

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.

1 Cor. 12:12-13



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Artificial intelligence

AI

Vatican puts AI guidelines in place

VATICAN: To ensure artificial intelligence (AI) is developed and used in an ethical, transparent and responsible manner in Vatican City State, the city-state governor's office has released a set of guidelines on AI, which will be followed by new laws and regulations.

"The guidelines highlight the importance of a balanced and mindful approach in regulating artificial intelligence and will act as a 'compass' and a framework for 'future regulatory actions' regarding AI technology, the city-state said in a press release on vaticanstate.va. The guidelines went into effect January 1, 2025.

The president of the governor's office will also set up a five-person AI commission, presided over by the secretary-general of the governing office, to oversee the implementation and regulation of AI within Vatican City State.

Specifically, the commission will: prepare the proposed laws and regulations; provide

input and opinions about the use of AI systems and models; and monitor the activities of AI systems and models and their impact on individuals, employment and the environment.

"The key principle is that technological innovation cannot and should never overtake or replace human beings," the press release said. "On the contrary, it should serve humanity, and support and respect human dignity," individual rights and freedom.

"The aim is to make artificial intelligence a resource that, if properly regulated, will be able to foster well-being and progress, without compromising ethical and social principles," it added.

The 13-page policy, released as a decree by the pontifical commission governing Vatican City State, covers a series of general ethical principles, specific guidelines for certain offices and prohibitions.

The bans include prohibitions against AI technology and practices that: cause discrimination; harm individuals physically or psychologically through subliminal manipulation; exclude people with disabilities; create social inequalities; demean

human dignity; violate fundamental human rights; compromise Vatican City State security and public order; encourage criminal conduct; and conflict with "the mission of the pope, the integrity of the Catholic Church and the proper operation" of the Vatican entities overseen by the governor's office.

The office oversees those who work in administration and human resources, the Vatican Museums, the gardeners, trash collectors, firefighters, police, post office employees as well as those who work for the Vatican health service, pharmacy and Vatican court system. The guidelines and future regulations also cover third-party suppliers, operators and professionals who are hired temporarily.

Some offices were given specific guidelines pertaining to their field, such as offices dealing with: personal data and data processing; scientific research and healthcare; copyright protection; cultural heritage; maintenance and services; administrative procedures; human resources and labour practices; judicial activities; and security.

Some examples included: mandating that all texts, music, photos, audiovisual and ra-

dio content that have used AI systems and models in their creation or reproduction be labelled with the acronym AI; and insisting that patients being treated by the Vatican's health care service must be informed about the use and application of AI in their care.

While most offices have been given the green light to adopt AI in ways that streamline and facilitate human labour, the guidelines specified that the Vatican's judicial offices may only use AI "for the organisation and simplification" of its research and work. Interpretation of the law, analysis of the facts and evidence of a case, and deciding on sentencing or other measures must never be handled by AI as these tasks are "reserved exclusively for the magistrate."

Laws and regulations applying the guideline's principles were to be adopted within the current calendar year, the press release said. **Cindy Wooden, CNS**

Photo Source: The words "Artificial intelligence AI" are pictured with a miniature of a robot arm and a toy hand are in this Dec 14, 2023, illustration. (OSV News photo/Dado Ruvic, Reuters)



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EMBRACING THE LIGHT OF HOPE

This week marks the beginning of a series of significant events in both the liturgical calendar and the lives of many in Malaysia. Today, we celebrate the *Sunday of the Word of God*, with the theme *I Hope In Your Word* (Psalm 119:74). This is a reflection that invites us to renew our trust in God's Word as a source of guidance, strength, and hope. Especially in a world that often feels uncertain and fragmented, these words serve as a reminder to hold firm in our faith, finding stability in God's promises (see Page 5).

Pope Francis, in his Apostolic Letter *Aperuit Illis*, emphasised the importance of the Word of God for all Catholics, encouraging us to not only read the Scriptures but to allow them to deeply transform our lives. The Sunday of the Word of God is an invitation for us to make God's Word a living part of our daily journey. It is a call to see the Scriptures not merely as historical texts but as the eternal Word that speaks to us in the present moment.

In the coming days, our Chinese brothers and sisters will celebrate the *Lunar New Year*, a festival marked by family reunions, feasts, and prayers for health, prosperity, and peace. Beyond the cultural significance, the Lunar New Year is a reminder of the values of family, tradition, and unity that transcend individual communities and contribute to the broader fabric of Malaysian society.

In this season of celebration, we are reminded of the urgent need to strengthen the spirit of reconciliation and harmony in Malaysia's multi-ethnic and multi-religious society. Despite our differences, we all share common hopes for peace, prosperity, and the well-being of our families. The Lunar New Year is an opportunity to build bridges, foster mutual respect, and deepen our understanding of one another. It reminds us that unity is

not just an ideal but a lived reality, one that requires our active participation in building a more inclusive and compassionate society.

This is especially pertinent in the context of the Jubilee of Hope, a season that calls us to embrace the hope that Christ offers, which is not a distant, abstract ideal but a tangible force that can heal divisions and inspire peace. It is a call to come together, to work for the common good, and to build relationships based on respect, understanding, and love. Hope, in this context, is a living, breathing reality that can be cultivated through our actions, words, and interactions.

As we transition into the following week, the Church will celebrate the *Feast of the Presentation of the Lord* on February 2, a moment when Mary and Joseph bring the infant Jesus to the Temple, fulfilling the Jewish law by offering Him to God. In the Scriptures, this event is a beautiful moment of recognition when Simeon and Anna, inspired by the Holy Spirit, see in the infant Jesus the fulfilment of God's promises — the Light of the World. This feast highlights Christ's divine nature, revealing that He is the light that guides humanity out of darkness.

The Presentation of the Lord is also the *World Day for Consecrated Life*, a day dedicated to celebrating those who have given their lives to God through religious vows. This day, established by St John Paul II, calls us to reflect on the importance of religious vocations — priests, brothers, and sisters who have chosen a life of service, prayer, and dedication. Their example challenges us to consider our own commitment to living out our faith with greater devotion and love.

For us in Malaysia, these overlapping celebrations offer an opportunity to reflect on the various ways God is calling us to respond to His Word and His light. Whether

through engaging with Scripture, celebrating the Lunar New Year, or recognising the commitment of those who have consecrated their lives to the Lord, we are reminded that our lives are meant to reflect God's love and light to the world.

In a world that often seems divided and fragmented, the Church's celebrations encourage us to bring Christ's light into every aspect of our lives. We are called to be bearers of that light — in our homes, in our workplaces, and in our relationships. Whether through acts of charity, prayer, or service to others, we are invited to be reflections of God's love.

Pope Francis often speaks of the Church as a "light to the nations", a beacon of hope for the world. As we observe these liturgical events, we are invited to make this light visible, especially in Malaysia, where the spirit of unity and mutual respect is essential for peace and social harmony.

As we journey through this Jubilee of Hope, let us pray that, like Simeon and Anna, we too may recognise Christ in our lives, and that His light may guide us toward peace, unity, and love. Let us pray for the continued faithfulness of those who have chosen the consecrated life. May their unwavering commitment inspire us all to live with greater devotion and trust in God's promises.

Let this season be one of spiritual renewal, a time to deepen our faith and trust in God's Word. May it be a time of joyful celebration in the light of Christ, a light that can illuminate the path to peace, joy, and unity for all Malaysians. May we, as a nation, continue to live out the values of respect, love, and reconciliation that are so vital to the harmony and prosperity of our country.

Sandra Ann

Called to bring the Good News to all

For many people, the word prophecy often means foretelling the future, either future events or figures who will arise in the future. Humanity in general is somewhat obsessed with the possibility of seeing the future. This is why the prophecies of Nostradamus was so popular for a period of time. Of course, we can put whatever meaning that we want into his so-called predictions and come out with something. This was the case with the Bible Code book. However, as the saying goes, given enough time, a monkey can type out the entire works of Shakespeare. The point is we cannot and should not read too much into prophetic literature.

In the Old Testament, the word prophet comes from the Hebrew *nabi*, which literally means a spokesperson. This is derived from the root verb *naba'*, which means to speak on behalf of another. Taking this into account, a prophet is someone who speaks on behalf of God. Nowhere do we find the idea of foretelling the future. However, a prophet can also speak of possible futures if certain conditions were not met. We see this occurring in many of the Prophetic writings in the Old Testament. These warnings or messages can also be applied to modern day circumstances as it concerns the choices that we make both as an individual and as a society. In the Gospel today, Jesus reads from the Prophet Isaiah and points out that He is the fulfilment of that particular prophecy.

The first line of the prophecy refers to His baptism, where the Spirit came down

and rested upon him and the following line refers to Him being the anointed one. This is, of course, directly related to His name, Christ, which literally means the Anointed One. The rest of the prophecy talks about bringing the good news of God to everyone and to give freedom to all who are held captive in whatever way. By the time this incident occurred, He was already in active ministry, carrying out exactly what the prophecy foretold. This was why He was able to say that the text is being fulfilled. By exercising His ministry, He brought fulfilment to the entire text of Isaiah. However, this was nearly two thousand years ago. The question is, can the text of Isaiah still apply to us today?

At Baptism, we receive the Holy Spirit and at Confirmation, we are anointed with the Oil of Sacred Chrism. Both these Sacraments fulfil the first two lines of the prophecy already. The last line of the text, which is to proclaim the Lord's year of favour is also what we are called to do, more so because our Pope has declared this year to be the Jubilee Year of Hope. By virtue of our Baptism, we are all called to bring the good news to the poor, not just those who are financially poor but also to those who are poor in all aspects of life. To those who are poor in hope, we bring them the message of hope, that God will not abandon us. To those who are poor in the practice of prayer, we accompany them in their journey of prayer and the list goes on. There is so much that we can do but we have to make the conscious decision to do it.

Reflecting on our Sunday Readings with Fr Philip Tay, OCD

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)

Readings: Nehemiah 8:2-6, 8-10;

1 Corinthians 12:12-30;

Gospel: Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21

How do we proclaim liberty to captives and set the downtrodden free? Being a captive need not necessarily mean being in a physical prison, it can also mean being in an emotional prison. This is especially true when we make the choice to hold grudges and not to forgive. Very often, we think that by not forgiving, we are making the other person miserable. But experience tells us that this is not always the case. By withholding forgiveness, we choose to lock ourselves in prison and throwing the key. Sometimes, instead of proclaiming liberty to captives, we proclaim liberty to ourselves. When we help others to forgive, we help them to open the doors of their 'prison' and set them free.

Blindness may not be physical as well. We can be blind to the needs of others around us and we can also turn a blind eye to those who seek our help. In this case, giving new sight to the blind means giving a new perspective on how we see things and people, not to see them from our prejudiced and biased vision but to see them using the eyes of God. This is what it means to have new sight. Ultimately, all of us can be a fulfilment of the text of Isaiah but the question is, are we willing or daring enough to take up that call? The choice is up to us.



Dispensation from fasting during CNY 2025

Dear People of God,

This year, the Lunar / Chinese New Year falls on January 29, 2025, and most Chinese celebrate the event for fifteen days, ending February 12.

The Catholic Bishops Conference of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei, in consultation with the Episcopal Regional Liturgy Commission of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei offer the following guidance:

(1) That on the Fridays of January 31, 2025 and February 7, 2025, dispensation is given from abstinence.

(2) That the faithful substitute these days with other forms of penance, especially works of charity and exercises of piety during this Year of Jubilee.

Wishing you the Lord's abundant blessings and joyous celebration of the Chinese New Year.

+ William Cardinal Goh

H. Em Cardinal William Goh
President

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

January 14, 2025

New book offers insight into overcoming fear through faith

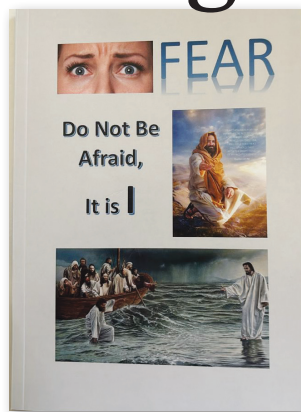
PENANG: A new catechetical book titled *Fear* by Fr Mark Michael is now available for all Catholics, providing a fresh perspective on the emotion of fear through the lens of faith.

Fr Mark, a priest of the Diocese of Penang, holds a Bachelor of Theology and a Licentiate in Catechetical Theology and has authored several books on catechetics.

Below is a review of *Fear*, written by the late Dr Anthony Sibert.

Fr Mark addresses a universal emotion — fear — which affects people of all ages and backgrounds. He acknowledges that fear is a regular part of human experience, but quickly clarifies a crucial point: while courage is often seen as the opposite of fear in everyday language, in Christian spirituality, it is faith that stands in contrast to fear.

Fr. Mark's attention to language is particularly insightful. He explains that when the Bible speaks about fearing God, it does not mean to be afraid of Him in the con-



ventional sense. Rather, it refers to a deep, reverential awe — a respect for God's divine authority and power. This type of fear, which motivates us to live according to God's commandments, is not a negative emotion but a spiritual foundation that draws us closer to God, inspiring humility and surrender.

The book then delves into two primary types of fear mentioned in Scripture. The

first, the fear of the Lord, is beneficial and even encouraged. It is a fear rooted in awe and respect, motivating believers to honour and follow God's will. In contrast, the second type, which Fr Mark calls the "spirit of fear", is spiritually detrimental. This kind of fear breeds timidity and anxiety, hindering us from fully living in faith and trusting in God.

One of the most powerful aspects of Fr Mark's message is his clarity and simplicity. He acknowledges that while the "spirit of fear" can often overwhelm us, the solution is equally simple: pray. By

turning to prayer in moments of fear, we can combat the spirit of fear and replace it with the stronger force of faith. Fr Mark assures readers that faith is the true antidote to fear, and through prayer, we open ourselves to the peace and courage that come from a deeper trust in God.

The book blends theological depth with practical application, making it accessible to a wide audience. Fr Mark explores the nature of fear, how it functions, and why it is so prevalent in our lives. Alongside the spiritual dimensions of fear, he offers a fascinating examination of common fears that people face, such as fear of darkness, heights, social rejection, sickness, animals, death, and even political or economic instability.

As the world continues to present complex challenges, Fr Mark's message is clear: fear should not be avoided or ignored but confronted and overcome with the light of faith. *Fear* serves as a powerful reminder that we are called to trust in God, even in the face of fear.

Fear is now available for purchase at St Anne's Minor Basilica Religious Article Shop and at the Catholic Information Service in Penang for just RM10.



KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

February

- 8 World Marriage Day 2025
- Cathedral of St John the Evangelist



PENANG DIOCESE

Diary of Cardinal Sebastian Francis

January/February

- 27-31/1 Visitation and Chinese New Year Masses – Kota Bharu, Kelantan
3-9/2 On Leave



MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

February

- 1 Installation of new Parish Priest – Church of Christ the King, Kulai at 6.00pm
2 Day of Consecrated Life – Church of St Louis, Kluang at 10.00am
5 Meeting – South Johor Vicariate, Church of St Joseph, Plentong
8 Language & Cultural Council 1st Assembly – MAJODI Centre



Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #207



Dear Friends of MJD, the Ordinary Times are here. Green is back.

Movements! Visitors entering, travellers exiting!

Visit Malaysia 2025 targets 32.8 million tourists, generating RM147.1 billion in tourism receipts. The Johor-Singapore Special Economic Zone (JS-SEZ) kicks off, planning to attract 100 projects. The Vatican estimates massive numbers converging at the Vatican for the Jubilee Year of Hope. Already, the Camino de Santiago has had an unprecedented 499,239 pilgrims in 2024. There's a renewed resurgence in appeal for this pilgrimage.

Similar to the cold, the flu or COVID-19 is the HMPV (human metapneumovirus) that has been reported in China and other countries.

Experts are urging the government to rethink strategies and repatriation of Palestinians to Egypt or, as per their request, after their medical treatment. People are more mobile these days. There are no more movement restrictions. Forced restrictions agitate; respecting freedom to move is calming.

Conscience-less Times:

Dogs getting arrowed. Cats getting killed. Sharing articles or books on one's faith journey or God experience excites police reports, prosecution or persecution? Rallies to free a convicted criminal but eyes closed to child marriages in the name of tradition, child and women abuse cases, and growing incidents of bullying? Are we becoming a nation without a conscience? When wrongdoings are not condemned as evil, when the inexcusable can be excused,

the unpardonable can be pardoned? Can we continue whitewashing sin, wrongdoings, crimes and criminals? There is forgiveness for the penitent, but one must be held accountable for the damage.

A Thought for the Week: My Balloon

Once, a group of 50 people was attending a seminar. Suddenly, the speaker stopped and started giving each one a balloon. Each one was asked to write his/her name on it using a marker pen. Then all the balloons were collected and put in another room. Now these delegates were let into that room and asked to find the balloon which had their name written, within five minutes. Everyone was frantically searching for their name, colliding with each other, pushing around others and there was utter chaos. At the end of five minutes, no one could find their own balloon. Now each one was asked to randomly collect a balloon and give it to the person whose name was written on it. Within minutes everyone had their own balloon.

The lesson from the speaker: Everyone is groping around, frantically looking for what is theirs(happiness) everywhere, and getting nowhere. Our happiness lies in the happiness of other people. Give them their happiness, you will get your own happiness.

QnQ. Q asks? They say small is beautiful. Do small things have an impact?

1. The Scriptures never underestimate the power of small people, small deeds, small gestures and small offerings. A boy with five loaves and two fish

triggered a miracle that fed 5000 that day.

2. Small habits like saving RM8 per day, amount to RM3,000 per year; reading 20 pages per day becomes 30 books per year; walking 10 thousand steps per day becomes 70 marathons per year. Never underestimate small habits.

3. E.F.Schumacher's philosophy "Small is Beautiful", is one of enoughness, appreciating human needs, limitations and appropriate use of technology, which developed from his study of village-based economics.

4. Among the many small things, simple acts of kindness, expressions of love and moments of connection have a significant impact on our well-being and relationships. The small things slow us down to be present, lowers one's anxiety level and appreciate the outcome. Vincent Van Gogh said: "Great things are done by a series of small things brought together."

The Holy Spirit @work:

God will never direct us to be prideful, arrogant and unforgiving, immoral or slothful or full of fear. We step into these things because we are insensitive to the leadership of the Holy Spirit within us. **Charles Stanley**

Something To Tickle You:

I believe that one reason why the Church of God at this present moment has so little influence over the world is because the world has so much influence over the Church." **Charles H. Spurgeon**

Bishop Bernard Paul
Bishop Bernard Paul

KL clergy reflect on priesthood, pastoral jurisdiction, marriage preparation

Fr Michael Chua

KUALA LUMPUR: Fifty-nine clergy of the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur gathered for their annual Clergy Pastoral Assembly (CAPA), at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre from January 13 to 15.

The clergy took time away from their hectic pastoral responsibilities in the parishes for this annual event which provides an opportunity for them to listen, reflect and discuss selected themes affecting priestly and pastoral ministry in the local Church, to review current practices and explore new directions. The programme included inputs from various speakers, reactions from respondents, and spiritual conversations in break-out groups which have become a staple of the synodal way of being Church. This was augmented by the spiritual exercises of daily Masses, Eucharistic adoration, confessions and communal praying of the Divine Office.

The themes selected for this year's CAPA included reflecting on the current vocation

crisis to the priesthood and consecrated life, administering sacraments within and beyond parish boundaries, and establishing a Marriage Catechumenate, which the Holy Father proposed.

Vocation Crisis

CAPA began with a fitting reflection on the issue of the vocation crisis by **Fr Simon Labrooy**, followed by responses from five other priests. Fr Simon began the conversation with a reflection on Luke 1:39-45 — the story of the Visitation — followed by two personal stories. Instead of focusing the discussion on the usual causes for the decline in religious vocations (ageing priests, cultural shifts, social and economic challenges), Fr Simon challenged the clergy to do an introspective examination of conscience, on the type of priestly ministry which they were observing and whether this had an impact on the crisis.



Fr Simon also highlighted the development of the Church's understanding of the priesthood from the period before the Second Vatican Council, and after. The key changes are a renewed focus on pastoral care, a greater emphasis on community and collaboration, modernisation of priestly formation and greater involvement of the laity. **Msgr James Gnanapiragasam**, the first respondent, shared that our focus on the issue should start by recognising that vocations are the result of God's call rather than gimmicks and human machinations.



Feedback from clergy

At the end of CAPA, many clergy agreed that this year's CAPA provided many significant and relevant takeaways.

Msgr Daniel Lim, an octogenarian priest who had participated in many similar CAPAs in previous years, gave this year's programme "a big tick mark".



"We seem to be focusing on very relevant topics over the years", he noted, "including years spent on topics like self-help and the mental wellbeing of the priest and this year's topics are most relevant to current challenges in pastoral ministry."

Heading the organising team, Msgr Stanislaus found this year's CAPA as another step for the clergy in "progressing towards having a common vision and sharing in the common mission of the Church."

Fr Nicholas Hoh OCD had this take-away: "The importance of collaboration among our priests to ensure that the Gospel remains a light for our people."



Fr Terrance Thomas shared, "I remind myself of the importance of fraternal communication with clergy, which can be of profit in any situation."



First time participant and soon to be ordained as priest, **Deacon Jonathan Rao** shared that he found this "experience to be exceptionally insightful and enriching" and "relevant to the evolving needs of our particular Church". Deacon Jonathan added that "this forward-thinking approach is essential to maintaining the Church's vitality and relevance in the years to come."



Pastoral Jurisdiction

On the second day, **Fr Dr Clarence Devadass**, who had been a key participant in the recently concluded Synod on Synodality, dealt with the issue of how pastoral duties, though naturally structured according to respective parish boundaries, should not be confined to these limits. Fr Clarence then invited Fr William Michael, a canonist and the current Judicial Vicar of the Peninsular Malaysia Ecclesiastical Tribunal, to give a short overview of the canonical position of pastoral jurisdiction based on one's domicile. Fr Clarence enjoined the conversation by introducing certain observations from the Synod. In the final document which had been approved by the Holy Father, it was acknowledged that the concept of "place" can no longer be conceived in purely geographical and spatial terms but evokes, in our time, one's belonging to a network of relationships and to a culture whose territorial roots are more dynamic and flexible than ever before."



Traditional territorial bonds, therefore, are being redefined, blurring the lines that divide dioceses and parishes. The Synod proposed that "missionary creativity" is needed to explore new forms of pastoral action. He raised several scenarios concerning the administration of sacraments which may have arisen from the issue of canonical requirements based on the domicile of a person. Although such requirements have an intended purpose to facilitate due diligence in the preparation of persons for sacraments, in practical application, some of these policies have resulted in unnecessary red tape and inconvenience to the faithful, pushing them from one parish to another. In their respective break-out groups based on districts, the clergy shared best practices, and challenges and listened to each other offer pastoral solutions to common issues.

Archbishop Julian Leow followed up the

discussion by challenging the clergy to offer pastoral assistance wherever it is needed and to collaborate in their pastoral outreach. Background checks and communication between clergy, however, should not be casually compromised whilst the clergy must find ways of being more creatively pastoral in their approach. He proposed to follow up with this discussion at the level of the Council of Priests who will be tasked with drawing up guidelines to streamline best practices.

Marriage Catechumenate

In the third session, **Fr William Michael** provided the clergy with a historical overview of the theological development, canonical history and magisterial teaching on the sacrament of Holy Matrimony, leading up to the current proposal of establishing a marriage catechumenate. Although this was recently raised by the Holy Father as a response to the growing crisis in marriages and families, the proposal of a more thorough and wholistic process of preparation had already been raised during the pontificate of St John Paul II.



The current proposal for a marriage catechumenate is similar in concept to that of the RCIA, which is intended to be done over a period of six months to a year before the wedding. This is a call to rethink marriage preparation as a continuous accompaniment, before and after the wedding. The process envisages three stages — remote (from childhood, sowing the seeds of a future vocation to married life); intermediate (when the couple approaches the church seeking the sacrament of marriage, this is an opportunity to get to know the couple and help strengthen their faith and proclaim the kerygma); and the final stage, which is meant to include the elements of Catechesis, evangelisation, and

proclamation in the proximate preparation of the couple before their intended wedding.

Conclusion

On the third and last day of the CAPA, **Msgr Stanislaus Soosaimariam** facilitated an open discussion during which many priests shared their personal experiences and challenges in priestly ministry.



The assembly concluded with Mass presided over by **Archbishop Julian Leow**. In his homily, the archbishop preached on the Gospel passage that set out a hectic day in the public ministry of Jesus, undeterred by the demands of His flock and never losing sight of the direction His Heavenly Father gave as He set aside time for prayer. His Grace spoke of the priest, following the example of Christ, as a man of prayer and a representative of Christ in making themselves available. Building on the 4 L's which he introduced in his inaugural speech during his episcopal ordination, the archbishop added that a priest should also be marked by an additional 4 L's of priestly ministry — we should imitate Jesus as the Logos, Light, the Life and Love. He prayed and hoped that the clergy will become role models to others and continue to inspire more vocations when they imitate Christ in prayer, presence and outlook.



This reflection was a most appropriate conclusion to the three-day proceedings, during which the clergy discussed and reflected on ways of balancing prudential practices based on canon law and Church policies with missionary creativity, reigniting zeal in their priestly ministry, navigating mental and physical fatigue, increasing workload, declining vocations, and growing parishes with growing needs.

Celebrating Sunday of the Word of God

On January 26, churches around the world will observe the Sunday of the Word of God, and Pope Francis has chosen a significant theme inspired by Psalm 119:74: "I hope in your word." This message is particularly relevant in times of confusion, worry, and uncertainty, offering people a reminder of the power and hope found in God's Word.

Why God's Word gives us hope

In the Bible, there is a powerful story of a Roman centurion who came to Jesus for help. His servant was ill, and he told Jesus, "only say the word, and my servant shall be healed" (Matthew 8:8). The soldier's faith showed an important truth: God's words are not

mere promises — they hold real power because they come directly from God Himself.

Later, when many of Jesus' followers were abandoning Him due to the difficulty of His teachings, Peter responded, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68). Peter's response wasn't just about the teachings, but about his deep trust in Jesus. He knew that Jesus' words were life-giving, not just words to be heard. This encounter teaches us that when we read the Bible, we're not simply reading ancient texts; we are hearing directly from someone who loves us, cares for us, and is with us now.

Understanding the theme

Psalm 119, the source of the theme, is a long poem that praises the importance of God's Word.

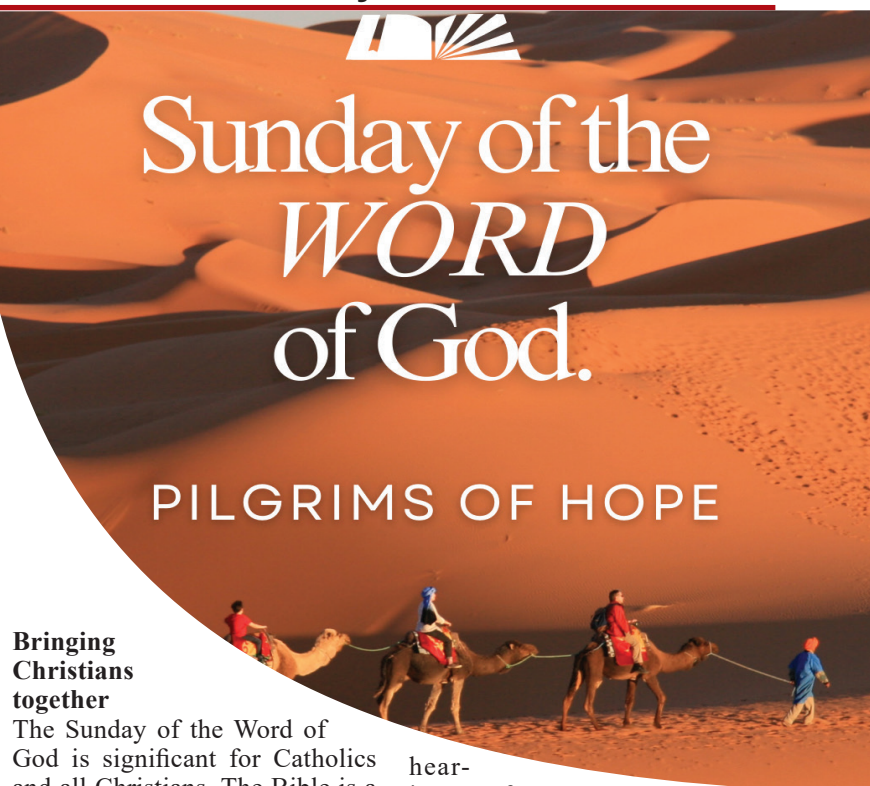
God's Word. The psalmist doesn't see God's teachings as a list of rules, but as promises from a loving God who is always present. The psalmist rejoices in the guidance that God's Word provides, viewing it as something that brings joy and enhances life. This understanding connects with Jesus' promise to His disciples in Matthew 28:20: "I am with you always, to the close of the age." When we open the Bible, we are not just learning about God, we are connecting with Him. The Bible becomes an invitation to spend time with God, drawing us closer to His presence.

Celebrating the Word in 2025

The Sunday of the Word of God will be marked by various special celebrations in churches across the globe. These may include:

- Special services where the Bible will be placed at the centre of worship, highlighting its importance.
- Bible study groups and prayer sessions, fostering deeper connections with Scripture.
- Distributing Bibles to encourage daily reading and reflection on God's Word.
- Training new readers to proclaim the Bible during Mass, emphasising the sacredness of Scripture in worship.

Additionally, this celebration occurs within the context of a Jubilee year in the Catholic Church, a time of renewal that invites the faithful to refresh and strengthen their relationship with God.



Bringing Christians together

The Sunday of the Word of God is significant for Catholics and all Christians. The Bible is a common bond that unites Christians, regardless of their denomination. It serves as a foundation for mutual understanding, allowing Christians to unite in shared reverence for God's Word. This celebration of Scripture reminds us of what unites Christians across different traditions, helping to build greater unity and collaboration among believers.

What this means for us

When we say, "I hope in your word," it is more than simply wishing that God's promises will come true. It expresses our trust in the God who speaks to us through the Bible. It's like having a friend who always keeps their promises—we trust them not only because of what they say, but because we know them.

In times of uncertainty or fear, the Bible offers us reassurance. It reminds us that we are not reading a distant or irrelevant text, but

hearing from God, who is always with us, cares for us, and keeps His promises. Through the Bible, God continues to speak to us today, guiding us through life's challenges.

This celebration is an invitation to view the Bible not simply as a collection of teachings or historical facts, but as a living connection with God. It is an opportunity to deepen our relationship with Him, to trust that He is walking with us in every moment, and to recognise that His Word is a source of hope, strength, and comfort.

Ultimately, the Sunday of the Word of God reminds us that the Bible is more than just a book — it is the living Word of God. And in it, we find not only knowledge, but a constant companion on our journey of faith. This is a message we can truly hope in.

Reference: <https://shorturl.at/V14DV>



(Unsplash/Cassidy Rowell)

YCW legacy inspires social action in Jubilee Year

KUALA LUMPUR: In this Holy Year, the faithful are encouraged to become pilgrims of hope by embracing the 'See, Judge, Act' method, a core approach of the Young Christian Workers (YCW) movement.

This call was made by Fr Fabian Dicom during a thanksgiving Mass held on January 11 at the Church of Our Lady of Fatima, honouring the departed leaders of YCW Malaysia. Msgr Daniel Lim, former national chaplain of YCW, concelebrated the Mass, which also saw the presence of Gabrielite Brother Francis Xavier Gasper from Montfort Boys' Town, Shah Alam.

The YCW movement, founded in 1925 by Cardinal Joseph Cardijn, was built around the methodology of 'See, Judge, Act,' which encourages ordinary workers to reflect on their lived realities through the lens of the Gospel and take actionable steps to improve their circumstances.

Fr Fabian highlighted the relevance of this approach in the context of the Holy Year, calling on the faithful to become "pilgrims

of hope." "The YCW legacy invites us to apply this powerful methodology to bring about social change, grounded in the teachings of the Gospel," he said.

Fr Fabian, who is also the director of Caritas Malaysia, reflected on the importance of the 'See' phase, which involves discernment, listening, and learning. He observed that in Malaysia, the marginalised are disproportionately affected by social issues such as corruption, political self-interest, economic inequality, and racial discrimination. "These challenges create a climate of mistrust, division, and systemic injustice," he said, noting that even within the Church, there is often a tendency to focus on rituals rather than addressing pressing social issues.

The Caritas director acknowledged the decline of movements like the YCW but emphasised that the need for action in the face of social injustice is still urgent. He noted that there were signs of hope, with individuals and groups inspired by YCW continuing to champion the dignity of workers



From left: Francis Xavier Anthony, former YCW president, Msgr Daniel Lim, former YCW national chaplain and Patricia Toh, former YCW leader.

and promote justice, as well as Church-based initiatives addressing poverty, climate change, and migration.

Fr Fabian then turned to the second part of the YCW methodology: 'Judge.' Reflecting on the baptism of Jesus, he quoted Luke 3:21-22, where God affirms Jesus as His beloved Son, a declaration

extended to all baptised Christians. "Through baptism, we are entrusted with the mission of living out this identity." He further quoted Luke 4:18, in which Jesus proclaims His mission to bring good news to the poor and set the oppressed free, stressing that as baptised Christians, we are called to live out that same mission.

"The Gospel compels us to see the inherent dignity of every person," he declared, adding that for the poor and marginalised in Malaysia, this means advocating for justice and equality. He urged the congregation to reflect on how they could contribute to the transformation of society, calling for genuine interfaith and interracial harmony and addressing the root causes of suffering.

The final step in the methodology is 'Act.' Fr Fabian encouraged the congregation to respond with courage and compassion. He posed two critical questions: "How do we bring the Gospel to life?" and "How do we live the dignity of our baptism?"

As a response, he called on the faithful to become "pilgrims of hope" not only in personal devotion but also in social transformation. He suggested that this could involve collaborating with other faith communities to oppose corruption, advocating for fair wages for migrant workers, supporting local educational initiatives for underprivileged children, and voicing concerns for marginalised groups.

OLOG community focuses on unity and growth at pastoral assembly

Bridget Antoinette Pereira

PUCHONG: The Parish Pastoral Assembly (PPA) at the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe took place on January 11. Although delayed due to last year's successful fundraising efforts, the event was well-attended by BEC and parish coordinators, reflecting the community's strong commitment to the parish's growth and unity.

The assembly commenced with an opening prayer followed by a warm welcome address from parish priest, Fr Raymond Pereira, who greeted Archbishop Julian Leow, parishioners, and facilitator Rita Krishnan.

Fr Raymond praised and thanked God for the Pastoral Centre, which has supported various liturgical services, meetings, Catechism classes, festive celebrations, and formation sessions across language groups over the past two years, despite challenges and space constraints.

Those present were encouraged to reflect, listen, and discern the path for the parish's growth in 2025, as the community looks forward to the completion of the renovated Church and new Community Centre. Gratitude was expressed to the Building Committee, fundraisers, donors, and supporters for their generous contributions. Fr Raymond concluded his address with a prayer, seeking the Holy Spirit's guidance and blessings for a fruitful and successful PPA. The gathering



The participants with Archbishop Julian Leow and Fr Raymond Pereira.

then prayed the PPA Prayer, followed by the Jubilee Year of Hope prayer.

Next, PPC chairman, Edward Tan Jr, delivered an insightful presentation, recapping the previous year's activities. He highlighted the Lenten Outreach programme, where BEC members collaborated to prepare meals for migrant workers and the underprivileged, showcasing the parish's strong commitment to service and charity.

Rita Krishnan from the Archdiocesan BEC Animating Team led the breakout sessions, where small groups discussed four key topics: Family, Church, Ecology, and Society. The discussions resulted in several actionable takeaways, including:

- Encouraging non-Catholic family members to join the RCIA programme.

- Providing transportation for parishioners in need.
- Organising community-building activities, such as karaoke sessions, within the BECs.
- Promoting youth participation through targeted formation and education about parish ministries.
- Establishing a Counselling Ministry to support parishioners emotionally and spiritually.
- Advocating for environmental initiatives, including reviving the *kebun* project, rainwater harvesting, and monitoring the parish's carbon footprint.
- Offering practical household management assistance for the neglected and homebound.

These discussions underscored the importance of living out Catholic values as a witness to the broader community.

Archbishop Julian expressed his gratitude to Fr Raymond and the organising team, recognising the challenges posed by the ongoing church renovations, now 95 per cent complete. He commended the community for maintaining their activities at the pastoral centre despite the constraints.

The archbishop encouraged the parish to create a welcoming environment, particularly for those who had temporarily left during the renovations, and to anticipate their return when the church reopens. He reminded the community that BECs should not only gather for funerals or prayers for the deceased but also celebrate key milestones such as Confirmations, First Holy Communions, and wedding anniversaries within their small communities.

In his closing remarks, the prelate compared the parish community to a jigsaw puzzle, where each individual plays a crucial role in completing the whole picture. He urged everyone to actively contribute, emphasising that unity and participation are essential for the parish's continued growth.

The PPA concluded with a closing prayer by Fr Raymond, who thanked all those present for their valuable contributions. It was a day of reflection, collaboration, and renewed commitment to building a vibrant, inclusive, and faith-filled parish community.

St Anthony's parish embraces synodal approach for 2025 pastoral plans

KUALA LUMPUR: The Church of St Anthony (SAC) held its Parish Pastoral Assembly at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre on January 12.

This important gathering brought together parishioners, clergy, and representatives from BECs, youth groups, and various ministries to discuss priorities and set the direction for the year ahead, in line with the Jubilee Year.

The assembly was graced by the presence of Archbishop Julian Leow, together with parish priest, Fr Dr Clarence Devadass, and assistant parish priest, Fr Michel Dass.

The primary goal of the PPA was to reflect on the previous year's achievements and challenges while setting goals and priorities for the year ahead, focusing on the four key pillars: Family, Youth, Ecology, and Society.

Participants arrived early, assisting with hall arrangements, embodying the spirit of unity and community in faith. The PPA began with an opening prayer, followed by a welcome address from Parish Pastoral Council chairman, Winson Rajah. He emphasised that the assembly would chart the path to foster spiritual growth, social justice, and service to the broader community. "With the support of every member, we can make meaningful strides in strengthening our community in faith while aligning with the Church's mission," he said.

The assembly continued with a review of the 2024 parish mission, highlighting events from the past year organised collaboratively by the 15 BECs and 15 parish ministries. Attendees then participated in group discus-

sions to identify areas for improvement, followed by a session on the regional pastoral assembly 2024, where they explored the four pillars of the pastoral plan.

The group discussions focused on key areas, including enhancing family life in faith, increasing youth engagement within the Church, addressing ecological concerns, strengthening parish initiatives, and expanding the Church's role in serving the broader society.

Several important outcomes emerged from the assembly, all aligned with its goals. These included plans for faith formation programmes aimed at drawing children and youth closer to the Church; increased community service and outreach efforts in the KL district; interfaith dialogue initiatives to foster peace and understanding with other religious communities; and a stronger emphasis on using social media and communication platforms to reach a broader audience.

In addition to these outcomes, Fr Michel shared several key reflections. He emphasised the importance of creating a welcoming Church, where everyone, from the wardens to parish members, actively engages with newcomers and integrates them into the parish family. "The role of the BECs in identifying and supporting families in need is increasingly vital, especially as many families today face not only financial struggles but spiritual challenges," he noted.

The young cleric also stressed the importance of empowering the youth to become the next generation of the Church by providing them with leadership opportunities



The attendees participating in the Conversation in the Spirit.

and proper support. "We must create a clean and safe environment, serving all members of the community by understanding the realities around us and reaching out to bring God's presence to others," he explained. He concluded by urging all to become 'Christ-centred community members,' saying, "This must be our goal, so that others may see the face of Jesus in our leaders."

Fr Clarence expressed his gratitude for the collective efforts of the parishioners and underscored the importance of community in sustaining the Church's mission. "In all that we do and hope to achieve for our parish, we must remember the importance of bringing everyone together as a true synodal Church," he said, emphasising the need for clarity in direction so that the parish can move forward with a unified mission centred on Christ.

He further highlighted that the Synod represents a reawakening of the baptismal role, binding everyone together as one people of God. "We walk together as a community

to build one Church and remember that the mission of the Church belongs to all of us." He encouraged the community to embrace their baptismal role, work together for the glory of God and the Church, and face challenges as a united family, positively influencing the parish and beyond.

Archbishop Julian Leow also shared his thoughts, highlighting the unique position of the Church of St Anthony in the heart of the city. He spoke about the vital role of evangelisation in today's society, stressing, "Our duty is to share the story of Jesus and what He is doing in our lives, making Christ known to others."

Addressing the youth, he emphasised the importance of understanding their needs and being present where they are. "The Church must be ready to provide answers to the questions young people are asking and help them engage with the faith," he said. He concluded by stressing the need to continue working together in love and unity, all to glorify Christ. **Elvina Fernandez**

AMNEC celebrates a year of appreciation and hope

Veron and Andrew Lim

KUALA LUMPUR: The Archdiocesan Mission of New Evangelisation for Christ (AMNEC) kicked off 2025 with an appreciation fellowship at the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Held on January 4, the event brought together over 100 participants from 15 parishes across the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, all of whom had previously taken part in AMNEC's initiatives.

The guests enjoyed an engaging montage that recapped the year's highlights and the friendships formed through AMNEC's events. The montage began with scenes from the *Transforming Parishes* event in June 2024 at the Church of St Francis of Assisi, followed by *Igniting the Spark* in July and *Inspired to Go* in August at the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

It also featured memorable moments from the October Mission Month events held at five parishes — Church of St Theresa, Nilai; Church of St Thomas the Apostle, Kuantan; Church of Sts Peter and Paul, Banting; Church of the Risen Christ, Kuala Lumpur; and Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Puchong, all under the theme *I Am a Mission*.

The montage culminated with highlights from AMNEC's participation in the *Joy to the World* event at The Godown, Kuala Lumpur, a collaborative effort with ASAYO, ABLAZE, Cornerstone Disciples, and other parish youth ministries.

Fr Edwin Peter, ecclesiastical assistant for AMNEC, reflected on three pivotal moments in the history of salvation: the first, Creation at the beginning of time; the second, Jesus' birth at Christmas; and the third, His Second Coming. Fr Edwin explained that between the first and second moments, God sent prophets, and between the second and third, He sent apostles — and now, He sends us.

"Let's get started," he urged, calling attendees to embrace their mission as disciple-makers, particularly during this Jubilee Year 2025. He described it as a time of the Lord's favour, a season of hope, and an opportunity for a transformative encounter with Jesus Christ, the "door" to salvation.

Andrew Lim, AMNEC chairperson, shared the team's mission to cultivate missionary disciples and foster a missionary culture among parishioners in the archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur. He acknowledged that achieving this



The participants from 15 parishes who joined in AMNEC's activities last year.

goal requires unwavering faith, hope, trust, and perseverance but emphasised, "We have to take that first step."

Andrew outlined AMNEC's strategy of adopting Spiritual Multiplication over Spiritual Addition, focusing on Intentional Accompaniment within small groups. He elaborated on the Faith Series, a programme consisting of five books — Discovery, Source, Growth, Trust, and Commission — each designed to be completed in six to eight weeks.

Trained leaders, selected based on the FACT criteria — Faithful, Available, Contagious, and Teachable — will guide small groups of five to six participants. These participants, upon completing the Faith Series, will lead their own groups, effectively transforming disciples into disciple-makers.

To further enhance their efforts, the AMNEC team has been engaging in training sessions via Zoom with Amber Effeuze, a parish specialist from Catholic Christian Outreach (CCO) based in Canada. Amber shared an inspiring example from Ireland, where the Faith Series transformed a parish community. A local priest had struggled to involve parishioners in ministry, but after experiencing the Faith Series and encountering Christ, parishioners stepped forward, becoming actively involved in ministries and committed to making disciples for Christ.

The fellowship concluded with the Rosary and Mass, presided over by Archbishop Julian Leow and concelebrated by Msgr Stanislaus Soosaimariam and Fr Michael Teng, OFM Cap. In his homily, Archbishop Julian emphasised the importance of

responding to God's invitation and reminded the congregation of their collective responsibility to share the Good News, especially with those who have yet to know Christ.

After Mass, everyone gathered to celebrate Archbishop Julian's birthday with a song and the ceremonial cutting of a cake. The day ended with a sumptuous buffet lunch, offering an opportunity for fellowship, joy, and the creation of cherished memories and lasting friendships.

Looking ahead, AMNEC plans to collaborate with the Archdiocesan Office for Human Development (AOHD) in October 2025 for the Jubilee of Migrants. This initiative seeks to support the Holy Father and Archbishop Julian in what has been described as an "event of great spiritual, ecclesial, and social significance in the life of the Church."

OLL parishioners prepare for feast day with formation session

KLANG: In preparation for its upcoming parish feast day, the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes (OLL) invited Fr Dr Clarence Devadass to lead a formation session for parishioners on January 11. The session, attended by around 100 participants, focused on three key themes: Spirituality, Synodality,

and Hope, helping the community prepare their hearts for the feast day celebration.

Fr Clarence explained the Synod process in a way everyone could understand, sharing his personal experiences and insights on how Synod questions were reviewed at various stages. He encouraged the group to

reflect on how they could better care for one another. Drawing on feedback from the Synod, Fr Clarence compared churches worldwide — highlighting that while the average age of Mass-goers in London is 75, churches in Asia are vibrant, filled with people of all ages, including children. He urged everyone to move beyond complaints and focus on creating a warm, welcoming church, especially for pilgrims. A Synodal Church, he emphasised, listens and journeys together.

Fr Clarence also reminded the parishioners of their mission to share the Good News. By living according to the Gospel and sharing their faith stories, they could strengthen their Catholic identity. Quoting Pope



Fr Dr Clarence Devadass

Francis, he emphasised that kindness and hope are central to the Gospel message.

The next speaker, Damian Prakash, spoke on being a *Pilgrim of Hope*, urging everyone to share

Christ's hope as the feast day approached. He highlighted the importance of showing kindness and reminded the parishioners that God is always with them, even during difficult times. Sharing the verse from Matthew 19:26, "With God, all things are possible," Damian's message resonated deeply with those present, encouraging them to trust in God's promises.

As the session concluded, participants felt spiritually renewed and better prepared for the upcoming feast day. Many shared how the formation had helped them grow closer to their faith and community, leaving the gathering with a sense of renewed purpose and unity. **Nesa Dhevasahayam**



The parishioners during the prayer session.

A day of festivity and fellowship at the Church of the Assumption

PETALING JAYA: The Church of the Assumption had a heart-warming Family Day celebration that brought together its vibrant parish community for a day of

fun, food, and fellowship recently. Despite the unpredictable weather — alternating between sunshine and light rain—the event radiated warmth and joy, drawing both pa-

rishioners and visitors alike

At the core of the celebration were food stalls which were managed with love and care by the BEC communities and various parish ministries. These stalls offered a variety of mouth-watering dishes, ranging from juicy burgers and ice cream to traditional favourites like *satay*, *nasi lemak*, *briyani*, *ice kacang*, *roti jala*, and *Maggi goreng*. The diverse offerings highlighted the creativity and generosity of the parish family, embodying the spirit of sharing and giving that is central to the Catholic faith.

The event also featured carni-

val-style games stalls organised by the BECs, which provided plenty of laughter and friendly competition. One of the highlights was the dunk tank, where parishioners took turns trying to dunk parish priest, Fr Leonard Lexson. Another major attraction was the petting zoo, which enchanted both the young and the young-at-heart with its furry, friendly residents.

For those looking for even more excitement, the popular BINGO sessions, hosted by the Evergreen Ministry, sparked laughter and friendly anticipation as participants joined in the fun.

The festive atmosphere was el-

evated by upbeat tunes from DJ Lollipop, live band performances, and musical acts from parishioners. Many took the opportunity to dance off the calories from the delicious food, enjoying the lively celebration.

The Church of the Assumption's Family Day was more than just a gathering — it was a powerful reflection of the parish's faith, resilience, and the strong sense of community that defines the Church. The event reminded all those in attendance that, at the Church of the Assumption, faith is celebrated with joy, vibrancy, and a spirit of togetherness. **Aaron Frankie**



Many watching a parishioner volunteering to be dunked.

FSIC religious mission continues in Sandakan

Evelyn Jock

SANDAKAN: The Cathedral of St Mary marked a heartfelt farewell to Sr Martina James, FSIC, and warmly welcomed Sr Rose Ginibun, FSIC, during a potluck fellowship dinner on January 5. The event brought together parishioners, BECs, and communities to express their gratitude for Sr Martina's years of service and to embrace Sr Rose as she steps into her new role.

Sr Rose, a native of Kampung Kopimpinan, Papar, is inspired by Psalm 119:104, "Your word is a lamp to my feet, a light for my path," and views her arrival in the Diocese of Sandakan as an opportunity to witness to the Gospel of Christ. The third of five children, Sr Rose was raised in a family with a strong religious background and received her Sacraments at the Church of the Holy Rosary in Limbahau. She pursued a diploma in computer studies



Sr Martina James, FSIC and Sr Rose Ginibun, FSIC cutting the cake with parish leaders looking on.

before working in a finance company for four years. Eventually, she answered God's call and entered the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception (FSIC) in 1998. Sr Rose took her first vows in 2001 and perpetual vows in 2006.

Throughout her religious journey, Sr

Rose served in various pastoral roles, including at the Church of St Theresa, Kota Marudu, San Damiano Hostel Kiulu, and Bondulu Children's Home, Tambunan. She encourages those interested in religious life to seek the Holy Spirit's guidance and embrace their vocation with courage and

commitment. With a passion for music, Sr Rose enjoys playing the guitar and ukelele, finding comfort and connection with God through music.

Sr Martina James, who has served in the parish for the past nine years, bids farewell as she is assigned to Tuaran parish. A native of Munibbah, Keningau, Sr Martina has dedicated 21 years to religious life. During her time in Sandakan, she served in the Catechetical Ministry, as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion and with the BECs. Sr Martina expressed her gratitude for the warm support from the parishioners and shared her appreciation for the lessons learnt from the diverse cultures and traditions in Sandakan. She encouraged others to respond bravely to God's call and be responsible for their decisions.

Both sisters leave a lasting impact on the parish community, and the faithful look forward to Sr Rose's continued contributions to the religious mission

Commemoration service at Mousquet Memorial honours WWI French sailors

PENANG: A commemoration service was held at the Mousquet Memorial on January 14, at the Church of the Assumption, to

honour the French sailors who lost their lives during World War I. The memorial, which is located in the church's front enclave, pays

tribute to the 43 sailors, including three ethnic Vietnamese, who perished in the naval Battle of Penang on Oct 28, 1914.

The French destroyer *Le Mousquet* was sunk by the German cruiser *Emden* off the coast of Penang, with sailors ranging in age from 19 to 43. A requiem Mass was held for them at the Church of the Assumption on Nov 18, 1914, celebrated by Fr Louis Duvelle. To honour this historic event, Cardinal Sebastian Francis, Bishop of Penang, consecrated the memorial on April 9, 2015.

The commemoration service was attended by Cardinal Sebastian, Fr Edmund Woon, Fr Desmond Jansen, the French Ambassador to Malaysia Axel Cruau, the Ambassador of Germany, and military attaches from the United Kingdom, Australia, Japan, the Czech Republic, and Malaysian Navy officers. Also present were representatives from the Penang Civil Society, Alliance Française,

PDRM, and about 40 sailors from the French Carrier Strike Group visiting Penang.

In his speech, Ambassador Axel Cruau paid tribute to the fallen sailors, stressing the importance of learning from history. He drew parallels between past and present geopolitical tensions and called for the respect of international law, cooperation to combat climate change, and the promotion of global peace and prosperity.

The service also acknowledged the loss of 89 Russian sailors during the Battle of Penang, as the Russian cruiser *Zhemchug* was also sunk. The Russian memorial is located at Western Road Cemetery in Penang, with two sailors' bodies buried on Pulau Jerejak.

The commemoration held special significance as the Church of the Assumption has been designated a pilgrim church in the Diocese of Penang for the Jubilee Year of Hope 2025. **Christopher Kushi**



Cardinal Sebastian Francis, Fr Edmund Woon, Fr Desmond Jansen and navy officers at the memorial.

Catholic lawyers reminded to decrease in self and increase in God

KUALA LUMPUR: The Catholic Lawyers' Society (CLS) of Kuala Lumpur celebrated their 31st votive Mass of the Holy Spirit, more commonly known as the Red Mass, on January 11, at the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist (CSJE).

This Eucharistic celebration, which is held annually, was attended by members of the CLS and all practitioners of the legal profession, students undergoing chambering, family, friends and the Catholic faithful from far and wide. An estimated 102 members of the legal profession was present.

The principal celebrant was Archbishop Julian Leow, together with concelebrants, the Apostolic Nuncio to Malaysia, Archbishop Wojciech Zaluski, Ecclesiastical Assistant to the CLS, Fr Gregory Chan, Fr William Michael, the Cathedral's parish priest Fr Gerard Theraviam and a visiting priest.

In Archbishop Julian's homily, he reminded the lawyers of three key points. First, about the Gospel reading of the Mass (John 3:22-30), the archbishop called on the lawyers to decrease in self but increase in God in their practice and lives, emphasising that their work should reflect this principle.

Second, he preached on the responsibility



The Catholic lawyers with the clergy for the Red Mass at the Cathedral of St John.

of lawyers as pilgrims in this world, reminding them that in their life journey from birth to death, they owe it to God to fulfil His work; and third, the archbishop posed challenging questions to the lawyers, asking them if they are Catholics first or lawyers first, whether they are Catholics who happen to be lawyers or lawyers who happen to be Catholics, and if they are serving God through their work as lawyers.

He reminded everyone of the need to have Christ in our hearts when carrying

out our work, be it in the legal profession, at home or in society. He emphasised the need to keep the faith while carrying out the mission of upholding and dispensing justice in our daily lives. To do so, we need to strengthen our faith. He also emphasised the concept of democracy in the community and advocated for world peace.

This annual Votive Mass was coordinated and animated by members of the CLS, comprising of the president, the executive committee members, and past presidents.

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

After Mass, the president of the Society, Stanislaus Cross, thanked the celebrants and clergy, members of the faithful and all who attended the event. He then invited them to join in the fellowship afterwards. The event concluded with a photo session at the main entrance of the cathedral with all the lawyers and celebrants. **Christine Lim**

KL Central district launches 'Come Home' initiative to welcome back parishioners

KUALA LUMPUR: In a heartfelt response to the Jubilee Year and the theme of *Hope*, the clergy of the Kuala Lumpur Central district have initiated a new outreach programme, inviting those who have drifted away from the Church to return and reconnect with their faith community.

Fr Gerard Theraviam, parish priest of the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist and senator for the district, explained that the 'Come Home' initiative is aimed at those who feel disconnected from the Church. Some may attend Mass but struggle to feel a sense of belonging, while others may have been absent for personal reasons. "Sometimes we need to gently nudge them in the right direction," said Fr Gerard. "Our goal is to provide a safe space for people to reconnect with their faith."

The first session of the 'Come Home' programme took place on January 4 at the Cathedral of St John, where approximately 20 individuals attended. The event offered a relaxed and welcoming environment, with coffee and tea available for attendees. Participants were encouraged to engage in one-on-

one conversations with either a priest or one of the lay collaborators present, depending on their preference.

Fr Gerard admitted that the clergy were initially uncertain about the turnout, especially given that the event occurred just after the New Year. However, they were pleasantly surprised by the response. "It's open to all, and we were happy to see people come," he said.

After their session with the clergy, the individuals are invited to stay for coffee and continue their conversation with lay collaborators, further strengthening their sense of community. "Through this gesture, we're helping them reintegrate into the community," said Fr Gerard.

Fr Gerard emphasised that the programme is about creating a welcoming and supportive environment for those who feel lost or weary. "In finding your way back home, every soul is cherished, and every heart finds its purpose," he said. "You belong here, and we eagerly await to walk this hopeful journey with you."

In his New Year message to the faithful,



Archbishop Julian Leow, the prelate of the KL Archdiocese, extended a heartfelt invitation to those who had distanced themselves from the Church. "Know that our arms are wide open to welcome you back into the fold," he said. "There will be no judgment, only love, understanding, and a shared desire to walk this journey together. As we celebrate this year, may you find the courage to return and experience the warmth and embrace of our community."

The 'Come Home' sessions will continue on the first Saturday of every month from 11.00 am to 12 noon at one of the four

Catholic churches in the KL Central district as follows:

- Feb 1 : Church of the Holy Rosary
- Mar 1 : Church of St Anthony
- May 3 : Church of Our Lady of Fatima
- June 7 : Cathedral of St John the Evangelist
- July 5 : Church of the Holy Rosary
- Sept 6 : Church of St Anthony
- Oct 4 : Church of Our Lady of Fatima

These sessions are open to anyone who has been away from the Church, whether they are seeking a friendly conversation, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, or simply a space to heal and rediscover hope.

Healing and Deliverance seminar inspires spiritual renewal

Georgina Tan

GEORGE TOWN: A transformative Healing and Deliverance Seminar was held at the Msgr Aloysius Spirituality Centre from January 10 to 12. It was jointly organised by the Penang Diocesan Healing and Deliverance Ministry and the Penang Diocesan New Evangelisation Commission. The event attracted over 100 participants from various regions, including Penang, Sabah, Sarawak, Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, Perak, Pahang, and Kedah.

The seminar featured two distinguished speakers, Fr Pat Collins, CM, an Irish Vincentian priest with over five decades of service, and Fr Dr Charles Chiew (KB, PA), Head of the Ministry of Exorcism and Deliverance in Keningau, Sabah. Fr Collins, a renowned international speaker, author, teacher, and exorcist, was unfortunately unable to travel to Penang due to unforeseen immigration issues. However, his determination and professionalism shone through as he delivered his sessions virtually, often speaking during the early hours of the morning in Dublin. Despite the challenging time zone difference, Fr Collins captivated the audience with his extensive knowledge on holistic healing, the importance of claiming God's promises, and how to find freedom from addiction.

Fr Collins, nearly 80 years old, simplified complex concepts from his book *Freedom from Evil Spirits: Released from Fear, Addiction & the Devil* by relating them to Scripture, psychology, and real-life applications. He emphasised the need to address psychological and physiological issues before discerning spiritual matters, and how spiritual breakthroughs are essential for lasting freedom from addiction.

Fr Dr Charles Chiew *pic*, a certified psychologist, spoke on

the topic of deliverance in the modern world. He made an important distinction between exorcism and deliverance, sharing their historical context and practical applications. Fr Charles engaged the participants with a down-to-earth approach, discussing the role of sacraments and how to discern between spiritual and psychological disorders. Drawing from his background in martial arts, he also demonstrated physical stances to ensure safety during deliverance sessions, and offered clear guidelines for those involved in the deliverance ministry. Fr Charles' light-hearted yet informative presentation kept the participants engaged and sparked meaningful discussions.

Throughout the seminar, smaller group discussions provided an opportunity for participants to share personal experiences and insights, fostering a sense of camaraderie and mutual learning. Participants were also encouraged to share their testimonies, which offered a sense of encouragement and solidarity in their spiritual journeys.

The seminar culminated in Mass and Adoration at the Church of St Francis Xavier, participated by around 500 people. Cardinal Sebastian Francis, who celebrated the Mass, reflected on the Church's transition from the Synod of 2024, focusing on conversion, to the upcoming Jubilee of Hope in 2025, centred on hope. He also shared his insights on healing and deliverance, highlighting the five stages of healing as reflected in the Our Father prayer (Matt 6:9-13).

Following the Mass, Fr Charles led the Healing Service through Adoration of the Holy Eucharist. As he exposed the Holy Eucharist, participants experienced profound moments of healing and spiritual renewal. The event was a deeply moving and spiritual experience, leaving many attendees with a renewed sense of hope and divine presence.



The participants adoring the Blessed Sacrament.

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Pope Francis reflects on faith, compassion, and hope in new autobiography

In *Hope: The Autobiography*, released on January 15, Pope Francis reflects on his life, his path to the papacy, and his vision for the future. Co-authored with Italian editor Carlo Musso, the book provides a deeply personal look into the Pope's experiences, shaping a narrative that blends history, family, faith, and his leadership as the spiritual leader of the Catholic Church.

While the autobiography doesn't introduce ground breaking revelations, it is rich in stories and personal anecdotes. The Pope revisits his formative years, recounting encounters that shaped his world view. Early chapters explore his family's history, including the dramatic story of his grandparents' survival when the ship *Principessa Mafalda* sank, a twist of fate that allowed for his existence. As he reflects on these experiences, he meditates on the concept of hope, central to his life's journey and the book itself. The Pope's words resonate with themes of resilience and faith, urging readers to never lose hope, even in the face of adversity.

Throughout the book, the Pope engages with the lives of numerous figures who have touched his life. He writes with affection about his grandmother, Rosa, his childhood friend Esther, and Nené, a friend whose life took un-

expected turns. Their stories, along with those of others such as "La Porota," a sex worker who turned to care for the elderly, illustrate his deep sense of compassion and his belief in the transformative power of mercy. "Everyone is invited. Everyone," he writes, emphasising the inclusivity at the heart of his ministry. These personal reflections are woven into the broader tapestry of his vocation and ministry, painting a vivid portrait of the man behind the papacy.

The Pope also addresses the controversies that have marked his tenure, defending decisions such as expanding access to the sacraments for divorced and remarried Catholics and blessing same-sex couples. These choices are framed within his broader vision of the Church as a welcoming, merciful institution that does not exclude anyone based on their status or identity. He insists that "sexual sins" are often less serious than others, such as pride, hatred, or abuse of power, calling for a Church that leads with compassion rather than judgment.

While much of *Hope* revisits familiar ground, especially regarding his early life and ministry, the Pope also offers candid reflections on his pontificate. Acknowledging his mistakes, particularly stemming from impatience, he reaffirms his commitment to



Pope Francis greets a child during an audience at the Vatican January 10, 2025, with young people receiving care at an oncology-hematology clinic in Poland, their families, medical staff and the organisers of the group's pilgrimage to Rome from Wroclaw. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

accompany all people on their spiritual journeys. The Pope also takes the opportunity to share his thoughts on his future, discussing his health and his belief that his papacy will end when God chooses. Although he had initially expected his papacy to be brief, the Pope is resolute that he will serve for as long as God desires, mentioning that he has already made plans for his burial at Rome's Basilica of St Mary Major.

Despite the introspection in later chapters, the earlier sections of the autobiography shine with a narrative richness that draws on the Pope's personal history, his faith, and his

relationships with others. His reflections on the 1969 moon landing, his fascination with Ingmar Bergman's films, and his deep-seated belief in the importance of community and connection give the book a reflective, almost cinematic quality.

Ultimately, *Hope* offers a poignant look at the man who became Pope Francis — a figure who has experienced personal and global challenges with humility and a profound sense of mission. As the Pope himself states, "The best wine has yet to be served," reinforcing his belief in the promise of hope, both for the Church and for humanity as a whole. **Agencies**

'Amerigo Vespucci' designated as Jubilee Church for 2025 pilgrims

As part of the Holy Year 2025, the iconic Italian naval ship *Amerigo Vespucci* has been officially designated a Jubilee church, offering a unique opportunity for pilgrims to receive the Plenary Indulgence. This designation, made by Archbishop Santo Marcanò of the Italian Military Ordinariate, transforms the ship's onboard chapel into a pilgrimage site at sea, allowing faithful Catholics to engage in prayer, confession, and liturgical celebrations in a remarkable setting.

The *Amerigo Vespucci*, a three-masted sailing ship that has served as a training vessel for the Italian Armed Forces since 1931, is named after the 15th-century Italian explorer Amerigo Vespucci, who lent his name to the Americas. Since July 2023, the ship has been on a global tour, promoting Italy's cultural heritage and serving as a floating ambassador. Its worldwide journey has already taken it to key cities, including Los Angeles, Tokyo, Darwin, Mumbai, Doha, and Abu Dhabi, with its final stop in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, planned for December 28, 2025.

This designation of the *Amerigo Vespucci* as

a Jubilee church aligns with the broader goals of the Holy Year, during which the Catholic Church invites the faithful to engage in acts of mercy and pilgrimage. Catholics who visit Jubilee sites like the *Amerigo Vespucci* chapel and participate in spiritual activities such as prayer or confession can obtain the Plenary Indulgence, a key spiritual benefit of the Jubilee. Pope Francis has authorised diocesan bishops to designate sacred sites in their regions, making it possible for Catholics around the world to partake in the Jubilee's grace, no matter their location.

Archbishop Marcanò expressed the significance of the *Amerigo Vespucci*'s role as a sacred site for the military, stating, "The Church that lives among the military also wants to establish signs during the Jubilee Year that express the hope that the Church and the world await from God, and which God entrusts to the military world." He highlighted the deep connection between the military mission and the spiritual journey of the men and women serving in the Armed Forces, who will now have the chance to participate in the Jubilee's

spiritual benefits through this remarkable pilgrimage site.

The *Amerigo Vespucci*'s chapel will serve as a sacred space for the crew, as well as for military personnel on missions at sea. Catholic chaplains, who have long accompanied the ship's spiritual life, will continue their important role during this Jubilee year, offering guidance and support to those aboard. "They will do so in a special way in this year of the Jubilee of Hope," remarked Archbishop Marcanò, emphasising the significance of spiritual care for military personnel in this holy time.

Pilgrims visiting the *Amerigo Vespucci* as part of the Holy Year will be invited to reflect on the themes of hope, mercy, and peace, which are central to the Jubilee. Archbishop Marcanò's words about forgiveness also resonate within this context, as he stressed the importance of building a culture of peace and the need for both self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others. In his homily during the Jubilee inauguration, the archbishop reflected on the powerful role of pilgrimage in the lives of military personnel, noting, "In its hardships and joys, may the Jubilee be a privileged time for growing in communion with God and fraternity, in shared service to the defense of human life, justice, and peace."

In addition to the *Amerigo Vespucci*, several other locations within the Italian Military Ordinariate have been designated as Jubilee sites, including the Church of Santa Caterina da Siena in Rome, the Church of the Celio Military Hospital, and the chapel at the Penitentiary in Santa Maria Capua Vetere. These sacred locations, alongside the *Amerigo Vespucci*, will offer the faithful ample opportunities to engage in pilgrimage and receive



The "Amerigo Vespucci," an historic Italian sailing ship dating back to 1931. (CNS photo/courtesy Tour Mondiale Vespucci)

the spiritual benefits of the Holy Year.

This initiative underscores the Church's commitment to making the Jubilee accessible to all, including those serving in the military, and its recognition of the importance of spiritual life in the context of military service. By designating the *Amerigo Vespucci* as a Jubilee church, the Italian Military Ordinariate invites both military personnel and civilians to embark on a journey of faith, reflection, and renewal during this special year. **Agencies**

The *Amerigo Vespucci* will continue its world tour as a living symbol of hope and service, not only promoting Italy's cultural identity but also offering a unique spiritual experience for those who encounter it. Through this Jubilee designation, the ship's mission expands to include the sharing of mercy, compassion, and the eternal promise of hope that defines the Holy Year. **Agencies**



Fr Mauro Medagliani, the chaplain onboard the "Amerigo Vespucci" — an historic Italian sailing ship — celebrates Mass on the ship's deck in this undated photo. (CNS photo/courtesy Tour Mondiale Vespucci)

The silent need for connection

Happy New Year 2025! I'm sure your social media feed, like mine, was overflowing with New Year wishes at the start of the year. Have you ever stopped to wonder why social media is so popular? Could it be that, at its core, it fulfils a basic human desire — the need to connect, belong, and be part of a group or community?

Countless studies illustrate, from the smallest rodents to us humans, that our social environment profoundly shapes us and that we suffer immensely when our social bonds are affected or severed. I am sure you can recall your experiences during the global lockdown. We are wired to be social. We are driven by intrinsic motivations to stay connected with other humans. This is our authentic nature. Most of the time we connect through the medium of language.

However, what happens when one of us can no longer verbalise? Or when we act in ways that may not suit the norms of behaviours set by us, the majority? This is very common in the world of dementia, especially when one loses the ability to use language to communicate. I wonder why we often assume that when people cannot speak, they have nothing to say. Let us pause to reflect on this absurdity. *Being unable to speak is not the same as not*



Dancing with Dementia

DR CECILIA CHAN

having anything to say. Just because someone is unable to articulate what he or she wants, we overlook their experience in favour of ours. Often, we jump to the conclusion (quite wrongly in most cases), that their needs and feelings are the same as ours because we have no other guidelines than our interpretation of their response, or even lack of it.

A close friend of mine (whom I will call Adam) is craving human connection as he gets visibility excited and

will launch into a series of what we often label as “incoherent” talk or “gibberish”. Usually, Adam is left alone in the house with no human interaction and connections other than basic physical needs like food and personal care. Adam, who had been supplying seafood to restaurant operators all his life is very vibrant, friendly, and enjoys human connection. Dementia affected his language comprehension and production, but not his need to connect. He became more and more frustrated and angry and began to demonstrate his frustrations physically and emotionally.

It was surprising that when my team began to connect with him daily, meeting his most fundamental needs as a human being, he began to flourish to his real self. Stepping into Adam's world enabled us to explore

ourselves as well as Adam and helped us reach further into our world and meanings, providing us with deeper reflections of what meanings it might have for him. My team realises that to truly know another person and be open to who they are, we must initially know and be open to ourselves. It is not static but rather, a fluid and organic relationship between two communicating partners where walls of power, superiority-inferiority/normal-abnormal must be demolished so that, learning about oneself and others and connecting, are central and authentic.

My personal experience of the world of dementia raised many crucial questions about the nature of self and personhood. I suspect that no other condition is experienced in isolation as dementia embodies this. It demands a profound question about what it is to be human and how we are defined as people. Being in this unique world forces me to recognise my limitations and my vulnerability. It often forces me to open parts of me that I prefer to be hidden, exposing my vulnerability as a human being. Initially, it feels too tender, too raw, too frightening. How can I turn myself inside out so that my inner world, the place where I feel, connects with the space of my friends living with brain changes such as dementia?

Perhaps we have to move from the model of merely ‘caring’, to one of partnership so that the one we are caring for no longer feels

himself or herself to be an object to whom life happens as a kaleidoscope of barely related events, but as a valued individual whose feelings and needs are sought out and validated.

If we understand this and treat those affected with dementia as fully human, with minds of their own who are entitled to the full respect of others, then perhaps they can live a full and meaningful life. More importantly, they can still share their lives with us.

For what they do often lose is their social self. Anyone's social self depends on its existence on being recognised by other social beings. What people say to us, and how they behave towards us, confirms our role as their parent, neighbour, teacher, student, colleague, etc. How they relate to us also shows our value in that role, confirming that we are, for instance, a much-loved parent, or merely a body to be taken care of.

If we ignore those living with dementia, talk about them as if they weren't there, and assume they are the living dead, we are telling them that they no longer have a valid social identity in our eyes.

*...if we listen attentively
we shall hear a faint flutter of wings,
the gentle stirring of life
and hope. — Camus (1960)*

Dr Cecilia Chan is a Gerontologist and Dementia Advocate and Activist. She can be contacted via WhatsApp (013-4384388).

The joy of birth and the sorrow of death

Pope Francis' prayer intention for November 2024 was pastoral and addressed parents who had lost children. It read, “We pray that all parents who mourn the loss of a son or daughter find support in their community and receive peace and consolation from the Holy Spirit”.

Many refer to Pope Francis as a reformist pope but I perceive him also as a pastoral pope. His reforms seem to revolve around pastoral issues.

I come from a family that, for years, mourned the loss of two sons. I am the eldest of four boys, and we tragically lost my second and third brothers when they were infants. I was just one year old when we lost my second brother, Gregory, so I have no memory of the events surrounding his death. However, the memory of losing my third brother, Anthony, remains vivid in my mind. It was the first time I witnessed my father weep uncontrollably. For years, my parents carried the weight of losing two beloved sons. Their healing was supported by the love of friends and relatives, as well as their faith in God, which consoled them.

Whenever I visited my mother, she often shared her life experiences with me at the dining table, and the stories of losing her two sons were always a prominent part of those conversations. My father was laid to rest in Anthony's grave, and my mother in Gregory's, as per their wishes during their lifetimes. We have honoured their wishes, and now we pray that all their souls may rest in peace.

Let me continue to discuss this painful topic, focussing on several variations of the loss of a child and the impact of these losses on parents.

Perinatal Loss

During Advent last year, I chose to watch the series *The Chosen*. I was surprised by season 3. It revolved around the

The pain of losing a child

perinatal loss or miscarriage experienced by Eden, the wife of Peter the Apostle. Of course, the actual events are not recorded in the Gospels but credit to the producers for introducing a significant event that occurs in the lives of couples. Perinatal death includes miscarriages. The medical term for miscarriage is abortion because the foetus is naturally aborted from the woman's uterus or womb. It also includes the death of an infant at birth and stillbirths.

Perinatal loss is an incredibly painful experience for parents. I recall several years ago when a close friend came to me to talk about the miscarriage his wife had endured. He was deeply grieving the loss of the child they had been eagerly expecting. He felt confused and struggled with his faith, as this loss left him questioning how to make sense of such sorrow.

More recently, a relative shared with me the experience of her miscarriage from many years ago. Even after all this time, it still brought her great pain to talk about it. What hurt her even more was that her husband had not been supportive during that difficult time.



Informed Opinion

PROF XAVIER V. PEREIRA

For people of faith, it is difficult to imagine this great loss as part of a loving God's will for them. There are many reactions to this unexpected loss which include emotional responses like shock and disbelief, sorrow, grief, anger, shame, and guilt. There is also the tendency of the grieving parent to socially withdraw from family members and friends, and isolate self. There is also the feeling of being abandoned by God and being angry with Him. Thus, it is essential at this juncture that the bereaved receive support from their pastor, relatives and friends.

These emotional and behavioural responses in parents are common in the loss of a child in all age groups — in infancy, in childhood, in adolescence and in adulthood.

Sudden Death

Two common causes of death in teenagers and young adults in the US are accidents and suicide. Sudden death can also be caused by illnesses like cardiac events. Homicide also ranks high among the causes. These are difficult death experiences for the parents and family members of the deceased because of the

sudden nature of the death, and the lack of time and preparation to address the passing of the child, unlike those in chronic terminal illness.

The suicide of a child is an especially heartbreaking and incomprehensible tragedy. Parents often question themselves and struggle with intense feelings of guilt and blame when their child takes their own life. The weight of this loss can be overwhelming, and for some parents, the emotional scars may never fully heal.

Impact on Parents

It has been reported that parents who have lost a child often suffer from anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation. Many also suffer physical ill health. The couple may experience marital difficulties. Separation and divorce may result. Some may experience unresolved complicated grief resulting in severe depression and may require professional help.

As outlined in the Pope's prayer, it is important that the communities that these parents belong to offer psychosocial support. Enhancing social support is also a therapeutic strategy in counselling and psychotherapy.

Intrapersonal efforts at healing this great hurt will take time. Hopefully, the consolation that comes from God can result in the internal experience of healing and peace.

Xavier V. Pereira is a medical doctor, psychiatrist, and an internationally certified interpersonal psychotherapist, supervisor, and trainer. Interpersonal psychotherapy addresses Grief and Loss. He is also an adjunct professor in Psychiatry at Taylor's University School of Medicine and founder chair of the Catholic Counsellors and Therapists of Malaysia.

Lucille Dass

Prayerful. Reflective. Discerning. Creative. Pro-active. Docile. Synodal. These are the seven (a biblically significant number) key features desired of a priest-in-the-making, according to Fr Ryan Innas Muthu, the new Rector of the Regional Major Seminary, Penang (as of January 1, 2025).

Fr Ryan's response to dozens of questions reflects a multi-faceted operational philosophy of the formative leadership he has in mind-and-heart for the seminarians. His consummate *modus operandi* is in two words: holistic and unifying. (Deuteronomy 6:5 and Luke 2:52 come to mind.)

Response to the 'call' – presently and previously

How was the good news conveyed to him? Fr Ryan notes that Cardinal Sebastian Francis informed him of having received the appointment letter and the Decree (Prot.N.3868/24) from Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, Pro-Prefect of the Dicastery for Evangelisation. His initial response? "I feel this is a call from God for me to help form future priests for our local dioceses. The hand of God is at work in the wisdom of the superiors." As soon as the news hit the ground, the seminarians of College General (CG) and the house-fathers rejoiced with him; not forgetting commendations received from his home-parish in Johor Bahru.

When sharing about his own path to becoming a priest, Fr Ryan steadily states, "Firstly, prayer life. I prayed, Lord if you want me to be your priest show me the way. This simple prayer led me to discern my vocation and to navigate my priestly formation with grace, notwithstanding the challenges I faced. Secondly, docility. This requires humility and willingness to discern God's will through obedience. Thirdly, service. As a seminarian I always reminded myself that I'm called to serve the Lord: bring Christ to the people."

(Give ear O seminarians-to-be!) He quotes a favourite scriptural verse (2 Cor.4:7) in context, to illustrate how our frail human bodies – "earthen vessels" hold the "treasure" that is Jesus, His Word, His Holy Spirit, love, wisdom, and strength. We need to be "broken" to share these God-given treasures with others. This verse is closely tied up both in its spiritual significance and related works with his ordination theme "Abide in me as I also abide in you" (Jn 15:4).

Servant leadership

Having already served six years as lecturer in College General (CG) prior to his current appointment, what transfer of skills and

knowledge could he bring to his new role? True to his calling, Fr Ryan declares, "I'm convinced that every lecturer and formator is an instrument of Christ the Good Shepherd forming seminarians after the heart of Jesus. We serve as guides, mentors, and spiritual companions, to help seminarians grow in faith, knowledge, and personal care – to prepare them for a life of servant-leadership." As the chief servant-leader, the rector firmly believes that God will guide him with sufficient strength in all situations and challenges (2 Cor. 12:9).

Equally, he draws comfort from Cardinal Tagle's reassuring reminder included in the appointment letter, "...always be aware that when the Lord chooses someone for an important task, he always provides the necessary grace needed for the service." He is thankful too for all that he has learned from fellow-formators, and from his role as procurator.

Why is the route to priesthood "The road less travelled?" Young people, he says, have family and financial commitments to fulfil. This, together with worldly distractions, can delay or waylay their discernment process. For those who feel the stirrings of a divine call, the rector recommends that they select a spiritual director to guide them, and "...stay in touch with your parish priest, and your diocesan vocation director."

Core values

"The primary formator in a seminarian's vocation is ultimately the Holy Spirit. All formators serve as instruments of the Holy Spirit, providing guidance, support, and structure. The Holy Spirit is the true source and sustainer of the vocation." He adds that surrendering to the Holy Spirit and adhering to the Church document on Priestly Formation (*Ratio Fundamentalis; Pastores Dabo Vobis*) together with a dose of discipline can mould seminarians to be pro-active, creative, reflective and synodal... and thus help him navigate CG to achieve the mission and vision envisioned. His valued aims vis-à-vis the seminarians are:

- i) to be a merciful father to them
 - ii) to establish a spirit of dialogue, unity, and fraternal correction
 - iii) to be close to them and attentive to their human and spiritual needs
 - iv) to purify their primary intention towards Christ-centred priesthood
 - v) to form them in collaboration with co-formators and other seminary staff.
- He recognises the need to awaken in the seminarians "awareness of the need to bring all people of good will into the fellowship of love and service" in this teeter-tottering and weary world of today. Fr Ryan, whose name literally means "little king" or "illustrious" (both apply!) with his steadfast faith trusts in the Holy Spirit to guide him wield the sceptre that has now been passed down to him.

Hear ye, hear ye!

In closing, Rector Ryan reminds all, especially prospective priests-in-the-making – not to be afraid to harken to the voice of God that may be hidden in the hustle and bustle of other sounds in the world. God can speak to us in a multitude of ways (think Job 33:14).



Forming shepherds after the heart of Christ

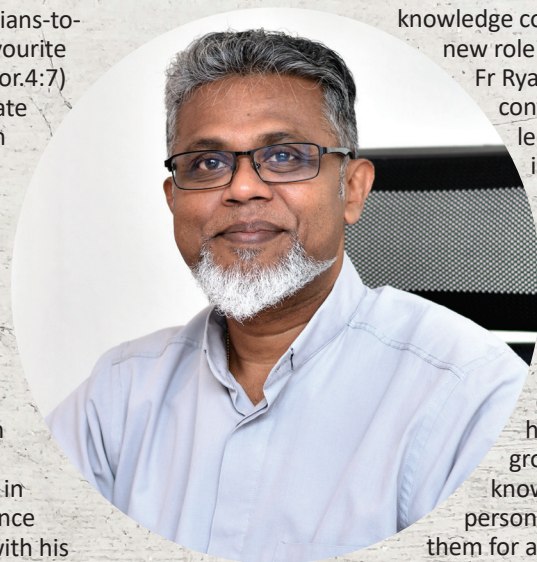


Photo credit Samuel Gopal & Sinaran College General

Christian Unity — A lay social perspective

The weeks of January are inundated by post-Christmas celebrations for Catholics — the solemnity of Mary, the Epiphany, the Baptism of the Lord, and various feast days of popular saints.

All for Ecumenism

One event that usually keeps parish interfaith councils busy for January, usually the first calendar event for interfaith dialogue — Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Recalling my own experience some 15 years back, while it was still something quite novel for our parish, a little like tiptoeing a landmine full of dos and don'ts.

I remember repeatedly running through the ecumenical worship text that I had downloaded with our then parish priest and liturgical team to make sure we didn't breach any sensitive words — both for us and the participating churches.

As we were hosting it that year, it was held in the church hall instead of the church itself — and we used a simple folding table with plain white linen cover, a sole crucifix — facing the celebrant-leader (with crosses everywhere else) and an open Bible, even our parish priest came in with a blue shirt with a roman collar rather than a cassock. I remember thinking how our church managed to pull off an almost “evangelical” church gathering! While we worried that it may have been only our parishioners who attended, a healthy number of nearby church members, as well as three pastors, joined in.



Making Sense

EMMANUEL JOSEPH

Beyond Church

No doubt we have come a long way since, but ecumenism and related activities still seem to be largely confined to hosted services in January and participating in one another's events. These are often an extension of the relationships the parish priest has with nearby pastors and church leaders, or even PPC members, through charitable work, social outreach programmes, or similar initiatives. Some churches now co-organise events such as blood donation drives or food distribution for the poor.

As a relatively minority faith community in the country, particularly in Peninsular Malaysia, these interfaith relations are not only beneficial for ecumenism but also contribute to our growth, both as individual faith communities and as Christians in Malaysia.

These parallels can exist beyond official church-to-church basis.

While BECs and similar groups exist along similar geographical boundaries (*tamans* and residential zones), can coordinate between each other to form a larger, unitary “Christian” group for both social and even religious purposes. This stretches the “unity” beyond January throughout the year, and on a social level, enhances the relationship between neighbours with the common thread of Christ.

Combating Misinformation

In the era of abuse, especially politicking on the 3Rs (race, religion and royalty), Christianity, has often (rather unfairly) been made the bogeyman along with Communism and Zionism as being the mother of all problems in the country, especially by unethical politicians.

Often, these accusations are untrue altogether, or purposely exaggerated to make a situation far worse than it is. Christianity being played up for politics isn't new — in the 90s, we saw Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah's wearing of a headgear with an alleged cross costing him his election victory, while in the 2000s, the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes in Silibin, Ipoh, was faced with protestors at a First Holy Communion Mass, when some people accused it of being a mass conversion event.

Of late, these accusations have intensified alongside rising political tensions, and the Government is allocating resources to address this systemic issue, which is undermining our inter-communal trust and relationships.

While publications like this one aim to raise awareness at the church level, fostering a strong bond within the Christian community — particularly in areas with diverse populations — can help disseminate accurate information locally. At the very least, it would provide local leaders from other faiths with a point of reference and a basis for dialogue when confronted with such rumours.

A social force

While we have organisations like the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism (MCCCBHST), the Council of Churches Malaysia (CCM), and the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship (NECF) to represent non-Muslims, mainstream churches, and evangelical communities respectively, community-driven projects play a vital role in fostering unity. These initiatives, such as adopting local charities, mutually supporting each other's projects, and pooling resources to assist one another at the grassroots level, can be incredibly impactful.

Such activities can address common

concerns, like the fear of proselytizing to our children, or involve cooperative efforts like mall carolling during Christmas. They can also provide a platform for tackling localised social issues of shared interest, such as advocating for a new highway, opposing new taxes, or helping a local family get back on their feet.

Unified sense of belonging

It can even take on a historical dimension — such as documenting the Christian history of the area, including schools, orphanages, and other institutions built over the years by various denominations, as well as recognising local community heroes from the churches in the area. A simple focal point for these efforts could be a WhatsApp group or Facebook page.

These stories, often intertwined with war history and business guilds, are at risk of being lost, particularly amid the competition for influence by politically vested individuals who seek to define what should or shouldn't be considered part of the Malaysian identity.

Such initiatives foster a localised sense of belonging to a shared geographical area, with activities that, while sometimes competing, are ultimately complementary — carried out for the greater glory of God.

While this does not diminish our pride and sense of belonging to our individual churches, it helps to build a broader narrative of the local Christian community, encompassing both its past and present.

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.

❖ *The views expressed are entirely the writer's own.*

What is holiness?

The call to holiness is universal, but the call is varied. The call can be lived as a single person, married and raising families, consecrated life as religious brothers or sisters, or priestly life. Each role contributes to the building of the Church and society. Whatever the vocation, all the baptised make up the Church and all who are baptised are called to acknowledge the Church as their own and to contribute to society as *salt of the earth and light of the world*.

Vatican Council II states, “Strengthened by so many and such great means of salvation, all the faithful, whatever their condition or state, are called by the Lord — each in his or her own way — to that perfect holiness by which the Father himself is perfect”. [LG11]

A baptised person must see his or her mission on earth as a path of holiness, for “this is the will of God, your sanctification” (1 Thess 4:3). [GE19]

Part of being a Christian is growing to be like Christ. And part of growing in Christ-likeness is growing in holiness. Holiness is not separate from practical daily living.

Pope Francis tells us that “we are frequently tempted to think that holiness is only for those who can withdraw from ordinary affairs to spend much time in prayer. That is not the case. We are all called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves. Are you called to the consecrated life? Be holy by living out your commitment with joy. Are you married? Be holy by loving and caring for your husband or wife, as Christ does for the Church. Do you work for a living? Be holy by labouring with integrity and skill in the service of your brothers and sisters. Are you a parent or grandparent? Be holy by patiently teaching the little ones how to follow Jesus. Are you in a position of authority? Be holy by working for the common good and renouncing personal gain.” [GE14]

All are called to holiness

Thus, to “Be holy” is a divine call to deeper relationship, a personal encounter with God. *We still need holiness because we need God. God is holy, and “without holiness, no one will see the Lord.”* (Hebrews 12:14) Our personal encounters with a holy God will so change us that we will look remarkably different from the world: different enough to make people think and reflect.

Scripture calls this “sanctification.” Sanctification is the process by which one grows in holiness to become more and more like Christ. But we still can't do it on our own efforts. Jesus died to make us holy, and we must trust Him to help us grow. Holiness is not achieved through self-will or determination. This is where the spiritual disciplines of reading Scriptures, spending time with God in prayer, enjoying communion of Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs), serving others and sharing your faith come in. It is only as we spend time with God and other believers that we will grow in our sanctification.

Growth in holiness is a life-long process. It is only when we ask God to change us that we will see the changes come. But you must ultimately take all your efforts and place them at the disposal of Christ who alone can make you holy. Only Christ can change your heart. And only when Christ has changed your heart will you find yourself growing in holiness.

Colossians 3:2 says, “Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things”. But setting your mind on things above does not free you from your obligations to other people. On the contrary, setting your mind on things above frees you from the unhealthy

attachment to earthly things that keeps you from loving and serving your neighbour as you should on the path to holiness.

Holiness in Consecrated Life

Consecrated life is a gift of God to the Church (cf. *Vita Consecrata* 3, 105). Holiness for consecrated persons means being “set apart” for the sake of the Kingdom of God. This is a specific style of living out the commitment to holiness and service. By living the Evangelical Counsels, they have the special mission to remind everyone of the universal vocation to holiness.

However, holiness is the great challenge of our day for those leading the consecrated life; it is the major prophetic witness of our time (VC 84). It is a call to perseverance on the path of holiness in the midst of the material and spiritual difficulties of daily life (VC 37). But it is also a call to pursue competence in personal work and to develop a dynamic fidelity to their mission, adapting forms, if need be, to new situations and different needs, in complete openness to God's inspiration and to the Church's discernment. Pope Francis states that “Everything can be accepted and integrated into our life in this world, and become a part of our path to holiness. We are called to be contemplatives even in the midst of action, and to grow in holiness by responsibly and generously carrying out our proper mission.” [GE26]

As part of the Church, consecrated persons do not only commit themselves to becoming holy but to promote and witness to holiness among all Christians. “Today a renewed commitment to holiness by consecrated persons is more necessary than ever, also

as a means for promoting and supporting every Christian's desire for perfection (...) Consecrated persons, at the deepest level of their being are caught up in the dynamism of the Church's life, which is thirsty for the divine Absolute and called to holiness. It is to this holiness that they bear witness. The fact that all are called to become saints cannot fail to inspire more and more those who by their very choice of life have the mission of reminding others of that call” (VC 39; cf. 103).

Thus, consecrated life is the manifestation (epiphany) of God's love in the world. As consecrated persons, the call to holiness focuses on doing the will of God for the world today. The diverse orders with various charisms give witness to the wonderful outpouring of the Holy Spirit, enriching God's people by helping to build the Kingdom of God here on earth. As prophetic persons, they must guarantee the enforcement and sustainment of truth, justice and peace everywhere and at all times.

Ultimately, it is Christ who loves in us and through us, for “holiness is nothing other than charity lived to the full” (BENEDICT XVI, Catechesis, General Audience of April 13 2011: *Insegnamenti VII* (2011), 451)

Conclusion

The path of holiness is a source of peace and joy for all, given to us by the Spirit. At the same time, it demands that we keep “our lamps lit” (Lk 12:35) and be attentive. “Abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thess 5:22). “Keep awake” (Mt 24:42; Mk 13:35). “Let us not fall asleep” (1 Thess 5:6). [GE164]. So, let us listen to the voice that calls all baptised persons to holiness as 1 Peter 1:15-16 says, “But just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’”

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PERCEPTIVITY

Sr Margarete Sta Maria FdCC



Fr Ron Rolheiser

Life and the sin against the Holy Spirit

There is nothing as psychologically and morally dangerous as lying, as denying the truth. Jesus warns us that we can commit a sin that is unforgivable which (in his words) is a blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

What is this sin? Why is it unforgivable? And how is it linked to not telling the truth?

This is the context where Jesus gives us this warning. He had just cast out a demon and some of the people who had witnessed this believed, as a hard religious doctrine, that only someone who came from God could cast out a demon. But they hated Jesus, so seeing him cast out a demon was a very inconvenient truth, so inconvenient in fact that they chose to deny what they had just seen with their own eyes. And so, against everything they knew to be true, they affirmed instead that Jesus had cast out the demon by Beelzebub, the prince of demons. They knew better. They knew that they were denying the truth.

Jesus' first response was to try to make them see their lie. He appeals to logic, arguing that if Beelzebub, the prince of demons, is casting out demons, then Satan's house is divided against itself and will eventually fall. But they persist in their lie. It's then, in that specific context, that Jesus utters his warning about the danger

of committing a sin that cannot be forgiven because it blasphemes the Holy Spirit.

In essence, what's in this warning?

The people whom Jesus addressed had denied a reality that they had just seen with their own eyes because it was too difficult for them to accept its truth. So, they denied its truth, fully aware that they were lying.

Well, the first lie we tell is not so dangerous because we still know we are lying. The danger is that if we persist in that lie and continue to deny (and lie) we can reach a point where we believe the lie, see it as truth, and see truth as falsehood. Perversion is then seen as virtue, and the sin becomes unforgivable, not because forgiveness is withheld, but because we no longer believe we need forgiveness, nor in fact do we want it or remain open to receive it.

Whenever we lie or in any way deny the truth, we begin to warp our conscience and if we persist in this, eventually we will (and this is not too strong a phrase) pervert our soul so that for us falsehood looks like truth, darkness looks like light, and hell looks like heaven.

Hell is never a nasty surprise waiting for a basically honest, happy person. Hell can only be the full flowering of a long, sustained dishonesty where we have de-

nied reality for so long that we now see dishonesty as truth. There isn't anyone in hell who is repentant and wishing he or she had another chance to live and die in grace. If there is anyone in hell, that person, no matter his or her private misery, is feeling smug and looking with a certain disdain on the naivete of those who are honest, those in heaven.

And how is that a "blasphemy against the Holy Spirit"?

In his letter to the Galatians, St. Paul lays out two fundamental ways we can live our lives. We can live outside of God's spirit. We do that whenever we are living in infidelity, idolatry, hatred, factionalism, and dishonesty. And lying is what takes us there. Conversely, we live inside God's spirit, the Holy Spirit, whenever we are living in charity, joy, peace, patience, goodness, long suffering, fidelity, gentleness, and chastity. And we live inside these whenever we are honest. Thus, whenever we lie, whenever we deny reality, whenever we deny truth, we are (in effect and in reality) stepping outside of God's spirit, blaspheming that spirit by disdaining it.

Satan is the prince of lies. That's why the biggest danger in our world is the amount of lies, disinformation, misinformation, and flat-out denial of reality that's present most everywhere today – whenever, it

seems, we don't find the truth to our liking. There is nothing more destructive and dangerous to the health of our souls, the possibility of creating community among ourselves, the future of our planet, and our own sanity, than the flat-out denial of the truth of something that has happened.

When reality is denied: when a fact of history is rewritten to expunge a painful truth; when you are told that something you witnessed with your own eyes didn't happen; when someone says, the holocaust didn't happen; when someone says there never was slavery in this country; or when someone says no kids died at Sandy Hook, that doesn't just dishonour millions of people, it plays on the sanity of a whole culture.

When something has happened and is subsequently denied, that doesn't just make a mockery of truth, it plays havoc with our sanity, not least with the one who is telling the lie.

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

I am on pilgrimage in the Holy Land with a group from my parish. It's close to noon, with hot sun and clear skies. We exit our bus and join hundreds of people walking to the Western Wall. Sounds swirl: drums and *shofars*, chanting and clarinets. Men in *kippahs* carry *chuppahs*; under each is a teenage boy. Today is Monday, and our guide tells us that on Mondays and Thursdays, *bar mitzvahs* may be celebrated at the Wall.

There are many Christian pilgrims, groups from Ghana, France, Canada, United States, Japan, Vietnam and Korea. Orthodox Jewish men in black suits. Some wear *yarmulkes*, others more elaborate *kippahs*, indicating their sect. The noonday sun glares, strong and unforgiving.

Two lines form to get to the Wall: one for women, one for men. Men's heads must be covered. I am not wearing a *yarmulke*, but a khaki sunhat; relief from the sun, but much more importantly, respect for the Lord according to the custom. The Wall looms. I carry a parishioner's prayer, given to me so that it may be inserted into the stones of the Wall.

I stop. Look. Breathe. Listen. Close by is a *bar mitzvah*. Men sing as a drum beats time. Near that *bar mitzvah* is another. More music, and cheering. Around me, dozens of men stand. Some kneel. Men's hands touch the wall and men's heads bow.

One man looks ancient. White-bearded, long-haired, black-suited, he is praying, wailing to the Lord, his gnarled hands bent and misshapen, caressing the stones. He seems to come from the past; but then again, as we are told, the past is never dead. It's not even past.

A low, slight gust; a measure of relief from the heat. I wedge the scrap of prayer into an opening between the stones. It almost falls out and I push harder until it is secured, safe, ensconced in the wall, joining its siblings in mute appeal to the Lord. I pray



What a convert hears and sees at the Western Wall

this prayer is fulfilled.

I want to open myself to all that is around me. Is God speaking? What is God saying? I hear a clarinet, notes in a major key, with minor grace notes. Chanting. Men around me, muttering prayers. Snatches of English and Hebrew. An Asian language. An African one.

I pray, too. I think about where our group has been, to churches and shrines, Roman ruins and ancient cities. We have sailed on the Sea of Galilee. We have walked where Jesus walked.

And, unexpectedly: an interior tug. I am here as a Catholic Christian, but I was not born into the faith. Despite having a Jewish father and a Russian Orthodox Christian mother, I was raised in no religion, never baptised, never had a *bar mitzvah*. Technically I am not even a convert, because I did not have a religion to convert from. Nevertheless, the word will serve, if only because my heart has changed and softened and opened, a conversion of self from cynicism and indifference – well, at least not as much as I used to have.

I close my eyes and place my hands on the stones, centuries-smooth from stroking and weather and wear. My ancestors stood here, right here, in this place. Jews who glorified the Lord and gave homage and

A man prays at the Western Wall in Jerusalem in this May 26, 2014, file photo. (CNS/Paul Haring)

praise. Jews who survived occupation and oppression. Jews who, in their doubt and worry, feared that the Lord did not hear them, had abandoned them. And despite their fears and frailties, despite those who hated them for no other reason than their being Jews, they came in faith and prayed. I lean my forehead onto the Wall in thanks and awe. I am moved to pray the *Shema*, "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one," to honour my ancestors. To honour God.

For a long while I stand, unmoving, eyes still closed, rooted to my spot not only in space, but in time. Surrounded by sound. And, in this time out of time, the sounds are all that exist. Not otherworldly, but the real world, the drums, the *shofars*, the clarinets, the chanting. The incessant voices, buzzing, humming, singing, chanting.

There have been voices here for thousands of years. All my forebearers who came to this Wall; but also those who could never come because they were exiled, feared, hated, persecuted, killed. Because, and only because, they were Jews.

I think of those who did the persecuting. Many were Christians, Catholics whose faith I converted to and now share. My Russian Cossack ancestors who might have

slaughtered a Jew as easily as slaughtering an animal. This, too, is part of who I am. I contain both the slaughtered and the slaughterer.

I am saddened. Within me lives the DNA of killers. And that is true not only of me, but of every human person in the world. Some came to grips with it long ago and have found a way to live in hope and harmony. Others have embraced the hatred and use it as their touchstone, their reason for living. Never excising the pain, the evil of the past remains toxic and poisonous. Never acknowledging the sin, the pain, the death that comes with hate.

I think of Jesus, who would respond with love, as well as all who wish to erode the jagged rocks of hatred. Towards a better way, with hope and peace for all.

The past may never be dead; it may not even be past. But the past, however alive, does not have to dictate the future. Love can transform.

I shake myself and open my eyes. Whisper an "Our Father." Rejoin my group. We leave the Wall as our pilgrimage continues to other places, other sites and eventually, back to the United States.

And the Wall remains, in Jerusalem and in my heart. **Art Blumberg, NCR**

Little Catholics' corner

LET'S COLOUR

When He came to the village of Nazareth, His boyhood home, He went as usual to the synagogue on the Sabbath and stood up to read the Scriptures. (Luke 4:16)



Dear children,

People make promises every day. Do they always keep their promises? Unfortunately, some people don't.

God makes promises too. The Bible is full of God's promises. Does God always keep His promises? Yes, He does!

The Bible says, "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ." (2 Cor. 1:20)

One day, Jesus was in the city of Nazareth. He went to the synagogue. He stood up and began to read the words of the prophet Isaiah from the Scripture.

He read where it says, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good



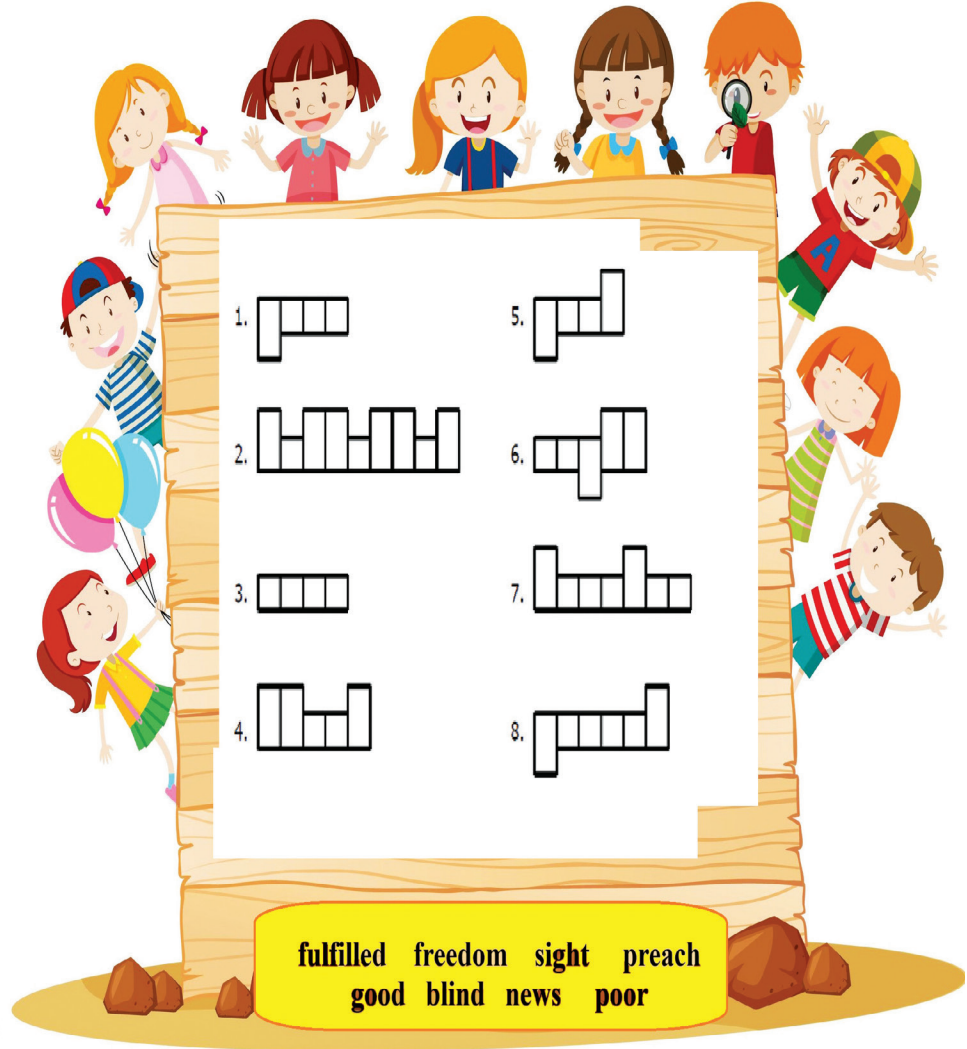
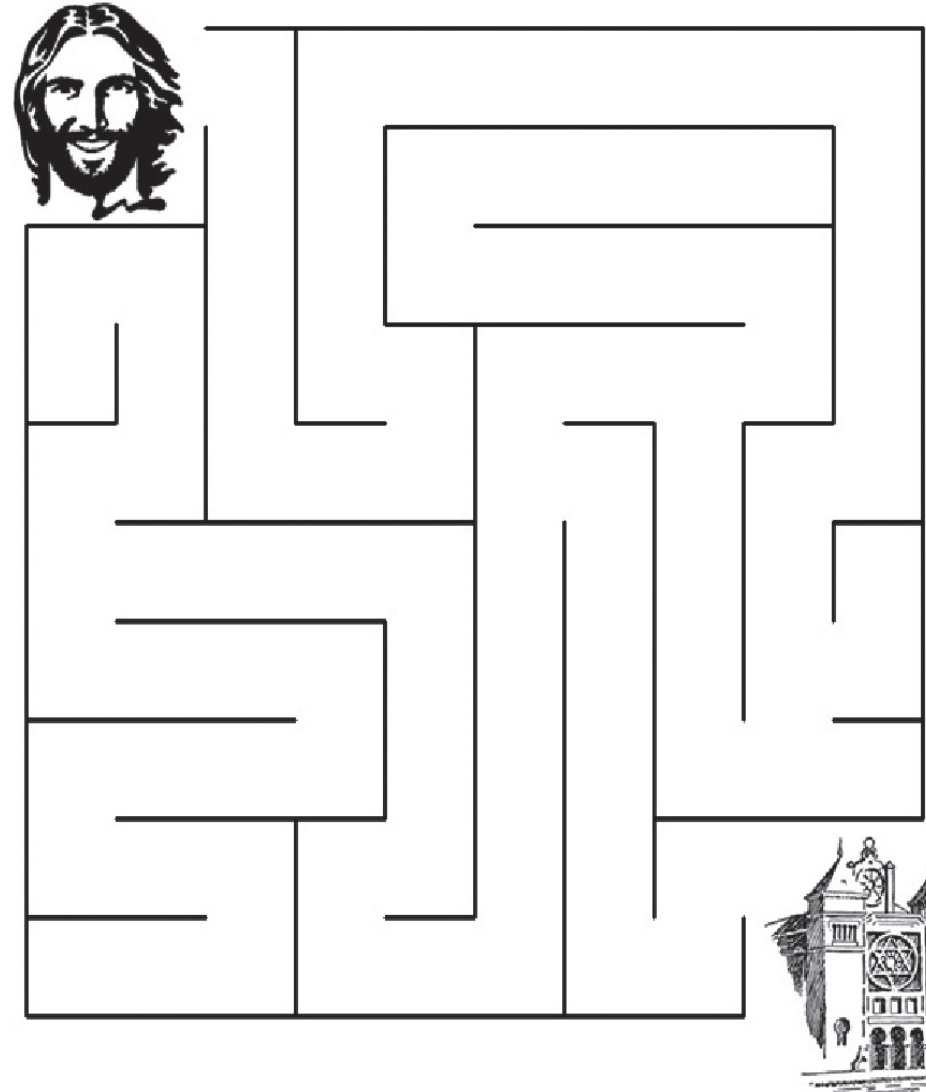
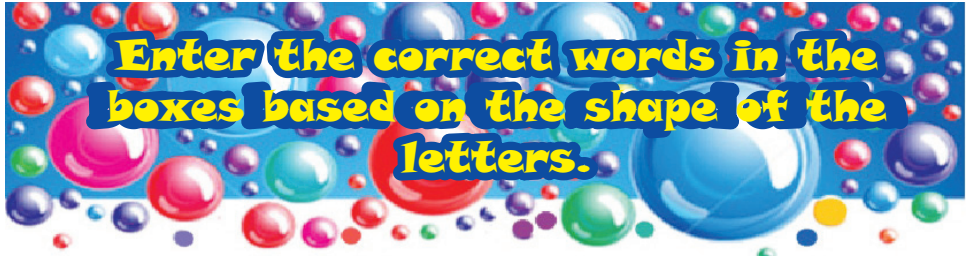
News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free and that the time of the Lord's favour has come."

When He had finished reading, all eyes were on Jesus. Jesus told them. "The Scripture that you have just heard read has been fulfilled this very day!"

Children, Jesus came to earth to fulfil the promises of God. All of God's promises are fulfilled in Him. Amen.

Love
Aunty Eliz

Help Jesus to find His way to the Synagogue (Luke 4:14-21)





'THE BELOVED' RETREAT FOR VOCATIONS TO THE PRIESTHOOD



Br Gabriel Puvan

The Malacca-Johore Diocese-Diocesan Priesthood Vocation Promotion Team (MJD-DPVPT), organised a stay-in experience from January 11-12 for individuals aged 18 and above who are discerning a call to diocesan priesthood. The retreat, aimed at fostering deeper reflection and spiritual growth, saw the participation of 28 individuals from both within and outside the diocese.

The central theme of the retreat, *The Beloved*, was inspired by the Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord, where God the Father proclaims Jesus as His Beloved Son. The participants were reminded that, like Jesus, they too are beloved children of God through Christ. This theme was intended to help the participants understand that their own lives and vocations are part of a larger, divine call.

The retreat took place at the peaceful CDD Formation House in Pulau Gadong, Melaka, a serene location that provided an ideal setting for quiet reflection and prayer, away from the distractions of city life. The programme ran from Saturday morning until Sunday evening, giving participants ample time for spiritual formation and bonding.

Sessions during the retreat focused on



three key sub-themes: called, chosen, and sent, all of which were closely connected to the participants' baptismal identity. The first session explored the universal search for joy, a joy that can be found in living out one's divine calling. The second session delved into the theme of the divine call and the importance of listening attentively to God's voice. This was followed by an engaging activity designed to help participants hone their ability to listen for God's guidance in their lives.

The third session was centred on the theme of being chosen, and was followed by a guided Holy Hour. During this time, participants were invited to bring their personal petitions and prayers before the Blessed Sacrament, offering them a sacred space for reflection and communion with God. The final session, held the next afternoon, focused

on being sent, empowering participants to respond to the call to serve and share God's love with others.

Throughout the retreat, seminarians currently engaged in pastoral work led the various sessions and activities. The Vocation Director for the Diocese of Malacca-Johore, Fr Adrian Francis, played a pivotal role in guiding the retreat. He emphasised the importance of understanding one's baptismal call, reminding the participants that through baptism, they too become beloved children of the Father and are invited to embrace the priestly vocation, should they feel called.

In addition to the deep spiritual practices, such as the Liturgy of the Hours, Rosary, Holy Hour, and Eucharistic Celebration, there were opportunities for light-hearted moments of fellowship. Icebreakers, sing-

alongs, action songs, and games were interspersed throughout the retreat, helping the participants to get to know one another in a fun and relaxed setting. A *santai* session offered participants some free time to relax, reflect, and connect. These activities were carefully designed to give participants a glimpse of daily life in the seminary, helping them experience the rhythm and demands of priestly life.

A highlight of the retreat was a pilgrimage to the Church of St Mary, Ayer Salak, one of the three pilgrimage sites in the diocese for the Jubilee Year of Hope 2025. This pilgrimage added a special spiritual dimension to the experience, allowing the participants to walk in the footsteps of those who have gone before them in faith.

The retreat concluded with the "Baptised and Sent" ritual, a meaningful and symbolic act that beautifully wrapped up the weekend. The event was further graced by the presence of Msgr Peter Ng, the Vicar General of the diocese, who shared words of encouragement and blessings with the participants. His presence further affirmed the participants' journey and strengthened their resolve in pursuing their vocations.

This weekend retreat provided valuable insights for those already serious about pursuing the priesthood and offered encouragement to those still discerning their call. It provided a space for reflection, growth, and mutual support, helping all involved to move forward in their spiritual journeys with greater clarity and confidence.

Making a difference through unity and service

NILAI: In a world where kindness and togetherness often shine brightest, the collective effort of a dedicated group of individuals can create a ripple effect that changes lives. This truth was evident when the Choice KL 107 team came together to serve the Orang Asli community of Kampung Tekir, Nilai, as part of their *Make A Difference* (M.A.D.) Project. This effort, which took shape over two months of planning, was more than a simple gathering; it was a reflection of God's love and the power of unity.

After weeks of meticulous preparation, the team gathered recently with the community to provide not only essential groceries for each

household but also educational materials to support the growth of children ranging from 2 to 18 years old. This initiative was designed to go beyond giving; it aimed to empower and nurture the spirit of hope for the future.

The day was filled with excitement as the villagers came together with enthusiasm, contributing ideas and offering their time to ensure the success of the celebration. This collaborative spirit was a testament to the power of community and the shared desire to make a meaningful impact.

Throughout the day, a range of activities brought joy to the community. Families bonded over ornament-making workshops, while games like

musical chairs brought laughter and camaraderie to all ages. The sounds of singing and dancing filled the air, creating an atmosphere of celebration that was felt by everyone.

As the evening unfolded, the community gathered for a Mass celebrated by Fr Christopher Soosaipillai, a moment that allowed everyone to reflect on the significance of the day and the power of coming together in the spirit of service. The Mass was followed by a communal dinner prepared with love by the villagers, embodying the true meaning of sharing and fellowship.

This gathering was a manifestation of the team's dedication, God's guidance, and the commitment to making a difference in the lives of others. Through their shared vision, the Choice KL 107 team exemplified how faith, teamwork, and compassion can come together to create a lasting impact on a community. As we look to the future, may we all be inspired by this example of unity and service, continuing to live out God's word by loving our neighbours as ourselves. **Shivonne & Mary Beth (Choice 107)**

Photo credit: Colin Sanjay



The Choice 107 team with Fr Christopher Soosaipillai after the Eucharistic celebration, marking the successful culmination of their efforts.



A building bridges activity that sparked creativity among the young ones.



A vibrant ornament-making workshop in full swing.

MUMBAI MUSICIANS RELEASE YOUTH ANTHEM FOR 2025 JUBILEE

MUMBAI, India: A group of musicians from Mumbai has launched an album featuring 15 songs to mark the 2025th year of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth.

The collection, titled *Jubilate Jesus 2025*, is an initiative by Tej-Prasarini, the media production house of the Mumbai Salesian province.

The project was coordinated by Salesian Fr Peter Gonsalves, the founder of Tej-Prasarini, former dean of the Faculty of Social Communications at the Salesian Pontifical University in Rome, and a member of the Vatican Department for Communications.

A second volume with the same title is scheduled for release on July 3, the feast of St Thomas the Apostle of India.

Fr Gonsalves explained the purpose of the Jubilate Jesus project, saying: "This initiative aims to bring people together to rejoice in the birth of Jesus Christ with uplifting melodies and meaningful lyrics. The reason for creating two volumes is to sustain a spirit of reverence, joy, and worship throughout the 12 months of the jubilee year."

The first song, *Jesus Christ is Our Only Hope* — a melody was composed by Korean Salesian Sr Cecilia, with lyrics by Fr Gonsalves, who has over 100 religious songs to his credit.

The song is sung and arranged by Neuman Pinto, a professional



Fr Peter Gonsalves (centre) with the team members.

musician who produces and records music for films, advertisements, and songs with social messages.

Revealing the genesis and production of the project, Gonsalves elaborated: "I had already produced a collection of my own compositions for the millennium in 2000 titled *Jesus is wonderful*."

"When I realised we were approaching 2025, I began collecting old, melodious, and meaningful hymns as early as 2023. These hymns, mostly in Italian, were translated and adapted for the English-speaking world. I sought and received permission from the individual composers before starting production."

Gonsalves added: "We then invited professional Christian musicians who owned studios to arrange the music and vocals and

send us rough cuts. Upon approval, we planned the videos so listeners could learn and sing along. Each song is presented with a picture on the left side of the screen visualising the lyrics displayed on the right. All images are generated using Artificial Intelligence."

In addition to translations from Italian, the two albums will include some songs in Korean and Portuguese. The production is educational and not-for-profit, with all rights to the original compositions and lyrics retained by the respective copyright holders.

The Tej-Prasarini media centre was established in 1992 at Matunga, Mumbai, under the guidance of Fr Gonsalves, as a production centre for audio cassettes with recordings of Christian and theatrical songs for the people of Maharashtra. **Matters India**

A daughter's transformation: The power of prayer and silence

How the faith and perseverance of parents changed the life of their teenage daughter, leading her to reconciliation with God and herself. The story of Inma and her parents is a powerful testimony for all families facing the challenges of adolescence. With faith and prayer, they managed to transform a time of crisis into an opportunity for grace.

Inma grew up in a home where living in the presence of God was part of everyday life: The Holy Rosary was prayed, the saints were talked about... However, when she reached adolescence, she began to question what she had learned. "I thought that everything my parents decided was wrong, and I looked for an opposite path," she says.

During that period, Inma moved away from faith and immersed herself in friendships and behaviours that affected her well-being. She struggled with eating disorders, work problems, and deep sadness after the death of a loved one. All this deteriorated her relationship with her parents, who decided to respond unexpectedly: they remained silent and turned to God in prayer.

Talking to God more about myself Inma remembers a key moment: one morning, returning from a par-

ty, she found her mother preparing to attend Mass. When asked what she was doing, her mother replied: "Someone has to make up for the Masses you are not going to." That answer left a deep mark on her.

Her parents had begun to attend daily Mass and pray intensely for her. Without sermons or reproaches, their faith and perseverance paved the way for Inma to reflect on her life.

Finally, her parents encouraged her to make a trip to Medjugorje, which turned out to be a turning point. There she experienced divine love and mercy, which helped her to reconcile herself with herself and her faith.

"I felt that Our Lady was embracing me, and I was able to forgive myself," says Inma. It was also on that trip that she met the man who would become her husband and the father of her three children.

Inma's testimony shows that parents' prayers are an invaluable resource for families. Instead of speeches or confrontations, the power of prayer and silence transformed her life.

"Talk more to God about your children, than to your children about God," Inma concludes, inviting parents to rely on the power of faith to overcome difficulties. **Mar Dorrio, Exaudi**



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15 JUNE 1933 -
28 JAN 2015

**10th
ANNIVERSARY**

In Loving Memory of

**THERESA
BALAKRISHNAN**

*Dearly missed and
fondly remembered
by Husband,
Children,
Grandchildren,
Relatives & Friends.*



**30th Anniversary
In Loving
Memory of**

**Appa
V. John James**

**Departed:
28-1-1995**

Eternal rest grant unto him O Lord!
And let thy perpetual light shine upon him.
May his soul rest in peace. Amen

*Deeply missed and
always remembered in our hearts.*

With love by
Children, Sons-in-Law, Daughters-in-Law,
Grandchildren and Great-Grandchildren.

**4th Anniversary
In Ever Loving Memory
of my beloved wife,
AMY PHILOMENA
ZUZARTEE**

15.04.1953 - 26.01.2021



Deeply missed by husband
Vincent Shanmugan
and loved ones.

For God so loved the world
that He gave His only Son.
Whoever believes,
will not perish but
will have eternal life.

**24th Anniversary
In Loving Memory of**



Henry Pereira
Departed: 1-2-2001

*May the road rise up
to meet you, may the wind
be always at your back,
may warm rains
fall softly upon your fields,
and until we meet again, may
God hold you
in the palm of His hand.*

Deeply loved and missed by
wife Lucy Pereira,
children and all loved ones.

**5th Anniversary
In Loving Memory of
Joe De Cruz**



20/10/1960 – 26/01/2019

*Your life was a blessing,
your memory a treasure,
you are loved beyond
words and missed
beyond measure.*

Dearly missed by
all loved ones.

**8th 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*



**30th Day
Memorial
In Loving
Memory of**

**Mdm
Marevin Dass**

**11.04.1951 –
03.01.2025**

*For as long as there are memories of you,
you will always live on in our hearts.*

**30th day Memorial service at 6.30pm
on the 1st February 2025 at Church of the
Immaculate Conception, Johor Bahru.**

*Dearly missed and fondly cherished by
family and loved ones.*

**19th Anniversary
In Loving Memory of our Beloved Mama**



Rosa Pereira (Dass)
**Called to rest:
28-01-2006**

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

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

Always loved
and remembered by:
Children, sons-in-law,
daughters-in-law,
grandchildren,
great-grandchildren and
a host of relatives
and friends.

In Loving Memory of

8th Anniversary



**Catherine Ho
Lai Koon**
(19-3-1939 to 27-1-2017)

4th Anniversary



**Joseph Fong
Meng Tao**
(16-6-1933 to 3-2-2021)

*You are missed but always loved,
You are gone but never forgotten,
We know your souls are at peace above,
In eternal joy in the Lord's kingdom in heaven.*

Deeply missed by your children, grandchildren,
siblings, relatives and friends.

Gaza's children dying of cold and trapped in war

The humanitarian crisis in Gaza has reached catastrophic levels, with children bearing the brunt of the suffering. "The suffering is truly immense," said Rosalia Bollen, UNICEF's communications head in Gaza, emphasising that while all families are affected, children are particularly vulnerable. "They cannot protect themselves, and their fragility puts them particularly at risk."

In recent weeks, harsh winter conditions have exacerbated the crisis, with temperatures dropping to as low as 4°C at night, accompanied by severe storms, strong winds, and relentless rain. Tragically, eight children, including newborns, have already died from hypothermia.

In an interview with *Vatican News*, Bollen explained that families in Gaza are struggling to meet even their most basic needs, with food, medicine, and shelter in critically short supply. Premature babies and fragile children are especially vulnerable, with no access to medical care to help them survive.

"These children were not suffering from specific medical conditions," Bollen said. "They were simply newborns, vulnerable to the cold. But their parents have no way to keep them warm." Many children lack even basic winter clothing and shoes, with Bollen noting that "When I walk through Gaza, I see children wearing summer clothes in the middle of winter. Many of them don't even have shoes."

The toll on Gaza's children is not only physical but psychological. Ongoing violence has left deep emotional scars, with children freezing in terror at the sound of planes or drones overhead. "They scream, they cry. Some have stopped speaking altogether, retreating into themselves," Bollen said.

In addition to physical injuries such as burns, spinal injuries, and amputations, children's mental health is deteriorating rapidly. Bollen shared the story of five-year-old Saad, who lost his sight after his home was bombed. "There is no psychological support available for children like Saad. When even basic medical care is inaccessible, psychological care becomes a distant dream," she lamented.

The daily struggle for survival has consumed the lives of Gaza's children. Many spend their days fetching water, scavenging for food, or collecting materials to burn for warmth. "These children dream of returning to school, seeing their friends, and sleeping in their own beds," Bollen said. However, the ongoing violence and destruction of Gaza's infrastructure have shattered these hopes.

The situation is dire. In the first six days of 2025 alone, at least 74 children were killed — nearly 10 children per day. Many more have been injured, with life-altering damage including severe burns and spinal cord injuries.

"The attacks must stop," Bollen reiterated. "We are trying to distribute warm clothing and other essentials, but it is not enough. The international community must act to end this cycle of violence."

Without immediate intervention, the crisis will only worsen. The lack of hygiene, insufficient food, and contaminated water are breeding grounds for disease, making children even more vulnerable.

Bollen concluded with a stark reminder: "These children deserve more than survival. They deserve a chance to live, to grow, and to dream. We must do everything in our power to make that a reality." **Vatican News**



Love's Enduring Gift - Remembrance

**5th YEAR IN LOVING
MEMORY OF OUR BELOVED
MR I. KULANDAISAMY**

25.12.1938 -25.1.2020

Five years have passed since you left us Appa, yet it feels like only yesterday we felt your warmth, love, and guidance. Though time has moved on, the pain of your absence still lingers in our hearts. We remember the lessons you taught, the laughter we shared, and the unconditional love you gave. Your memory lives on in all of us, and your spirit continues to watch over us. On the fifth anniversary of your passing, we honor you, Appa with gratitude and love, knowing that you will forever remain a part of us. We miss you more than words can express, and your legacy will live on in our hearts forever, dearest Appa.

**DEEPLY MISSED AND LOVINGLY REMEMBERED
BY YOUR BELOVED FAMILY.
IN OUR HEARTS FOREVER.
REST IN PEACE WITH CHRIST.**

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CHURCH OF OUR LADY OF LOURDES
KLANG

FEAST OF OUR LADY OF LOURDES

7 - 16 FEBRUARY, 2025

100
CELEBRATING
1928 - 2028

YOUTH RALLY

Date: 7, 8, 9 Feb 2025
Venue: Wisma Lourdes
Commitment Fee: RM20



MASS WITH ANOINTING FOR THE SICK AND ELDERLY

Date: 11 Feb 2025
Time: 10:30 AM, followed by healing session led by the Putri Carmel Sisters



MASS FOR CHILDREN

Date: 15 Feb 2025 | Time: 10:30 AM



CONFESSION

Confessions will be heard 30 minutes before Mass and at other times by appointment.



LOURDES WASH

Daily before & after mass. All pilgrims are to bring their own towels



114, Jalan Tengku Kelana, 41000
Klang Selangor, Malaysia.

Tel +60 33-371 3053, HP: +60 10-221 1928
Email: lourdes@archkl.org

Parish Priest: Rev. Fr. Gregory Chan
Asst Parish Priest: Rev. Fr. Gnana Selvam Berentis



SCAN ME FOR
CHURCH LOCATION



PILGRIMS OF HOPE

HOPE IN GOD, ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE (MT 19:26)

RETREAT BY PUTRI CARMEL SISTERS

Theme: Retreat Mengatasi Kelemahan
Date: 15 Feb 2025, 3pm - 16 Feb 2025, 4pm



EXHIBITION

Date: 8, 9 Feb 2025
- Catechetical Ministry,
Laudato-Si, Inter-Religious, Landings



FORMATION

Family • Church • Ecology



MOVIE NIGHTS

Date: 7, 10, 12, 13 Feb 2025 (After mass)
Venue: Community Hall
(Light Refreshments served)



LIVE STREAMING

All masses, including masses at the grotto in the morning, will be live-streamed @OLL Klang official YouTube Channel.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

For mass offerings/donations:

Bank: CIMB 8001835920 (OLL Klang)

Cheques: Payable to Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Klang.

Send details via: lourdes@archkl.org / +60 10-221 1928

THEME: PILGRIMS OF HOPE

Hope in God, all things are possible (Matthew 19:26)

கருப்பொருள்: எதிர்நோக்கின் திருப்பயணிகள்

மனிதனால் இது இயலாது. ஆனால், கடவுளால் எல்லாம் இயலும் (மத்தேயு 19:26)

TEMA: ZIARAH HARAPAN

Berharap kepada Tuhan, segala sesuatu adalah tidak mustahil (Matius 19:26)

主题: 对天主抱有希望一切皆有可能 (玛窦福音 19:26)

7 FEB-FRI

6:00AM Rosary & Novena
6:30AM Mass (E)
7:00PM Rosary
7:30PM Adoration & Novena
8:00PM Mass (Multilingual)

SUB-THEME Mary's Hope in God's Salvation
இறைவனின் மீட்பு திட்டத்தில் மரியாவின் நம்பிக்கை
Harapan Maria dalam Karya Penyelamatan Tuhan
玛利亚对天主救赎的希望

8 FEB-SAT

6:00AM Rosary & Novena
6:30AM Mass (E)
5:00PM Rosary
5:30PM OLPH Novena & Benediction
6:00PM Mass (E)

SUB-THEME Mary's Unwavering Faith in God
இறைவனில் மரியாவின் நம்பிக்கை
Iman Maria kepada Tuhan yang Tidak Goyah
玛利亚对天主坚定的信仰

9 FEB-SUN

6:00AM Rosary & Novena
6:30AM Mass (E)
7:20AM Rosary & Novena
8:00AM Mass (E)
9:20AM Rosary & Novena
10:00AM Mass (T)
11:50AM Rosary & Novena
12:30PM Mass (BM)
5:20PM Rosary & Novena
6:00PM Mass (E)

SUB-THEME Mary, Queen of Our Home
மரியா, நமது இல்லங்களின் அரசி
Maria, Ratu Rumah Kita
玛利亚, 我们家庭的女王

10 FEB-MON

6:00AM Rosary & Novena
6:30AM Mass (E)
7:00PM Rosary
7:30PM Adoration & Novena
8:00PM Mass (Multilingual)

SUB-THEME Mary, Mother of Nature
மரியா இயற்கையின் தாய்
Maria, Ibu Alam Semesta
玛利亚, 自然的慈母

11 FEB-TUE

9:30AM Rosary
10:00AM Adoration & Novena
10:30AM Mass (Multilingual)-Anointing of the sick
7:00PM Rosary
7:30PM Adoration & Novena
8:00PM Mass (Multilingual)

SUB-THEME Mary, Mother of Mercy (Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes)
World Day of the Sick
மரியா இரக்கத்தின் தாய் (லூர்து அன்னை திருவிழா)
உலக நோயாளிகளின் தினம்
Maria, Bunda Kerahiman (Pesta Our Lady of Lourdes)
Hari Orang Sakit Sedunia
玛利亚, 慈悲的母亲 | (露德圣母瞻礼)
世界病人

12 FEB-WED

6:00AM Rosary & Novena
6:30AM Mass (E)
7:00PM Rosary
7:30PM Adoration & Novena
8:00PM Mass (Multilingual)

SUB-THEME Mary, Mother and Mediatrix of Grace
மரியா, அருளின் நடுவர்
Maria, Ibu dan Rahmat
玛利亚, 恩宠的母亲和 中保

13 FEB-THU

6:00AM Rosary & Novena
6:30AM Mass (E)
7:00PM Rosary
7:30PM Adoration & Novena
8:00PM Mass (Multilingual)

SUB-THEME Mary Pondered and Cherished All Things in Her Heart
மரியா அனைத்தையும் தம் உள்ளத்தில் இருத்திச் சிந்தித்துக் கொண்டிருந்தார்
Maria yang merenung dan Menghargai Segala di dalam Hatinya
玛利亚默存和珍惜一切在她的心中

14 FEB-FRI

6:00AM Rosary & Novena
6:30AM Mass (E)
7:00PM Rosary
7:30PM Adoration & Novena
8:00PM Mass (Multilingual)

SUB-THEME Mary, Servant of the Lord
மரியா இறைவனின் பணியாளி
Maria, Hamba Tuhan
玛利亚, 主的仆人

15 FEB-SAT

10:00AM Rosary & Novena
10:30AM Mass for Children (Multilingual)
3:00PM Mass (Myanmar)
5:00PM Rosary
5:30PM Adoration & Novena
6:00PM Mass followed by procession thereafter Benediction (Multilingual)

SUB-THEME Mary, New Ark of the Covenant
மரியா உடன்படிக்கையின் பேழை
Maria, Tabut Perjanjian Baru
玛利亚, 新约柜

16 FEB-SUN

6:00AM Rosary & Novena
6:30AM Mass (E)
7:20AM Rosary & Novena
8:00AM Mass (E)
9:20AM Rosary & Novena
10:00AM Mass (T)
11:50AM Rosary & Novena
12:30PM Mass (BM)
2:50PM Rosary & Novena
3:30PM Mass (Mand)
5:20PM Rosary & Novena
6:00PM Mass (E)

SUB-THEME Mary, Woman of the Eucharist
மரியா நற்கருணையின் பெண்மணி
Maria, Wanita Ekaristi
玛利亚, 圣体的人