — *ucanews.com*

Hong Kong approves first Catholic university

HONG KONG: The Hong Kong government has approved the Church-run Caritas Institute of Higher Education (CIHE) as a university, making it the first government-recognised Catholic university in the Chinese-ruled territory.

The chief executive-in-council and the permanent secretary for education have approved the institute as a university and its name has been changed to St Francis University on January 9, the Hong Kong administration said in a press release.

The granting of a university title is "a milestone" for the Catholic institute and also "testimony to the government's commitment to provide young people in Hong Kong with quality, flexible and diversified study pathways," said Christine Choi Yuk-lin, the secretary for education.

The Catholic institution is the fourth self-financing post-secondary education establishment granted a university title.

Along with the Caritas Bianchi College of Careers, St Francis University offers post-secondary programmes in 35 different disciplines, ranging from social sciences to technologies and economics with about 2,500 students.

Hong Kong's bishop, Cardinal Stephen Chow, had promoted the idea of a

Catholic university when he was the local superior of the Jesuits before he became bishop.

The university began in 1985 as the Caritas Francis Hsu College, becoming an approved post-secondary college in 2001 offering sub-degree programmes.

After acquiring accreditation for offering degree-level programmes in 2010, it changed its name to Caritas Institute of Higher Education in 2011, the report stated.

As Jesuit superior, Chow wanted to build a new university in Fanling, close to the border with Mainland China, but the authorities rejected it for urban planning reasons.

Once he became bishop, Chow revived the idea of a university by suggesting that the Institute of Higher Education be turned into a university.

"The upgrade in the title will open up more opportunities for quality learning in tertiary education and give recognition to youths who want to develop their profession," said Kim Mak Kin-Wah, university president.

"After the name change, the university will continue to offer our distinctive curriculum." — *ucanews.com*



The Caritas Institute of Higher Education of Hong Kong is now St Francis University. (RVA photo)

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More than 7.3 million people displaced in Sudan

KHARTOUM: UNHCR said Sudan is now the country with the largest number of displaced people and the largest child displacement crisis in the world.

Elsewhere, the head of Sudan's army, Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, has

rejected the latest reconciliation efforts with his rival paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), vowing to continue a war with the RSF.

He said the whole world had witnessed the RSF committing war crimes and crimes against hu-

manity in West Darfur and the rest of Sudan.

"For that reason, we have no reconciliation with them, we have no agreement with them," he said.

Last month, in a collective statement, the Catholic Bishops in Su-

dan and South Sudan urged the UN, the US, the UK, and Norway — also referred to as the Troika — and other members of the international community, to intensify their respective efforts to end the ongoing violence in Sudan.

Compounding matters, it is estimated the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance in Sudan has reached 25 million, a figure that amounts to more than half the population. — **By Nathan Morley, Vatican News**

Pope appeals for end to all wars

VATICAN: As he led his Wednesday General Audience recently, Pope Francis relaunched his appeal for peace in our war-torn world.

In his greetings to the Italian-speaking faithful, January 10, he expressed his solidarity with the people of countries that are enduring the horrors of war.

"We renew our prayerful closeness to the dear Ukrainian population so harshly tried and to those who suffer the horror of war in Palestine and Israel, as well as in other parts of the world," he said.

The Pope also encouraged all people to pray for nations at war.

"Let us pray for these people who are enduring war," he said, "and let us pray to the Lord that He may sow the seed of peace in the hearts of the authorities of those countries."

Pope Francis has made his appeals for peace a near-constant refrain in his public audiences.

On Jan 8, he held his annual "State of the World" address to ambassadors accredited to the Holy See, detailing his concerns regarding global issues.

The Israel-Hamas war in Gaza and Russia's war in Ukraine topped his list of situations that require global attention and concern.

At the same time, he condemned the "enormous stock of available weapons" that offer the illusion of deterrence.

"The contrary is true: the availability of weapons encourages their use and increases their production," said the Pope. "Weapons create mistrust and divert resources." — **By Devin Watkins, Vatican News**



Lack of space prompts Hong Kong's underground church



HONG KONG: Cardinal Stephen Chow of Hong Kong inaugurated and blessed an underground church due to a lack of available spaces in a highly urbanised area of the city.

The rebuilt and renovated St Joseph Church in Fanling was reopened on January 7.

The church would serve as a centre for connecting various communities, including migrants living in the area, Italian priest Fr Pietro Paolo Dossi of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (PIME) said during the ceremony.

"When we run out of space, we literally build underground," Dossi said.

Underground construction was required as there was "no more building space available in the district," and "the community continued to grow and the diocese approved the construction of a larger church," Dossi added.

The Northern District, in the New Territories of Hong Kong where Fanling is located, is a heavily urbanised area.

Cardinal Stephen Chow, Bishop of Hong Kong, presides over the inauguration of the new underground church in the Fanling district January 7, 2024. (Photo: EDA)

"In recent years, several dozen buildings have been built next door," each with "forty floors and thirty-two apartments on each floor," Dossi said.

He estimates that some 30,000 new residents — consisting of mostly students and civil servants commuting from mainland China — are expected to move into the area around the parish church over the next few years.

The new underground church is accessible through escalators and elevators.

The parishioners are mostly Hong Kongers, with around 100 Filipino women, almost all of whom work in domestic jobs. The Chinese residents mostly arrived in the 1950s and 1960s, Dossi said.

"We haven't yet reached those from mainland China who have settled in the district, but perhaps that's who we'll turn to in the future," Dossi said.

The parishioners prepared for the inaugural ceremony with vari-

ous events while managing their regular parish activities from a school nearby.

"For six months, every first Mass of the month, we organised a different activity, retracing the history of the old church, in anticipation of the arrival of the new one in the manner of a return to our roots," Dossi said.

The parishioners also made a 500-piece jigsaw puzzle with the image of the five loaves and two fishes. The image refers to the episode recounted in Mark's Gospel where Jesus says to the disciples: "You give them something to eat." (Mark 6:37)

"Behind each piece of the puzzle, each person wrote a prayer, as a sign of a community deciding to enter a new place, and to renew itself on an inner level too," Dossi said.

The final piece of the puzzle was added on the church inauguration day, Dossi added. — **ucanews.com**

Korean Catholics warned over 'Naju' Marian apparition

SEOUL: The Archdiocese of Gwangju in South Korea has issued a letter warning clergy, religious and laypeople to refrain from promoting devotion to a controversial Marian apparition not recognised by the Church.

The archdiocese also cautioned Catholics about ex-priest Alexander Kim Dae-sik, who was expelled from the Salesian congregation in 2022 but continues to administer sacraments illicitly and without permission in private places related to "the Naju phenomenon."

Korea-born Kim was ordained in 1996 as a Salesian priest, worked in Malawi, Africa as a missionary and returned to the homeland in 2020.

Since his return, Kim visited a shrine dedicated to the Virgin Mary in Naju, Gwangju and started promoting devotion to the controversial apparition, the archdiocese said.

Fr Angel Fernández Artime, Superior General of the Salesian Society, issued a decree on October 22, 2022, ordering Kim's expulsion from the religious order due to his illegitimate acts.

Artime cited a decree from former Gwangju archbishop, Andrew Choi Chang-moo, that incurs automatic excommunication to anyone who presides over, or participates in, sacramental ceremonies at the location of the so-called 1985 Marian apparition.

"Clergy, religious, and laypeople who preside over or participate in the administration of the sacraments and sacramental ceremonies prohibited by them in arbitrary

chapels and the Virgin Mary's Garden are subject to automatic punishment and excommunication," Archbishop Choi said in the decree dated Jan 21, 2008.

The so-called Marian miracle of Naju dates to the 1980s when Julia Kim, a mother of four, claimed she had a vision of Jesus with his Sacred Heart bleeding in 1982 and asking for the conversion of sinners.

Then, she claimed a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary owned by her started weeping on June 30, 1985.

Kim, a Protestant-turned-Catholic, also claimed she was miraculously healed from terminal cancer even though doctors said she had no hope for survival.

As the stories of the apparition and Julia's healing spread, many flocked to visit the statue. Some started calling the statue Our Lady of Naju, which is now placed in a hilly garden.

This prompted the Archdiocese of Gwangju, which covers the area, to conduct investigations into the claims.

The Korean Catholic Bishops' Conference rejected the miracles associated with the shrine.

In 1998, former Gwangju Archbishop Victorinus Youn Kong-hi declared that so-called "miracles" attributed to the Virgin Mary in Naju city have produced no evidence that "they are supernatural and thus from God."

To consider the alleged events in Naju as supernatural is regarded as "an act of breaking the unity of the faith of the Church," Youn warned. — **ucanews.com**

Synod will change the Church “through transformative friendship”

Reflecting on the first assembly of the meeting of the Synod of Bishops on synodality, Dominican Fr Timothy Radcliffe pondered whether or not it will bring about change in the Church.

“Some people came with the hope that it would bring dramatic change to the life of the Church,” said Fr Timothy during a recent presentation at Sts Peter and Paul Cathedral in Indianapolis. “Other people hoped it would exactly change nothing.”

Fr Timothy, an English priest appointed by Pope Francis as spiritual adviser of the synod, which met at the Vatican from October 4-29, 2023 was in Indianapolis while touring various cities in the US to speak about the meeting.

“According to the media, the press, ... no big decisions were taken. It was dismissed as a failure, a flop,” he said to an audience of about 100. “But Pope Francis always insisted that it’s the Holy Spirit that is the protagonist of change. That’s quite a different

understanding of change.”

From this perspective, Fr Timothy asserted, the synod will change the Church “through transformative friendship” that “will leave people completely changed.”

“Any change in the structures of the Church for which we hope, for which we long,” he said, “any of these will derive because we’ve become different sorts of people, a different sort of community, a community of the friends of God.”



Karla Hudacek, pastoral associate and director of religious education at St Thomas Aquinas Parish in Indianapolis, speaks on December 6 with Dominican Fr Timothy Radcliffe in Sts Peter and Paul Cathedral, Indianapolis after the priest gave a presentation at the recent meeting of the Synod of Bishops on synodality. (The Criterion Photo/Sean Gallagher)

‘Transformative friendship’

Such “transformative friendship” at the synod is ultimately rooted, Fr Timothy said, “in the divine friendship, which is the very life of God: Father, Son and Spirit.”

“Pope Benedict often said our religion, Christianity, is not a religion of the book,” he said. “It is a religion of encounter, transformative encounter.”

To further such encounters, Fr Timothy said, the synod meeting did not meet like past synods, in an auditorium centred around the

Pope, cardinals and bishops.

Rather, the participants — ordained, religious and lay Catholics — sat at round tables where they listened to and looked at each other.

“You could see faces being changed, people learning to smile at each other,” Fr Timothy said. “Christianity is a religion of the face. A lot of what was happening at the synod, at this first stage, was learning to see each other’s faces, learning to befriend them.”

In reflecting on the work of the

Holy Spirit in the synod meeting, Fr Timothy recalled how, when he ministered in Rome as the general of the Order of Preachers, he watched a nest of hawks outside his office where the mother and father hawks urged their nestlings to fly out of the nest.

“Fly or die,” Fr Timothy said. “That’s what the Holy Spirit does. It propels us out of where we are comfortable. A similar thing happened at the synod, and its consequences are potentially enormous.”

‘Citizens of the kingdom of God’

Part of going beyond “comfort zones” in the synod, Fr Timothy said, was its participants seeing value in the priorities and experiences of fellow participants from different countries and cultures.

This, he said, is especially important in contemporary society marked by a growing “militant nationalism all breathing to war” that “often goes with fundamentalist forms of religion.”

“But in the synod, we began to glimpse how we are called to be more than citizens of our country,” Fr Timothy said. “We are baptised

to be citizens of the kingdom of God. Vastly more significant than any identity we may have as citizens of any country is that we are citizens of the kingdom [in] which, as St Paul said, there is neither slave nor free, Greek nor Jew, male, nor female.”

While the Holy Spirit takes believers beyond the comfort zones of their countries and cultures, Fr Timothy said that it also binds people of great diversity into the truth.

“The Spirit leads us into all truth,” he said. “On the night before he died, Jesus promised the

Spirit, the Spirit of truth. Human beings live by the truth. We need it to thrive. Birds need air. Fish need water. Human beings need truth. Without it, we perish. And we live in a society in which ... the instinct for the truth is being undermined.

“Detachment from the truth is subversive of the human community, as we can see all over the world. It leads to polarisation, violent language and conflict, here in the United States, at home in Britain and everywhere in the world. This detachment from reality is fundamentally dangerous.”

Accepting the ‘ministry of unity’

During a question-and-answer session after his presentation, Fr Timothy was asked whether the way issues in the Church were being discussed at the synod might lead to a devaluing of obedience and a corresponding growth in the influence of relativism in the life of the Church.

Noting that this was “a concern that was widely shared” at the synod, Fr Timothy noted that it can be overcome by fostering unity in the Church.

“We have to be held in the unity of the Church as we seek,” he said. “And the bishop, according to the teaching of the Church, is the minister of unity, holding us together. So, one way in which we respect and honour the bishop — at the local level, our priest, at the level of the whole Church, the

pope — is by accepting that ministry of unity.”

Fr Timothy emphasised that the dialogue about the Church at the synod “can’t drift into relativism.”

“There is one truth,” he said. “But it’s beyond the grasp of all of us. You see, the temptation of some people is to say, ‘There’s one truth and I’ve got it.’ The opposite temptation is to say, ‘I’ve got my truth, and you’ve got your truth.’ Those, I think, both lead us astray.

“The middle way, which I think is the healthy way, is that of the course of St Thomas Aquinas, who taught us that there are truths that we know, such as God is good and God is true, the truths of the teaching of the Church. But what they mean — we’re always on the way of understanding.”

‘Deeply Eucharistic all the way through’

Fr Timothy noted how the October synod meeting “was profoundly prayerful.”

“It was filled with silence,” he said. “After every four or five interventions, we’d have four minutes of silence, four minutes of prayer. And so, you could say — and the Pope said this many times — the whole event was Eucharistic.”

Fr Timothy recalled a trip he made to Rwanda in 1993, when tribal violence began taking its toll on the eastern African country that would soon descend into genocide.

After visiting a hospital filled with children who were victims of this violence, Fr Timothy said he “couldn’t think of any-

thing to say.”

While he was “robbed of all words” by the violence swirling around him in Rwanda, Fr Timothy knew he could do something, “do this in memory of me.”

“Then I think I understood, in a way, the Eucharist a little bit better than I’d ever done before,” he recalled. “Do this in memory of me.

“It took us back to that last crisis [for Jesus and His disciples], the last night, when there was no future, apparently. All that lay ahead was betrayal, torture, failure, and death. And at that moment, He performed ... an act of radical hope. This is My body, and I give it to you. This is Me. I give Myself to you.

Timothy said, is “to bring on board the priests.”

“If we do not do so, the synodal path will get us nowhere,” he said. “It was remarked that the priests around the world — I don’t think in this archdiocese only — but around the world, the priests have been those most resistant to the synodal path.

“I think that if we are to move forward, we have to find ways of cherishing the priesthood, of accepting it and seeing its beauty in a good way, of seeing how people are ordained to be ordered to the people of God.”

Looking more broadly, Fr Timothy also saw a challenge in the way that competition marks so much of contemporary culture.

“How do we become a non-rivalrous people,” he wondered. “It’s the hardest lesson of all.”

This aspect of society has an effect on the Church, Fr Timothy said.

“I think for us the great art is how we learn to live without competition with each other,” he said. “Because essentially, more authority, more voice for the laity does not mean less authority for the priests. More authority for priests does not mean less authority for bishops.

“If we learn to live together well in the Holy Spirit, poured upon us by the Father, then we will become less and less competitive and mutually empowering.”

— By Sean Gallagher, *The Criterion*



ECHOING THE FAITH

Dr Steven Selvaraju

The origin and significance of Catechetical Sunday

Catechetical Sunday is celebrated by the Church every year. This year, the Church in Malaysia observes Catechetical Sunday on January 28. In this article, I will examine the origin and significance of Catechetical Sunday.

Origin of Catechetical Sunday

The first Church document that directs parishes to set aside a special day to highlight the importance of the catechetical ministry is *Provido Sane Concilio* (Better Care for Catechetical Teaching). It was issued on January 12, 1935 by the Catechetical Office of the Holy See, with the approval of Pope Pius XI.

The introduction to *Provido Sane Concilio*, states, "...the Catholic Church, the guardian and teacher of divinely revealed truth... has always held that the imparting of heavenly knowledge necessary for salvation through catechetical instruction must be placed among the most serious obligations..." (no.1).

The document goes on to emphasise that all the baptised, including bishops, clergy, religious and laity, are responsible for transmitting the faith. It points out that, "... effective help and loyal support in this matter is both expected and demanded from parents and guardians" (no. 22).

Then, several "Specific Commands for the Catechetical Apostolate" (nos. 24-31) are issued. Basically, these are directives by the Catechetical Office on the aspects that should be improved in the task of catechesis at the national, diocesan and parish level. This is followed by a list of "Practical Means to be Adopted" (nos. 32-43). One of the "practical means" is that:

"... in order that the mind of the Christian people may be directed from time to time toward religious education, let a Catechetical

day be established in each parish, if this has not already been done" (no. 38).

The Catechetical Office also presents a "what-to-do" list on the 'Catechetical day'. It includes the following:

- ❖ The faithful should be "called together" in the parish, and after having received the Holy Eucharist, they should pray to obtain "greater fruit from divine teaching" (catechesis).
- ❖ A special sermon should be preached to the people on the necessity of Catholic instruction. Parents are to be told about their duty "to instruct their children in Christian doctrine and to send them to the parochial catechism classes..."
- ❖ Books, pamphlets, leaflets and other materials suitable for the purpose should be distributed to the people.
- ❖ A collection should be taken for the promotion of catechetical works.

Since the publication of the document, the proposal to establish a "Catechetical day" has been taken up enthusiastically by churches throughout the world. Over the years, it has gradually led to the establishment of Catechetical Sunday.

Over time, it was the common practice for churches, especially in Europe, to observe Catechetical Sunday on the third Sunday of September. It is largely based on that fact that the new school term (and, therefore, the new catechetical year) in Europe, often starts around mid-September or early October. Later, the practice of celebrating Catechetical Sunday during these months was adopted by churches in other parts of the world.

Catechetical Sunday in Malaysia

In Malaysia too, it was normal in the past to observe Catechetical Sunday in early October. In recent years, however, the Malaysian Cat-

echetical Commission (MCC) proposed that it be observed in January instead. It is to ensure that the start of the new catechetical year coincides with the new school term which begins in January (this was before the COVID-19 pandemic). With the approval of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia, it was, therefore, established that Catechetical Sunday falls on the fourth Sunday of January each year.

As mentioned, in 2024, Catechetical Sunday will be celebrated in all the dioceses in Malaysia on January 28. The objectives of celebrating this occasion include:

- ❖ to highlight the importance of the catechetical ministry in the Church.
- ❖ to emphasise that all members of the Church, especially parents and guardians, are responsible for the ministry of catechesis.
- ❖ to serve as an opportune time for all Catholics to re-commit themselves to be responsible for the ministry.
- ❖ to show appreciation to those serving as catechists in the parishes, whether they are transmitting the faith to children, teenagers or adults. Normally, a commissioning or re-commitment service is held for catechists.

Every year, the MCC also prepares materials for distribution to the parishes. These include the Catechetical Sunday message, which is available in English, Tamil and Mandarin, as well as, in Bahasa Malaysia and Iban. The Catechetical Sunday Kit is prepared in these languages too. In addition, an e-poster with the Catechetical Sunday theme and the liturgical text for the commissioning / re-commitment service are also distributed. The materials are sent to the parishes accompanied by a formal letter from the Episcopal President for Catechetics (presently, Bishop Joseph Hii from the Diocese of Sibiu).

For 2024, the MCC selected *We are Stewards of God's Creation* as the Catechetical Sunday theme for the Church in Malaysia, with the related Scripture passage: "Each one of you has received a special grace, so, like good stewards responsible for all these varied graces of God, put it at the service of others" (1 Peter 4:10). The theme was selected with an emphasis on the focus areas of Church and Ecology. This is in light of the journey of the Church in Malaysia towards 2026, when the Malaysia Pastoral Convention will be held.

Conclusion

Catechetical Sunday is an occasion that involves all the baptised. It reminds us of the importance of being responsible for the ministry of transmitting the faith. This responsibility was given to each of us at our baptism, where we are called to share in the prophetic (teaching) ministry of Jesus. On this special day, may we re-commit ourselves to the mandate that Jesus gave to the Apostles, and which is now shared with the whole Church, that is: "Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations... and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you" (Mat. 28: 19-20).

The key ideas of the article are presented in a simple illustrated format below. The illustrations are my own. The e-poster for Catechetical Sunday was prepared by the Malaysian Catechetical Commission.

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THE ORIGIN AND SIGNIFICANCE OF CATECHETICAL SUNDAY

The origin of Catechetical Sunday can be found in the Church document *Provido Sane Concilio*. It was issued on January 12, 1935 by the Catechetical Office of the Holy See, with the approval of Pope Pius XI.



It states "... in order that the mind of the Christian people may be directed from time to time toward religious education, let a Catechetical day be established in each parish, if this has not already been done" (no. 38).

The directive to establish a "Catechetical day" was taken up by churches throughout the world. Over the years, it has led to the establishment of Catechetical Sunday.



...is a celebration of the whole community.

We celebrate Catechetical Sunday:

1. To highlight the importance of the catechetical ministry in the Church.
2. To emphasise that all members of the Church are responsible for the ministry of catechesis.



WE ARE ALL RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS MINISTRY!

3. To re-commit ourselves to be responsible for catechesis in the home, community and parish.
4. To show our appreciation to those serving as catechists in the parish.

THANK YOU dear catechists



2024 theme for the Church of Malaysia

CATECHETICAL SUNDAY 2024

28TH
JANUARY
2024

"WE ARE STEWARDS OF GOD'S CREATION" (1 PETER 4: 10)

我们是天主受造物的管理员 (伯前 4: 10)

KITA ADALAH PENGURUS Ciptaan TUHAN (1 PETRUS 4:10)

கடவுளின் படைப்புக்கு நாம் சீரிய

பொறுப்பாளர்கள் (1 பேதுரு 4:10)

Kitai ke Pengibun Semua Utai

ke Digaga Tuhan (1 Peter 4: 10)



He was a true shepherd to all

ULU TIRAM: “I will miss him,” said Bishop Bernard Paul as he expressed his sorrow over the sudden passing of Monsignor Michcel Mannayagam, Vicar General 2 of the Diocese of Malacca Johore, who died at the age of 63 on January 7.

Msgr Michcel had been hospitalised on Christmas morning due to a heart attack and was also diagnosed with COVID. The diocese issued a chancery notice the same day, indicating his critical condition. Unfortunately, he did not recover and passed away 12 days later.

The funeral Mass, held on January 10 at the Church of the Holy Family, where he served as the parish priest, saw a full house with some of the faithful seated under tents outside and in the parish hall. Approximately 1000 people, including Muslims and Hindus whose lives he had impacted, attended the funeral. Clergy from various dioceses were present to bid farewell to their fellow clergyman.

In his homily, Bishop Bernard shared a poignant poem reflecting on the sudden loss. The bishop emphasised the transformative nature of death, likening it to the end of a caterpillar’s life and the beginning of a but-

terfly’s. He reassured the congregation that while death is an inevitable part of life, it does not have the final say. Quoting St Paul and the gospel, the prelate underscored the belief in resurrection for those who believe in God.

“This is the God that Msgr Michcel loved. This is the God that he served. This is the God he celebrated. Fittingly, it was after the Christmas eve Masses which he celebrated that he began to slowly make his way to the Lord. This is the same God he died in. This is the God he believed in. This is the God he introduced to many — the rich, the poor, to all races, to all religions.

“Today as we send him off, we know that his work is over, we know his mission is over. We know that he has fought the good fight and we know that he has been an inspiration to many,” said the bishop.

Those touched by Msgr Michcel’s ministry affirmed the words of Bishop Bernard. Stories of his kindness, compassion, and willingness to help others in need painted a picture of a compassionate and humble man. Even in his final days, he continued to extend a helping hand and provide comfort.



“Over the years, I’ve been touched by countless stories of kindness and compassion exemplified by the gentle giant, Msgr Michcel Manayagam. Anyone in need knew that seeking his help wouldn’t end in disappointment. In 2007, during a challenging period when my mother was critically ill in the hospital, I manned the graveyard shift. Msgr Michcel would join me, maintaining a silent vigil. Although not one to speak much, his reassuring and gentle presence spoke volumes. Rest in peace, dear Msgr Michcel” — **Bernadette Miranda, Church of St Joseph, Plentong.**

“My final conversation with Msgr Michcel was about a week before Christmas. We discussed a newly baptised Catholic facing complications from hernia surgery, leading to being bedridden with a tracheostomy. Abandoned by his wife and family due to past mistakes, he found himself helpless. Seeking guidance on finding an affordable nursing home, I turned to Msgr Michcel. He emphasised the importance of helping this individual in a desperate situation, stating, ‘We must not abandon him now; God is merciful.’

“Msgr Michcel never turned away anyone in need, serving as a true example of selfless service. To me, he was the St John Vianney of Malacca Johore Diocese. — **Deacon Dr Leslie Petrus, MAJODI.**

“Humble, pragmatic, and ever ready to extend a helping hand — these were the qualities that stood out to me about Msgr Michcel. Radiating an old-school charm that instilled a sense of ease, I last met him at Holy Family Church, two weeks before he fell ill. Seated in prayer before the tabernacle at the sanctuary, he had just celebrated morning Mass. As the Chaplain of Hospital Sultan Ismail, he shared insights into a case of family abandonment I was handling. With his pragmatic approach, he outlined the steps needed to place the individual into a private nursing home. Another problem solved; another lost sheep safely back in the fold. Thank you, Msgr Michcel!” — **Cornelius Chew**

● To read the full profile of Msgr Michcel Mannayagam, go to: <https://bit.ly/3NZLeIs>



The clergy and faithful at the funeral Mass of the late Fr Michcel Mannayagam.

Germany mourns Catholic football great Franz Beckenbauer

“For me, of course, it’s an unforgettable experience because he’s the first Pope that I was able to shake hands with or exchange a few words with.”

It was with those words that Franz Beckenbauer described his encounter with Pope Benedict XVI on 26 October 2005.

Beckenbauer, who died on January 7 at the age of 78, was one

of the world’s greatest footballers. During the course of his career, he became a world champion as both a player and a coach, and brought the 2006 World Cup to Germany.

On the same day he met the German-born Pope, Beckenbauer spoke to *Vatican Radio*’s German-language edition.

“This is the most beautiful moment of my life,” he said. “After

all, I was raised as a Christian and Catholic, and my thoughts are always turned upwards. Of course, I was looking forward to this moment because I think he is a great representative of the Christian world. And I also told him that I wish him all the best, especially a long life, because humanity needs it more than ever.”

Beckenbauer joined Bayern Munich as a young player and quickly established himself as a key player for the Bavarian club.

The young man from the Giesing district won four national championship titles, captured the European Cup three times, and the World Cup.

With his elegance and ease on the field, he redefined the role of the sweeper and crowned his career by winning the 1974 World Cup at home.

Two years earlier, he had already led the German team to victory in the European Championship.

After a few years in the United States with the New York Cosmos, where he played on a legendary team with Pelé, Beck-



Franz Beckenbauer greets Pope Benedict XVI on 26 October 2005.

enbauer returned to Germany and won another championship title with Hamburger SV in 1982.

After being eliminated in the preliminary round of the 1984 European Championship, he became team manager of the Mannschaft — the German national team — without even having a coaching license.

He led the national team directly to the final of the 1986 World Cup against Maradona’s Argentina.

It ended 2 to 3 for the South Americans. Four years later, he avenged Diego Maradona’s team with a triumph in the World Cup

in Rome during the 1990 Italy World Cup.

Beckenbauer resigned, but later returned to FC Bayern as coach when the Munich team was in crisis in the mid-nineties.

The German Football Association employed his charisma and multilingual glamour for the bid for the 2006 World Cup, which was eventually won by the Italian national team, led by Marcello Lippi.

The summer fairy tale was Beckenbauer’s masterpiece as an official. — **By Mario Galgano, Vatican News**



Beckenbauer waves to spectators at the World Cup 1974.



MAKING SENSE

Emmanuel Joseph

Responding to dangerous short-term politics

Dubai is a well-known destination for many Malaysians working in the Gulf area, or for those of us flying internationally with its popular airlines, Emirates. It is also a well-known destination for exhibitions and trade shows, even a hub for cutting edge technology like vertical farming and Internet-of-Things. Of course, it is a tourism hotspot and global financial hub as well.

Most recently, it added to its list of accolades, a rather infamous label — a destination where politicians meet and plot to overthrow the government, joining the other fortunate or unfortunate towns of Kajang and Port Dickson in the list of locations associated with sinister political moves, the first international city to be added to the list, which has grown to include several hotels!

While on one hand, Malaysians are long bored of political antics that this ‘news’ no longer perturbs us, the toll it exacts on our institutions and norms cannot be underestimated.

The long chain of events that led to this latest alleged conspiracy, being propagated by a once-popular fugitive blogger, a few well known, if rather rude, cyber troopers and the legions of online propagandists, willing to lap it up and disseminate this unverified, unverifiable ‘news’ does not augur well for a mature, united, harmonious country. Rather, the opposite.

A radical slant

This stretches to the 2000s. Exacerbation of Barisan Nasional’s shock defeat in five

states led to a sharp increase in race-and-religion themed undertones to the political narrative which, sadly, has now turned rather mainstream. As these previously anathema storylines have become so normalised, we shrug them off as part and parcel of silliness that we have devolved into, an occasional meme-worthy punchline we share on our family WhatsApp groups next to sparkling “Good mornings” and assorted blessings from various saints.

Not that there is anything wrong with memes, morning wishes, or assorted saints.

The “best” has given way to the “most tolerable”, and what was a most radical thought yesterday has become centrist and moderate, appealing even, to us today.

We have reached a level where merely existing — being allowed a small space within defined parameters and guarded walls are things to be celebrated and sighed upon — “at least we still have that!”

After all, in the age of misinformation and bogeyman politics, we tend to ask what Théoden asks in the second *Lord of the Rings* trilogy — “The world changes, and all that once was strong now proves unsure. How shall any tower withstand such numbers and such reckless hate?”

Answering again, and again.

The movie version replies, “Ride out to meet it!”

As helpless as one reply is to the hundred lies, we should still ride out to meet it.

As hopeless as one act to spread the truth is, in the face of a thousand programmes to make whichever leader’s version of their

truth, manufactured to sell their ideology, we still ride out to meet it.

Continue organising, mobilising, and participating in events that advance the cause of democracy and its offshoot topics — elections, freedom of expression, sanctity of the law and citizen empowerment.

These institutions need defending, and we should support initiatives that promote moderation, and condemn those that do not, even if we feel inclined to support a certain stance for want of similar faith, religion, or race. The moment we do so, we fall into the same category of the people we dislike.

Issues like Palestine are sensitive and multidimensional and should not be dismissed off easily, either way. Sometimes, we may understand the need to hold onto heritage and sentiment, but this needs to balance with equity, fairness and a liberal dose of reality.

A recent example would be a Sarawakian school board’s decision to stop Muslim students from conducting a Quranic recitation graduation ceremony (or *khatam*), due to the school’s historic Christian heritage. This does not seem fair to the Muslim students and is the foil of what we have been arguing here in Semenanjung — against prohibitions of wearing crosses, and the fight to keep Good Friday a school holiday.

We cannot afford to separate Semenanjung and Bornean issues, nor can we look at issues from a religious or racial lens at the time, as we expect others to do the same.

Continual dialogue

It is important to continue dialogue

and offering our halls as platforms for conversations with our neighbours, leaders, and friends in a continuing effort to find common ground, despite the increasing difficulty to do so.

Perhaps the easiest to participate in, but also the easiest to give up on doing, is informing our elected representatives what we think about what they say. This is especially so in our polarised demographic, with an MP or ADUN who already echoes what we think, or who does not need to consider it. In either case, it still matters to speak, as we vote not only with ink, but our voices every day, and continued silence may imply that the issue does not really concern us.

Elected representatives are there to serve and listen to our views (and mostly, they do) regardless of whether they are our preferred choice or otherwise.

We are blessed to belong to a Church that is already multicultural and global to have experience in dealings with all sorts of political ideologies and administrative ideals.

Tapping into our common experience with each other would not only facilitate, but perhaps even allow, us to catalyse conversations to counter short sighted ideas and help everyone see the bigger picture that eludes them, intentionally or otherwise.

● Emmanuel Joseph oversees IT as his 9-5 job and from 5-9, he serves a few NGOs, think tanks and volunteer groups. He serves as an advisor for Projek Dialog and is a Fellow with the Institute of Research and Development of Policy.



FAITHFULLY SPEAKING

Julie Lim Seet Yin

The gift of cultural diversity A celebration and a challenge

Growing up in a multi-cultural and multi-religious country like Malaysia has created in me a sense of appreciation for the different cultures.

The cultural diversity of Malaysia brings with it a variety of festive seasons, ethnic outfits, superstitious beliefs, cultural taboos, etc. The wide selection of food from different cultures enriches the Malaysian palate. People in Malaysia are always spoilt for choices when it comes to deciding what to eat.

Whilst living in a polyethnic society may be natural for many of us, cultural diversity could also pose challenges, especially for people from monoethnic countries.

Challenges being monoethnic

My Japanese colleagues who are transferred to work outside Japan for the first time usually have to attend orientation programmes on the culture and practices of the country where they will be based.

There are also training programmes for Malaysian staff to get to know Japanese culture. We learn the Japanese way of exchanging business cards, the art of bowing, and why punctuality is important in Japanese culture. I was amazed to learn where the boss should stand in a lift when he is with his subordinates, and where he should sit in a car. If you’re interested, go read it up. There is a reason why people say Japan is a planet on its own.

At one of our staff dinners, the theme selected was, “International”. Staff were required to dress up in cultural costumes. However, there was a catch — they were not supposed to dress up in their own ethnic outfits.

The Malaysian staff immediately understood the requirement. However, few of the Japanese staff, having come from a monoethnic community, did not understand the requirement. Even though the theme was explained to them, a handful still chose to wear their own Japanese outfits to the dinner.

The Malaysian staff, however, came dressed in their best cultural costume that was not their own. Malay staff came dressed resplendently in saree and *jippa* ala Bollywood style. Chinese and Indian guys came dressed in *baju Melayu* complete with *kain sampin* and *songkok*. The more adventurous Malaysian ladies wore the Japanese *kimono*, Korean *hanbok* or Vietnamese *ao dai*. The night was a showcase of the beauty of cultural costumes.

In relation to the challenges of being monoethnic, the lack of awareness about other cultures and religion could lead to misunderstanding.

Diversity faux pas

In one of my previous employments, we organised a carnival to celebrate the completion of a project in Taiwan. A few of our Taiwanese colleagues came to Kuala Lumpur for the occasion. Since my department was in-charge of organising

the carnival, these colleagues paid a visit to the head of department, my boss, who was a Malaysian Muslim. As a memento, the Taiwanese colleagues brought him a small figurine of a cute pig. They were not aware that in Islam, figurines of any kind are prohibited as it promotes idolatry. And what more a figurine of a pig for a Muslim.

Being the professional public relations personnel that he was, my boss accepted the gift graciously. And after the guests left, he quietly gave the figurine away to another colleague who was a non-Muslim. I was a rookie at that time, and that incident served as a personal reminder to always research before giving gifts to people of different cultures and religious beliefs.

Racism in diversity

In spite of living in a multi ethnic society, there are many Malaysians who prefer to live amongst people of their own ethnicity.

I have a basic method of gauging whether a person has friends from diverse ethnicities — just look at their friends list in Facebook. People from a monoethnic society would obviously have a majority of friends from their own ethnicity. For Malaysians, their friends list should be diverse. However, this is not the case for many Malaysians.

People have various reasons for not mingling around. They may have had bad experiences with certain ethnicities. Some could be xenophobic or prejudiced due to their upbringing. Whatever the reason may be, people who prefer to stick to their own

ethnicity are depriving themselves from experiencing the beauty of another culture.

I have heard of a Malaysian Chinese who does not know what a *vadai* is in spite of living her whole life in Malaysia. And I’ve had Malay colleagues who have never eaten a banana leaf meal before.

As a Peranakan who occasionally eats with her fingers, I’ve been scorned by certain Malaysian Chinese for doing so. These people are clearly not aware that food (especially a banana leaf meal) tastes yummier when eaten with fingers.

One of my favourite images of the acceptance of cultural diversity are of ladies in *hijab* using chopsticks to eat noodles. I always say that Malays who are able to eat using chopsticks could only come from multicultural Malaysia or Singapore.

Conclusion

Living in multi-cultural and multi religious Malaysia certainly teaches us to be sensitive and respectful towards each other’s culture and religious beliefs, because these are sensitive areas that could cause division and disharmony.

In spite of the challenges that cultural diversity brings, the beauty and gift of each culture is to be celebrated and appreciated.

● Julie Lim Seet Yin believes that a satisfied life measured by one’s heart, mind and soul is better than a successful life measured by worldly yardsticks. She can be reached at: limseetyin@gmail.com



Fr Ron Rolheiser

Piety and humour

Piety is the enemy of humour, at least whenever something less than piety is masquerading as piety. Here's an example: I once lived in community with an overly serious man who, after someone would tell a colourful joke, would bring us back to earth with the question, "Would you tell a joke like that in front of the Blessed Sacrament?" That not only deflated the joke and its teller, but it also took the oxygen out of the room.

There's a response I would have liked to have given to his question, namely, a joke my Oblate Novice Master used to tell, one whose irony exposes false piety. The joke runs this way: A young woman was getting married and her family could not afford a venue for a reception for the wedding. The parish priest generously offered them the foyer at the entrance of the church, telling them they could bring in a cake and have a reception there. The father of the bride asked whether they might also bring in some liquor. "Absolutely not," the priest replied, "you can't drink liquor in a church!" "But," protested the bride's father, "Jesus drank wine at the wedding feast of Cana." "But not in front of the Blessed Sacrament!" replied the priest.

Admittedly, humour can be impious, crass, offensive, dirty, but whenever that's

the case, the fault normally lies more in the aesthetics than in the content of the joke. A joke isn't offensive because it is about sex or religion or any other area we surround with sacredness. Humour is offensive when it crosses a line in terms of respect, taste, and aesthetics. Humour is offensive when it is bad art. Bad art crosses a line in terms of respect, either vis-à-vis its audience or its subject matter. What can make a joke offensive or dirty is when it is told, or how it is told, or to whom it is told, or the tone in which it is told, or lack of sensitivity to what is being told, or the colour of the language as it is being told. Whether or not it can be told before the Blessed Sacrament isn't a criterion. If a joke shouldn't be told in front of the Blessed Sacrament, it shouldn't be told in front of anyone. There aren't two standards of offensiveness.

Still, bad piety is the enemy of humour. It's also the enemy of robust, earthy living. But, that is only the case for bad piety, not genuine piety. Genuine piety is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit and is a healthy reverence before all of life. But it's a reverence that, while healthily respectful, is not offended by humour (even robust, earthy humour) providing the humour isn't aesthetically offensive — akin to nudity which is healthy in art but offensive in pornography.

False sensitivity that masks itself as piety also strips all spirituality of humour, save for the most pious kind. In doing that, in effect, it makes Jesus, Mary, and the saints humourless, and thus less than fully human and healthy. One of our mentors at our Oblate novitiate told us, young novices, that there is not a single incident reported in Scripture of Jesus ever laughing. He told us this to dampen our natural, youthful, ram-bunctious energy, as if this was somehow a hindrance to being religious.

Humorous energy is not a hindrance to being religious. To the contrary. Jesus is the paragon of all that is healthily human, and He, no doubt, was a fully healthy, robust, delightful human person, and none of those words (healthy, robust, delightful) would apply to Him if He hadn't had a healthy, indeed earthy, sense of humour.

For fifteen years I taught a course entitled *The Theology of God* to seminarians and others preparing for ministry. I would try to cover all the required basis asked for in the curriculum — biblical revelation, patristic insights, normative Church teachings, and speculative views from contemporary theologians. But, inside all of this, like a recurring theme in an opera, I would tell the students this: In all your preaching and teaching and pastoral practices, whatever

else, try not to make God look stupid. Try not to make God look unintelligent, tribal, petty, rigid, nationalistic, angry, or fearful. Every homily, every theological teaching, every ecclesial practice, and every pastoral practice ultimately reflects an image of God whether we want it to or not. And if there is something less than healthy in our preaching or pastoral practices, the God who underwrites it will also appear as unhealthy. A healthy God does not undergird an unhealthy theology, ecclesiology, or anthropology.

Hence, if we teach a Jesus who is humourless, who takes offence at the earthiness of life, who is uncomfortable hearing the word sex, who flinches at colourful language, and who is afraid to smile and chuckle at irony, wit, and humour, we make Jesus appear as rigid and uptight, a prude, and not the person you want to be beside at table.

● **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

Nurture the spiritual practice of staying present

As someone who travels often for work, I spend a lot of time in airports waiting for early morning flights. And when I have a sketchbook with me, I fill those present moments by drawing and sipping a cup of hot black coffee. There is always something or someone worthy of my prayerful attention for 20 or 30 minutes to help me overcome boredom, impatience and my addiction to sudoku puzzles.

Airports become giant monastic cells where I can read, draw and mind my own business: the business of *lectio divina* and *visio divina* rolled into one happy hour of prayerful present moment bliss.

During my novitiate year almost 50 years ago, I realised I was put on earth to be a combination of brother and artist — not a priest, as I had originally thought when I first entered the novitiate. In those days, 30 minutes of morning meditation in the chapel began promptly at 6.30am. That was the rule, and being obediently present, on time and in cassock, seemed more important than how we actually filled that half hour with prayer. "Keep the rule and the rule will keep you" was a mantra back in the day — one I happily ignored. (Rules are stifling; prayer is exhilarating.)

Fortunately, I had a very wise novice director who was perfectly fine with me writing in my prayer journal as a way to reflect on my devotional reading during meditation time. Journaling allowed me to organise my inspirations and use the present moments creatively and meditatively. For me, the written word evolves quite naturally into the illuminated word, and *lectio divina* (divine reading) flows into *visio divina* (sacred seeing).

St Francis de Sales said: "Open your soul to peace in the morning and recall it throughout the day." No matter where or when I sketch, whether in a busy airport or a beautiful retreat setting, I am opening my soul to peace in the moment. Even watching the world spring to life from my screened-in porch at home in Camden can be a beautiful



"Airports become giant monastic cells where I can read, draw and mind my own business: the business of *lectio divina* and *visio divina* rolled into one happy hour of prayerful present moment bliss," writes Oblate of St Francis de Sales Bro Mickey McGrath. Here is a detail of one of his sketches. (NCR photo/Mickey McGrath)

thing. I pray with a peaceful but heavy heart when I observe and sketch people passing by with large trash bags or shopping carts filled with their worldly belongings. On several occasions, when they have stopped at the kitchen door for a cup of coffee, I have asked if I may sketch them. I have never been turned down. They strike a pose, and in those fear-free moments of sketching, they remind me that the Body of Christ is bigger — and for me, more beautiful — than any elaborately gold-plated monstrance can contain.

Years ago, shortly after my dad died, I fell in love with St Thérèse of Lisieux when I learned that she loved to paint and used that gift following her own father's death to decorate a chasuble depicting his face as the face of the suffering Christ. She taught me that grief-centred present moments are charged with the healing power of creativity.

Therese also wrote poems and plays and kept a journal of her memories and inspirations, even as tuberculosis wracked her body with pain.

Thomas Merton — who also loved Thérèse — had parents who were artists, so it was in his DNA to appreciate visual art as well as poetry, jazz music and Eastern mysticism. Merton, inspired by Buddhist contemplative practices, created Japanese brush drawings as part of his morning prayer routine. Sometimes abstract, sometimes figurative, these lovely ink drawings ushered him into the present moment and led by the Holy Spirit into uncharted territories within. Mystical life is all about the journey, not the destination; about discovering God in internal freedom, not external rules. And some of my favourite mystical BFFs, like Thérèse and Merton, used pens and paintbrushes to get to

that momentary place of inner peace.

But it isn't just the great saints and mystics who have taught me to live in the present moment since those novitiate days so long ago; great artists have done their share of mentoring me as well. The great impressionist painter Claude Monet, who lived at the same time as Thérèse, once said, "What keeps my heart awake is colourful silence." Imagine my thrill several years ago at the grace-filled opportunity to sketch in his legendary garden in Giverny: water lily pads floating serenely under Japanese foot bridges; bright blue water reflecting the sunny sky above; rowboats which he used first thing every morning — as a nearly blind 90-year old man — to clip and trim the weeds and overhanging branches of his artfully planned garden. The beautiful colours of silence which he tended so lovingly in countless present moments still inspire us a century later.

Now also imagine my chagrin at the irony of encountering a woman seated on a bench, feverishly texting on her handphone in this earthly garden of heavenly delight. She reminded me of the bored and lonely travellers I witness in crowded airports, desperately searching for distraction and entertainment. Over the years I have come to see that most people in every airport terminal are on cellphones — talking, texting, reading or playing games — doing anything to distract from silently, colourfully immersing themselves in sacred present moments that will never pass this way again.

Lest you think I am being too holier-than-thou, I must admit that when I have finished sketching in the present moment, I often take out my cellphone to enjoy some relaxing rounds of sudoku puzzles. My left-brain, logical side needs attention too — just not too much. — **By Bro Mickey McGrath, NCR**

● **Bro Mickey McGrath**, an Oblate of St Francis de Sales, is an artist, author, retreat director, and art and faith tour guide.

Little Catholics' Corner

"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." (Mk 1:17)

Let's Colour



Dear Children,

Jesus called His disciples, drawing to Himself followers who would help Him in His work and continue to spread His good news.

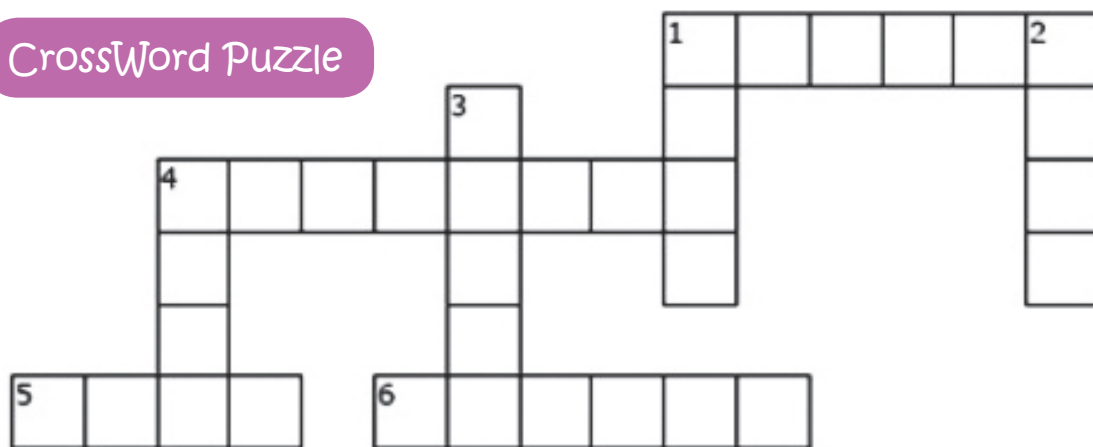
These men didn't know what would happen by following Jesus, but they were willing to leave their jobs and the lives they knew, in order to serve this teacher.

In doing so, they gained new life in Him. The disciples were not special because of training or talent, but because they committed to follow the Lord.

When we follow Jesus, we can trust that He will provide for us and love us every day of our lives.

Love
Aunty Eliz

CrossWord Puzzle



BOAT
SHORE
PEOPLE
WALK
FISH
FOLLOW
NETS
BROTHERS

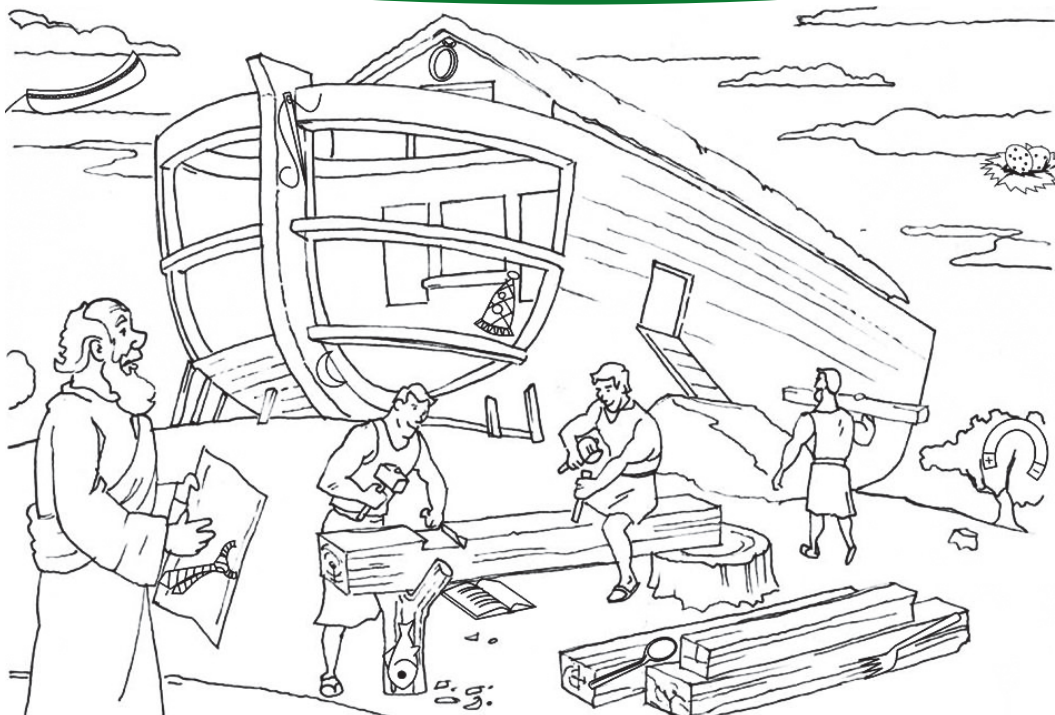
ACROSS:

1. To move along behind someone
4. Two or more males who have the same parents
5. Open fabric made of threads or cords used to catch fish (plural)
6. Men, women and children, human beings

DOWN

1. An animal without legs that lives in the water
2. To move along the edge of the sea, lake or wide river
3. The land along the edge of the sea, lake or wide water
4. A small vehicle for travelling on water

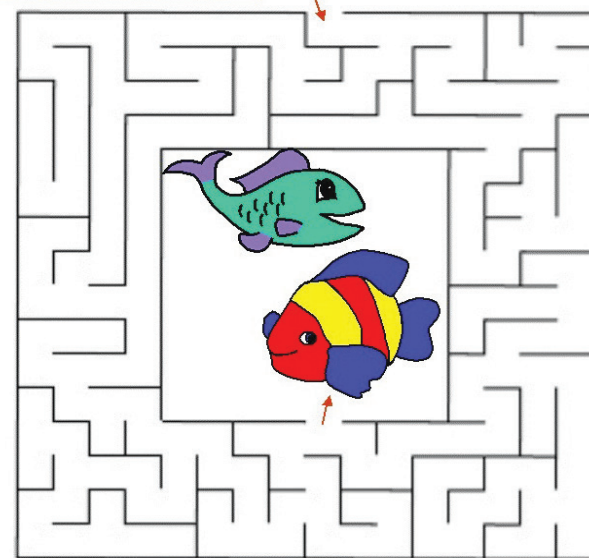
HIDDEN PICTURES: GOD GUIDED NOAH



Find these objects hidden in the picture below:
book,
bird nest,
canoe,
fish, fork,
hat,
magnet,
moon,
necktie,
needle thread,
ring,
spoon.



Help the disciples find the fish they caught



YOUTH

January 21, 2024

KENINGAU: Aspirants and seminarians from the Diocese of Keningau organised a “Weekend with the Seminarians” for youth interested to discover more about the priestly or religious calling at the Tatal Retreat Centre.

The aspirants/seminarians present were: Candy Yangun, Jackelson Jimmy, Valerian Victor, Uldrich Mark, Clive Leo Singki, Bob Cornelius, Devson Konsuang, Hogan Bonaventure, Alexsius Linggam, Nelbert Victor, Byrwinedren and Timothy.

Keningau prelate, Bishop Cornelius Piong and Vicar General of Keningau Diocese, Msgr Gilbert Lasius and several priests, joined them for the fellowship dinner on first day. Bishop Piong asked the seminarians to reflect on “What are you looking for?” in discerning one’s calling in life. For the participants, Bishop Cornelius hoped the sessions would help them discern further their calling. The following day began with Mass, presided over by Bishop Cornelius. In his homily, Bishop Cornelius stressed on St John the Baptist as the great prophet and

Weekend with Seminarians



precursor of the Lord a model for Christians also today. “John the Baptist never was scared to speak the truth. He was faithful to God’s word, and God’s law: and that is something very important today especially discerning your priestly vocation and formation.”

Twenty-two teens invested their time and hearts listening to sharings from Aspirant Clive Leo on *What is Vocation and Commitment of life?* This was followed by Aspirant Jackel-

son who talked on *Diocesan Priests*. In addition, two religious congregations were present and gave their sharing — Sr M Chiara from the Poor Clare (OCS) and Friar Timothy from the OFM. They shared the joys and challenges of their calling alongside the orders’ charism and role in bringing the Good News to all.

In the evening, the seminarians and participants watched a movie titled *John Constantine*. On the final day, Fr Bede Anthonius, presided over the Mass to

conclude the programme. He reminded the participants that it was the Lord Himself who had invited and led them to the weekend programme so that they could listen to Him more attentively and discover His will for them. Of the 12 seminarians, six will be doing pastoral work in the Keningau Diocese (Leo, Mark, Bob, Alex, Brywin, Nelbert) and another in the Kuala Lumpur Archdiocese (Devson). — **By Juanis bin Marcus**

ODE TO LAUDATO AT STELLA

KUALA LUMPUR: Stella Maris International School Damansara organised a Garden Festival on its school grounds recently. This was in response to the Church’s call to Care for Our Common Home, reinforced in Pope Francis’ encyclical *Laudato Si’*.

Aptly aligned with the United Nations’ 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the school chose four of these 17 goals that clearly supported *Laudato Si’*. Both the concepts of *Laudato Si’* and SDGs are all about caring for the natural environment and all people, as well as broader questions of the relationship between God, people, and Mother Earth.

On January 10, the school played host to members of the Klang Valley Plant Acquisition (KVPA). Led by Professor Chan Eng Heng, a UN-recognised biologist who lives in the neighbour-

hood of Stella Maris. The school believes in doing its part for the environment by promoting events such as this. The event focused on the sale and exchange of garden plants, curated to provide that soul-felt experience and reconnection with mother nature. Basically, plant-lovers gathered to contribute, buy, donate and exchange home-propagated plants.

There were also booths to promote recycling of usable materials for the overarching purpose of protecting the environment. There were also lucky draws, all towards a good cause. Other booths from KVPA members offered breakfast coffee and sandwiches, as well as hand-made accessories from recycled items like household gizmos and gadgets, baubles, bangles and beads!

The entire programme was aligned with Stella Maris’s own aspiration to foster healthy habits among its children based on the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals



The Klang Valley Plant Acquisition team.

(SDGs) while demonstrating its support of *Laudato Si’*. Among these SDGs of the United Nations, the school adopted four, namely, SDG No 3 - Helping the children understand the urgent need to promote good health and well-being by working with charitable organisations like Hospis Malaysia in aid of people in need; SDG No12: on Responsible Consumption by reducing the use of plastic and paper, practising the 3Rs of reducing, reusing and recycling resources and materials, as well as preventing food waste. And SDG No 13 on Taking Climate Action with hands-on efforts to green our environment by growing plants; and hosting KPVA’s event was one of these.

Stella Maris has its own societies that teach the children on greening the environment through tangible initiatives like growing a vegetable garden in its backyard, cultivating compost for fertilizers, and others.

President of Stella Maris International School, Margaret Soo, a plant-enthusiast, said the occasion was “an ode to *Laudato Si’*. It is in the school’s ethos that we do our part in caring for all God’s creation. We do

our part to help the community rekindle the spirit of caring for people in need. It’s all about the relationship between God, people and the Earth. We are all part of the *Laudato Si’* family which cares for our common home. Let’s do it through the SDG ways!”

The event also had a charity drive in its programme to help people in need. From the sale of plants, gifts and exchanges, food, crafts, and others, all proceeds went towards Hospis Malaysia, a professional community palliative care service-provider to people with life-limiting illnesses. The KVPA has conducted many such similar programmes but this was the FIRST with an element of charity. Hospis Malaysia had a booth in the corner selling their in-house souvenirs of tote bags, soft toys and trinkets.

There was a solo presentation by a talented saxophonist, Yinny Loh, and carol singing by members of the KVPA with their guitars and percussion, inviting the onlookers to sing along as well and reconnect with one another in brotherly love.



Hospis Malaysia’s booth at the Garden Festival.

CATHOLICISM Study Programme

KUCHING: YAST building witnessed the first of many gatherings; a group of young adults from different backgrounds with the same purpose – to dive deeper into the faith and encounter the living God.

Greeted eagerly by the Kuching Archdiocesan Youth Commission Team, we quickly warmed up after a round of ice-breaking activities and opening prayer, and then dived into our first session of *The Catholicism Study Programme: Amazed and Afraid*. We kicked off by watching an amazing video by Bishop Robert Barron who took us around the world and made our minds spin at the same time. This was followed by meaningful dialogue where each of us got a chance to share our thoughts and insights.

Over the next three months, we had 10 sessions in total. As time went on, our friendship

grew and so did the depth of our discussions, led patiently and joyfully by our facilitators under the guidance of Fr Ramon Borja SDB. We looked forward to those nights where we could come together as a body of Christ to immerse ourselves in the teachings of the Church and share openly knowing that it would be a safe space; there would be no judgement, only acceptance. With each session our hearts became lighter, recognising that it was truly the Holy Spirit who had led each of us to this gathering, with a purpose unique to each individual, yet all for His divine purpose.

We learned to appreciate the different facets of our rich Catholic faith through the eyes of our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. It was a humbling experience to sit and unravel the spiritual and intellectual aspects of the Catholic faith with regards to Church history,



liturgy, the saints, evangelisation and so much more. Quoting Bishop Robert Barron, “God is so high you can’t get above Him, so low you can’t get below Him, so wide you can’t get around Him.”

We had our last session on December 20, 2023, during which we also celebrated our pre-Christmas party. It was a delightful evening of happiness and sharing where we had a hearty dinner with plenty of sweet treats, singing and dancing, exchanging of gifts, and reminded each other of the many spiritual blessings there is to be found in God-centred friendships. Not wanting to waste the fading year, we organised a hiking trip to Silabur Cave on December 30, 2023, enjoying nature

and camaraderie – God’s sweet blessings, as Fr Ramon said.

It is our hope and desire that the Catholicism Study Group may continue its journey in seeking His face. By God’s grace and blessings, we will organise more gatherings and outings in 2024 to provide a platform for youths and young adults who are serious about pursuing God, to learn from and encourage each other. In the words of Bishop Robert Barron, “We’re not meant to be hunkered down behind the walls of the church, rather we’re meant to go out and transform the world. Let what you have learnt invade society.” — *By Eva Simrenjit Kaur, KuchingCatholicYouth.com*



Synodality, listening to young people guided mission of SEEK24

ST LOUIS: A record number of attendees gathered at the Jan 1-5 SEEK24 conference in downtown St Louis, with excitement already mounting for the 2025 conference.

Hosted by the Fellowship of Catholic University Students in this Missouri city for the second consecutive year, the conference drew more than 23,000 attendees, including 188 international participants. SEEK attendees participated in presentations and discussions about the Catholic faith led by globally recognised speakers, along with opportunities for Mass, Confession and Eucharistic adoration.

Edward Sri, FOCUS’ senior vice president of apostolic outreach, recounted the humble beginnings of FOCUS in 1998 at a Jan 4 press conference.

“Curtis Martin and I were graduate students together ... we did a retreat in January of 1998,” he said, describing how a small group of 24 students gathered in “nowhere Kansas” and sparked a movement that now touches thousands nationwide.

“I remember driving and seeing what at the time was called the Pepsi Centre,” Sri said. “I remember saying to Curtis that one day we were going to be in the Pepsi Centre.” At SEEK24, liturgies were held in The Dome at America’s Centre, the former home of the NFL’s St Louis Rams. “It’s very moving to see,” Sri said, describing the impact of students falling to their knees during Eucharistic adoration.

P.J. Cronin, a student at University College Cork, Ireland, said he heard about the SEEK conference while hanging out in a Dominican-run cafe with some friends.

“I really love Scott Hahn,” Cronin said. “He really opened up Scripture for me in ways that I hadn’t seen before.” Hahn is a professor of biblical theology at Franciscan University of Steubenville, Ohio.

Cronin said he recognised a few other



Attendees pray during the SEEK24 conference at America’s Centre Convention Complex in St Louis Jan 3, 2024. More than 23,000 participants attended the Jan 1-5 conference held by the Fellowship of Catholic University Students. (OSV News photo/courtesy FOCUS)

speakers too, but the biggest draw was seeing other young people practising the Catholic faith, which is not something he sees in Ireland.

“I’m there in my local parish at Mass on a Sunday; I look around and there might be one other person my age, and it’s demoralising sometimes. ... You’re on your own,” he said. “And I come here and there’s 20,000 young college students all practising the faith and trying to live a good life.”

Fr Mike Schmitz, director of youth and young adult ministry for the Diocese of Duluth, Minnesota, and chaplain at the University of Minnesota Duluth Catholic Centre, spoke about his engagement with FOCUS and its impact on campus ministry. He highlighted the tremendous growth in student involvement, noting his campus now hosts 75 regular Bible studies.

“It’s just amazing stuff,” Fr Schmitz said.

Sri admitted this growth comes with challenges. In response to concerns about the organisation being perceived as “cultish” or

“clicky,” Sri emphasized the importance of inclusivity in training and outreach.

“What the Church is calling us to — and what FOCUS is calling all of our staff, all of our missionaries to do — is to be like Jesus, Who goes out,” he said. Sri noted it’s a perennial temptation for Catholic ministries to become “insular.” He called for “courage and charity” to drive outreach to people of all backgrounds and to accompany them.

Fr Schmitz agreed. He described conversations he’s had challenging leaders in his ministry to continue to go beyond a small circle as a “family meeting.” He said that it’s human nature to be comfortable with a group of friends, but it’s essential to continue to encourage students to reach out.

“Every community is going to have some dysfunction,” Fr Schmitz said, “but when you can point out that dysfunction without fear of recrimination, that’s a sign of health.”

Asked about the polarisation visible in the Church today and the impact of the Synod

on Synodality, Fr Schmitz responded by contrasting his experience growing up with what he sees among young people today.

“The anger, the bitterness, the resentment, the need to change the Church that was present when I was in college. ... I grew to love Jesus and hate the Church,” he said. But Fr Schmitz finds students today come with a new openness. “I find our students saying when they encounter Jesus, ‘I love the Church.’”

Listening is a two-way street, Fr Schmitz said, requiring the Church to listen to students but also for students to listen to the Church.

Sri noted that a number of FOCUS staff have participated in listening sessions at parishes held in preparation for the synod, and he emphasised a synodal approach is at the heart of FOCUS’s evangelical mission.

“So much of what we’re doing is going to listen to people downstream,” he said. Sri insisted that hearing the questions of young people has driven the way that FOCUS has developed its formation curriculum. And that process will continue, as formation materials are revised and reissued, Sri said.

Emily Wilson Hussem, an author and speaker, described the openness she has seen among students at SEEK24.

“They’re so hungry, they’re so sick of the culture, they know it’s all a lie ... and they’re here, and they’re ready and open,” she said.

Fr Schmitz echoed Hussem’s hope. He described meeting attendees who enthusiastically shared with him that the Bible, and a newfound love for Scripture had saved their families. — *OSV News*

As SEEK24 drew to a close, FOCUS announced the theme for SEEK25, to be held in Salt Lake City, using the words Jesus Christ speaks to His disciples in the Gospel: “Follow me” — *OSV News*

Indonesia's oldest bishop dies at age 95

The oldest bishop in Indonesia has died at the age of 95 after championing many social issues.

Divine Word Bishop Emeritus Anton Pain Ratu of Atambua died in hospital on January 6 after experiencing lung and respiratory problems, said Fr Vincentius Wun, vicar-general of the diocese.

Pain Ratu, as he was known, celebrated his 95th birthday on Jan 2. He led Atambua diocese, which borders Timor-Leste, for more than two decades from 1982. He was buried on Jan 9.

According to Divine Word Fr Steph Tupeng Within, Pain Ratu was involved in helping refugees from Timor-Leste, a former Portuguese colony, during its struggle for independence from Indonesian rule in the 1990s.

He mobilised "emergency relief efforts for the refugees and asked the Indonesian government to "provide a decent life" for them, the former editor-in-chief of local newspaper *Flores Pos* said.

As the struggle for independence turned violent, Bishop Pain Ratu sought a reduction in military presence in border areas, Fr Within recalled.

In 2006, Pain Ratu played a leading role in ending violence in Atambua during a mass protest against the execution of three Catholic farmers — Fabianus Tibo, Marinus Riwu, and Do Minggus da Silva — accused of sectarian riots, which killed about 200 Muslims, in 2000.

They were later executed by firing squad on Sept 22, 2006.

Riots followed in Atambua, the capital of Belu Regency in East Nusa Tenggara province.

Pain Ratu took part in a rally against the death penalty, which is also opposed by the Vatican.

"He rode a motorbike around Atambua, calling for an end to violence. Atambua was calm," Fr Within noted.

"Who dared take to the streets to quell mass unrest? Whose voice could activists hear and the restless security forces rely on? Only Bishop Anton Pain Ratu," said the priest.

He sided "with the oppressed, with a non-violent struggle," Fr Within said.

In 2003, when he turned 75, he submitted his resignation to the Vatican. However, it took four years for his request to be granted when Pope Benedict XVI chose Bishop Dominikus Saku as his successor.

The appointment of Bishop Saku marked the transition of leadership from Divine Word bishops to diocesan bishops in Atambua which became a diocese on Jan 3, 1961.



Since retiring, he lived near a shrine in St Mary Kiupukan Parish in Atambua.

There, as he wrote in a letter, he wanted to spend the rest of his life "as best as possible by praying, writing and helping Atambua diocese to the best of my ability in the field of service."

Robert Bala, a Catholic writer, said that his choice to remain in the diocese and live in simplicity was an expression "to embrace the land in which he worked."

Fr Yudel Neno of Atambua diocese, who lived with Pain Ratu in recent years, called his simplicity "inspiring."

"He took care of old items, as long as they were suitable for reuse. He didn't always need new things."

Mery Nitbani, chairperson of Polycarpus Congregation Council in Atambua of the Timor Evangelical Christian Church, recalled the bishop's ecumenical efforts.

She said the bishop encouraged an ecumenical exchange programme by which Protestant pastors lead sermons in Catholic churches and vice-versa.

Agustinus Taolin, head of Belu Regency, called Pain Ratu a Church leader "with charisma and character." Taolin attended a Mass with the bishop at the end of December.

Pain Ratu was born in Lamawolo, East Flores Regency, to a farming family.

He studied at St John Berchmans Todabelu Mataloko Minor Seminary and St Paul Ledalero Major Seminary in Flores.

He was ordained a priest in 1958 after studying cultural anthropology at the East Asian Pastoral Institute at Ateneo University, in Manila.

In 1972, he was appointed as regional superior and remained in the post for three consecutive terms.

In 1979, he was appointed as a member of the congregation's general council in Rome until his appointment as bishop. — *ucanews.com*

MEMORIAM

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

7th Anniversary
In cherished memory of



Kandamkary Mathai Cherian

12 October 1927 -
25 January 2017

Dearest dad
Our very grateful thanks
for the great blessings
we received from you.
Praise be to God!
Your loving family

21st Anniversary
In Loving Memory of



Alphonso Sta Maria (Sunny)

Departed: 24-01-2003

Deeply missed
and fondly remembered
by loving wife, children,
their spouses and
grandchildren.

ELEVENTH ANNIVERSARY
WITH FOND MEMORIES OF OUR
BELOVED BARBARA BONNEY aka "Acca"



Called to The Lord on 26th January 2013

Yes, Yahweh is good,
His Love is everlasting,
His Faithfulness endures from age to age.
Psalm 100.5

Affectionately remembered by loved ones.

8th Anniversary
In Loving Memory of
Camilo Gomes
23.12.1925 - 22.1.2016



In Our Hearts

We thought of you with
love today, But that is
nothing new. We thought
about you yesterday, And
days before that too. We
think of you in silence, We
often speak your name.
Now all we have are
memories. And your picture
in a frame. Your memory is
our keepsake. With which
we'll never part. God has
you in his keeping. We have
you in our hearts.

Dearly missed by children, grandchildren
and great-grandchildren.



In Ever Loving Memory of
Mary Rose DeCruz @ Irene

From the Lord: 15.04.1947
To the Lord: 19.12.2023

Deeply missed, fondly remembered and forever cherished by
loving husband — Herman Gomez, children,
siblings, relatives and friends.

A Requiem Mass will be held on Sunday,
21 January 2024 at 11.00am at the
Church of the Divine Mercy, Shah Alam.

Eternal rest grant unto her, O Lord, and let perpetual light
shine upon her. May her soul rest in peace.

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters.
He restores my soul. *Psalm 23*

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FEAST DAY CELEBRATION 3-11 Feb 2024

FEAST DAY PROGRAMMES

Youth Rally

Date: 3rd Feb 2024 (Sat) & 4th Feb 2024 (Sun)
Time: 9:00am – 6:00pm
Venue: Auditorium Wisma Lourdes
Commitment: RM20
Contact person: Issac Raj - 016-648 6564,
Danisha - 012-230 0413 & Ivy – 011 5719 5068

Lourdes Wash

Date: 3rd Feb 2024 (Sat); 4th Feb 2024 (Sun)
10th Feb 2024 (Sat); 11th Feb 2024 (Sun)
Time: After each Mass
Venue: Grotto
Stipulation(s): Pilgrims are advised to bring their
own towels

Anointing of the Sick

Date: 11th Feb 2024 (Sun)
Time: After 8:00am, 10:00am and 12:30pm Mass

Celebrating World Cancer Day

A Time Of Sharing The Journey & Prayer
Date: 4th Feb 2024 (Sun)
Time: 2:30PM – 5:00PM
Venue: Lourdes Community Hall

Inter-Religious Harmony Exhibition

Date: 3rd Feb 2024 (Sat); 4th Feb 2024 (Sun)
10th Feb 2024 (Sat); 11th Feb 2024 (Sun)
Venue: Lourdes Community Hall



Do To Others What You Would Have Them Do To You - Celebrating Human Fraternity As Church - Matthew 7:12

பிறர் உங்களுக்குச் செய்ய வேண்டும் என விரும்புகிறவற்றை எல்லாம் நீங்களும் அவர்களுக்குச் செய்யுங்கள்
- மனித சகோதரத்துவத்தை திருஅவையாக கொண்டாடுதல் - மத்தேயு 7:12

Apa Yang Kamu Ingin Orang Lain Lakukan Untuk Kamu, Lakukanlah Hal Itu Untuk Mereka
- Menyambut Persaudaraan Manusia Sebagai Gereja - Matthew 7: 12

己所不欲，勿施于人- 以教會之身慶祝人類之情 —— 馬太福音 7:12

3rd Feb (Sat)

Time
5:00pm Flag-raising, Rosary, & Novena
6:00pm Community Mass

Theme
Do To Others What You Would Have Them Do To You - Celebrating Human Fraternity As Church
பிறர் உங்களுக்குச் செய்ய வேண்டும் என விரும்புகிறவற்றை எல்லாம் நீங்களும் அவர்களுக்குச் செய்யுங்கள் - மனித சகோதரத்துவத்தை திருஅவையாக கொண்டாடுதல்
Apa Yang Kamu Ingin Orang Lain Lakukan Untuk Kamu, Lakukanlah Hal Itu Untuk Mereka - Menyambut Persaudaraan Manusia Sebagai Gereja
己所不欲，勿施于人- 以教會之身慶祝人類之情

4th Feb (Sun)

Time
6:00am Rosary & Novena 6:30am Mass (E)
7:30am Rosary & Novena 8:00am Mass (E)
9:30am Rosary & Novena 10:00am Mass (T)
12:00pm Rosary & Novena 12:30pm Mass (BM)
5:30pm Rosary & Novena 6:00pm Mass (E)

Sub-Theme
Communion, Participation & Mission in Youth
இளைஞர்களில் ஒன்றிப்பு, பங்கெடுப்பு மற்றும் தாதுரை
Persekutuan, Penyertaan dan Misi dalam Belia
青年中的共融、參與和使命

5th Feb (Mon)

Time
7:30pm Rosary & Novena 8:00pm Mass (E)
7:30pm Rosary & Novena 8:00pm Mass (T)
• Tamil - Auditorium
7:30pm Rosary & Novena 8:00pm Mass (BM)
• BM - Chapel

Sub-Theme
Communion, Participation & Mission in Family
குடும்பத்தில் ஒன்றிப்பு, பங்கெடுப்பு மற்றும் தாதுரை
Persekutuan, Penyertaan dan Misi dalam Keluarga
家庭中的共融、參與、與使命

6th Feb (Tue)

Time
7:30pm Rosary & Novena 8:00pm Mass (E)
7:30pm Rosary & Novena 8:00pm Mass (T)
• Tamil - Auditorium
7:30pm Rosary & Novena 8:00pm Mass (BM)
• BM - Chapel

Sub-Theme
Communion, Participation & Mission in Church
திருஅவையில் ஒன்றிப்பு, பங்கெடுப்பு மற்றும் தாதுரை
Persekutuan, Penyertaan dan Misi dalam Gereja
教會中的共融、參與和使命

7th Feb (Wed)

Time
7:30pm Rosary & Novena 8:00pm Mass (E)
7:30pm Rosary & Novena 8:00pm Mass (T)
• Tamil - Auditorium
7:30pm Rosary & Novena 8:00pm Mass (BM)
• BM - Chapel

Sub-Theme
Communion, Participation & Mission in Ecology
சூழலியலில் ஒன்றிப்பு, பங்கெடுப்பு மற்றும் தாதுரை
Persekutuan, Penyertaan dan Misi dalam Ekologi
生態中的共融、參與和使命

8th Feb (Thu)

Time
7:30pm Rosary & Novena 8:00pm Mass (E)
7:30pm Rosary & Novena 8:00pm Mass (T)
• Tamil - Auditorium
7:30pm Rosary & Novena 8:00pm Mass (BM)
• BM - Chapel

Sub-Theme
Communion, Participation & Mission in Society / Community
சமூகத்தில் ஒன்றிப்பு, பங்கெடுப்பு மற்றும் தாதுரை
Persekutuan, Penyertaan dan Misi dalam Masyarakat
社會/社區中的共融、參與和使命

9th Feb (Fri)

Time
7:30pm Rosary & Novena 8:00pm Mass (E)
7:30pm Rosary & Novena 8:00pm Mass (T)
• Tamil - Auditorium
7:30pm Rosary & Novena 8:00pm Mass (BM)
• BM - Chapel

Sub-Theme
Communion, Participation & Mission in Leadership
தலைமைத்துவத்தில் ஒன்றிப்பு, பங்கெடுப்பு மற்றும் தாதுரை
Persekutuan, Penyertaan dan Misi dalam Kepimpinan
領導中的共融、參與和使命

10th Feb (Sat)

Time
7:30am Chinese New Year Mass (Eng & Mandarin)
• Followed by Lion Dance
5:00pm Rosary & Novena 6:00pm Mass (E)
5:00pm Rosary & Novena 6:00pm Mass (T)
• Tamil - Auditorium
5:00pm Rosary & Novena 6:00pm Mass (BM)
• BM - Chapel

Sub-Theme
Communion, Participation and Mission in Mental Health
மன நலத்தில் ஒன்றிப்பு, பங்கெடுப்பு மற்றும் தாதுரை
Persekutuan, Penyertaan dan Misi dalam Kesehatan Mental
精神健康中的共融、参与和使命

11th Feb (Sun)

WORLD DAY
OF THE SICK

Time
6:00am Rosary & Novena 6:30am Mass (E)
7:30am Rosary & Novena 8:00am Mass (E)
9:30am Rosary & Novena 10:00am Mass (T)
12:00pm Rosary & Novena 12:30pm Mass (BM)
5:30pm Rosary & Novena 6:00pm
Community Mass followed by Procession
& Benediction

Theme
Do To Others What You Would Have Them Do To You - Celebrating Human Fraternity As Church
பிறர் உங்களுக்குச் செய்ய வேண்டும் என விரும்புகிறவற்றை எல்லாம் நீங்களும் அவர்களுக்குச் செய்யுங்கள் - மனித சகோதரத்துவத்தை திருஅவையாக கொண்டாடுதல்
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己所不欲，勿施于人- 以教會之身慶祝人類之情
Anointing of Sick - After 8am, 10am & 12:30pm Mass

NOTE: Confessions will be heard half an hour before Mass (daily)

114, Jalan Tengku Kelana, 41000 Klang, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia
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