

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

Assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly.

*Eph. 3:2-3*



**Church is not just a building, but the people**

■ P4



**Interfaith groups bond over tea party**

■ P7



**OLF students put lessons into practise**

■ P16

# Dare to build a different world

**VATICAN: Pope Francis has challenged young people to endeavour towards a qualitative transformation of societal life, specifically advocating against marginalisation, exclusion, and closure of any societal factions.**

The Pope further encouraged young people to embrace listening and welcoming those on the margins of society.

The pontiff said this in his greetings to the young people who had gathered, under the auspices of the Taizé community, "to

pray and share the life of the local people and Church communities" in Ljubljana, Slovenia.

The 46th Taizé European Meeting, an ecumenical gathering of youth from various countries and denominations, which took place from December 28, 2023 to January 1, 2024 focused on the theme *Journeying Together*.

In the message conveyed by Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin, the Holy Father highlighted the opportunity for participants to live "the beautiful experience of friendship with God and with others" as a Church and a community.

As the "Body of the Risen Lord present

in the world," young people are invited to rediscover the art of listening, an act of love that lies at the heart of trust. In a world where conflicts and wars continually arise due to lack of listening, the Pope urged the young "to dare to build a different world, a world of listening, dialogue, and openness."

The challenge, he said, is "to work towards the qualitative transformation of our life in societies," especially by avoiding all forms of "marginalisation, closure, exclusion, and rejection" of various categories of people.

The Pope envisioned the youth becoming architects of cultures and religions,

contributing to the creation of a stable and inclusive world. He encouraged them to emulate Jesus, who welcomed everyone and acknowledged God's presence in those society overlooked.

Cardinal Parolin concluded his letter with the assurance that Pope Francis "is counting on you and trusts you, and the Church trusts you." The Pope, he said, is calling on them, by their words and actions, to "give a powerful message to our world, which rejects the vulnerable. Make your dreams of love, justice, and peace a concrete reality... Don't let your dreams be stolen, and contribute to 'building a society worthy of the name.'" — **Agencies**

## Christ our eternal light

### Feast of the Epiphany



(Pixabay/CC0)

Christmas marks the radiant manifestation of Christ as the Light, revealing God's promise fulfilled as Jesus enters the world. The Epiphany, another momentous event during this season, echoes this revelation — declaring that the Son of God's love extends universally, embracing all, regardless of background or circumstance. It's a proclamation that no one exists beyond the reach of God's boundless love.

This celebration boldly asserts that amidst the world's prevalent darkness — conflicts, poverty, injustice, and despair — Christ's light prevails. While shadows loom large, the light of Christ, bearing peace, love, justice, joy, hope, and unity, pierces through. This light transcends the boundaries of Christianity; it beckons even to those outside its fold. The narrative of the wise men exemplifies this, portraying individuals from diverse beliefs guided by their yearning for truth and ultimately led to Jesus through divine grace.

The Epiphany, this grand festival of light, commemorates the revelation that the infant born in humble obscurity embodies the world's illumination. 'Epiphany,' meaning revelation, encapsulates how the shepherds were informed by angels and how a guiding star led distant travellers to witness Jesus.

The shepherds and the magi didn't linger at the stable after encountering Jesus; they departed, carrying the profound joy of witnessing the extraordinary child. Much like the shepherds and the visitors from afar, we too are summoned to depart from the crib, not merely as spectators but bearers of the light. Jesus urges us to be the illuminators of the world, exclaiming, "You are the light of the world; let your light shine."

Gazing upon the crib reminds us of our mission—to carry the light of Christ into our communities, transforming our lives and interactions to make the world brighter and better, especially for the marginalised. This light is a gift, but its purpose transcends personal possession; it must radiate through our actions, illuminating homes, families, and communities, leaving none untouched by its warmth and hope.

May Christ the Light, radiate within our homes, families, and communities, infusing us with His eternal brilliance, today and always.



# HERALD

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

As the new year unfolds, Pope Francis has set an inspiring intention for January, emphasising the gift of diversity within the Church. His focus highlights the significance of acknowledging and celebrating the multitude of backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives that enrich our faith community. This call couldn't be more timely or pertinent in our ever-evolving world.

Diversity in the Church is essentially celebrating the beauty of God's creation reflected through the uniqueness of each individual and community. It acknowledges that unity does not mean uniformity but rather a harmonious coexistence amid our differences. This inclusivity is not just a suggestion but a fundamental aspect of Christian doctrine, echoing St Paul's teachings on the unity of believers despite their diverse backgrounds.

Perhaps we could embrace diversity as a new year resolution. This would prompt us to confront biases and prejudices that may exist within us. It would challenge us to examine our attitudes and behaviours, ensuring they align with the Gospel message of love, acceptance, and inclusion. It would compel us to actively combat discrimination and promote justice, advocating for those marginalised or oppressed due to their differences.

This resolution would call for a renewal of our commitment to dialogue and reconciliation. It will encourage open and honest conversations to acknowledge the complexities of diversity while seeking common ground and mutual respect. By fostering a spirit of unity amid diversity, we will embody Christ's message of love and acceptance for all.

This year, let us pledge to make our parishes welcoming spaces where everyone feels valued and embraced. Let us dedicate ourselves to building bridges across divides, fostering unity in our diversity. Let us challenge ourselves to break down barriers and build bridges of understanding. Let's foster



## For the gift of Diversity in the Church

dialogue, empathy, and mutual respect within our communities. Let's listen attentively to diverse voices, learning from each other's experiences and perspectives.

Let us strive to create an environment where all individuals, regardless of their background, race, gender, or circumstances, feel embraced and valued. The Church should be a place where everyone finds solace, acceptance, and a sense of belonging.

It's essential for our Church to embrace inclusivity and welcome everyone with open arms, irrespective of their backgrounds, struggles, or differences. As Pope Francis reminds us, the Church is a field hospital for the wounded, not an exclusive club for the perfect. Let's actively foster an environment where all individuals feel valued, respected, and accepted, regardless of their race, gender, socioeconomic status, or past mistakes.

We must work tirelessly to ensure that our parish communities are places of genuine hospitality, understanding, and compassion. By doing so, we reflect the love of Christ and make the Church a sanctuary where all can find solace, support, and spiritual nourishment.

Moreover, as we look ahead, let us embrace the call to reach out to those in need with compassion and love. Our faith is not lived in isolation but in the service of others. This new year presents us with fresh opportunities to extend our hands to the marginalised, the downtrodden, and the vulnerable in our communities. Let us heed the words of Pope Francis, who reminds us that "faith without charity bears no fruit."

In this pursuit of inclusivity, let us also recognise the importance of listening and understanding. By truly listening to one another, we can foster a culture of empathy and respect within our faith community. Let us engage in meaningful dialogue, acknowledging and valuing the unique experiences and perspectives of each individual.

Let us commit ourselves to building a Church that reflects the boundless love and acceptance of God — a Church where everyone feels at home, embraced by the warmth of Christian fellowship.

Wishing all of you a Happy New Year, filled with the blessings of peace, joy, and spiritual fulfillment.

*Patricia Pereira*

## The party is over. It's time to work!

Today, the Church celebrates the Feast of the Epiphany. It marks the end of the Christmas celebrations in the liturgical calendar of the Church, and the start of Ordinary Time. We celebrate the manifestation of Jesus Christ, as Son of God and Saviour of the World, not only for the Jews but for all humanity. Therefore, the Church celebrates the Feast of Epiphany as the revelation of Jesus, the Son of God to the world.

The main characters in today's Gospel reading, the three magi, were one of the first people to seek Christ. They ironically were not of the Jewish faith, yet they were the first who recognised and acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God. They travelled long distances to Bethlehem to seek Christ, to pay homage to baby Jesus, bringing with them the gifts of frankincense, gold, and myrrh to adore the saviour of the world. Upon their encounter with the baby Jesus, they took a different way home, avoiding their previous perilous route.

With the last of the turkey leftovers consumed, the pots of pork *varuvel* polished clean, the wrapping papers have been recycled and the lights on the Christmas tree blinks silently in the background, we conclude our annual Christmas celebration with the Feast of the Epiphany. It reminds us that there is much more to this season beyond the Carols and festive feasts. The season of Christmas is also about a call and response to mission.

Mission begins with a call, and the magi



received a call to mission through their understanding of Isaiah's prophecy. In their study of scripture, they discern that they were called to pay homage to the infant king of the Jews. Along their journey, they consulted King Herod and the chief priests for further direction. Just as when we are called to mission or to respond to the call of our vocation in life, we undergo a period of discernment. We often need guidance in our discernment, and we find it through our spiritual directors and priest; or even to be guided by a moving star.

Following the period of discernment, the magi chose to embark on a long journey from the east, persevering over desert and mountainous terrain because of their conviction and commitment to their mission. This was their response to their call to pay homage to the King of the Jews. In this conviction, they chose to leave their comfort zone, and to trust in the ancient prophecies embedded in scripture. Similarly when we respond to our calling,

it requires a level of commitment and conviction. We are compelled to leave our comfort zone for the unknown and to place our faith in God. A call requires a response of sacrifice and perseverance just as that exhibited by the magi.

Upon reaching Bethlehem, they found baby Jesus, and paid homage to Him. They brought Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, in recognition of Jesus's Kingship, His Divinity and His passion death and resurrection. When we respond to God's call, regardless in mission or vocation, we will encounter Christ. In our vocation and mission in life, it is also imperative that we always seek Christ through the Eucharist and the Sacraments of the Church. It is in this encounter with Christ, just as the magi, we too bring with us our gifts, albeit in the humble form of our brokenness and pains, our hopes, our joys and our dreams, which in the very same way reflects our recognition of Jesus's divinity, sovereignty and salvific actions over our lives.

Finally, the personal encounter with Christ, changes us. Just as the magi, after paying homage to the baby Jesus, received the message to change their route back to the east, to avoid Herod. When we have experienced Jesus Christ, we cannot but be changed in our lives. This experience will compel us to change our ways, and leave our sinful evil past, as we continue our journey in our calling. Furthermore, when we respond to God's call, we must

## Reflecting on our Sunday Readings with Bro Lincoln Lee

### Epiphany of the Lord (B)

**Readings: Isaiah 60:1-6;**  
**Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6;**  
**Gospel: Matthew 2:1-12**

be ready to cooperate with graces given in order to change ourselves into the image and likeness of Christ.

Therefore, the Feast of the Epiphany, is not only a celebration of the revelation of Jesus Christ, as the Son of God and saviour of the world for all humanity but it is also a call to our mission and vocation here on earth. The season of Advent was a preparation for the coming of Christ. Christmas was to welcome the Christ in the manger of our hearts, and thus now that we have received Christ, we too are sent on mission to the world. We have received the call, we need to respond to it, we need to seek and encounter Christ in our lives, and we need to change our lives.

The party is now over. It's time to get to work!

*Bro Lincoln Lee from the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur is a seminarian in his seventh year of formation. He has recently concluded his Second Year Theology Studies in St Peter's College Major Seminary, Kuching.*



# Listen to the other and address fears, concerns



KAJANG: Archbishop Julian Leow emphasised the imperative need for unity and collaboration among Malaysians for the progress of the nation. He said this at the annual Christmas Hi-Tea reception hosted by the Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM) on December 17, 2023.

The event, a collaboration between the Catholic Church, the Council of Churches Malaysia and the National Evangelical Christian Fellowships, brought together approximately 360 guests, including Transport Minister Anthony Loke, Youth and Sports Minister Hannah Yeoh, Bangi MP Syahredzan Johan, Seputeh MP Teresa Kok, along with diplomats and leaders from various NGOs.

Addressing the gathering, Archbishop Julian who was the principal host, expressed concern over the diminishing spirit of togetherness in the country, highlighting the growing narrow-mindedness and limitations imposed on religious practices. He lamented the increased suspicion and lack of trust among diverse faiths in recent times, questioning how Malaysia, after 60 years of nationhood and 66 years of independence, had arrived at this juncture.

"The erosion of trust and the constraints on religious freedom need to be addressed through dialogue and understanding," said the archbishop. He emphasised the importance of

actively listening to differing perspectives, resolving fears, and finding common ground even in disagreement.

"We must listen to the other and address their fears and concerns. If we cannot reach a consensus, there may be compromises and assurances to be given. We must always be able to agree to disagree and work for the betterment of the whole," he said.

The prelate added that places of worship such as mosques and churches should not stand as symbols of division but as monuments to freedom of religion and mutual respect.

"One of the most remarkable aspects of Malaysia is our ability to maintain our cultural and religious identities while living together in peace and harmony. There is so much more we can do beyond scratching at its surface.

"As we move forward as a nation, let us hold fast to the values that define us — a commitment to unity amidst diversity, a dedication to mutual respect and an unwavering belief in the strength of our multicultural tapestry," he said.

Minister Anthony Loke, representing Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim at the event, echoed these sentiments, citing the fear of further polarisation as a driving factor behind the coalition government's formation.

In his speech, Anthony attributed the growing divisive-

ness and fear among the people as the reason behind the formation of the coalition government.

"It's precisely because of the fear that politics may further polarise the country, that we have put aside our past rivalry to start a new chapter for Malaysia," he said.

However, Loke also acknowledged that the many component parties in the government were still learning to work with each other and coexist, calling it a "work in progress".

"What's most important is that we have a vision at heart. If we can put aside our differences and celebrate our diversity, the potential of Malaysia can be further strengthened and may go further as a (diverse) country in the world," he added.

As the evening unfolded, guests exchanged thoughts on fostering unity and cooperation while acknowledging the ongoing learning process within the coalition government. The event served as a reminder of the shared vision to strengthen Malaysia through collaboration and appreciation of its diverse heritage.

The reception, a testament to Malaysia's cultural inclusivity, concluded with a call for concerted efforts to uphold the values of unity, respect, and diversity for a brighter future for the nation.



## KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

### Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

January

**8-12 Meeting – Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia, Singapore & Brunei at Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam**



## PENANG DIOCESE

### Diary of Cardinal Sebastian Francis

January

**8 Thanksgiving Mass – Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam**

**8 - 12 Meeting – Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia, Singapore & Brunei at Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam**



## MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

### Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

January 2024

**8-12 Meeting – Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia, Singapore & Brunei at Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam**



مجلس حكماء المسلمين  
MUSLIM COUNCIL OF ELDERS

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

The Most Reverend Leow Beng Kim,

On behalf of the Muslim Council of Elders- Malaysia I wish you and the entire Christian community under your spiritual guidance a pleasant and blessed Christmas season. May this joyous day bring everyone peace, unity, and harmony.

May the Christmas celebrations serve as a reminder of our common values of compassion, generosity, and respect for one another in the spirit of interfaith understanding and goodwill. May our communities' partnership and mutual respect continue in the next year.

Merry Christmas and a New Year full with hope, love, and prosperity to you and your congregation.

Best wishes,

Razif

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December 29, 2023

Ustaz Mohamad Razif Bin Mohamad Fuad  
Director, Muslim Council of Elders  
Malaysia

Dear Ustaz Mohd Razif,

Greetings of Peace.

Thanking you and the Muslim Council of Elders -Malaysia for your Christmas wishes upon the Christian Community in this region. Your heartfelt greetings are treasured by us. I pray it will be a foundation for future collaboration and partnership in building a more cohesive and resilient nation.

With utmost respect and gratitude,

Julian Leow

**+Most Reverend Julian Leow Beng Kim, D.D.**  
Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur



# Church is not just a building, but the people

By Tianne Ramona Pereira

KUALA LUMPUR: The Cathedral of St John the Evangelist or the Mother Church as it is commonly referred to, officially welcomed home her parishioners with a re-dedication Mass on December 27, 2023, the feast day of St John the Evangelist, the parish patron.

Hundreds of parishioners and friends joined the celebrations to witness the momentous occasion. Concelebrating with the main presider Archbishop Julian Leow were parish priest Fr Gerard Theraviam, current assistant Fr Gnana Selvam Berentis and 12 members of the clergy.

In his homily, the archbishop asked the congregation to think about the type of disciples they would have made if they lived in the time of Jesus. While all the disciples broke bread with Jesus, spoke to Him and even learnt from Him — in the end, he questioned how many of them were with Jesus at the foot of the cross? He also went on to state that the days following Christmas were full of symbolic meaning.

The feast of St John the Evangelist is sandwiched between the feasts of St Stephen who was martyred for his faith and the Holy Innocents, the bloodshed of hundreds of innocent children. This is intentional, to remind us that sacrifice is es-



Archbishop Julian Leow and Fr Gerard Theraviam blessing the people.

sential to faith. The most loved disciple of Jesus as John was referred to, was not a term of vanity but one of assurance. John knew just how much God loved him and how much he loved God in return.

In addressing the congregation, before inviting everyone to join in the fellowship after Mass, Fr Gerard reminded the congregation that the church is not just a building but more importantly the people. While the church building is beautiful, we need to remember that the church is made up of living stones, and we are meant to build ourselves as individuals and as a community.

The rite for the dedication of the church is considered among the most solemn litur-

gical services, and it truly was encapsulated throughout the mass. It was a beautiful celebration for all the sacrifice this parish has gone through to get to this point.

On February 10, 2023, part of the ceiling in the cathedral collapsed due to a termite infestation. This forced the cathedral to close its doors temporarily. For months Sunday Masses were held at the Convent Bukit Nanas Chapel, while weekday Masses were held at the parish house. Seeing that the church was closed for extensive repair work, the already planned renovations were also hurried along during this time.

The reopening of the church was very exciting for many different reasons —

one of it being the physical changes that were made. While there were added ambience lighting, an upgraded sound system, a new ambo, warmer paint colours (even on the original doors), to name just a few, the most significant change seen is that of the sanctuary. Beautifully adorned in gold, with the words *Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus* standing out from afar, hand painted vines on the tabernacle, makes it truly the crowning glory of the Cathedral. Elegance and simplicity. It is the hope that the aesthetic beauty of the Cathedral will allow for a more enhancing encounter with Christ for those who worship within these walls.

If you did not already know, the Church of St John the Evangelist started off as just a long wooden hall with some windows. Over the years it morphed into the big, proud and tall structure we see today, nestled in the heart of Kuala Lumpur City Centre. It's grand white exterior could once be seen from miles away as it sits majestically on Bukit Nanas Hill. Today, it is surrounded by high rise buildings and developments. On January 8, 1962, the status of the church was elevated to that of a Cathedral. The Cathedral of St John the Evangelist is now the seat of our Archbishop and the mother church of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur.

## Assumption Church reopens after renovations

PETALING JAYA: The rededication of the Church of Assumption was held on December 16, 2023. It was closed since May 21 for renovations and repairs.

This sacred ceremony marked a significant chapter in the history of this venerable institution, as parishioners and clergy alike gathered to celebrate the restoration and renewal of their cherished place of worship.

As the doors of the church reopened, the community not only witnessed the physical transformation of a cherished landmark but also experienced a profound spiritual renewal.

The rite of dedication was celebrated by Archbishop Julian Leow, with parish priest, Fr Leonard Lexson, resident priest, Fr Biju Mathew, former parish priest Fr Gregory Chan, and Fr Michael Chua, son of Assumption concelebrating with several other clergy. The rite is a liturgical tradition of blessing and consecration of the church and the altar. During the rite, the church trans-

forms from darkness to light, and from an empty altar to one that is clothed and decorated.

Archbishop Julian used this metaphor to call us to move from darkness to light and rededicate ourselves to God by trying to be a better person every day. The archbishop also urged all the parishioners to care for and nourish each other, as it is the people who are the church. He asked us to focus on our own transformation while giving life to one another.

During the closure, all Masses, services and programmes were shifted to the Assumption Family House, a house behind the main church. There was much planning, cooperation and accommodations involving everyone. The success of these endeavours is a testament to the dedication of our priests and to our parishioners' community spirit and commitment. — *By Rufina Lazarus*

Turn to Pg 12 for more

## Dedicated parents, catechists of Guadalupe parish



Communicants with Frs Raymond Pereira, George Harrison, Fr Frederick Joseph and their catechists.

PUCHONG: Sixty-three young children from the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe (OLOG), were filled with excitement and anxiousness as they prepared for the Sacrament of First Holy Communion (FHC) on November 25, 2023.

The Eucharistic celebration was held at the Church of St Thomas More, Subang Jaya as OLOG church is currently going through a major renovation. The main presider was OLOG parish priest Fr Raymond Pereira with Frs George Harrison, Frederick Joseph and a visiting priest from India concelebrating.

The children and their catechists had to go through some challenging times throughout the year as they did not have a conducive classroom for their lessons. Since the commencement of the renovations on the church, the parish has shifted to a shop lot near Castlefield Estate, Puchong. Masses and all activities are held at the shop lot. It goes without saying that the parents have to put up with all kind of issues during these

difficult times.

Only the sacramental classes are held physically while other levels are held online. Thanks go to the parents, the "First Catechists" for faithfully bringing their children and making sure they attend classes. They also give a lot of support and cooperation to our catechists. Fr Raymond was constantly guiding and assisting us in fulfilling the sacrament of reconciliation and FHC.

One week prior to the FHC, the children attended a fun-filled camp, all clad in purple t-shirts donated by the parents' group. They had singing, followed by ice-breaking games. Later, they moved on to understand the sacrament of FHC through an experiential experience. The children were excited and thrilled to handle the miniature settings and experience the Lord's Supper in a hands-on manner. The camp ended with lunch.

Despite the unusual circumstances faced, the journey was a fun and memorable one with the grace of God.



Archbishop Julian Leow knocks on the door of the church using the crosier.



# CHOICE KL makes a difference

By Jasline David

KUALA LUMPUR: The CHOICE English Kuala Lumpur (CEKL) group organised a Christmas Shoebox M.A.D (Make a Difference) Project on December 17, 2023 bringing joy to 140 children from the migrant community in Kuala Lumpur with special gifts, elevating the festive spirit.

For six weeks leading up to the event the team rallied the community for support and with the blessing of CHOICE KL spiritual director Fr Simon Lau, the team spearheaded a breakfast sale at Jesus Caritas Church in Kepong to raise funds.



Choicees and children at CEKL's M.A.D Project Advent 2023 event.

This event wasn't merely about collecting funds; its impact extended far beyond material gifts.

It was manifested in the laughter, smiles, and camaraderie witnessed throughout the day, unit-

ing the community in the true spirit of Christmas.

CEKL extends sincere gratitude to all donors, former Choicees, and non-Choicees for their generous contributions. Their support brought not only gifts but also priceless moments of happiness and belonging to these children, reaffirming the profound impact of collective kindness.

The real magic of this initiative unfolded when CEKL's team engaged in carolling and sing-along sessions with the children. The tunes of familiar carols filled the air, evoking sheer delight in the hearts of these young ones. Singing together, sharing moments of joy, and fostering a sense of be-

longing left an enduring mark on the children's lives.

Beyond the material gifts, the initiative embodied empathy, compassion, and solidarity, creating a memorable and inclusive environment. Witnessing the happiness on the faces of the migrant children reinforced the significance of such initiatives in nurturing a caring and supportive community.

This CEKL initiative symbolises the transformative power of community-driven actions. Let this heartwarming experience inspire us to spread warmth, kindness, and joy as we embrace the festive season, reflecting the essence of Christmas in our actions.

## Parish hosts Winter Solstice-Christmas celebration for the sick, elderly

PENANG: The parishioners of the Church of the Holy Name of Mary, Permatang Tinggi, Bukit Mertajam, celebrated the Winter Solstice festival and Christmas on December 22, 2023. The focus was to gather the sick and the elderly of the parish together with non-Catholics living in the vicinity of Permatang Tinggi to bring Christmas cheer to the participants. Their caregivers were also invited to attend.

Msgr Henry Rajoo celebrated a multilingual Mass and the elderly parishioners responded enthusiastically as they were able to hear the homily in their own vernacular languages.

After Mass, the volunteers helped to wheel the sick and the elderly to St Mary's Hall where the event was to be held.

The organising team, together with the parish ministries, prepared various games and programmes to entertain the guests. This included a Christmas pageant presented by the children in the English Catechetical Ministry, Tamil songs and dances performed by the Tamil Apostolate and Christmas carols sung by the Youth Society, dances by the Chinese prayer group and St Stephen's Altar Servers' Society. The appearance of Santa Claus during the event delighted everyone. It was really wonderful to see the various ministries coming together in unity to bring love and joy to the sick and the elderly.

Sr Jessica from the Little Sisters of the Poor conducted various games for wheel-chair bound attendees who eagerly participated in them to win attractive prizes.

Fr Augustine Wong was present at the event and took the time to mingle with the sick and elderly while entertaining them with his jokes. The attendees were also delighted to have photos taken with him.

The participants were then treated to lunch comprising delicious local dishes prepared by the Women's Group and other volunteers.

During lunch many of the attendees were thrilled to be able to reminisce with old friends and take trips down memory lane. They exchanged handshakes and hugs upon seeing their old friends who were now in their twilight years.

The parish priest, Fr Louis Loi, who was not able to be present during the event, sent greetings



Fr Augustine Wong mingling with the elderly.

via a WhatsApp call to wish all those present a happy and blessed Christmas and to convey his hope that everyone would continue to embrace the spirit of Christmas in order to share laughter and joy, and to create an atmosphere of

love, peace and happiness in the parish.

The event for the sick and elderly concluded on a very happy note with Santa Claus distributing Christmas gifts to everyone present. — *By Patricia Ng*

## Special Christmas Mass for prison inmates

NEGERI SEMBILAN: The Seremban Prison Ministry organised a special Christmas Mass within the confines of Seremban Prison. The Mass, celebrated by Fr Bonaventure Rayappan and Fr Albet Arockiasamy aimed to bring the joy of the festive season to the incarcerated individuals.

Prior to the Mass, the clergy offered confession for Catholic attendees and personal counselling for others seeking guidance and support. This initiative emphasised not just the religious aspect but also the holistic well-being of the attendees.

During the Mass, Fr Albet delivered a poignant homily, urging all present to seek redemption

and return to a righteous path. Employing a powerful analogy, he likened individuals to bent, rusty nails that, when straightened and polished, become serviceable again. He emphasised the transformative power of forgiveness and redemption, reminding everyone of their ability to reclaim lost dignity through repentance, inspired by the redemptive act of Christ.

Following the liturgical service, a sense of camaraderie and community flourished among the inmates during a fellowship session. This session, organised by David Allymuthu, offered a chance for attendees to bond over a meal comprising chicken nasi

briyani, cookies, and soft drinks, fostering a sense of togetherness and shared joy during this festive occasion.

Meanwhile, on the same day, Fr Xavier Andrew celebrated Mass for the inmates at the Jelebu prison. Fr Christopher Soosaipillai made a similar visit to the Mantin prison and celebrated Mass for the inmates there.

The Christmas Mass for the inmates not only provided a moment of spiritual reflection but also a sense of warmth and inclusivity, reminding everyone of the hope and positivity the season brings, even within the confines of the prison walls.



Fr Albet Arockiasamy blessing the inmates at the Seremban prison.



Fr Christopher Soosaipillai celebrating Mass at the prison in Mantin.



Fr Xavier Andrew at the Jelebu prison.



# Hosanna! The cry of angels — a Christmas musical

By Markus Lim

CHERAS: The parishioners of the Church of St Francis of Assisi were treated to an original and unique Christmas performance on the night of December 24.

Themed, *Hosanna, The Cry of Angels*, the 45-minute musical is an original script, with adapted songs by Freddy Hayler, and three original compositions by Yvonne Chin.

The musical showcases the battle of good and evil through the central characters of Father God, Archangel Michael, Lucifer who then became Satan. The musical was organised by the English Choir under the leadership of Cristina Brian.

The musical was aimed at transforming and offering our hearts back to Jesus this Christmas. The musical was formatted as a prayer rather than a performance where parishioners are given time to pray, reflect and offer their hearts back to

Jesus. The message of the musical is to demonstrate God's sacrificial love for us through His Son Jesus, and the gift of free will given to us and His Angels.

The climax was the offering of hearts back to Jesus through a prayer — 'Jesus, I give You my heart today and everyday'. The musical ended with a song, *The Day the Angels Cried* while the video of Christ's Passion was played, to show the connection that the Birth of Christ, was a result of Mary saying yes, which led to His passion, death and resurrection which ultimately won us salvation and freedom from sin. The musical was aimed at preparing the parishioners to receive Christ deeper at Mass.

The musical was commissioned by parish priest Fr Paul Cheong, OFM Cap, and preparations began in September 2023. The main essence was around prayer, Scripture, the Blessed Sacrament. Focus was also on promoting love and fun among the team members.



The characters in their costumes.

The musical brought many parishioners together in offering their time, talents in singing, acting, dancing, props and costume preparation, back stage, logistics, lighting, food preparation and transportation.

All who participated witnessed God's power moving and His Holy Spirit operating all throughout the musical. There were 50 members who were part of the team, from children to senior members of the church.

## Team-building session for KL archdiocesan staff

KUALA LUMPUR: Archbishop Julian Leow and the staff of the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur based at Bukit Nanas attended a one-day team-building session on *Communication and Relationships in the Workplace* on December 18, 2023.

Highlighting the significance of fostering a conducive and enjoyable workplace environment, Archbishop Julian emphasised the importance of creating a space akin to a second home, considering the substantial time spent in office settings.

"Every organisation has its challenges but here, we must remember that we are a church and faith-based, and our environment should reflect that," said the archbishop.

Recognising the diverse roles within the institution, the archbishop conveyed appreciation for every individual's contribution, emphasising the significance of each role, irrespective of its scale.

He quoted the parable of the three bricklayers on a scaffolding. He said the first was asked, "What are you doing?" to which the bricklayer replied, "I'm a bricklayer. I'm working hard laying bricks to feed my family." The second bricklayer, responded, "I'm a builder. I'm building a wall." But the third bricklayer, the most productive of the three,



Archbishop Julian Leow giving his team instructions on how to assemble interlocking plastic bricks to construct a building structure.

when asked the same question, replied with a gleam in his eye, "I'm a cathedral builder. I'm building a great cathedral to The Almighty."

"Remember you serve the archdiocese that incorporates the parishes and all its people. I hope you are happy to come to work and continue to help build the kingdom of God on earth.

"These formation sessions will be a regular feature so we may grow and become the best versions of ourselves."

Expressing gratitude to the archbishop for his guidance in providing developmental opportunities for the staff, Acting Finance Administrator Ong Cheng Watt quoted Walter Gropius, emphasising the significance of an open mind, likening it to an umbrella that's most effective when unfurled.

Drawing an analogy, Ong encouraged everyone present to be receptive to the session as "only through an open window can fresh air come in."

Trainers Alfred Netto of the Wolf Trainer,

and Helena Michael kept the 36 attendees engaged in multiple solo and group activities throughout the day.

The session started with an icebreaker called Human Bingo where everyone mixed and mingled to ask questions and fill the template as quickly as possible. It was interesting to learn facts and some quirky details about colleagues we seldom engage with.

The trainers also talked about how our conditioning, from the womb to education, cultural backgrounds, peers, and the media, contributes to our worldview and how we maneuver through life's ups and downs.

In an engaging activity, five individuals were chosen as team leaders and assigned the responsibility of verbally guiding their respective groups in assembling interlocking plastic bricks to construct a building structure. After a few minutes, these leaders were reassigned to different groups. Subsequently, a new leader was appointed within each group, and one member from each team shifted to a different group. This entire process served as an eye-opener. Within this small-scale scenario, participants observed the emergence of their teammates' personalities as each grappled with the challenges inherent in each role. — **By Gwen Manickam**

## Prayer missionaries mark third anniversary

KUALA LUMPUR: The Prayer Missionaries, a group of differently abled persons who contribute towards the mission through online prayers, celebrated their third

anniversary on December 16, 2023.

Mass and fellowship was held at the home of one of the members, Gladys Fernandez, with the Ecclesiastical Assistant



Fr Edwin Peter, Raymond Pereira and Archbishop Emeritus Murphy Pakiam with the prayer missionaries on their third anniversary.

for the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS) for the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, Fr Raymond Pereira, presiding at the Eucharistic celebration. Concelebrating was Fr Raymond's predecessor, Fr Edwin Peter, and Archbishop Emeritus Murphy Pakiam, who joined in their celebration for the first time.

For supporting member and newcomer Regina Chong, it was truly a celebration of eight fruitful months of unfailingly praying for various intentions not only of the prayer missionaries but also for the world, especially Pope Francis and all the clergy; this takes place every Saturday at 12 pm via WhatsApp video.

Themed *A People Living out Christ's Mission*, the Eucharistic celebration was preceded by recitation of the Rosary at 11.30am followed by lunch, the cutting of the anniversary cake and exchanging of Christmas gifts.

"It was a delightful experience for all of

us in the team present and for AB Emeritus Murphy, who gladly blessed all those present individually," expressed Gladys, who coordinated the event. "Unfortunately, not all the members were able to participate in the celebration due to illness or other commitments.

"I am very inspired and glad that the Prayer Missionary group has been fervent and dedicated to always praying for the missionary works everywhere. God's continued blessings on them and their families," said Fr Raymond.

A novelty this year was a unique spiritual prayer bouquet prepared for both Archbishop Julian Leow and AB Emeritus Murphy from the Prayer Missionaries and supporting members, with all their names as well as their commitment listed on a card.

Differently abled persons or their parents who would like to join the Prayer Missionaries may contact Gladys at 011-26151985.



# Interfaith groups bond over tea party

SUBANG JAYA: The Parish Ministry of Ecumenism and Inter Religious Affairs (PMEIA) of the Church of St Thomas More hosted a tea party to share the love, joy and peace of Christmas with its interfaith friends. These were leaders of other faiths within Subang Jaya, USJ and Putra Heights. Archbishop Julian Leow and ADUN Michelle Ng attended the event as well.

A short meeting before tea briefed all present on the role of PMEIA and its mission to build bridges through dialogue among all religions in the community. The opening address by PMEIA's Chief Coordinator Angeline

Lesslar stressed that though we represented different races and religions we are all members of the human race. Speeches by parish priest Fr Patrick Boudville, Archbishop Julian and Michelle Ng reflected the need for unity and fraternity with each other and to build on our diversity rather than have it divide us.

A brief walkabout in the church helped in the understanding of how Catholics practise their faith. Guests were entertained by a medley of Christmas carols during a sumptuous high tea. Everyone left in high spirits with hope for a better 2024 for Malaysia.



The interfaith leaders from Subang Jaya, USJ and Putra Heights at the tea party.

## PMEIA Christmas gift of love

KUALA LUMPUR: Three hundred families benefited from 'A Christmas Gift of Love 2023' December 17 at Dewan Yayasan Bena Nusa in Taman Maluri.

They were from the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Chapel of Our Lady of Good Health in Kg Pandan, within the parliamentary constituency of Titiwangsa.

This event was a collaboration between the Parish Ministry of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (PMEIA) of the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Yayasan Bena Nusa.

Member of Parliament for Titiwangsa, YB Datuk Seri Haji Johari Bin Abdul Ghani was the guest of honour. The MP is also the Chairman of Yayasan Bena Nusa. Joining in were members of PMEIA lead by its coordina-



YB Datuk Seri Haji Johari Bin Abdul Ghani with PMEIA members of the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and 300 families from his constituency.

tor, Dr Florence John and other invited guests and well-wishers.

Datuk Seri Johari who is also the Minister of Plantation Industries and Commodities sponsored hampers worth RM100 each for the 300 guests present.

He also handed out RM100 cash gift to each of the 300 recipients.

The morning programme started with a welcoming ceremony by martial arts students from Kelab Silambam, Setapak. Three PMEIA members did a blessing

ceremony using three lighted tea candles.

Dr Florence briefly welcomed all to the joyful event and mentioned that Datuk Seri Johari has been supporting and hosting this programme with PMEIA since

2016 at Yayasan Bena Nusa.

To keep the guests entertained, PMEIA members belted out several carols in Bahasa Malaysia, English and Tamil, while a Santa Claus and Santarina went around distributing sweets to the delight of the children.

After a cake cutting ceremony on stage, Datuk Seri Johari distributed the hampers and cash gift, before bidding farewell to the guests.

According to Dr Florence, Datuk Seri Johari is a strong supporter of this 'Christmas Gift of Love' programme which is in its eight year, and which has benefited many.

The PMEIA team also thanked parish priest, Msgr Stanislaus Soosaimariam for his support and encouragement. — **By Bernard Anthony**

## Visitation parish collaborates in Corporate Social Responsibility programme

SEREMBAN: The Church of the Visitation collaborated with a corporate organisation, Matrix Concepts Holdings Berhad, to organise a Christmas programme for children from Kampung Orang Asli and adoptees of the parish's ministry of the poor recently.

Held at the D'Tempat Country

Club, a total of 45 children and their parents were feted to a wonderful celebration during which the children gave a performance accompanied by a guitarist. The children also had a great time enjoying the games and activities.

The distribution of gifts and cookies among attendees, coupled

with a RM3000 donation to the parish, magnified the benevolence and influence of this partnership. These combined endeavours undeniably created a substantial positive impact on the individuals involved, spreading abundant joy and bolstering support throughout the holiday season.



The children and parents who were feted at D'Tempat Country Club.

## Carollers bring joy to elderly



The carollers singing at the St Francis Xavier home for the Elderly run by the Little Sisters of the Poor.

CHERAS: The idea of Christmas carol singing still manages to invoke memories of joy and overwhelming emotional and spiritual responses, especially for residents in aged care facilities.

Singing, especially hymns from Christmastide, has the ability to release joyous memories tucked away in the deep recesses to the surface resulting in huge smiles across their faces. And this is what happened when a

group of carollers, came together, on December 21, 2023, from five different parishes across the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur when they brought the spirit of Christmas to the residents of St Francis Xavier Home for the Elderly under the Little Sisters of the Poor (LSP).

The carollers adhered to the necessary health precautions as advised by the Mother Superior of LSP.



## King Abdullah II receives Christian and Muslim leaders



AMMAN: Christians and Muslims must “stand united” in defending Holy Sites in Jerusalem, while the Hashemite Monarchy of Jordan will carry on with its role in safeguarding Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem. This was reaffirmed by King Abdullah II of Jordan during a meeting with religious leaders from Jerusalem and Jordan on December 20, 2023.

During the meeting, which took place at Al-Husseiniya Palace, in Amman, many speeches referred to the ongoing war in Gaza and its devastating effects on the population.

Council of Church Leaders President Archbishop Christoforos Atallah said that in Gaza the spirit of evil and hatred and its tools are killing innocent civilians, “as if Herod’s actions in the massacre of the children of Bethlehem were repeated in their most atrocious forms”, in a climate of general silence and official disengagement at an international level.

King Abdullah II, for his part, reiterated that any truce must lead to a ceasefire and a return to the negotiating table to find a solution to the Palestinian issue based on the two-state solution, which is supported by international consensus. The King also condemned the targeting of places of worship, including mosques and churches in Gaza, where many have sought refuge in these places and are in need of aid.

Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, expressed his appreciation for the humanitarian relief provided through field hospitals in Gaza and the West Bank, stressing that the intervention of the international community will be necessary to help in finding a new and realistic perspective for the future of Gaza and of Palestinians. — *Fides*

# Indian PM acknowledges Christians’ contributions

NEW DELHI: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in an eventful Christmas interaction at his New Delhi residence, honoured and appreciated the invaluable contributions of the Christian community. He highlighted their significant role in India’s freedom movement, citing intellectual leaders and their pivotal involvement acknowledged even by Mahatma Gandhi.

Modi, commemorating his tenure of 10 years as the Prime Minister, emphasised the Christian community’s vital contributions to societal welfare, particularly in education, healthcare, and upliftment of the underprivileged. Extending warm Christmas wishes, he expressed gratitude to those present for sharing in this meaningful occasion, lauding the Indian Minority Foundation’s initiative to celebrate together.

Reflecting on his longstanding engagement with the Christian community, Modi reminisced about his frequent interactions during his tenure as Gujarat’s chief minister. He recalled a memorable meeting with Pope Francis in 2021, discussing critical global issues such as social harmony, environmental conservation, and inclusive development.

Beyond the festivities, Modi underscored the essence of Christmas, not merely as a celebration of Jesus Christ’s birth but also a reflection on his teachings and principles. He highlighted Jesus’ emphasis on compas-



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi with his guests for Christmas at his residence.

sion and service, fostering an inclusive society founded on justice, values resonating with India’s developmental journey.

Aligning diverse societal values, Modi drew parallels between the teachings of the Bible and the sacred Upanishads, emphasising the pursuit of truth and service to others. He stressed the importance of shared heritage and values, envisioning a collaborative path for a progressive 21st-century India.

Reaffirming India’s ambition to become a developed nation by 2047, Modi emphasised the pivotal role of youth and their holistic well-being. He urged community leaders to promote fitness, proper nutrition, and awareness against substance abuse among the youth.

Acknowledging the tradition of gift-giving during Christmas, Modi urged for the gift of a sustainable planet for future generations. He championed Mission LiFE, advocating for a sustainable lifestyle, promoting reuse, recycling, biodegradable materials, and reducing carbon footprints. He sought the Christian community’s active involvement in this global initiative.

The gathering included esteemed Christian leaders such as Cardinal Oswald Gracias, Archbishop Anil Couto, Bishop Paul Swarup, Principal John Varghese of St Stephen’s College, Fr Kevin J. Kimtis, and Bishop Thomas Mar Antonios, signifying a shared commitment towards inclusive progress and global welfare. — *Agencies*

## Christmas is a universal celebration

NATORE, Bangladesh: A Christmas marked by interreligious harmony and sharing of celebration, with faithful of different religions united to celebrate the joy of the birth of Jesus. The community of Natore, a district of Bangladesh located in the Rajshahi division, experienced moments of profound participation in the name of rebirth, of a new beginning, of forgiveness and peace in a nation that was once the theatre of confessional tensions. Trees adorned with lights and decorations illuminated their surroundings, accompanied by special prayers in churches and Christmas carols and hymns of joy in Christian homes.

The celebration crossed the boundaries between different religions, with members of the Christian, Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist communities united in underlining that “Christmas is a universal celebration”. Robiul Islam, a young Muslim from Natore, shared his experience: “I joined the Christmas party with my friend Jonathan Gomes. We sang holiday songs, enjoyed



An interreligious Christmas celebration in Natore.

delicious food, including cake.” He also highlighted the strong bond between faiths, recalling that previously Jonathan had also participated in the (Muslim) *Eid* celebrations with his family.

On Christmas Day, the parish of Bonpara, in Natore, hosted Muslim leader Siddiqur Rahman Patwari, member of Parliament, and other political leaders for a convivial moment after Mass, bringing the country’s best wishes to the Catholics present. Patwari also expressed gratitude to the missionaries of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (PIME) for their significant role in the development of the entire area. He then underlined the prevailing religious harmony, hoping that it could continue in the future. It is notable that Italian PIME priests and nuns have served in the parish of Bonpara — where Christians have shared sweets and Christmas carols with people of different faiths after Mass — for many years. And their contribution, underlines a local person, is still remembered fondly today by the Christian community and members of other faiths.

Bangladeshi President Md Sahabuddin and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina extended their greetings to the Christian commu-

nity on the occasion. The president hosted a reception in Bangabhaban, attended by Archbishop of Dhaka Msgr Bejoy N D’Cruze, the president of the Christian Association of Bangladesh Nirmol Rozario, community representatives, diplomats and religious leaders from various countries. The head of state then urged everyone to work for the well-being of the country and the people, underlining that religion is a personal element and that, at a national level, it is necessary to support harmony and the free practice of worship. Finally, he extolled the example of Christ for all faiths in leading people towards truth, justice and peace, working to make the world a peaceful place.

Cardinal Patrick D’Rozario, Archbishop Emeritus of Dhaka, shared a message for the holiday in which he states: “Celebrating Christmas in the period leading up to the next elections is a grace from God and a call to embrace the challenge.” The cardinal prayed that people would participate in bringing the message of Christmas into the electoral process, choosing leaders committed to justice, peace and harmony, wishing everyone a fruitful Christmas and a new year full of grace.” — *By Sumon Corraya, AsiaNews*

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# No more digital projection during Mass

## US Bishops revisiting technology use in worship

CHARLOTTE, North Carolina: Just as families, schools and workplaces rethink the increasingly pervasive use of digital technology, Catholic churches locally and nationally are venturing into the challenges posed by screens at Mass and other sacred liturgies.

A new policy defining how churches in the Diocese of Charlotte can — and can't — use digital projection screens took effect as the new liturgical year began. The US Conference of Catholic Bishops is also examining the issue and weighing whether to develop national guidelines for technology use during Mass.

As some other dioceses have done, the Diocese of Charlotte policy — promulgated by Bishop Peter Jugis and shared with pastors in August 2023 — prohibits the use of digital projection screens during Mass so worshippers can focus on the liturgy without distraction.

Parishioners may continue to use smart phones and other personal devices to access information to assist in their understanding of and engagement in the Mass. The policy took effect December 3, the first Sunday of Advent.

"It is important for sacramental reasons that people aren't distracted during Mass, and that they are concentrating on what's happening at the altar — not on words on a screen," said Msgr Patrick Winslow, vicar general and chancellor of the diocese, whose office studied other dioceses' policies and commentary from the USCCB in drafting the local policy.

"Digital screens are useful and can elevate a programme or talk, and one of Bishop Jugis' pastoral goals is to increase our digital evangelisation," Msgr Winslow said. "Nonetheless, we also want to preserve the essence of the Mass as a holy celebration in which people participate fully in the Eucharistic sacrifice offered on the altar."

Two projection screens came down at Holy Cross Church in Kernersville, and 600 new hymnals recently arrived as Fr Noah Carter, pastor, prepared to embrace the diocese's new policy.

Fr Carter has been following the national conversation and had planned to remove the screens early next year. He inherited the screens when he became pastor in 2019, which had been installed years earlier in part to avoid the cost of hymnals and were regularly used during Mass to project readings, musical lyrics and Spanish translations.



(CNS photo/Patricia Zapor)

"The intent of the screens is good — to help parishioners follow along with elements of the Mass — but there are a lot of concerns about them," Fr Carter said. "Ours were positioned on the right side of the church and forced people to look away from the sanctuary. Since we shifted back to hymnals, I have already noticed that people seem to be singing with more gusto. Families and friends are sharing hymnals and they have the lyrics and music together in front of them — it's kind of drawing people together."

Digital projection screens have become more common inside churches as a means of replacing expensive printed texts, providing a visual worship aid for large crowds, and projecting prayers and hymns to encourage participation.

Still, screens during Mass can be distracting or disruptive to the liturgical celebration, the diocese's policy says, and they lack "due sacramentality" for the Mass, the Church's highest form of worship.

Using screens to project hymn lyrics, prayers and liturgical texts may also violate licensing and copyright protections, the policy notes — a concern also raised by the US bishops during their bi-annual General Assembly in November.

Only a handful of the diocese's 92 churches currently use screens during Mass and other

liturgies, and now will need to find other ways to transmit the same information. They must also move screens and equipment from view, so that they are not visible except on those rare occasions they are permitted.

To make Sunday readings, hymns and other information available for parishioners, churches may choose to provide hymnals, print material in bulletins or as handouts, or use QR codes to access information on personal devices — a technology popularised by restaurants and other businesses during the pandemic to share menus and other information. Electronic devices, however, may not replace missals, lectionaries or other books used by the ministers during Mass, the policy says, unless needed to accommodate people who are sight or hearing impaired.

The diocese's approach, Msgr Winslow said, "enables each person to decide for themselves if they want or need a personal device as a worship aid — rather than unintentionally diverting everyone's attention toward a screen away from the sanctuary."

### Under the new policy:

- Non-retractable screens, televisions, projectors and other digital displays may not be permanently situated in the sanctuary or nave.
- Cameras should be mounted "in unobtru-

sive and discreet locations." (Livestreaming Masses and other liturgies for the sick and homebound may continue under the new policy.)

- Screens may only be used inside churches before or after Mass "when there is an extraordinary need to share some sort of media message."

- Some exceptions may be acceptable, but prior approval from the bishop is required to use screens and projectors during liturgies inside a church or chapel.

- Not all digital projections are prohibited, though:

- Screens may be used in parish halls or other "overflow" spaces during liturgies when the church is full.

- Retractable screens may be used for non-liturgical events in churches, such as talks and presentations, as long as "they are discreet and unnoticeable when retracted."

- Screens may also be used as needed for liturgies not celebrated in a church, such as at a convention centre, arena or outdoors.

Msgr Winslow noted that this local policy is a first step in the evolving landscape of leveraging and regulating technology until the broader Church determines whether or how to incorporate digital technology into the liturgy.

The Church already prohibits the use of pre-recorded music during liturgies and offers guidance on televising Masses.

Now, the US Conference of Catholic Bishops is revisiting technology use in worship for the first time in nearly 30 years.

The US bishops last issued guidelines on digital transmission of the liturgy in 1996.

At their General Assembly in November, Bishop Steven J. Lopes, chairman of the USCCB's Committee on Divine Worship, introduced the question of whether "new national guidelines might merit further consideration."

The bishops spent 20 minutes discussing the topic and providing written feedback to the committee, including input about livestream liturgies and screens in liturgies, whether those were used well or poorly, and what "opportunities and threats does this practice present?" for both. It also asked if any dioceses in the bishops' respective regions had guidelines regarding the use of technology in the liturgy. — *Catholic News Herald/OSV News*

## Canon law must be part of Church's mission of mercy

VATICAN: All the Catholic Church's structures, including tribunals and faculties of canon law, must undergo a "pastoral and missionary conversion" to ensure the Church is giving the world "the only thing it needs: the Gospel of the mercy of Jesus," said Pope Francis.

"To be pastoral does not mean that the norms should be set aside, and one sets off in whatever direction one wishes, but that in applying the norms one should make certain that the Christian faithful find in them the presence of the merciful Jesus, who does not condemn but exhorts them to sin no more because he gives grace," the Pope wrote to an international group of canon law scholars.

Francis made his remarks in a message to the *Consociatio Internationalis Studio Iuris Canonici Promovendo* (literally translated as the international association for promoting the study of canon law), which celebrated its 50th anniversary with a conference in Rome December 1.

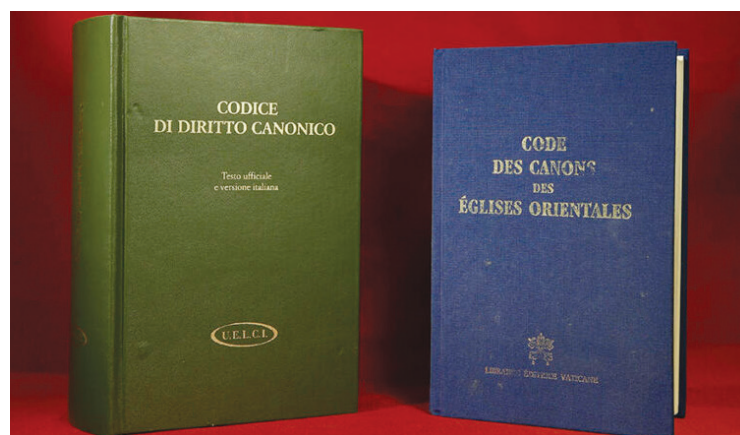
When canon law is an instrument of mer-

cy, the Pope wrote, "even when a severe sanction is to be applied to one who has committed a very serious crime, the Church, which is mother, will offer him the help and spiritual support that is indispensable so that in repentance he may encounter the merciful face of the Father."

In its application, he said, each Church law must be interpreted in light of the "supreme law," which is *salus animarum*, the salvation of souls.

The application of canon law is something which must be done in prayer and with fidelity to the word of God, the living tradition of the Church and the magisterium or teachings of the popes, he said.

"The wisdom that comes from God, received in prayer and in listening to others," he said, should guide canonists "in distinguishing what is essential in the daily life of the Church, inasmuch as it is desired by Christ himself and established by the Apostles, and also expressed in the Magisterium, and what instead is merely a set of external



Code of Canon Law books for the Latin and Eastern Catholic churches are pictured in Rome at the Pontifical Oriental Institute in this Sept 15, 2016, file photo. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)

forms, perhaps useful and significant in the past, but no longer so in the present or, indeed sometimes, an impediment to a witness that, especially today, requires greater simplicity to be credible."

As a model, Francis pointed to most Catholics' mothers, who first taught them the faith. This essentiality of faith is what was transmitted to us by our mothers, the first

evangelisers. "Why not take her as a point of reference regarding the attitude of spirit to be lived in the various situations of Church life?"

The Pope thanked the canon lawyers for their contributions to Church life and prayed that they would be "instruments of God's justice, which is always inseparably united with his mercy." — **By Cindy Wooden, NCR**



## Holy Land: Instrumentalisation

**H**oly Land. A convenient term, which allows Christians to designate the places where Christ lived. An expression also terribly ambiguous: attaching the qualifier “holy” to a land is fraught with risks of appropriation, regardless of the religion. Just like with “Land of Islam,” or “Promised Land.”

It shows how problematic it is to designate the geographical space of this place, cherished by the three monotheistic religions, us-

ing a religious qualifier. This implies that God has given this land to a specific community. Claiming ownership of the land as a divine will opens the way to exclusion, rejection, and violence.

In the conflict between Hamas and Israel, religion has thus become a tool to justify territorial control, serving two nationalisms. These designations that instrumentalise God are thus cultural and historical constructions,

which then serve political projects.

In these days following Christmas in a land devastated by war, it is wise to refrain from annexing God. For Christians, calling “holy” a land where Christ’s tomb is now empty is even somewhat nonsensical. God alone is holy, and it is probably better to speak of the “Land of the One Who is Holy.” The land belongs to no one, says the God of the Bible, which Christianity interprets through the con-

cept of the “universal destination of goods.”

We are only passing through here. We are akin to gardeners, whose calling is to make this space livable, to pass it on to our successors. “Be the gardeners of the holy land”: this is the only wish one would like to express, during these days after Christmas, to the political leaders of the region. — **By Isabelle de Gaulmyn, LCI** <https://international.la-croix.com>

## The Pope's 2023: A year of health challenges, travel and the synod

**P**ope Francis' 2023 was a year of important trips made or postponed, a predecessor's funeral and his own 10th anniversary as pope, a call to the world to act on climate change and a call to the Catholic Church to strengthen its mission by learning “synodality.”

The Argentine pope, who was born December 17, 1936, was to finish the year as an 87-year-old.

As the oldest reigning pope in the last 120 years, Francis' year was punctuated with hospitalisations, breathing difficulties and ongoing mobility challenges. The last pope to serve at his age was Pope Leo XIII, who died at the age of 93 in 1903.

For Francis, the year began with mourning Pope Benedict XVI, who resigned in 2013 and died Dec 31, 2022.

Francis spent the week after his death speaking about his predecessor, lauding his “wisdom, tenderness, devotion” and lauding how his theology was a direct result of his faith.

“His explanation of the faith was carried out with the devotion of a man who has surrendered all of himself to God and who, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, sought an ever-greater participation in the mystery of that Jesus who had fascinated him from his youth,” Francis wrote in the introduction to a book published by the Vatican.

Francis presided over his predecessor's funeral January 5, and preaching about the Gospel rather than giving a eulogy as liturgical norms dictate, he built his homily around four quotations from Benedict.

The first of five foreign trips Francis made in 2023 took him to Congo and then on an ecumenical peace mission to South Sudan. The trip with the Anglican archbishop of Canterbury and the moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland had been set for July 2022, but was cancelled because Francis was experiencing intense pain in his knee.

Even though he was well enough to travel in 2023, the knee continued to be a problem. Photos taken in his residence often showed him using a walker. He would be pushed in a wheelchair to his place when presiding at Mass in St Peter's Basilica and when greeting people at his general audiences. On days when it was not so painful, he would use a silver cane.

Francis spent nine days in Rome's Gemelli hospital in June after undergoing a three-hour surgery to repair a hernia. Surgeons also removed several adhesions or bands of scar tissue that had formed after previous surgeries decades ago.

Suffering from a respiratory infection, he also spent four days in March in the suite of rooms the Ge-

melli reserves for the pope. When he was experiencing respiratory difficulties again in late November, he went to the Gemelli Isola hospital for a CT scan but returned to his Vatican residence the same day. He was given intravenous antibiotics at home but kept many of his appointments, even if he did have an aide read his speeches for him.

The bronchial infection, which made his breathing very laboured, forced him to cancel his planned trip to Dubai in the United Arab Emirates in early December for COP28; he would have been the first pope to attend a UN climate change summit.

“Are we working for a culture of life or a culture of death?” he asked world leaders in his COP28 message read in Dubai by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state. “To all of you I make this heartfelt appeal: Let us choose life! Let us choose the future!”

The destruction of the environment is “a sin” that not only “greatly endangers all human beings, especially the most vulnerable,” he wrote to the leaders, but it also “threatens to unleash a conflict between generations.”

In anticipation of the conference, Francis in early October released *Laudate Deum* (Praise God), a follow-up document to his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si'*, *On Care for Our Common Home*.

“We must move beyond the mentality of appearing to be concerned but not having the courage needed to produce substantial changes,” he wrote in *Laudate Deum*.

Making an even more urgent appeal for action than he did with *Laudato Si'*, the Pope wrote that COP28 could “represent a change of direction, showing that everything done since 1992 (with the adoption of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change) was in fact serious and worth the effort, or else it will be a great disappointment and jeopardise whatever good has been achieved thus far.”

The two major events Francis



Pope Francis with volunteers after the closing Mass for WYD2023 in Lisbon, August 6, 2023. (Vatican Media)

was able to participate in were World Youth Day in Lisbon, Portugal, in August and the long-awaited first assembly of the Synod of Bishops on Synodality in October.

WYD brought more than 1.5 million young people together and, in a letter for local youth day celebrations in November, Francis described it as an “event that surpassed all our expectations. Our meeting in Lisbon was magnificent, a genuine experience of renewal, an explosion of light and joy!”

Throughout his visit to Portugal, in meetings both with young people and with clergy, the Pope's refrain was that in the Church there is room for “todos, todos, todos” — “everyone, everyone, everyone.”

“Please, let us not convert the church into a customs office” where only the “just,” “good,” and “properly married” can enter while leaving everyone else outside, he told Portuguese bishops, priests and pastoral workers. “No. The Church is not that,” he said, rather it is a place for “righteous and sinners, good and bad, everyone, everyone, everyone.”

Interviewed by Italian television about the Oct 4-29 assembly of the Synod of Bishops, the Pope said, “The result is positive. Everything was discussed with full freedom, and this is a beautiful thing.”

Asked specifically about the assembly's discussions about wel-

coming gay Catholics, Francis responded: “When I say ‘everyone, everyone, everyone,’ it's the people. The Church receives people, everyone, and does not ask what you are. Then, within the Church, everyone grows and matures in their Christian belonging. It's true that today it's a bit fashionable to talk about this. The Church receives everyone.”

At his Mass concluding the synod assembly, the Pope summarised his key hope for the synod, which will meet again in October 2024: “The Lord will guide us and help us to be a more synodal and missionary Church, a Church that adores God and serves the women and men of our time, going forth to bring to everyone the consoling joy of the Gospel.”

Just days before the synod opened, Francis created 21 new cardinals from 16 nations, including Cardinal Robert F. Prevost, the Chicago-born prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops, and French Cardinal Christophe Pierre, the nuncio to the United States.

In an interview with Mexican journalist Valentina Alazraki Dec 12, the Pope said he feels “quite well” physically and his health continues to improve. Yet asked if people should be concerned about his health, he responded, “Yes, a little bit, yes. I need them to pray for my health.” — **By Cindy Wooden, NCR**



Pope Francis among the delegates of the Synod on Synodality, held in October of 2023. (Vatican Media)



Pope Francis at Rome's Gemelli Hospital. (Vatican Media)



# For the gift of diversity in the Church

## Pope's prayer intention for January

At the core of Pope Francis' plea for prayer for the gift of diversity in the Catholic Church lies a profound dedication to the Gospel's message of love, unity, and acceptance. This prayer is a humble request for the Holy Spirit's guidance to open our hearts and minds, urging all of us to actively appreciate the diverse gifts, talents, and cultural richness bestowed by God. It challenges us the faithful to move beyond mere recognition and engage in the active celebration of varied charisms and traditions that contribute to the vibrancy of the Church.

### Jesus' Teaching on Diversity

The call to embrace diversity finds its origins in Jesus' earthly ministry, marked by a profound inclusivity that defied societal norms. Jesus' engagements with people from varied backgrounds, such as the Samaritan woman at the well and the healing of the Centurion's servant, illustrate a radical acceptance of diversity that goes beyond cultural and social conventions. Parables like the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son underscore the significance of embracing everyone, irrespective of cultural or societal expectations. Jesus' teachings offer a model for a Christian community where diversity is celebrated as a reflection of God's diverse creation, establishing the groundwork for a united and diverse community.

### Scriptural Foundations for Unity and Solidarity

The Scriptures consistently advocate for embracing diversity to foster unity and solidarity. In Galatians 3:28, St Paul emphasises oneness in Christ, transcending distinctions of ethnicity, social status, and gender, promoting a community bound by shared faith and love. Paul extends this idea in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, likening the Church to a body with diverse parts, highlighting the interdependence of its members and their



### PRAYER PRISM

Fr Fabian Dicom

unique contributions. In Romans 15:7, Paul underscores the importance of acceptance, urging believers to accept one another as Christ accepted them, ultimately bringing praise to God.

### Pope Francis' Vision on Diversity and Inclusivity

Pope Francis consistently champions a Church that embraces diversity and actively promotes radical inclusivity, anchoring his vision in the Gospel principles of love, mercy, and compassion. Encapsulated in his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, the Holy Father envisions a Church that reaches out to the peripheries, welcoming all, fostering a sense of global solidarity that transcends boundaries.

Pope Francis initiated the Synod on Synodality, marking a significant shift in the Church's approach. This synodal process emphasises inclusive decision-making, cultural sensitivity, the amplification of marginalised voices, fostering dialogue, and promoting pastoral flexibility. By embracing these principles, the Church aims to create an environment conducive to embracing diversity.

The Pope's prayer intention is also an invitation to Catholics to embrace the cultural and liturgical diversity within the Church to enrich their own spiritual journey and foster unity within the global Catholic community. This aligns with the Catholic Church's recognition of the universality of its message while respecting and celebrating the unique expressions of faith found in different cultures and communities.

### Relevance for the Malaysian Church and Society:

In the context of Malaysia, a nation marked by its multicultural and multi-religious society, the call to pray for the gift of diversity holds particular significance. Malaysia's Catholic Church reflects this diversity, comprising members from various ethnicities and cultural backgrounds. Embracing diversity within the Church contributes to fostering unity and understanding within the broader Malaysian society.

The Malaysian Church faces the challenge of navigating ethnic and cultural diversity within its congregations. This prayer intention encourages Malaysian Catholics to appreciate the richness of their collective traditions and charisms, contributing to a harmonious coexistence within the Church and serving as a model for broader societal unity.

### Elements of Social Justice:

#### A Necessary Ingredient for Diversity

The call to embrace diversity within the Church is inherently linked to the principles of social justice. Ongoing discussions within the Church encompass gender equality, LGBTQ+ inclusion, interfaith dialogue, social justice, economic inequality, and youth engagement. Recognising the dignity and equality of all individuals, regardless of their background, is a foundational aspect of the Church's commitment to justice. By actively working towards inclusivity, the Church engages in the pursuit of a just and equitable society, mirroring the teachings of Jesus who stood against societal inequalities.

### What We Hope for by Praying for Diversity

By earnestly praying for the gift of diversity in the Church, we the faithful are able express hope for a transformed community. The aspiration is for the Holy Spirit to guide

individuals and the Church as a whole in recognising and valuing the diverse gifts that each member brings. Through this prayer, may we anticipate the strengthening of bonds, the breaking down of divisive barriers, and the creation of a community where all are seen as equal members of the Body of Christ.

### Our Prayer

*Gracious and loving God,*

*We come before you with open hearts,*

*Grateful for the rich tapestry of your Church.*

*In this month of January,*

*we lift our prayers,*

*For the gift of diversity within our Christian community.*

*May the Holy Spirit guide us,*

*To recognize the unique charisms, present in each person,*

*And help us discover the richness of different traditions and rituals.*

*As we pray for unity amid diversity,*

*May we embrace the teachings of Jesus, Who welcomed all into His loving embrace,*

*Seeing each person*

*as a cherished child of God.*

*Inspire us to live out the vision of Pope Francis,*

*Creating a Church*

*that transcends boundaries,*

*Fostering understanding*

*and mutual enrichment.*

*May the Malaysian Church and society, Marked by diverse cultures and religions,*

*Serve as a testament*

*to the beauty of unity in diversity.*

*In your name, we pray,*

*Amen.*

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

## SOCIAL JUSTICE



### Making a Difference

Tony Magliano

## Reflections on Pope Francis' 2024 World Day of Peace message

Fast moving advancements in science and technology grab our attention, spark fascination, and receive automatic acceptance within our modern societies which crave new things, quick results, and instant gratification. Within such an atmosphere there is often little time given to examine the pros and cons of budding technological innovations before they become mainstream — for good, or for bad. And the quickly developing world of artificial intelligence (AI) is a prime example.

In an insightful and challenging effort to stay morally ahead of the AI curve, Pope Francis has penned *Artificial Intelligence and Peace* as his January 1, 2024, World Day of Peace message (see: <https://bitly.ws/37M6b>).

Regarding AI the Pope writes, we “cannot presume a priori [from logical reasoning based on self-evident truths] that its development will make a beneficial contribution to the future of humanity and to peace among peoples. That a positive outcome will only be achieved if we show ourselves capable of acting responsibly and respect such fundamental human values as ‘inclusion, trans-

parency, security, equity, privacy and reliability.”

“Freedom and peaceful coexistence are threatened whenever human beings yield to the temptation to selfishness, self-interest, the desire for profit and the thirst for power. We thus have a duty to broaden our gaze and to direct techno-scientific research towards the pursuit of peace and the common good, in the service of the integral development of individuals and communities,” writes the Pope.

“Ethical considerations should also be taken into account from the very beginning of research, and continue through the phases of experimentation, design, production, distribution and marketing. This is the approach of ethics by design, and it is one in which educational institutions and decision-makers have an essential role to play.”

But when ethics by design is not employed, we endanger the truth! A serious example raised by Pope Francis is found in the lies of misinformation — “fake news.” And AI is becoming so technically sophisticated that it is becoming increasingly difficult to dis-

tinguish real news from fake news. We need to carefully discern, fact check, and consult highly reputable sources (see: <https://bitly.ws/37Lwe>).

Turning to AI and its increasing role in weapon development and use, the Holy Father writes, “In these days, as we look at the world around us, there can be no escaping serious ethical questions related to the armaments sector. The ability to conduct military operations through remote control systems has led to a lessened perception of the devastation caused by those weapon systems and the burden of responsibility for their use, resulting in an even more cold and detached approach to the immense tragedy of war” (listen to “The Take” <https://bitly.ws/37Lux>).

“Research on emerging technologies in the area of so-called Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems, including the weaponisation of artificial intelligence, is a cause for grave ethical concern. Autonomous weapon systems can never be morally responsible subjects.”

Warning: As weapon systems become increasingly autonomous, it is reasonable

to see these weapons developing to a point where humans could lose partial or even full control of them. The 1983 movie “War Games” presents a realistically chilling scenario of humans initially losing computer control of a nuclear weapons system (see movie trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bymdsSvLfJY>).

Amidst these necessary warnings Pope Francis has raised regarding AI, he adds, “On a more positive note, if artificial intelligence were used to promote integral human development, it could introduce important innovations in agriculture, education and culture, an improved level of life for entire nations and peoples, and the growth of human fraternity and social friendship. In the end, the way we use it to include the least of our brothers and sisters, the vulnerable and those most in need, will be the true measure of our humanity.”

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# Rededication of the Church of the Assumption

## The design philosophy

It was with profound gratitude that on December 16, 2023, Most Reverend Julian Leow, Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur, and 18 priests, led the parishioners of the Church of the Assumption Petaling Jaya, in the ancient and sacred rite of rededicating the church.

The church building had closed for renovations and repairs on May 21, 2023, and was reopened after more than six months, on schedule and in time for Christmas. The project to revitalise the church began in 2016 under the guidance of Fr Mitchel Anthony, the then parish priest, to expand and renovate the main prayer hall and administrative block. Despite delays due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, the committee meticulously designed the project, emphasising the preservation of the church's original architectural heritage.

### The Stations of the Cross

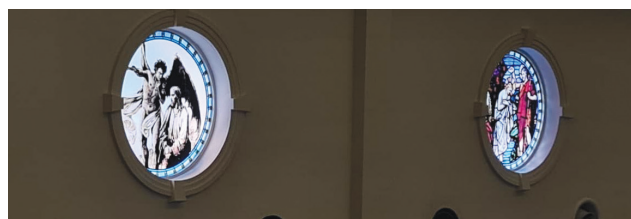


One crucial aspect of the renovation was the preservation and enhancement of the iconic Stations of the Cross, a stunning collection of art deco mosaic reliefs, and possibly the largest inside a Malaysian church, illuminated with precise lighting to amplify their brilliance.

### The Central Oculus



The redesign incorporated symbolic elements, notably the prominent Christ Pantocrator in the central oculus of the church's ceiling. This symbolically places Jesus at the centre of our focus and spiritual life. Christ Pantocrator, meaning "Christ the Almighty" or "Christ the Ruler of All", is an iconic representation of Jesus as the divine and sovereign Lord of the universe. The depiction shows Our Lord in a frontal view, as Creator, Saviour, and Judge, holding the Book of the Gospels in one hand and making a gesture of blessing upon the observers with the other.



### Stained Glass

Stained glass windows were also installed above the Stations of the Cross. The selection of images for the rosette windows was a thoughtful and meaningful process. The four corners of the rosette windows depict the symbols of the Evangelists: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, the authors of the Gospels, upon which our Church is anchored. The remainder of the images are from the life of Christ, with the choice of visual narratives that reflect the shared experiences and faith journey of our congregation, fostering a deeper connection to our spiritual heritage.

### Choice of Sanctuary Marble

The choice of marble from the Antalya province for our Church sanctuary floor holds a special significance due to the proximity of its quarry to the ancient regions of Lycia and Pamphylia. You may recall these regions from the Acts of the Apostles, which recorded among others, the travels of the Apostle Paul on in his missionary journeys.

The choice of Volakas marble for the altar, tabernacle table, ambo, and baptismal font, especially due to its quarry's proximity to Thessalonica, one of the early centres of Christianity and the site of one of the Apostle Paul's missions, holds both practical and symbolic significance. Incorporating Volakas marble carries a deeper symbolism related to the heritage and religious history of the region of its origins, and added historical and spiritual depth to

the Church's design.

The altar stand bears the image of the Lamb of God, and the beginning of John 1:29 in Latin: *Ecce Agnus Dei — Behold, the Lamb of God*. The riser of the mensa (altar table) proclaims the Holiness of the Lamb of God, who is sacrificed to take away the sins of the world.

### The Reredos

The selection of the Glorious Mysteries for the reredos of the Church was an obvious choice. Our Church after all, shares the title of the Fourth Glorious Mystery, the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into heaven. The decision to create the reredos were Fr Leonard Lexson's and Fr Biju Mathew's inspired choice. To recreate the images of the Glorious Mysteries life sized, to match that of the statue of Our Lord on the Crucifix, could only have been a revelation by the Holy Ghost. They were brought to life by our Benjamin (Ben) Ignatius. Ben, who is from the parish, is a very gifted artist and leaves us with a wonderful legacy.

### The Cross – *LAUDATO SI, mi Signore*

To accommodate the reredos on the sanctuary wall, the crucifix had to be downsized. The priests and project committee were conscious that our crucifix was on an artificially large, boxed-up plywood and vinyl cross, which had to be replaced. In response to His Holiness Pope Francis' call for environmental stewardship in his Encyclical *Laudato Si*, we embarked on an initiative by utilising salvaged old chengal columns for the creation of a new crucifix.

Let the love we find within these sacred walls shine brightly beyond them

The rededication was marked by messages. Fr Leonard Lexson, in his message for the Rededication said, "A new chapter begins with sacred space and the uplifting of souls in sacred time. It is good to give thanks to the Lord for His mercy endures forever and let us delight in the Lord's presence praising God from age to age." Fr Biju Mathew shared this message and hopes, "As I contemplate with admiration this sacred space of marvellous beauty, of so much faith-filled history, I ask God that the Assumption Catholic community continue to rise up and flourish, and present to the world the great service that the Church can and must offer to humanity: to be an icon of divine beauty, a burning flame of charity, a path so that the world may believe in the One whom God has sent."

May God's blessings continue to abound in our newly consecrated church, in our parish, and in the world. — **By Alan Adrian Gomez, Chairperson Parish Pastoral Council, Assumption Project Committee**



# Towards a new New Year

As the world heralds in another new year, we inevitably grow one year older. We may not grow richer, taller, smarter or healthier, but we will certainly grow older and hopefully wiser. The Church in Malaysia too is now one year older, as it moves closer to the 1st Malaysia Pastoral Convention in 2026.

Towards the end of each year, the secular media normally highlights or summarises the year that had passed, and put forward a list of resolutions for the future. In 2023, there was no shortage of global breaking news, each as horrifying and gruesome as the next. From earthquakes, wars, wild fires, plane crashes, train collisions, etc. The list goes on, each with staggering velocity and worse than the previous ones. Each time these happen, the world is shocked, and there are numerous calls to end these senseless deaths. Religious organisations, including the Catholic Church, will hold vigils and prayers for the dead and suffering.

For corporate organisations and businesses, this is the time to review the company's performances, make adjustments to their goals and set higher targets. For employees, they will review their career and seek better opportunities. For families, they may perhaps talk about family plans — family relationships and bonds are what keeps any family together.

For the Universal Church, our Holy Father Pope Francis started the synodal process on October 9, 2021 and on Sept 29, 2023 in St Peter's Basilica marked the culmination of the first session of the Synod on Synodality. The next session will take place in October 2024.

In the three weeks in October when



## REMINISCING CHURCH

Richard Chia

the 363 voting delegates in the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops met, the Church underwent intense prayers and scrutiny. It was a period when the Church was subjected to a global microscope, where every word and action it said and did solicited comments. Rightly or wrongly, the Pope's call for a media blackout and periods of silence during the assembly, further fuelled the anticipation.

Back home, the year 2023 has also been an eventful year. Having come out from the COVID pandemic, churches are gradually filling up with parishioners and activities. For many, the fear of the virus is still hanging in the air, as evidenced by the number of people who still wear face masks in Church and in public. One cannot be too relaxed especially after many lives were lost to this invisible danger.

A quick glance at the journey of the Church in Malaysia in the past twelve months may seem uneventful. For some, it may seem that the Church had slipped a few notches, based on the church attendance for weekend Masses. One thing prominent post-COVID, is the absence of paper-based church bulletins, leaflets and flyers usually available at the entrances of all churches. Instead, many churches have moved into digital media

to obtain any information about going-ons in the church.

Online meetings and formations have not totally gone away. Some parish ministries and groups are still having its gatherings and meetings in hybrid (combination of physical and online), where attendance is somewhat better than before when physical meetings was the norm. Online talks and seminars seem to attract a larger audience, with a silent majority quietly connected.

This poses a challenge to the speaker or facilitator, as they need to adjust to this new form of participants. They need to be engaging online (to capture the attention of an audience who may be connected but not really there), have less physical movement (to be always within the camera frame), more wary of words used (in case it is recorded) and planned (to avoid silence or long pauses).

Looking ahead to the new year, will the Church remain "same old, same old"? I would think not. Too much has changed. Physically, structurally and even liturgically, we may not see any changes. But, socially, mentally and individually, the people of God (the lay faithful) have changed. For those who lost their job, took a hefty pay-cut or lost a loved one, life will never be the same. Perhaps they may even question their faith, God, Church and religion.

For the young people who did their education online for two years, having to learn and interact with people may be new. This poses a challenge to our catechists in catechism who will need to create innovative ways to engage and to capture their attention span.

For adults struggling to earn a living, with the rising cost of everyday goods and the decline or closure of many businesses, means longer hours at work, or a second job. Participation and attendance in church events or activities may be compromised.

For the senior citizens and homemakers, perhaps they may be the only ones who can step forward to contribute their services in church. From statistics, the Catholic Church is seeing a significant increase in aging parishioners. In some churches, the parish ministry of the senior citizens is the only one growing each year.

For the clergy and religious, many will reach their retirement age and will eventually slow down. Though still available, their services will be less active as they settle down in their retirement. With the acute shortage of vocations to the priesthood and religious life, this would mean the lay faithful need to step up.

On a positive note, there is a silver lining. At the October 2023 Synod of Bishops, Pope Francis in his closing speech reminded the participants that "The Holy Spirit is the protagonist of this Synod", and that we need to commit ourselves to prayer and silent contemplation of the Holy Spirit. What lies ahead is difficult to see with our human eyes. But we can be sure that the Holy Spirit is already at work in every one of us, and that the New Year can never be the same again.

● **Richard Chia** shares his experiences on the journey of the Church in Malaysia — her challenges and achievements in the past forty years — as she moves toward synodality.

## Navigating the New Year with faith and commitment



## FROM THE OTHER SIDE

Regina William

**Isaiah 43:18-19 – Remember not former things, and look not on things of old. Behold I do new things, and now they shall spring forth, verily you shall know them: I will make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert.**

Where did the year 2023 go? We are now in the first few days of 2024 and many of us would already have reflected on the year that was.

Perhaps all of us have had our fair share of ups and downs during the year and I always hear more laments of how bad the year has been while some would be grateful and happy to usher in another New Year and put the past behind them.

Along with the New Year, almost all of us make resolutions which we hope to commit to throughout the year.

New Year resolutions are our personal commitments to improve ourselves. I've stopped making these resolutions during New Year as more often than not, they are hard to keep up with.

Case in point, I've resolved for decades to lose some weight but never succeeded until my grandchildren came along and running after them was the best solution ever to go back to where I was more than 30 years ago.

All of us prioritise our resolutions which can encompass a wide range of areas, such as health, relationships, personal development, and spiritual growth. While making resolutions is a common practice, how much do we align these with our faith?

As Catholics, do we go for resolutions that promote virtues, moral values, and spiritual growth to deepen our prayer life, attend religious services regularly, practice acts of kindness, or strive for greater patience and forgiveness?

It is important to balance and be prudent in what we decide as extreme or unrealistic resolutions may lead to harm, self-centredness, or neglect of one's responsibilities. The Church teachings encourage us to reflect on our intentions and motivations behind the resolutions to ensure they are rooted in love, humility, and a genuine desire to grow closer to God.

Ultimately, we should be guided by moral and ethical principles, and we should make resolutions that align with the Church's teachings while also being mindful of our overall well-being and the well-being of others.

Making resolutions that work involve setting realistic, achievable goals and establishing a plan to implement and sustain positive changes not only during the New Year but every day of our lives.

For those who already have made these resolutions, these are some tips on how we can try to make them succeed.

Being specific and clearly defining our goals. Instead of vague resolutions like

being more spiritual, dedicating more time for church or charitable activities, exercise more or eat better we should always be specific from the onset on how we want to make these changes in our lives. Setting specific goals are easier to track and work towards.

Also we should set realistic goals. We should always be honest with ourselves about what we can achieve in our lives. Unrealistic goals can lead to frustration and abandonment of our resolutions. We must always consider our current lifestyles, commitments, and abilities when setting objectives. Breaking them down to smaller, more manageable tasks can make the overall objective less overwhelming and allows us to celebrate smaller victories along the way.

Create a step by step plan outlining how to achieve goals which can include a timeline, specific actions, and any necessary resources. Having a plan towards the end game in sight increases our chances of success.

Always remember to be flexible with room to make changes. Life is unpredictable, and circumstances may change and we should always be open to adjusting our goals or plans if needed. Flexibility allows us to adapt to challenges without feeling discouraged.

Not many of us would share our resolutions with friends, family and our church communities due to fear of failure or being made fun of, but having a support system can be advantageous to provide encouragement, advice, and accountability.

We should always acknowledge and celebrate achievements along the way, however small, which will keep us being motivated while we can also learn from the setbacks. Rather than focus on the negative aspects, we should always view them as a learning curve rather than reasons to give up. Understanding what went wrong and adjusting the plan can help us to continue moving forward.

The key to successful resolutions is commitment, patience, and a willingness to adapt. Rather than viewing resolutions as all-or-nothing endeavours, we should always see them as ongoing processes of personal and spiritual growth and improvement.

As we embark on this New Year, let us also remember that our resolutions are not merely personal promises, but opportunities for spiritual growth and a deeper connection with our faith. Through prayer, reflection, and a commitment to virtuous living, we can transform our resolutions into acts of worship.

Our resolutions are not solely about what we can achieve on our own, but about how we can align our will with God's divine plan. May the grace of God empower us, the Holy Spirit guide us, and the teachings of Christ inspire us.

● **Regina William** is an ex-journalist turned head of communications, now full-time grandmother to three children aged between 4.5 and one, crisscrossing the globe to play the role. She can be reached at [regina.william1223@gmail.com](mailto:regina.william1223@gmail.com)





# My wheelchair confines me — but it also liberates me

Like Moses' staff, my wheelchair can part a sea of people. Yet my wheelchair is the 'elephant' in the room that everyone sees but nobody talks about. It frightens many and awakens presumptions. As a paralytic from the waist down, I need the wheelchair. Seen as a sign of weakness or disgrace or as an evoker of pity, the wheelchair has been judged unfairly. Despite its utility for those with mobility loss, and the life lessons its occupant learns from having to use it, the wheelchair continues to be a symbol of dashed hopes and dreams.

My wheelchair allows me to join in the celebration of the Eucharist and chant the Liturgical Hours with my Benedictine neighbours. I can host guests at a community pantry/kitchen in town and wander down a country lane delighting in God's creation. I can enjoy a ball game and beer with my buddies.

Wheeling around also reminds me of the physical autonomy I once enjoyed and took for granted. I miss feeling the sand between my toes, playing tag with kids, tossing a football or fielding a fly ball. I miss huffing and puffing up a hill or just pacing back and forth. No longer can I sneak into a restaurant without much ado, nor can I navigate potholes and sidewalk cracks without knowing ahead of time the turf I traverse. Is the dare of facing traffic worth the risk?

Dents in drywall where I have passed by are common. Running over a cat's tail or a friend's toe happens more often than I like. Tipping over a display stand at Walmart or becoming stuck or even stranded for minutes or hours is not unusual. I cannot mount a sidewalk unless there is a cut in the curb for my wheels. My ability to wheel distances is limited to a

battery's capacity. Pressure sores from being bound to the chair occur often and, in their wake, require surgery.

I acquired my physical disability at age 22. An errant gene in my DNA triggered an inflammatory attack on my spine and hips. Before my journey as a differently-abled person, I treasured my youth and athleticism, my ego and my pride. The gradual loss of mobility and becoming hunched over led me to withdraw from myself and the public. I was filled with grief, anger and frustration. Feelings of guilt or the need to apologise kept me brooding.

At first, I was dependent on assistive devices to propel my feet forward, but my condition deteriorated. I went from hanging on someone's forearm to using crutches, then to relying on a walker. The disease finally compromised my spinal cord and I went to using a wheelchair full time. Even reconstructive surgeries, spinal rods and artificial hips could not stay or deflect the disease's progression into paralysis.

But the gradual loss of sensation in my legs awakened my awareness of God's compassion reaching out to me through others, nature and the contemplative life. I now see my wheelchair as a grace.

Relying on a wheelchair makes my life open; I am exposed in all my humanity. This includes my physical deformity, pain and paralysis; my dependencies and rejections; my humility and frustrations.

I have no prop to hide behind or pose I can adopt to pretend. Kindness attends the majority of my public interactions; the readiness of another to reach for the item atop the third shelf or smilingly hold a door.

Despite undergraduate and graduate de-

grees and certifications, work was scarce and chances of job advancement were denied due to a disease that bowed my back and stiffened my steps. My dean at SUNY Empire State College, where I worked a half-time position as an adjunct, even wondered why I would want to work full-time as a professor. "You receive SSI disability, don't you?" he said. "So, why pursue a full-time position?"

For years I have been stared at, treated like a child, whispered about, pitied and assumed to be lacking in discernment and intellect. In a country and community that value their independence and celebrate the rugged individualist (while seeking social conformity from those very same individualists), I cannot compete. I rely on others to help me dress, bathe, tend to my wounds, change catheters, eat and perform basic bodily functions.

Before I became known as the "wheelchair guy," I was the "bent-over guy" because of my spinal deformity. Many of my friends drifted away as I isolated myself. I relished the past and was forlorn over "what might have been." Fear of the future also preoccupied me.

For me, structural barriers were less intimidating than someone else's attitude. Many able-bodied people cannot see past the wheelchair, nor its occupant, without imagining a life of despair, unaware of its beauty and value. My time is seen as expendable, whether in the waiting room or with the individual who needs to be listened to and narrates to me his/her life story.

Then God's grace led me to a Benedictine monastery. The prior welcomed me to live and participate, as a layperson, in the cloister and choir. I experienced the Rule. I enjoyed both

communal and private prayer in silence and peace. I read Scripture. I felt the monks' compassion. All of these things lessened my fears and frets. Through introspection and grace, I came to realise that "differently abled" is a gift. I was becoming the individual that God intended me to be. No longer obsessing over the past and what might have been, nor fretting over a fragile ego that worried about what another thought, I was free to forgive and tolerate.

No longer do I have to contend with the hassles of "hurrying," either physically or emotionally. I do not have to participate in our socioeconomic need for efficiency, speed, time and profit. I now have much more peace, appreciation and attentiveness to the here and now.

My prayer has gone from seeking a cure for my ailments to realising a true healing: self-acceptance. I accept myself, in all my imperfections and frustration, my pain and paralysis. I recognise Christ in the other.

Though my wheelchair confines me, it liberates me. It is no longer restrictive but redemptive. My wheelchair not only separates me from the "herd," but it also, paradoxically, brings me closer to it. Experiencing God's love, I can interact with the public without feeling shame, guilt or embarrassment. I have only a longing to serve.

A sibling recently told me that if he ever found himself in my position, paralytic and in a wheelchair, he would end his life by going off into the woods, never to be seen again. Despite his cold and distancing comment, as I sat in my wheelchair, I could not help but look at him and sadly think, "There, but for the grace of God, go I." —

By Wayne Barr, *America*



As I was  
contemplating

Fr Gerard Steve  
Theraviam

## Welcoming the stranger in 2024 — and discovering a sister/ brother!

Another year goes and another year comes. Is there anything new under the sun? Certainly, 'cos life presents new adventures, opportunities and challenges — thus, I welcome this new year even as I have barely gotten over the Advent confessions, Christmas liturgies and festivities and attempt to start the new year with as much energy as I can muster. There are plans and projects ahead, more parish than personal, and there is sometimes no time to stop and ponder...

However, one thing that sticks out in my mind was an evening I spent with a small group of young friends of mine, some of whom I met as youth in a previous parish long ago, joined by spouses as well as newer friends with whom I have bonded and met over meals at regular intervals. Some of them were earlier very active in church as youth, but studies and jobs (and age) have meant that they are hardly involved, although I know I could depend on them if I sent out a SOS, even if they might miss a Sunday Mass or two along the way. Among them are two couples whose weddings I have been honoured to preside at, one partner who is now a catechumen. One individual claims he is atheist but probably really is agnostic (for now!) and yet asked me to bless his home when we earlier had dinner there (to please his mother, he says, but I think there was more

to that!), and really is enthusiastic to dialogue with people as to why he and many other young people don't attend Mass anymore. Two identify as gay — one of whom who 'came out' to me recently, although he assumed I knew already — and yes, I had guessed. All of them have strong opinions on the Church (and her priests — I am not spared either!) and have no problems sharing their opinions vehemently — and I listen attentively to their raves and rants because this is one way of listening to the voices on the ground and I am glad that they also reciprocate and listen to me when I present my views, sometimes accepting the flaws they see in the Church but also when I present them with another way of looking at things. I always come away from these encounters with a warm feeling of love — giving and receiving — and a sense of having spent time in fulfilling ministry — for didn't Jesus spend a lot of time ministering while breaking bread with people?

Our latest encounter came the night before the Declaration *Fiducia supplicans* issued by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and approved by Pope Francis, which allows priests to bless people who request a blessing, whether they are in 'irregular' marriages or identify as LGBTQ. I am sure this will provide fodder for our next meeting. Of course, some of the secular press have misrepresented and

sensationalised the Declaration to mean that the Church now allows priests to preside at gay weddings. No, it hasn't — the Church still sees marriage as being between a man and a woman. However, her stance towards people who have been seen as in the periphery or outside her 'boundaries' has certainly changed with Pope Francis, whose heart reaches out to people who have sometimes felt rejected by the Church. Sadly, his overtures to such people have been misunderstood by even cardinals and bishops who are very critical (and sometimes downright rude towards him) and think he is 'going soft' on traditional Church teaching. But surely, doesn't his pastoral concern for all point to the Good Shepherd who goes after the lost sheep, to bring it back in his arms and restore it to the flock?

During this last year, the cathedral parish had been inclusive and welcoming as one of our major goals. We have a large congregation and many of our congregation are not local. We also have many visitors from other parts of Malaysia as well as overseas; more so this Christmas perhaps due to our recent 'makeover' and reopening. Sadly, you could come to church and attend Mass but not feel welcome in the crowd, since we Catholics are poor at reaching out in love, except perhaps at the sign of peace. Even some of our Ministers of Hospitality have

had to be reminded to smile and be welcoming and offering actual hospitality rather than seeing their role as ushers and money-collectors and worse still, arbiters of fashion who send people away because they are improperly dressed! (OK I get it, people should dress decently for Mass but the reality is that some people have different standards and if people come covering the essentials, let's not be Scribes and Pharisees!) At our recent Parish Pastoral Assembly, it was noted that we had improved but there are still lots to work at so that people see themselves as part of a loving faith community, rather than mere attendees.

Each of us needs to open ourselves to be able to greet the stranger and see Jesus in them — and also recognise that as children of the one God, we are all sisters and brothers, irrespective of colour, status or orientation. Since we are still in the Christmas Season, a blessed Christmastide and warm wishes for the New Year 2024. Like the Magi, may we go out of our way to greet, discover and welcome the Saviour who resides us in all.

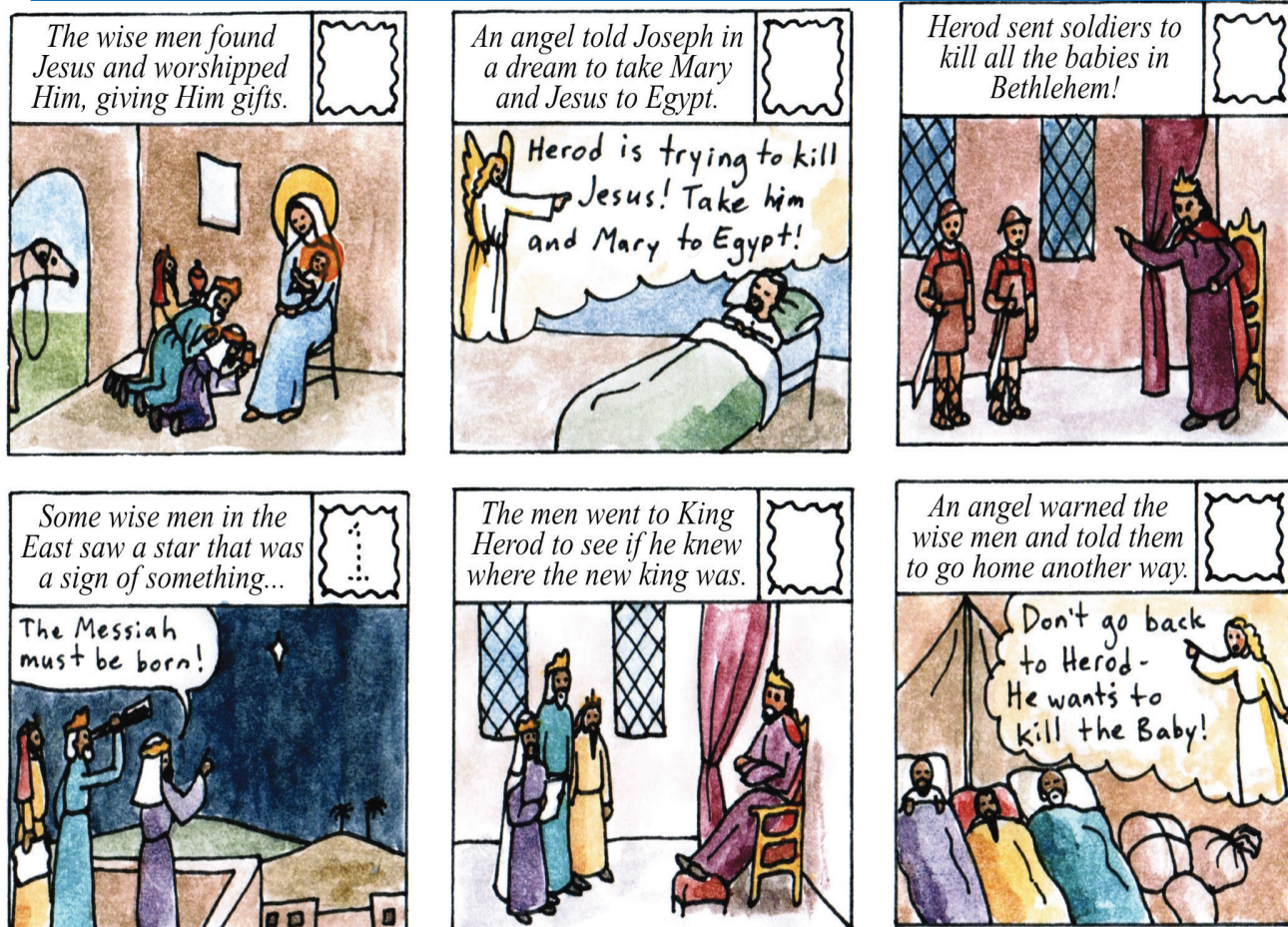
● **Fr Gerard Theraviam** is the Parish Priest of the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist in Kuala Lumpur, as well as the Spiritual Director to the World Community for Christian Meditation, Malaysia.



# Little Catholics' Corner

## The Wise Men Puzzle

Do you know the story of the wise men who came to worship Baby Jesus?  
What order do these pictures go in? Write the numbers from 1 to 6 in the boxes.



Dear Children,

Today we celebrate the feast of the Epiphany. On this feast we remember when the wise men came from the East and worshipped baby Jesus.

The wise men wanted to find the great King and give Him their best gifts.

They studied long and finally knew where He was. Then they had to travel a great distance to find the baby King.

When they found Him they knelt before Him and gave Him their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, which were all costly treasures.

Do you want to find the greatest King? You know Who He is! You don't have to travel far to find Him - He comes in every Mass!

Children, do you want to give your best gift to the baby King who loves you so much?

You don't need to give Him gold or frankincense or myrrh.

You can give Him your heart! Love Jesus and He will always be with you!

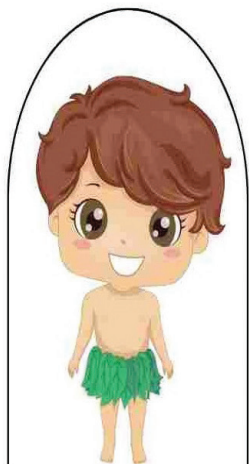
Love  
Aunty Eliz

Let's make finger puppets!

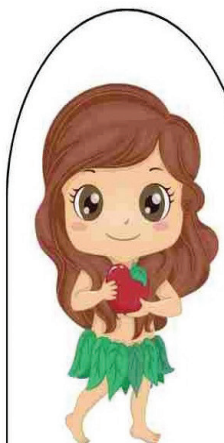
Cut out the puppet outline.

Apply the outlines around your fingers using some glue.

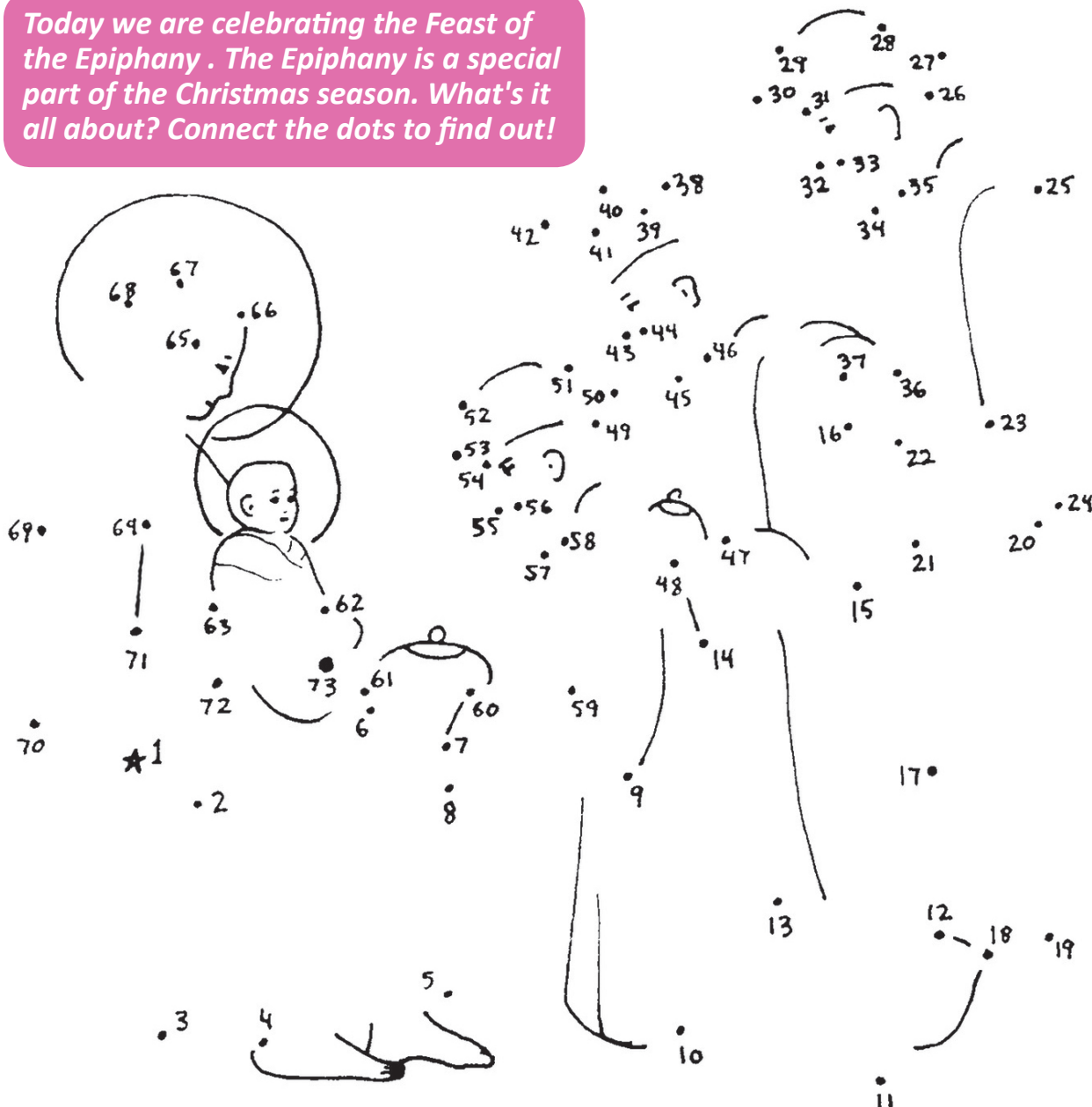
Then pick a partner and Act out the scene from Genesis 2:7



**ADAM & EVE FINGER PUPPET**



Today we are celebrating the Feast of the Epiphany. The Epiphany is a special part of the Christmas season. What's it all about? Connect the dots to find out!





# YOUTH

JANUARY 7, 2024

## OLF students put lessons into practice

**KUALA LUMPUR:** The Level 8 students of the Church of Our Lady of Fatima organised a fundraising event with the aim to support the needy. This initiative was aligned with the Level 8 catechism Chapter 10: *Jesus Cares for the Sick and the Poor*.

This project named, *Heavenly Harvest* was aimed at raising funds for the refugee children at The Myanmar Centre: CEAM VABAWK School, KL.

The student led project turned out to be a success with the students raising RM2,000 at a sale held after the Sunday morning masses. It was a joy for the parishioners to see the students actively take part in this sale and work hard to make it a success.

An appeal was also made to students of all levels to donate pre-loved/ new toys, books, stationery and gifts.

A total of 10 boxes and bags were handed over to the Myanmar centre. The joy and gratitude that the children expressed on receiving the gifts was indeed a humbling Christmas experience for those of us who visited the centre.

### The students share their experience:

“Working on the *Heavenly Harvest Project* was very fun and incredible. We sold a lot of stuff and we earned a lot of money to donate to orphanages. I would like to thank my two catechists — Natalie and Jasmine — for guiding me throughout this project. A big thank you to all the generous donors too. Your contributions made this event a success.” — **Devan Ryan Dickson**



The refugee children with their Christmas gifts.

“*Heavenly Harvest* was a wonderful experience. It was fun to work with my friends on this project. I got to work for a good cause. It taught us to help the people in need. It made me more active. I was glad to be a part of this project.” — **Delisha Leona Lobo**

“My honest experience with *Heavenly Harvest* was that it was a really fun and a new experience to me and the responsibility was kinda hard but it was enjoyable.” — **Oushman Krishow**

“It was an amazing experience. Personally I learned a ton of skills such as leadership, communication, teamwork and overcoming challenges. Not only that, I am very

happy that we achieved our goal in this fundraising project. Empowered by the joy of giving, my experience in church fundraising was a testament to unity.” — **Emmanuelraj**

It was wonderful to see the students take charge and make a difference in the community and in doing so they also learned about the importance of teamwork, taking responsibility, leadership as well as the importance of reaching out to the poor.

We hope this serves as an encouragement for the students to conduct fundraising events for charity in your parishes and schools.

If you would like to be a blessing to the children at the Myanmar Centre, kindly reach out to: Gerad Anselem at 0133969324.



The catechism students.

## Stella Maris students share joy of yuletide at special needs school

**KUALA LUMPUR:** The annual Family Day cum Christmas at Taarana School for Special Needs education was more than the usual in 2023. Dr Sunitha Sivakumaran, principal of Taarana School first mooted the idea of inviting a carolling group to her annual event. Her first thought was Stella Maris, where she knew a Catholic teacher.

Despite the year-end holidays, the teachers and staff of Stella Maris International School returned for this “corporal work of mercy” in preparation for the coming of Christ at Christmas.

Led by President of the School, Margaret Soo, and the Head of Music faculty, Helena Fernandez, a group of teachers came together to volunteer — they practised their Christmas carols, and off they went to Taarana School on the morning of December 9, 2023. Their aim in mind was simple — to make the Christmas season special and memorable for these children,



Stella Maris carolling team at Taarana School.

however little time they had to share.

Taarana School is a unique educational centre for special children with attention deficit disorder, autism spectrum disorders, Down Syndrome and others. Both the schools share a common bond in ad-

vocating the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals, in this case it is SDG 4, which is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong opportunities for all.

With a guitar in hand, the group belt-

ed out popular renditions like *Joy to the World* and *Gloria in Excelsis Deo*, as well as all-time children favourites of *Deck the Halls* and *Feliz Navidad*. They had the audience entertained, singing along and clapping in rhythm. During the *We Wish You a Merry Christmas*, members of the choir broke out to shake hands with the children, parents and teachers. As with all Christmas dos, there was also a dancing Santa who thrilled the children to laughter.

Margaret said the visit enriched her team with a humbling experience and “reinforced the noble values which are in line with the school’s vision in inculcating care, share and love”.

There were stations activities and games for the children, and everyone was later invited to share a hefty “brunch” in the Christmas spirit of caring and sharing.

In addition to the fun and singing, the Stella Maris group came prepared with gifts for the children too.



# Seminarians and aspirants close 2023

By Linda Edward

KOTA KINABALU: Another year has passed for the young men aspiring to be priests as the academic year 2023 for the Initiation Year (IY) seminarians and Preparatory Year aspirants closed on December 14.

Archbishop John Wong presided over the Mass at the chapel of St Peter's College KK with Fr Mattheus Luta, Director for the IY Formation House, and Fr Isidore Gilbert, Director for the Aspirancy Formation House concelebrating.

These who have been journeying with them throughout the whole year were present at the Mass in support of the young men; they were the lecturers, benefactors, religious sisters, Catholic Women's League of Sacred Heart Cathedral and many others.

Six seminarians and eight aspirants are now on year end break until the end of January 2024 and will return to their respective parishes.

Fr Isidore in his speech advised the young men to talk to their bishop and parish priest



The seminarians and aspirants singing carols by candlelight during the closing event.

and to not skip Mass as "not attending Mass is a great crime in formation" he said, emphasising the importance of relying to Jesus in the Holy Eucharist.

Meanwhile, Fr Mattheus advised them to never give up and never stop believing, that they will never walk on their own and to always trust in Jesus. He shared with the audience three questions posed by the rector of St Peter's College in Kuching that

help the seminarians in their vocation discernment:

- 1) Do you have a vocation?
- 2) If you have a vocation, how have you responded to the formation?
- 3) Can I (or the bishop) entrust you with a parish with 2,000 parishioners?

Archbishop Wong said he is filled with gratitude for every progress in the formation houses and thanked the two directors

for their dedication and hardwork. He said taking care of a seminary is not easy as directors must deal with various matters. He also congratulated the seminarians and aspirants for completing another year and to the people whom are supporting for their generosity.

Clive Leo Singki of the Initiation Year, will begin his Philosophy Year in General College Penang next year. He said being in the formation house, one needs to "allow yourself to adapt to any situation". He felt that the beginning was hard but now that the academic year is closed, he felt much lighter and grateful.

Velerian of the Aspirancy Year said he is grateful for all the opportunity given in the formation house for two years that he was there.

"Coming from the interior of Nabawan, being in the formation house, I'm grateful that I can improve my English language, and get to know God from the formation process. What I'm most grateful for is that my spiritual life is being put into proper order," said Velerian. — *Catholic Sabah*

## SITIAWAN YOUTH BRING MAGIC OF CHRISTMAS TO LIFE

SITIAWAN, Perak: The catechism students from the Church of St Francis de Sales brought the magic of Christmas to life with a captivating pantomime during the 2023 Carols Night celebration at the parish hall.

Led by their dedicated catechists, these young performers beautifully enacted the "Nativity of our Lord," infusing the scene with heartfelt carol melodies.

Both the acting and singing were orchestrated by the talented students, who wholeheartedly embraced their roles in this mem-

orable performance. This experience was truly enriching for all involved, allowing the students to immerse themselves fully in the joyous spirit of the season.

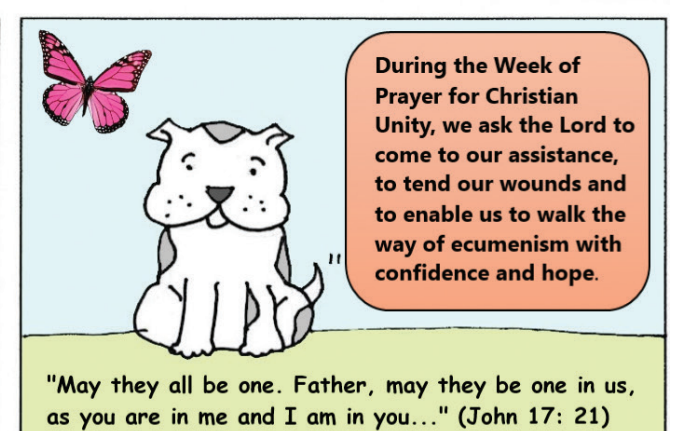
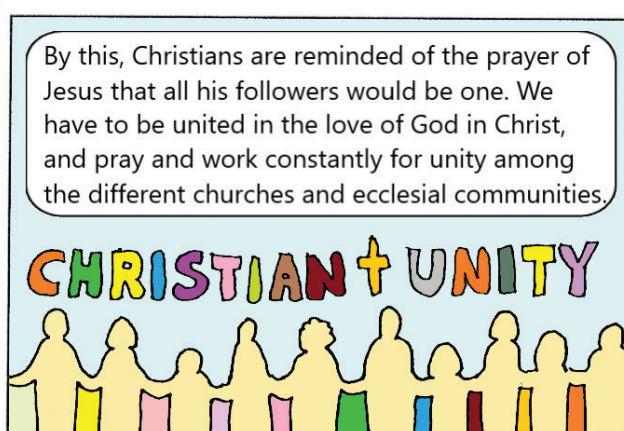
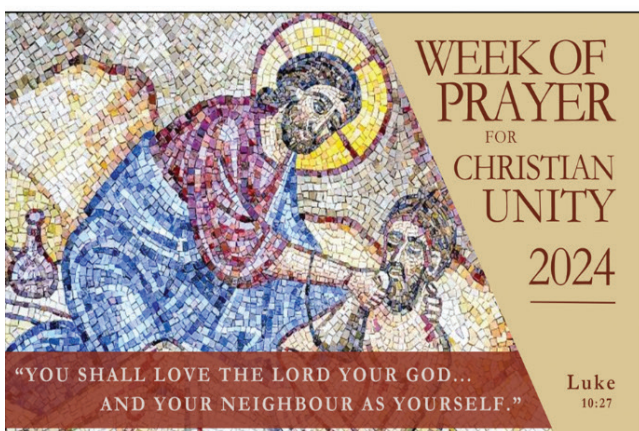
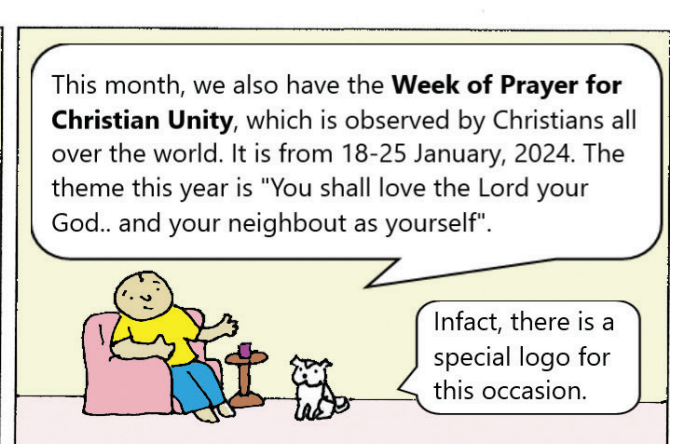
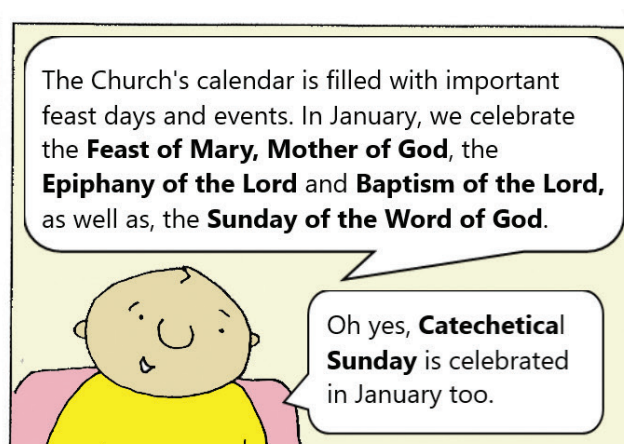
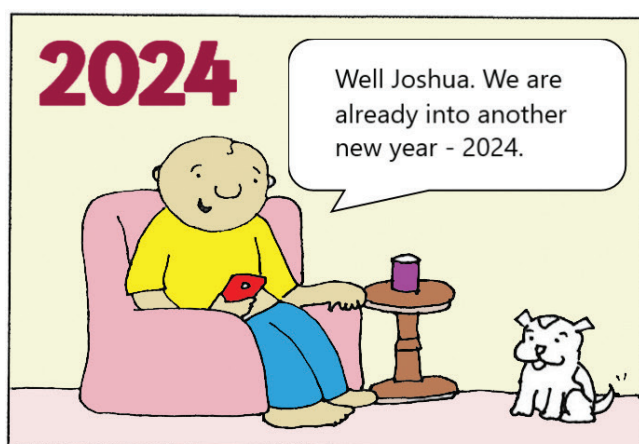
Fr Francis Andrew, the parish priest, was moved by the performance by the students. This successful outcome stemmed from the innovative "catechism through singing" sessions that he had introduced, further emphasising the power of music in education and celebration. — *By Punithamarya Anthony*



Nativity play by the Catechism students.

## THE SIMPLE LIFE...

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





# Christian villages in Nigeria reeling after Christmas attacks

WASHINGTON: Catholic and Nigerian leaders are demanding government action as Christian villages in the central Nigerian state of Plateau are reeling from a series of Christmas weekend attacks that left nearly 200 Christian Nigerians dead.

Photos obtained show victims of the attacks being buried in mass graves, underscoring the scale of the bloodshed.

"This indeed has been a gory Christmas for us," Plateau governor Caleb Mutfwang said in a statement that noted the attacks were "well-coordinated" and carried out using "heavy weapons."

Bishop Matthew Kukah of the Sokoto Diocese in northern Nigeria meanwhile called on the newly elected Nigerian president Bola Tinubu to take immediate action to protect the Nigerian people, telling him: "You have no excuses before God or the people of Nigeria" and that "neither God nor history will forgive you if you fail."

The bishop's address, which was published by the Nigeria Catholic Network, also emphasised that "Nigerians have almost lost hope" that "a government can really and truly care for them" and that "our politicians will put our interests first and find a way to deal with the cancer of corruption."

According to accounts by several local news sources and human rights activists, 198 Christians were killed in a series of terror attacks in 26 Christian communities in Plateau. The attacks began the night of Dec. 23 and continued through Christmas Day.

Maria Lozano, a representative for the papal relief group Aid to the Church in Need, said that the Christmas attacks made the weekend "one of the most violent [times] in the area's history." She said she believes that a radicalised Islamic tribe known as the Fulani is responsible for the latest violence.

The attack also marks another instance of terrorists targeting Christian Nigerians on significant Christian feast days such as in the 2022 Pentecost massacre that killed 50 Christian villagers. Lozano said

the attacks were carried out because of a combination of reasons including ethnic and religious strife between the Christian farmers and nomadic Fulani herdsmen.

She pointed out that the timing of the attacks had "religious undertones."

Lozano also emphasised that a "lack of response from the government" over the years has worsened the situation in the region and that tangible government support has been largely absent after the Christmas massacre. The absence of government support, Lozano said, has forced Christian churches to take on the "primary responsibility of providing assistance."

Nigeria's new president, Bola Tinubu, meanwhile, ordered an "immediate mobilisation of relief sources" and directed the country's security agencies to "scour every part of the zone" and "apprehend the culprits responsible for these atrocities."

Mutfwang, the Plateau governor, called on the country's security agencies to also identify those who have been "the sponsors of these attacks" so that the government can act to "unravel all those responsible."

"Until we cut off the supply in terms of sponsorship, we may never be able to see the end of this," Mutfwang said. — **By Peter Pinedo, CNA**



This image made from an AFPTV video taken in the Nigerian village of Maiyanga on Dec. 27, 2023, shows families burying in a mass grave their relatives killed in deadly attacks conducted by armed groups in central Plateau State.

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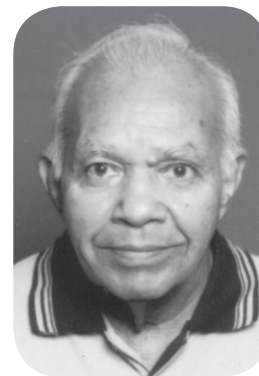
**Gary Reginald Gomez**

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**CHARLES DE SILVA**

called home to be with the Lord on 11 January 2008

Sixteen years have passed since you left us, leaving behind your sweet thoughts and memories. You may no longer be here but your memory will always be with us to love and cherish each and every day.

Dearly missed by loving wife, children, their spouses and grandchildren.

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**ANTHONY JAGANATHAN**

(8/11/1942 - 25/12/2022)

Always remembered and dearly missed by family, relatives and friends till we meet again.

### Rest in Peace



**Victoria Alexis Ratnam**

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**Beatrice Patrick Ratnam**

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**EVA JOSEPHINE EDMONDS ANDREW RAPSON EDMONDS**

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Always in our hearts, your beloved family.

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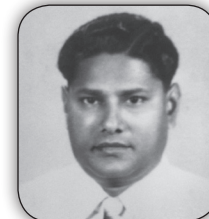
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**Michael Stanislaus**  
Departed:  
16-07-2000



**Philomena Mariadoss**  
Departed:  
10-01-2023

In our hearts you will always live  
Your love, your voice, and your smile  
Are forever imprinted in our minds  
and all the beautiful memories of you held deep in our hearts  
will be kept, loved and cherished always.

"Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever"  
(Psalms 23:6)

Deeply missed and lovingly remembered by children, in-laws, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and loved ones.

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## Pope warns his Curia against “the illusion of omniscience”



VATICAN: Sometimes a gift can send a pointed message. Such was the case with the book Pope Francis gave his top aides on December 21, 2023 during his annual gathering to exchange Christmas greetings with senior officials of the Roman Curia.

The title of the slim volume says it all and it sums up the 87-year-old Pope's vision for what the Curia should be — *Holy, not Worldly. God's Grace Saves Us from Interior Corruption*. The book, which was released in October, is actually a collection of texts that Francis has written over the years. And by giving it to the Vatican officials, he obviously wanted to again hammer home the point he's made before — that they need to be more humble.

Humility (linked to the sense of wonder) was also the theme of the more than 30-minute-long address the Pope read to his aides who were gathered in the ornate Hall of Blessings above the porch of St Peter's Basilica.

We need to be “open to the mystery of the other, ready to receive with humility what he or she wants to tell us,” Francis told the Curia officials. “Sometimes, even when speaking among ourselves, we risk being like ravenous wolves,” he warned them, insisting that listening carefully is the only way to escape the position of believing we “already know or have understood what others are about to tell us”.

In the same vein, Francis asked the prefects and secretaries of the Vatican dicasteries who were present to implement discernment, a central notion in the spirituality of his own Jesuit order. “As an art of the spiritual life, it can strip us of the illusion of omniscience, from the danger of thinking that it is enough simply to apply rules, from the temptation to carry on, even in the life of the Curia, by simply repeating what we have always done,” he said.

Francis, who has made reform of the Roman Curia one of the priorities of his pontificate, said Christian faith is not designed “to confirm our sense of security, to let us settle into comfortable religious certitudes, and to offer us quick answers to life's complex problems”. Rather, he said it “draws us out of our comfort zones”.

He spoke of a faith that “sends us on a journey”, inviting us to reflect, rather than provide ready-made answers.

The Pope's address came three days after the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith published a declaration that permits Catholic priests to offer blessings to “couples in irregular situations”. But some Church leaders around the world, including bishops, have denounced the new document as “lacking in clarity” and a cause for “confusion”.

“Sixty years after the Council, we are still debating the division between ‘progressives’ and ‘conservatives,’ but that is not the difference,” Francis told the Curia officials. “The real, central difference is

between lovers and those who have lost that initial passion,” he said. “Today we strive to kindle passion in those who have long since lost it,” the Pope added, before thanking the officials for their service to the Church.

Was it those who maintain the debates between progressives and conservatives that Francis was addressing when he spoke out against “rigid ideological positions”?

“In our service here in the Curia, it is important to keep faring forward, to keep searching and growing in our understanding of the truth, overcoming the temptation to stand still and never leave the ‘labyrinth’ of our fears,” the Pope emphasised. “Fear, rigidity and monotony make for an immobility,” he warned. “Discernment ought to help us, even in the work of the Curia, to be docile to the Holy Spirit, to choose procedures and make decisions based not on worldly criteria, or simply by applying rules, but in accordance with the Gospel.”

— **By Loup Besmond de Senville, LCI**  
(<https://international.la-croix.com/>)

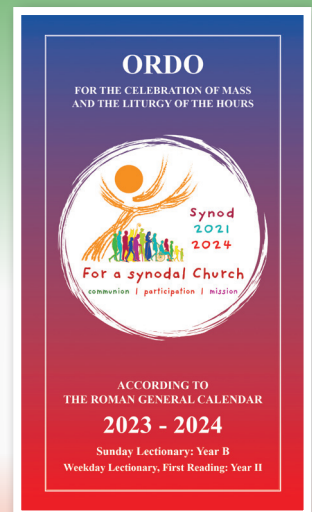


Following his custom, Pope Francis gives Vatican officials books as a Christmas gift during his meeting with cardinals of the Roman Curia. (Vatican Media)



Pope Francis gives his annual Christmas address to the cardinals who work in Vatican offices on December 21, 2023, in the gilded Hall of Benediction at the Vatican. (Vatican Media)

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*Thanksgiving  
Solemn Mass*

**MONDAY**  
**8 JAN 2024**  
**6.00 P.M.**

MINOR BASILICA  
OF  
ST. ANNE,  
BUKIT MERTAJAM,  
PENANG,  
MALAYSIA

**LET US JOIN TOGETHER AS ONE UNIVERSAL CHURCH  
TO GIVE THANKS AND CELEBRATE  
THE APPOINTMENT OF H. EM. CARDINAL SEBASTIAN FRANCIS  
TO THE COLLEGE OF CARDINALS**

Thanksgiving Mass Celebrated by His Eminence Cardinal Sebastian Francis  
together with his brother bishops  
from the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia - Singapore - Brunei,  
the Clergy, Religious, Lay Faithful and all People of Goodwill