

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.

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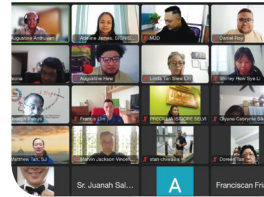
But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation)

Heb 9:11



Sandakan diocese to focus on family

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Enhancing the ability to communicate meaningfully on social media

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Pope Francis: It's a manner of communicating my ministry

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# 'Support those struggling to find hope'



**VATICAN: In a message to participants at the first International Interfaith Symposium on Palliative Care, Pope Francis underscored the importance of hope in confronting life's challenges, including serious illness and the end of life.**

"Hope is what gives us strength in the face of questions raised by life's challenges, difficulties, and anxieties, said the pontiff.

Reflecting on the theme of the gathering held in Toronto, Canada – *Towards a Narrative of Hope* – Pope Francis says, "As members of the human family and especially as believers, we are called to accompany, with love and compassion, those who struggle and have difficulty finding reasons for hope."

He emphasised that as members of the human family and believers, there is a call to support those struggling to find hope amid life's difficulties (cf. 1 Peter 3:15). "Especially those who are suffering from sickness and approaching death, the Pope continued, "need the witness of hope provided by those who care for them and who remain at their side."

He goes on to explain that palliative care, in attempting to lessen the burden of suffering is a "concrete sign of closeness and solidarity to those who are suffering," and can help those facing the end of life and their families and loved ones "to accept the vulnerability, frailty, and finitude that mark human life in this world."

In his message, which was read on the opening night of the Symposium by the apostolic nuncio to Canada, Archbishop Ivan Jurkovic, Pope Francis carefully

distinguishes between "authentic palliative care" and euthanasia, "which is never a source of hope or genuine concern for the sick and dying."

Instead, he says, euthanasia "is a failure of love, a reflection of the throwaway culture," despite being presented, falsely, as "a form of compassion." True compassion does not involve ending someone's life, but being willing to accompany them and share in their physical, emotional, psychological, or spiritual suffering.

As such, it affirms "the fundamental and inviolable dignity of every person, especially the dying" and helps them "to accept the inevitable moment of passage from this life to eternal life."

Believers especially can offer a perspective that provides a deeper understanding of "illness, suffering, and death, seeing them as part of the mystery of divine providence [and] a means of sanctification," the Pope said.

A faith perspective can likewise help those at the end of their lives find comfort in and reconciliation with God and with others, especially family members and loved ones.

Pope Francis went on to encourage symposium participants, saying their service is important, "even essential, in helping the sick and dying to realise that they are not isolated or alone, that their lives are not a burden, and that they remain inherently valuable in the eyes of God, and united to us by bonds of communion."

The Holy Father concluded his message by expressing his hope that the Symposium's deliberations will help participants "to persevere in love, to give hope to those at the end of life, and to further the building of a more just and fraternal society." — *Vatican News*

● See more on back page

## THE JUBILEE PRAYER

Father in heaven,  
may the faith you have given us  
in your son, Jesus Christ, our brother,  
and the flame of charity enkindled  
in our hearts by the Holy Spirit,  
reawaken in us the blessed hope  
for the coming of your Kingdom.  
May your grace transform us  
into tireless cultivators of the seeds of the Gospel.  
May those seeds transform from within both  
humanity and the whole cosmos in the sure  
expectation of a new heaven and a new earth,  
when, with the powers of Evil vanquished,  
your glory will shine eternally.  
May the grace of the Jubilee reawaken in us,  
Pilgrims of Hope, a yearning for the  
treasures of heaven.  
May that same grace spread the joy and peace  
of our Redeemer throughout the earth.  
To you our God, eternally blessed,  
be glory and praise for ever.  
Amen



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## COMMENTARY

## Open to the Mystery, caring for the faith of ordinary people

**T**he Church's Magisterium protects the faith of simple believers... That is its democratic mission. It is meant to give a voice to those who have none." These words of then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger come to mind after reading the new norms on alleged supernatural phenomena, published by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith.

This document reflects the pastoral approach that characterises Pope Francis' pontificate and addresses the need to resolve difficulties, dead ends, and open contradictions that have arisen over the past 50 years, with sometimes conflicting pronouncements on the same phenomenon.

The faith of simple believers is protected, firstly, because the text clearly states that the Revelation ended with the death of the last Apostle, and that no believer is obliged to believe in apparitions or other alleged supernatural phenomena, even in cases in which they were approved and explicitly declared supernatural by the ecclesiastic authority.

At the same time, there is an acknowledgement that in many cases, these exceptional manifestations resulted in an abundance of spiritual fruits and growth in the faith. Thus, the authority of the Church should not have

an *a priori* negative judgment, as if God and the Virgin Mary needed the authorisation of the curia or a Vatican Dicastery to manifest themselves.

The intention of protecting the faith of simple believers from illusions, fanaticism, fraud, and religious marketing, as well as from the obsession with chasing apocalyptic messages and forgetting the essentials of the Gospel, is also very clear.

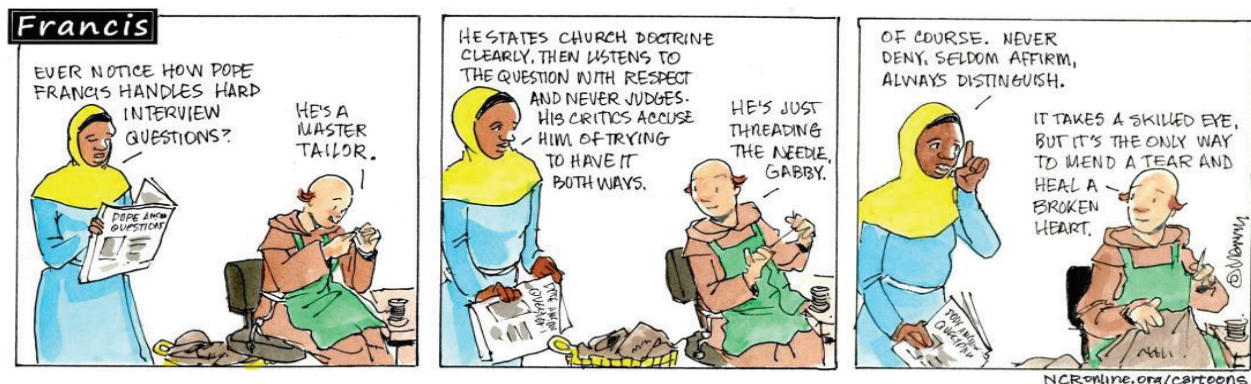
The decision to no longer make demanding declarations regarding the authenticity and supernaturalness of phenomena — except in very rare cases involving the authority of the Successor of Peter — is striking. This too is a way to protect the faith of the People of God, allowing them more freedom to express their devotions and participate in pilgrimages when there are no reasons to advise against them. It involves continuing to study the phenomena, supporting visionaries without leaving them alone and adrift (as has unfortunately happened) and conducting pastoral and catechetical activities that help bring about good spiritual fruits.

The new norms introduce six categories of final judgments on alleged phenomena, replacing the previous three. Under the old 1978

norms, the judgment could conclude with a declaration of supernaturalness (*constat de supernaturalitate*), a negative declaration but one that is open to possible further developments (*non constat de supernaturalitate*), or a clearly negative declaration when *non-supernaturalness* was evident (*constat de non supernaturalitate*). There are now more possibilities and nuances, always aimed at protecting the faith of simple believers. The most positive final judgment in the new norms is the  *nihil obstat*, a clearance that does not force the Church to pronounce herself on supernaturalness, but attests that positive elements prevail, making it a phenomenon to be promoted.

What happened in recent decades also helps explain why, from now on, the involvement of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith will always be required, and the diocesan bishop will always make pronouncements in agreement with the Holy See. This measure became necessary because of contradictory pronouncements in the recent past and the now-evident impossibility of confining these phenomena to the local level. — **By Andrea Tornielli, Vatican News**

● See also page 9



## “...My body...My blood...”

Dear Beloved Catholics; Wake up!

It's the Solemnity of Corpus Christi, the greatest miracle that Christ ever worked on earth... *My Body...My Blood!*

Do you really believe in God? Do you truly believe that Our Lord, truly, and substantially is present in the Eucharist; do you believe in the Real Presence?

If you don't, I shall invite you to explore this mystery with intellectual honesty and sincerity of your heart. And if you do, then live up to the faith! Where is the fruit of your action? The external signs of love should come from the heart and find expression in the testimony of a Christian life. If we have been renewed by receiving our Lord's body, we should show it.

Have you made disciples, did you bring the Good News to others and attract them to know Christ, especially to your family, children, friends and acquaintances; did you communicate the language of love to build GOD's kingdom?

On the feast of Corpus Christi, let us take God seriously in our lives, let us come together to consider the depths of our Lord's love for us, which has led Him to stay with us, hidden under the appearances of the Blessed Sacrament.

The Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, also known as the Feast of Corpus Christi, is a celebration of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. On this day, we recall the institution of the

Eucharist at the Last Supper. When our Lord instituted the Eucharist during the last supper, night had already fallen. The world had fallen into darkness, for the old rites, God's infinite mercy to mankind, were going to be brought to fulfilment. The way was opening to a new Beginning.

We too have to prepare for this new Beginning. Everything harmful, dangerous or useless has to be thrown away — discouragement, indifference, dissension and bitterness, sadness, cowardice, disillusion. We have been given a new energy, strong new roots grafted onto our Lord — the Power of the Resurrection! We must not return to the old leaven, for now we have the bread which lasts forever.

Let us ask our Lord then to make us souls devoted to the Blessed Eucharist, so that our relationship with Him brings forth joy and serenity and a desire for justice and goodness. In this way we will make it easier for others to recognise Christ; we will put Christ at the centre of all human activities.

We should always remember that if there is no sowing there is no harvest. That is why we need to sow the Word of God generously, to make Christ known to men so that they hunger for Him. Corpus Christi — the feast of the bread of life — is a good opportunity to reflect on the hunger which people suffer: hunger for truth, for justice, for unity and for peace.

Christ's way can be summed up in one word: love. If we are to love, we must have

a big heart and share the concerns of those around us. We must be able to forgive and understand; we must sacrifice ourselves, with Christ, for all souls. If we love with Christ's heart, we will learn to serve others and we will defend the truth clearly, lovingly. If we are to love in this way, we need to root out of our individual lives everything that is an obstacle to Christ's life in us.

We may sometimes be tempted to think that this is very nice but an impossible dream. There is nothing impossible for God. The apostolic zeal which Christ has put in our hearts must not be diminished or extinguished by a false humility. Sometimes we experience the weight of our personal failings, but our Lord takes into account our mistakes. In His merciful gaze He realises that we are creatures with limitations, weaknesses and imperfections, that we are inclined to sin. But He tells us to fight and “to remain in Him”, to acknowledge our weaknesses, not to be afraid.

By “remaining in Him” we are led to live the divine life — the inception of personal holiness, is the one cure that overcomes any difficulty. Being holy means living exactly as our Father in heaven wants us to live. You will say that it is difficult. It is. What is not?

On the other hand, it is also easy, it is within our reach, the medicine is always at hand. It is Jesus, present in the most holy Eucharist — *My grace is sufficient for you!*

Don't be afraid to know your real self. If

## Reflecting on our Sunday Readings

with Fr William Pillai

## Corpus Christi (B)

Readings: Exodus 24:3-8;

Hebrews 9:11-15

Gospel: Mark 14:12-16, 22-26

you feel depressed, lost and powerless, then is the time to abandon yourself completely and obediently into God's hands.

Even in moments when we see our limitations clearly, we can and should look at God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, and realise that we share in God's own life. We have to face up to our obligations and we will find in Jesus the love and the stimulus we need to understand other people's faults and overcome our own. In this way even depression — yours, mine, anyone's — can also be a pillar for the kingdom of Christ.

Let us recognise our infirmity but confess the power of God. The Christian life has to be imbued with optimism, joy and the strong conviction that our Lord wishes to make use of us for the greater Glory of God.

Let us celebrate this feast by savouring, in the intimacy of your soul, the infinite goodness of God, realise that Christ is going to make Himself really present in the host, with His Body, His Blood, His Soul and His Divinity. Adore Him reverently.





## KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

### Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

#### June

- 1 **Feast – Church of Jesus Caritas, Kepong**
- 2 **Confirmation – Church of St Peter & Paul, Banting**
- 7 **Santification of Priests – Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, KL**
- 9 **Confirmation – Church of St Francis Xavier, PJ**
- 9 **Feast – Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, KL**
- 13 **Yayasan Tan Sri Vendargon Board Meeting**
- 16 **Confirmation – Chapel of Kristus Aman, TTDI**



## MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

### Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

#### June

- 14-16 **Triduum and Feast – Church of St Anthony, Cha'ah**

# Let us replant the seeds of unity

KUALA LUMPUR: Venerable Datuk K. Sri Dhammaratana, the Buddhist chief high priest of Malaysia, has called for increased interfaith activities to promote unity and harmony within the country.

Speaking at the Malaysia National Wesak Hi-Tea 2024 gathering at the Buddhist Maha Vihara Temple in Brickfields on May 19, Sri Dhammaratana emphasised the importance of interfaith gatherings at various houses of worship.

He urged society to normalise such events as part of a concerted effort to “replant the seeds of unity among the younger generation.” Sri Dhammaratana stressed that establishing a solid foundation for unity and harmony requires more than dialogue sessions and meetings, advocating for activities that go beyond mere discussions and meals.

“I call upon all our brothers and sisters to come together once in a while, whether at mosques, neighbourhoods, churches, or Hindu temples, to engage in meaningful discussions on how to strengthen our relationships for the long term,” he said. “By generating ideas that we can put into practice, we can educate the next generation and ensure a sustainable future.”

The high tea gathering marked the first grand open house event at the temple since the pandemic, symbolising unity and a strong sense of family not limited to the Buddhist community alone.



Archbishop Julian Leow with some of the religious leaders and representatives at the Malaysia National Wesak Hi-Tea 2024 gathering at the Buddhist Maha Vihara Temple in Brickfields on May 19.

The event also saw the attendance of Deputy National Unity Minister Saraswathy Kandasami and leaders and representatives from various religious groups in Malaysia, including Most Rev Julian Leow, Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur.

Sri Dhammaratana highlighted the important role of these practices in initiating change, especially as the older generation fades away. “We must make a concerted effort to replant the seeds of unity before we leave this world, ensuring that our legacy endures for future generations. In our pursuit of peace and harmony, we must organise well-planned activities that contribute to the development of a healthy and prosperous society.”

In a recent discussion with Archbishop Julian, Sri Dhammaratana mentioned that they are considering a visit to Pope Francis in Singapore during his

upcoming trip to Asia to rekindle relationships post-COVID-19, emphasising the importance of nurturing relationships with all individuals.

Archbishop Julian echoed these sentiments, stating, “Besides the warmth of being together as Malaysians of all races and religions, we are also one with Buddhists of many nations celebrating this auspicious Wesak Day. There is so much more we can achieve together for humanity, in areas of ecology, justice, peace, and harmony if we concentrate on what unites rather than what divides us.”

Deputy Minister Saraswathy called on Malaysians to “protect our cause,” emphasising the importance of unity and tolerance. “The voice of unity in Malaysia reverberates heavily with respect and tolerance. Malaysians in general

are peaceful people. We are gentle with one another. We must protect our cause. We Malaysians have lived together for so long in harmony, where a variety of colours, voices, and human stories have come together in the epic rhythm of togetherness. Unity in Malaysia tears apart the curtain of misunderstanding, revealing that despite our differences, we are in an irreplaceable symphony on the stage of life.”

She also highlighted her recent visits to a Hindu temple and a mosque in Penang, followed by the Buddhist temple event in Kuala Lumpur, underscoring the importance of fostering harmony among various religious communities. “These visits align with our objectives to enhance national unity and integration, guided by the principles of the Malaysian Constitution and the *Rukun Negara*,” she said.



## Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #175

**F12**  
MJD NEWS  
UPDATES

### Greetings dear friends of MJD,

Interesting facts! The Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) announced that our population has reached 34 million, from 33.2 million in 2023. Of the total, 90 per cent are citizens and the rest (3.4 million) being non-citizens. The male-female ratio stands at 111:100. The racial composition is made up of 57.9 per cent Malays, 22.6 per cent Chinese, 6.6 per cent Indians and 12.2 per cent other Bumiputras. Live birth rates have decreased. National planning and development programmes rely on these findings. What about us? Churches, ministries and parishes? Do we take time to read the signs and sciences of the times?

**Lonely Times:** *Nas Daily* founder and CEO, Nuseir Yassin, an Israeli Palestinian, famous for his one-minute YouTube videos, with over 60 million followers across the world, has one mission: To Bring People Together. He is calling on all peacemakers to believe in the long term, on persevering on what brings people together. He pointed out that six out of seven assassinations in the last few years, were assassinations of leaders who stood for peace. Peacemakers believe in reconciliation for peace and live “*Fratelli Tutti*” that “all are brothers and sisters”. And it is a lonely walk. Most prefer to see differences, discrimination and division.

Blessed are the lonely peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God.

### A Thought For The Week: The Firefly

A snake began to chase a firefly that only lived to shine. The firefly stopped and said to the snake: “Can I ask you three questions?” The snake said, “Yes.”

“Do I belong to your food chain?” The snake said, “No.”

“Did I do anything to you?” The snake said, “No.”

“Then why do you wanna devour me?” The snake replied, “Cause I can’t stand to see you shine.”

A lesson from the firefly: Often, some people can’t stand to see you shine, and that’s why they act like snakes, silent and ready to destroy you! Continue to shine.

### Announcements For The Week:

1. The Family Life Ministry has initiated the **Special Children’s Parents Support Group** for the children and their parents. Contact: Veronica Dass, Tel: 016 2095001.
2. The **Vocation Camp in Mandarin**, held at St Louis Kluang attracted 13 young men from the parishes in the diocese.
3. Be watchful. Be safe. Another wave of **COVID-19** reported in Singapore and locally.
4. **Papal visit to Singapore:** Only 100

tickets are offered to each diocese. The Singaporeans have to ballot for a seat in the National Stadium.

5. Coming up NEXT? **Mangrove Project** with Caritas-CJC MJD in July!

6. The **7th Kursus Evangelisasi Peribadi (KEP)** takes off on July 7! The peninsula prepares for its August Regional Pastoral Assembly or known as **PMPC5**.

### QnQ? Q asks:

**Does praying for vocations make any difference?**

The Lord said: Pray that the Lord of the Harvest sends more labourers into the harvest. Pray! Pray! Pray!

The first call is to follow Christ. It is a call to discipleship, to be a follower. Only a good follower turns out to be a good leader. As we build our lives with the Lord, He invites us to give one’s self to Him, and His people. The first prayer is “Lord use me”. Be available to Him.

Then, we pray for more labourers. Men and women for the Lord’s Vineyard. Pray for the Lord to send men and women with an authentic sense of call and mission.

Pray the prayer below, promoted by our diocesan Vocation Promotion Team in your private prayer, family prayer, group prayer and BECs.

*Jesus, I want to be happy in this life.  
And spend eternity with you in the life*

*to come.*

*From the first moment of my existence,  
you knew my vocation.*

*Please help me to discover your plan  
for my life. Help me to know myself. Help  
me to overcome my fear. Help me to want  
what you want. Help me to trust you  
completely.*

*Send your Holy Spirit into my mind  
and heart so I can see the gifts you have  
given me and hear your call to serve the  
Church.*

*Mary Mother of God, pray for me, that  
I can discover my vocation and have the  
courage to respond. Amen.*

**Being strong. Finishing strong.** It is in the Holy Spirit. Pope Francis says: “This is what the anointing of the Holy Spirit foresees: “without His strength, man has nothing (cf. Sequence for Pentecost). Without the power of the Holy Spirit we can do nothing: it is the Spirit who gives us the power to go forth. As Jesus’ entire life was enlivened by the Spirit, so too is the life of the Church and of each of her members under the guidance of the same Spirit.”

**Something to tickle you:** All the darkness in the world cannot extinguish the light of a single candle.” — **St Francis of Assisi**

*Bernard*  
**Bishop Bernard Paul**



# Sandakan Diocese to focus on FAMILY

SANDAKAN: The Diocese of Sandakan convened its third Diocesan Pastoral Assembly from May 3 to May 5, marking a significant gathering for the local Catholic community.

The assembly commenced with a Mass celebrated by Bishop Julius Dusin Gitom and concelebrated by the clergy of the diocese. The timing of the assembly coincided with the Feast of Sts Philip and James (the Less). In his homily, Bishop Julius exhorted the delegates to draw inspiration from these saints, emphasising the importance of building a Christian community and leading others to Christ. He underscored the need for evangelism and courageous witness, stressing that true leadership is characterised by humility rather than status or prestige. He further encouraged the delegates to embody the simplicity and humility exemplified by St Teresa of Calcutta.

The theme of humility was reinforced during the orientation session, centred around *Buka Kasut*, a practice of removing shoes before entering a house, symbolising a relinquishing of status and prestige. This session aimed to prepare the delegates to be led by the Holy Spirit throughout the assembly.

On the second day, guest speaker Fr Alvin Ng delivered two sessions on synodality — *Synodality in the Biblical Context* and *Synodality: Journeying Together in the Diocese of Sandakan*. Fr Alvin emphasised that the concepts presented were reminders of the



Bishop Julius Gitom Dusin with the clergy, religious and lay leaders of the Diocese of Sandakan.

core essence of synodality.

The third day began with the Body Prayer, followed by the presentation of the diocesan report on Ecology, which was the focus of the diocese from June 2023 to May 2024. After discussions on the report, Fr David Garaman led a session titled *Melangkah ke Hadapan* (Steps Forward), transitioning the focus from ecological issues to family matters in preparation for the Malaysian Pastoral Assembly 2026 (MPC 2026). He emphasised that the Diocesan Pastoral Plan remains central to the diocese's mission and serves as a catalyst for future initiatives.

Anna Teresa outlined a strategic plan for the diocese's focus on the family from June 2024 to May 2025. The plan includes seven steps to be completed before the fourth Diocesan Pastoral Assembly in May 2025:

- Study Day on *Amoris Laetitia*



During one of the group sessions.

- Parish Pastoral Assembly
- Development of a Pastoral Plan for the family
- Implementation of the plan
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Submission of reports to the Diocesan

Focus Team

- Diocesan Pastoral Assembly

The assembly concluded with Mass, once again celebrated by Bishop Julius, marking the end of a productive and spiritually enriching gathering for the diocese.

## Understanding the consequences of sin

KUCHING: As part of their annual series of talks on healing of families, Servant Communities Emmaus conducted a Healing of Families (HoF) Seminar at the Blessed Sacrament Church Hall recently.



Pauline Lim from the Emmaus Teaching Ministry giving one of the sessions.

In his opening address at the HoF seminar, rector of BSC, Fr Leonard Yap, emphasised the importance of receiving the "Bread of Life – the Eucharist".

The Eucharist is one of the sacraments of healing and the "source of our Christian life" given by Jesus himself at Mass and is "God's love", Fr Leonard stressed. The participants should ask the Holy Spirit for guidance to discover their "hunger" for what is missing in their lives.

The HoF talks presented by members of Emmaus Teaching Ministry, covered topics on *Spiritual Warfare*, *Image of God*, *Free Will*, *the Cardinal Points*, *the Access Points*, *Scriptures* and *Christ Our Way Out*.

The seminar participants, many who were attending for the first time, came with mixed feelings, but went home fired up and hopeful with the knowledge that curses, sins and consequences of sins of their ancestors can be healed because of God's compassionate love and mercy. They learnt that unforgiveness, trauma and family bondage can contribute to the challenges plaguing their lives. — *Today's Catholic*

## New office bearers for ECMI

SIBU: The recollection and election for new office bearers of the Episcopal Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerants (ECMI) brought together 23 official representatives and observers from ten dioceses and a vicariate at the *Laudato Si'* Centre from May 6-9. These delegates represented their diocesan ministries for migrants and itinerants. ECMI President, Bishop Bernard Paul of the Diocese of Malacca Johore, was also present.

The first day commenced with two speakers, Fr Arin Sugit from the Apostolic Vicariate of Brunei Darussalam and Fr Raphael Samosir, OFM Cap from the Diocese of Sibiu, who shared insights on reflecting on God's guiding hand throughout their ministry and listening to God, respectively.

Fr Arin emphasised the importance of recognising God's presence in the challenges faced in ministry, urging reflection on whether one believes in God's care amidst struggles. Fr Raphael stressed the

need to listen attentively, especially to the stories of migrants, as each represents the face of God. He prompted reflection on how members read or listen to the Word of God.

Bishop Bernard concluded the session by encouraging personal reflection, focusing on whether one's prayer leads to love for God and others, whether love discriminates, and whether there is a spirit of communion treating all as brothers and sisters.

The following day featured reports from clusters and the election of new office bearers. Dioceses from Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei were grouped into five clusters based on shared migrant issues. Peninsular Cluster, Sarawak Cluster, Sabah Cluster, Singapore Cluster and Brunei Cluster. Bishop Bernard explained that the clustering of dioceses was formulated when ECMI realised that, for the dioceses such as in Sabah, they have similar issues related to migrants. However, issues faced

by migrants in Peninsular are different, and as such, methods of handling their issues are different.

The new ECMI Office Bearers for 2024-26 are:

**Chairperson:**

**Dionysius Richard Ellai**  
(Diocese of Miri)

**Vice-Chairperson: Peter Zeter**  
(Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu)

**Secretary: Sebastian Lachamanan**  
(Diocese of Penang)

There will be two additional executive committee members for Singapore and Brunei.

Bishop Bernard emphasised the importance of collaboration and support among dioceses, noting that while the ministry may involve challenges, perseverance leads to dedication and faithfulness. He highlighted the significance of the cluster groups in addressing diverse migrant issues.



Bishop Bernard Paul and Bishop Joseph Hii with the members of the Episcopal Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerants.



# Building an Inclusive, Caring and United parish community

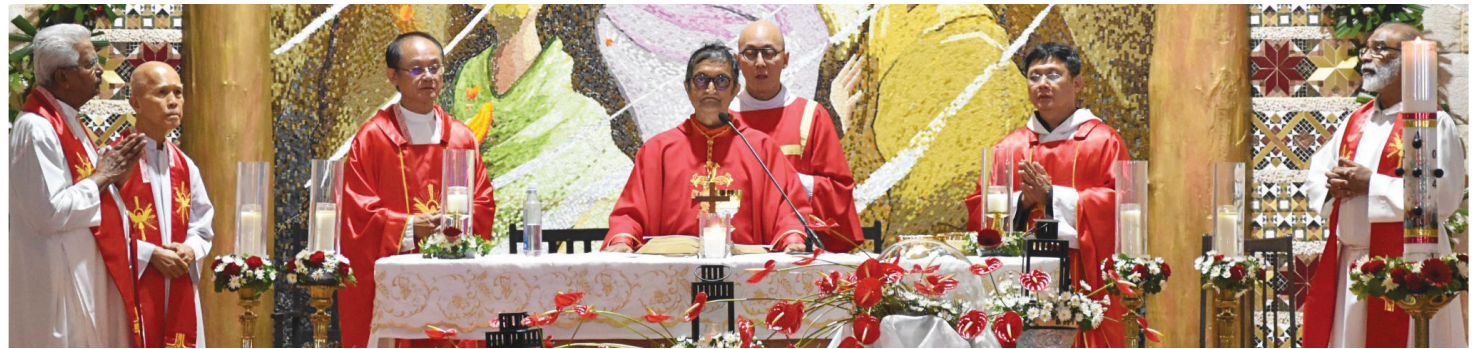
PENANG: This year marked a unique Pentecost and parish feast day for the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit in Penang as it was infused with a concerted movement themed *In God, all are one* to foster a strongly inclusive, caring, and united parish community as inspired by the findings from their Parish Pastoral Assembly and a further development from their Parish Leaders Formation Programme.

As the parish priest, Fr Joachim Robert, is currently attending a short course in Rome, Fr Fabian Dicom, the priest-in-residence at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, conceptualised the programme and led its implementation by working in close collaboration with a dedicated team and members of the Parish Council, who tirelessly contributed to ensuring the event's success.

During the 10-days leading up to Pentecost, the cathedral was blessed with the wisdom of dynamic guest presiders and preachers namely Fr Larry Tan, SJ; Fr Simon Labrooy; and the priests who celebrated the Triduum: Fr Paul Kee, CSsR; Fr Philip Tay, OCD; Msgr Henry Rajoo; and Fr Ryan Innas.

Deacon Andrew Loh, the current parish administrator, assisted at all the Masses, and Fr Francis Anthony's unwavering dedication was truly inspiring, as he concelebrated at the Masses.

The Masses and the Novena to the Holy Spirit, extending from the Ascension Vigil to Pentecost Sunday, were animated by the different ministry clusters of the parish. The liturgy and the preaching throughout focused on the importance of: **Inclusivity** — remind-



Cardinal Sebastian Francis celebrating the feast day Mass.

ing everyone that just as Jesus Christ valued every person, we must also respect and care for others, so that no one in the parish community feels excluded and rejected; being **Caring** — just as Jesus cares for all of us, we must learn to genuinely care for everyone and actively seek out opportunities to extend kindness and compassion; and being **United** — taking after the perfect example of unity in the Holy Trinity, we must celebrate the diversity of gifts, talents, and perspectives that every parishioner brings, fostering relationships based on love, compassion, mutual respect, and solidarity.

Cardinal Sebastian Francis, the Bishop of Penang who was the main celebrant of the Pentecost and the parish feast day Mass, delivered the message of *Fratelli Tutti* — that we are all brothers and sisters in this one world, one earth and one creation; and exhorted all to not be afraid of the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Truth who searches the depths of all things, reveals all things and will teach us all things.

The celebration concluded with a fellow-



The parishioners in prayer.

ship lunch that included special guests: the neighbours residing around the Cathedral, beneficiaries of the Sharing Hope and Agape

Meal programme — a parish outreach initiative for the poor — and all those who joined the celebration from near and far.

## Catechism of the Catholic Church made easy

RAWANG: On January 29, twenty-five members of the Church of St Jude embarked on an extraordinary journey. Unaware of the surprises in store for them, they committed to a 12-week programme, meeting every Monday evening from 8.00 to 9.00pm.

Richard Ganesh, a knowledgeable catechist hailing from Sentul, helped us discover the beauty of Scripture as revealed through the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC). It was indeed an adventure into the deposit of faith which was entrusted to the Church by God.

Richard, when asked about his arduous task, said, "Any study on the CCC can be a challenging and daunting experience. The language used, the style and the content itself proves challenging for all."

"The 12-week journey was really not sufficient given the fact that the CCC is so extensive. Nevertheless, the patience, determination and faithfulness of all the participants was a joy to behold."

When asked 'why the CCC', he said, "I was anxiously waiting for the right time to embark on this CCC journey as I felt that our Catholic

brethren, especially the catechists, must discover the depth and majesty of the Church's teachings.

"Coupled with the fact that catechism is deeply rooted in Scripture, it provides an opportunity for us to deepen our spirituality and understanding of our own faith."

Antony, one of the participants, said, "What felt heavy and laborious in the beginning, was made easy by Richard."

Brenda Abigail, another participant, who follows Richard and his wife for all sessions, said, "The journey was amazing as it opened up a new portal for us to appreciate how cohesive and complete the catechism is in its structure and content."

Like Antony and Brenda, many of the participants felt contented and fulfilled at the end of the session.

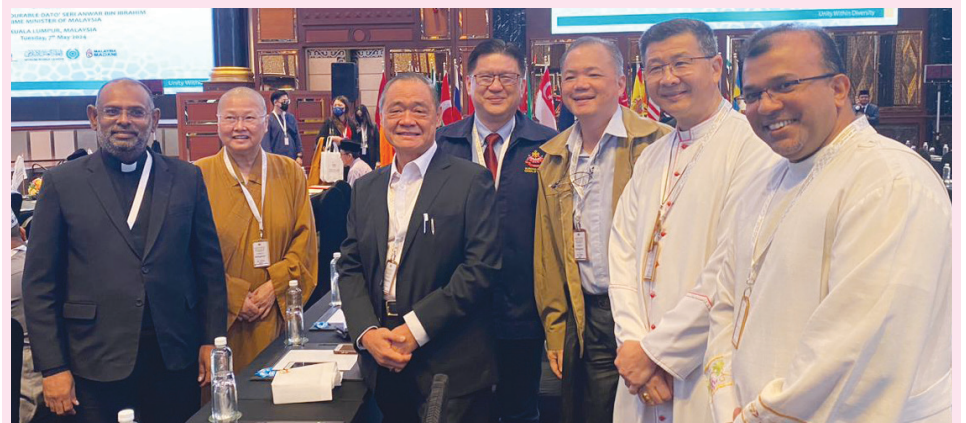
Each session ended with a simple fellowship. Many thanks to parish priest Fr Vincent Thomas who has always encouraged such formations to take place.

The session ended on May 6. — **By Mercy Almeida Stellus**



Richard Ganesh (seated centre) with the participants.

## Global religious leaders attend peace conference



Fr George Harrison (right) and Archbishop Julian Leow with some of the representatives of the faith groups at the International Conference of Religious Leaders 2024 which was held at the Sunway Resort Hotel, Petaling Jaya on May 7 and 8, 2024.

KUALA LUMPUR: The inaugural International Conference of Religious Leaders 2024, jointly organised by the Government of Malaysia and the Muslim World League (MWL), concluded successfully with over 2,000 participants from 57 countries.

The event, held from May 7 to 8, saw representatives from various faiths, including Most Rev Julian Leow, Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur, and Fr George Harrison, parish priest of the Church of the Divine Mercy, Shah Alam.

Malaysian Prime Minister YAB Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim presided over the opening ceremony. In his keynote address, the Prime Minister emphasised the conference's goal of creating a platform for international religious leaders and experts to share insights and strategies for promoting global peace.

H.E. Sheikh Dr Mohammad Abdulkarim Al-Issa, Secretary-General of the MWL, highlighted the importance of the conference in bridging religious and civilisational divides, fostering unity, and mitigating conflicts, especially in light of the ongoing situation in Palestine.

Reflecting on his experience at the conference, Fr George Harrison said, "The Catholic Church, guided by the teachings of the Gospel and the exhortations of Pope Francis in *Fratelli Tutti*, challenges us to consider whether we want to be true neighbours to others. We must continue our efforts in building bridges, fostering hospitality and friendship, and always work for the common good, bringing peace and harmony to all."



# CDM parish launches sign language course to empower ministries

SHAH ALAM: The Parish Integral Human Development Ministry (PIHDM) of the Church of the Divine Mercy recently began its first session of a ten-week basic sign language course, facilitated by our dedicated Catholic Ministry for the Deaf.

Eighteen participants from various ministries, directly involved in works of mercy through PIHDM, signed up for the course. These include the Ministry of the Poor, Migrant Ministry, Hospitality Ministry, Catechetical Ministry, Medical Team, and KUBM.

As an integral ministry focused on human development, sign language symbolises a seed of understanding and compassion that needed to be planted. It fosters an environment where every voice — whether heard audibly or seen through signing — is valued and acknowledged. Within this sacred space, the language of the heart resonates louder than any spoken words could convey.

“PIHDM represents a ministry characterised by genuineness, compassion, and optimism. Engaging with this ministry serves

as a poignant reminder that our individual paths don’t have to confine us; rather, they can serve as sources of resilience, enabling us to offer kindness and understanding to others who are struggling,” said Stephen John, who heads the PIHDM at the Church of the Divine Mercy (CDM).

He further emphasised that incorporating sign language into PIHDM is paramount. Why? Because it cultivates empowerment. Directly engaging with the deaf community, instead of relying on intermediaries, fosters a deep sense of empowerment and enables prompt responses.

During the sessions, participants embarked on a journey of discovery, exploring the intricate art of sign language that communicates meaning without the use of spoken words. Amidst moments of laughter and determination, attendees embraced the challenge of learning unfamiliar signs, their fingers tracing shapes and movements with newfound purpose.

We are grateful for the support and encouragement extended by CDM’s



PIHDM members learning to sign.

parish priest, Fr George Harrison, as well as Fr Michael Chua for his words of encouragement.

Our heartfelt appreciation goes to the team from the Catholic Ministry for the Deaf,

particularly coordinator Melina Sylvia Ann, and her dynamic team members Max Lim, Geraldine John, Anthony Lim, and Adrienne Lim, whose dedication and enthusiasm made this endeavour possible.

## An enriching pilgrimage through Negeri district

KUALA LUMPUR: The BEC of St Monica from the Church of Christ the Light, Desa Jaya embarked on a one-day pilgrimage to three churches in the Negeri district on May 11. The group of over 40 members, began their journey with a blessing and spiritual send-off from their parish priest, Fr Peter Anthoney.

The first stop was the Church of St John Marie Vianney, Tampin where Fr Albet Arockiasamy led the group in confession, anointing with Holy Oil, and blessings with a relic cross containing a part of the Holy Cross of Jerusalem. During Mass, Fr Albet honoured all mothers with affection in recognition of Mother’s Day.

Next, at the Church of the Immaculate Conception in Port Dickson, Fr Edwin Peter and his parishioners warmly



The BEC members at the Church of St John Marie Vianney, Tampin.

welcomed the pilgrims. Joseph, who has served the parish for 48 years, shared the rich history of the church. Fr Edwin bestowed blessings upon all the pilgrims, who then enjoyed a taste of Port Dickson’s local delicacies.

The pilgrimage concluded at the Church

of the Visitation in Seremban. There, the participants engaged in prayer, including the rosary and novena followed by Mass celebrated by Fr Kenneth Gopal, OCD, who also blessed all the mothers present. The pilgrims had the opportunity to deepen their understanding of the church’s his-

tory, enhancing their spiritual experience.

As the day drew to a close, the participants gathered for a nourishing dinner hosted by the parish, cherishing the profound experiences and connections forged during this transformative pilgrimage. —

By Abner Nathan

## Health awareness initiative for St Anthony’s parishioners

KUALA LUMPUR: The Church of St Anthony organised a health camp on May 19 at Dewan Dominic, Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre. It was a collaborative effort with Unit NHI Pejabat Kesihatan Lembah Pantai and Klinik Pergigian Cahaya Suria.

The health camp offered a range of health screenings, including dental screening, hypertension, diabetes, dyslipidaemia, obesity, breast screening, alcohol and smoking status, and mental health screening. Each of these tests was conducted by professionals, ensuring accurate results and providing attendees with a clear understanding of their health status.

The dental screening was a highlight of the event, especially for the children in the parish. They were given the opportunity to learn about good oral health, an essential aspect of overall well-being that is often overlooked. The children were not only screened but also educated about the importance of regular brushing, flossing, and routine dental check-ups. They left the camp with brighter smiles and goodies that included toothbrushes, toothpaste, and educational materials about oral health.

The screenings for hypertension, diabetes, dyslipidaemia, obesity, and breast screening



Children learning about the importance of regular brushing, flossing and regular dental check-ups.

provided valuable insights into the attendees’ physical health. These tests are crucial, as these conditions often have no visible symptoms in the early stages. Early detection through such screenings can lead to timely treatment and management, significantly improving health outcomes.

The alcohol and smoking status screening was another significant aspect of the camp. It served as a wake-up call for some attendees,

highlighting the adverse effects of these habits on their health. The mental health screening was a much-needed initiative, considering the increasing prevalence of mental health issues in today’s society.

The initiative was not just about screenings; it was also an educational experience for parishioners of all ages to not only undergo various health screenings but also listen and understand how to maintain a healthy lifestyle

from health experts. A healthier lifestyle ensures a better quality lifetime with their families, church, and communities.

Through the series of health talks and live demonstrations, attendees got an insight into various health issues and received useful health tips and resources to manage their health better, including information on a balanced diet, the importance of regular exercise, and routine health checks, as well as other advice in the aspects of overall general health and wellness. The event also emphasised the detrimental effects of unhealthy habits like smoking and excessive alcohol consumption.

The health camp organised by the Parish Integral Human Development Ministry’s social team was a resounding success. It provided a valuable opportunity for health awareness for both adults and children. Parish priest Fr Dr Clarence Devadass said that the health camp is an initiative aimed at fostering a healthier and more aware parish and society. “The health camp underscores the church’s commitment to the wellbeing of its parish and the broader community. We hope the camp’s informative input will inspire our parishioners to prioritise their health and be healthy members of their families, BECs, workplaces, and community,” he said.



# Creating a relevant presence in the digital world

KUALA LUMPUR: “How does the Church exist in the digital world? How can we be relevant as a Church in a world that is fast-changing?”

These were some of the questions Fr Dr Clarence Devadass raised to Catholic media practitioners and social communications representatives in the Archdiocese of Kuala

Lumpur May 18.

In conjunction with the 58th World Day of Social Communications, Archbishop Julian Leow and the Archdiocese Social Communications Ministry hosted an appreciation lunch attended by 70 professionals from various communication platforms.

Fr Clarence, as the Ecclesiastical Assistant for the Archdiocese Social Communications Ministry, set the tone with an insightful welcome speech. He stressed the imperative for the Church to adapt to the digital landscape and emphasised the need to cultivate “digital missionaries” in response to the call for synodality. Fr

Clarence highlighted recent themes from World Communications Days, focusing on matters of the heart, aligning with the Holy Father’s emphasis on this aspect.

Archbishop Julian Leow expressed gratitude to the attendees for their continued contributions as media practitioners. He drew attention to an image depicting two hearts — one real and the other artificial — as a metaphor for discerning truth amidst the rush for breaking news. The archbishop emphasised the importance of accuracy, truth, and creating uplifting content that resonates with humanity’s inherent goodness.

Participants were also given an insight on the Archdiocese Social Communications Ministry’s mission, vision, and statistics, setting the stage for an engaging dialogue session.

The participants candidly shared challenges faced in the secular

world, including difficulties in engaging diverse age groups and the necessity of speaking authentically from the heart. Collaborative efforts were encouraged to address these challenges collectively as a Church community.

Adeline James introduced the World Catholic Association for Communication (SIGNIS), underlining its role as a Roman Catholic lay ecclesial movement for communication professionals. She highlighted past, ongoing, and future projects, inviting attendees to connect with the wider Catholic communications community.

The event concluded with fellowship and networking, fostering connections and solidarity among participants. Through reflection, dialogue, and collaboration, attendees aimed to chart a path forward for the Church’s meaningful presence in the digital world. — *By Tianne Ramona Pereira*



Media practitioners from the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur with Archbishop Julian Leow.

# Enhancing the ability to communicate meaningfully on social media

By Friar Jorgerson Japar, OFM

JOHOR BAHRU: The Diocese of Malacca Johore (MJD), in collaboration with SIGNIS Malaysia, successfully hosted an online Social Communication Journalism workshop on May 11 and 12. This virtual event, conducted via Zoom, was organised in conjunction with the 58th World Day of Social Communications. It attracted 73 participants from Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei, including priests, religious brothers and sisters, and laypeople.

The workshop featured two main sessions, each designed to equip attendees with essential skills in social media messaging and content editing.

The first session on Social Media Messaging focused on the essentials of concise storytelling, emphasising the delivery of impactful messages within a short span of time. Participants learned the art of crafting compelling narratives and conveying key messages effectively, a critical skill in today’s fast-



(Freepik)

paced media landscape. This session aimed to enhance the ability of Catholic communicators to engage their audiences meaningfully on social media platforms.

The second session, *Editing Social Media Content*, delved into the world of mobile journalism, highlighting the power of smartphones as tools for capturing, editing, and sharing news stories. Participants explored mobile journalism ethics and engaged in practical hands-on exercises, gaining valuable insights into

producing professional-quality content using their mobile devices. This session underscored the accessibility and practicality of mobile technology in modern journalism.

The workshop was led by Augustine Anthuvan, who currently serves as a Media Training Consultant for SIGNIS Malaysia, and Dexter Anthony, the Creative Director and Film Director of All Things Creative. With experience working on commercial projects, Anthony provided practical insights



Dexter Anthony sharing his experience in video editing.

into the creative aspects of social media content production.

Participants expressed their appreciation for the valuable insights and practical skills gained during the workshop. “This workshop has equipped me with new skills and a deeper understanding of integrating my faith into my work as a Social Communicator,” shared Felicia Rinto of the Church of St Joseph, Plentong.

Another participant, Clayton Andrew, shared that the workshop definitely helped him to generate more

ideas on how to produce interesting and attention-capturing videos and images for his parish’s social media platforms.

Friar Marvin Jackson Vincent Voo, OFM, also mentioned that one of the things he appreciated in the workshop was the chance for participants to share resources and ideas to produce content for social media platforms. “Most of the shared information was new to me even though I have been serving in the Social Communication field for a few years now,” he said.

# Pentecost spiritual journey for Kulai parishioners

KULAI, Johor: The Tamil Pastoral Team of the Church of Christ the King organised a three-day novena prayer and worship from May 13 to 15, leading their parishioners on a soulful expedition in preparation for the celebration of Pentecost.

The halls of the church echoed with the melodious recitation of the Rosary, prayer and worship led by the vibrant youth of the parish. Under the guidance of our parish priest, Fr Matthew Bun, the event unfolded seamlessly, drawing an average of 80 parishioners each day into the embrace of spiritual enlightenment and



communal devotion.

Furthermore, the celebration was graced by the presence of Fr John Anandan, OFM Cap, Fr James Rajendran, and Deacon Arama Das P. Sinnathamby, whose shared

insights during the sharing sessions added a refreshing dimension to the discourse on sacraments and the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit. Their words, laden with wisdom

and grace, enriched the hearts and minds of all present, fostering a deeper understanding of the sacred mysteries of the Catholic faith.

As the days unfolded, the ado-

ration of the Eucharist provided a profound opportunity for parishioners to connect with the divine presence, offering moments of solace, reflection, and spiritual renewal. Each prayer, each hymn, and each shared moment served as a testament to the unwavering faith and unity within the community of Christ the King.

During these three days, people felt comforted, encouraged, and deeply devoted. The Tamil Pastoral Team and the parish community worked together, showing how strong faith and the Holy Spirit can change lives. — *By Mark Michael*



# Indonesian bishops to champion social issues

JAKARTA: The Indonesian Bishops' Conference (KWI), marking the centenary of its foundation, has decided to address national issues like poverty and intolerance as the Muslim-majority nation prepares for a papal visit in September.

"The presence of the Catholic Church is to build the Church and the nation as mandated by God," Bishop Antonius Subianto Bunjamin of Bandung, president of the conference, said at a special meeting of the KWI in the capital, Jakarta.

"This session is a reflection on what we have not implemented and what must be implemented," the prelate said.

At a press conference on May 17, Bishop Subianto said they discussed the presence and meaning of the Catholic Church in Indonesia's diverse society.

Subianto added that since its formation in 1924, with six dioceses when Indonesia was under Dutch rule, the conference has become a trusted partner of the government.

He said the conference was committed to continuing to "be a community of hope"



Indonesian Catholics at a church service. (Vatican News)

amidst poverty and other social problems in the Muslim-majority Southeast Asian nation.

The bishops held a four-day meeting in the capital which commenced on May 13. Of its 270 million population, over 9.36 per cent are poor, staying in the Christian-majority provinces.

Also, Eastern Papua province is plagued

by a conflict between armed rebels and the military.

Bunjamin expressed readiness to support President Prabowo Subianto's new government.

It does not mean political support, the prelate added.

"The Church must be neutral in practical politics but never neutral in morals," he

said.

"The Church that believes in Jesus Christ must be grounded in Indonesia," said Bishop Paskalis Bruno Syukur of Bogor, secretary general of the conference.

Syukur said many dioceses, particularly those in the Christian-majority East Nusa Tenggara province, have implemented programmes to eradicate poverty.

However, this needs to be developed further, he said.

Syukur flayed the recent attack on a rosary prayer of Catholic students in Banten Province on the outskirts of Jakarta.

He criticised the action, initiated by the head of a neighbourhood association.

The special session, attended by 33 bishops, three diocesan administrators, one vicar-general, and six bishop emeriti, discussed Pope Francis' four-day visit to Indonesia, scheduled for Sept 3.

Bishop Syukur said the papal visit, which has the theme of faith, fraternity, and compassion, will strengthen faith in the country.

— ucanews.com

## Consecrated persons begin preparations for the Jubilee Year 2025

ABIDJAN, West Africa: The Conference of Religious Major Superiors in Cote d'Ivoire (CSM-CI) recently inaugurated the start of preparations for the Jubilee Year 2025 celebrations for consecrated persons of Cote d'Ivoire. The religious superiors met at the St Jean-Eudes d'Abatta Centre, Bingerville, in the Archdiocese of Abidjan.

The opening Mass was celebrated by the Apostolic Nuncio to Cote d'Ivoire, Archbishop Mauricio Rueda Beltz. The Nuncio urged the major superiors to be examples and witnesses in following Christ.

In his homily at the event with major superiors, Archbishop Beltz urged them to be united with Christ, docile to the Holy Spirit, and builders of communion.

Addressing the first point, that of being united with Christ, the Apostolic Nuncio said that this means being immersed in the

person of Jesus, intimately united to Him like branches to the vine.

The archbishop further encouraged the religious gathered to be docile to the Holy Spirit, "for we are chosen as superiors, not to do our own will, but God's."

The prelate further invited major superiors to act as "the Father acts," allowing themselves to be led by the Holy Spirit.

In closing, the nuncio called upon all major superiors of Cote d'Ivoire to be witnesses to the Risen Lord, pointing out that the originality of our Christian commitment lies in our vocation, which leads us to follow the poor, live a life of chastity and obedience. "For you," he said, "the commitment is greater, insofar as you must be, within your communities, builders of communion, weavers of relationships that bear witness to the Risen Christ in the unique commandment of love," he said. — Vatican News



Christians attend an ecumenical prayer meeting for peace in Manipur in front of Sacred Heart Cathedral. (UCA News photo)

## Church group initiates peace talks in India's Manipur

MANIPUR: Led by a Church group, warring tribal Christians and Hindus in India's northeastern Manipur have met for the first time to end the one-year-old sectarian strife that claimed over 220 lives.

"We had seven representatives each" from both the communities, said a Church official associated with the meeting held in the neighbouring Assam state on May 17.

Over a dozen influential leaders from the Meitei Hindu and Kuki-Zo Christian communities were party to the first-ever meeting held at Bosco Reach Out, a Salesian house, in Guwahati in Assam.

Observers say the state administration, led by the pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has failed to end the violence that started on May 3 last year.

"The leaders spent almost a day discussing ways to restore peace after the government failed to make any headway," said a Church official who attended the peace meeting.

He described the meeting as a "significant breakthrough" as the leaders of both sides agreed to reach out to their respective people "with a positive mind."

"Surely, their efforts will yield positive results," said the Church official who did

not want to be named.

The All-Manipur Christian Organisation, representing all Christian denominations in the state, initiated the meeting.

The Imphal diocese, based in the state capital, covers the entire Church in the state, and it is headed by Archbishop Linus Neli.

The violence started in the hilly state bordering civil war-hit Myanmar over conferring the tribal status on majority Hindus to avail benefits under India's affirmation policy.

Christians protested against the court order directing the state government to include wealthy Meitei Hindus as tribal people, which would entitle them to avail quotas in government jobs and education.

The tribal status would also allow Hindus, who mainly reside in the lower valleys, to buy land owned by indigenous Christians in the hilly districts.

Hindus make up more than 51 per cent, while tribal Christians are nearly 41 per cent of Manipur's 2.3 million people.

The sectarian conflict killed over 220 and displaced more than 50,000 people, a majority of them Christians. More than 350 churches and other Christian institutions were set on fire and damaged by the violence. — ucanews.com

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# New norms on alleged supernatural phenomena



A religious sister holds an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe in St Peter's Square at the Vatican. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)

VATICAN: A new document from the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, published on May 17, has updated the norms for discerning alleged supernatural phenomena. The norms came into force on Sunday, May 19, the Feast of Pentecost.

The document is preceded by a detailed presentation by Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández (*pic*), Prefect of the Dicastery, followed by an introduction and six possible conclusions. The procedure allows for faster decisions while respecting popular devotion.



As a rule, the Church's authority will no longer be engaged to officially define the supernatural nature of a phenomenon, a process that can require large amounts of time to thoroughly study an event.

Another new norm involves the explicit involvement of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, which must approve the local bishop's final decision and which has the authority to intervene *motu proprio* at any time.

Many cases in recent decades have involved the former Holy Office, even when individual bishops have expressed themselves. However, the interventions have usually remained behind the scenes and were never made public.

The Dicastery's new explicit involvement also relates to the difficulty in circumscribing phenomena, which in some cases reach national and even global dimensions, "meaning that a decision made in one Diocese has consequences also elsewhere."

## Reasons for the new norms

The document originates from the long experience of the last century, which saw cases where the local bishop (or bishops of a region) rapidly declared a phenomenon's supernatural nature, only for the Holy Office to express a different decision later. Other cases involved a bishop saying one thing and his successor deciding the opposite (regarding the same phenomenon).

Each event also required lengthy discernment periods to evaluate all elements in order to reach a decision on the supernatural nature or non-supernatural nature of the phenomena. These time periods sometimes contrasted with the urgency to give pastoral responses for the good of the faithful.

The Dicastery began revising the norms in 2019, leading to the current text approved by Pope Francis on May 4, 2024.

## Spiritual fruits and risks

In his presentation, Cardinal Fernández explains that, "many times, these events have led

to a great richness of spiritual fruits, growth in faith, devotion, fraternity, and service. In some cases, they have given rise to shrines throughout the world that are at the heart of many people's popular piety today."

However, there is also the possibility that "in some events of alleged supernatural origin," serious issues that harm the faithful may arise. These include cases where, from the alleged phenomena, "profit, power, fame, social recognition, or other personal interest" (II, Art. 15, 4<sup>o</sup>) are derived, even to the point of "exerting control over people or carrying out abuses" (II, Art. 16)."

There may be "doctrinal errors, an oversimplification of the Gospel message, or the spread of a sectarian mentality." There is the possibility of believers "being misled by an event that is attributed to a divine initiative but is merely the product of someone's imagination, desire for novelty, tendency to fabricate falsehoods (mythomania), or inclination towards lying."

## General guidelines

According to the new norms, the Church will exercise her duties of discernment, based on the following:

- whether signs of a divine action can be ascertained in phenomena that are alleged to be of supernatural origin;
- whether there is anything that conflicts with faith and morals in the writings or messages of those involved in the alleged phenomena in question;
- whether it is permissible to appreciate their spiritual fruits, whether they need to be purified from problematic elements, or whether the faithful should be warned about potential risks;
- whether it is advisable for the competent ecclesiastical authority to realise their pastoral value" (I, 10).

However, "it is not foreseen in these Norms that ecclesiastical authority would give a positive recognition of the divine origin of alleged supernatural phenomena" (I, 11).

Therefore, as a rule, "neither the Diocesan Bishop, nor the Episcopal Conferences, nor the Dicastery will declare that these phenomena are of supernatural origin, even if a *Nihil obstat* is granted. It remains true, however, that the Holy Father can authorise a special procedure in this regard" (I, 23).

## Possible conclusions regarding an alleged phenomenon

The discernment of an alleged supernatural phenomenon may reach the following six conclusions.

- **Nihil Obstat:** Without expressing any certainty about the supernatural authenticity of the phenomenon itself, many signs of the action of the Holy Spirit are acknowledged. The bishop is encouraged to appreciate the pastoral value and pro-



Worshippers hold candles at the Marian shrine of Fatima in central Portugal, May 12, 2024. (OSV News photo/Maria Abranches, Reuters)

mote the dissemination of the phenomenon, including pilgrimages;

- **Prae oculis habeatur:** Although important positive signs are recognised, some aspects of confusion or potential risks are also perceived that require the diocesan bishop to engage in a careful discernment and dialogue with the recipients of a given spiritual experience. If there were writings or messages, doctrinal clarification might be necessary;

- **Curatur:** Various or significant critical elements are noted, but the phenomenon is already spread widely, and verifiable spiritual fruits are connected to it. Therefore, a ban that could upset the faithful is not recommended, but the local bishop is advised not to encourage the phenomenon;

- **Sub mandato:** The critical issues are not connected to the phenomenon itself but to its improper use by people or groups, such as undue financial gain or immoral acts. The Holy See entrusts the pastoral leadership of the specific place to the diocesan bishop or a delegate;

- **Prohibetur et obstruatur:** Despite various positive elements, the critical issues and risks associated with this phenomenon appear to be very serious. The Dicastery asks the local bishop to offer a catechesis that can help the faithful understand the reasons for the decision and reorient their legitimate spiritual concerns;

- **Declaratio de non supernaturalitate:** The Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith authorises the local bishop to declare that the phenomenon is found to be not supernatural based on concrete facts and evidence, such as the confession of an alleged visionary or credible testimonies of fabrication of the phenomenon.

## Procedures to follow

The new norms then indicate the procedures to be implemented. It is up to the diocesan bishop to examine cases and submit their judgment to the Dicastery for approval. The

bishop is asked to refrain from making public declarations about the authenticity or supernatural nature and to ensure there is no confusion or sensationalism.

If the elements of the case "seem sufficient," the diocesan bishop will then set up an investigative commission, which should include at least one theologian, one canonist, and an expert chosen based on the nature of the phenomenon.

## Positive and negative criteria

The document lays out several positive criteria to evaluate the alleged supernatural phenomenon.

These include: "the credibility and good reputation of the persons who claim to be recipients of supernatural events or to be directly involved in them, as well as the reputation of the witnesses who have been heard...; the doctrinal orthodoxy of the phenomenon and any messages related to it; the unpredictable nature of the phenomenon, by which it is evident that it is not the result of the initiative of the people involved; and, fruits of the Christian life" (II, 14).

The negative criteria involve: "the possibility of a manifest error about the event; potential doctrinal errors...; a sectarian spirit that breeds division in the Church; an overt pursuit of profit, power, fame, social recognition, or other personal interest closely linked to the event; gravely immoral actions...; psychological alterations or psychopathic tendencies in the person that may have exerted an influence on the alleged supernatural event; and, any psychosis, collective hysteria, and other elements traceable to a pathological context" (II, 15).

Finally, "the use of purported supernatural experiences or recognised mystical elements as a means of or a pretext for exerting control over people or carrying out abuses" (II, 16) is considered of particular moral gravity.

Regardless of the final approved determination, the diocesan bishop "must continue to watch over the phenomenon and the people involved, exercising his ordinary power" (II, 24). — *Vatican News*



# Pope Francis: It's a manner of communicating my ministry

The last few months have witnessed another flurry of interviews by Pope Francis with secular and Catholic media outlets, the release of several more books on the Pope, and even the publication of a memoir by the Pontiff, under the title, *Life, My Story Through History*. The media blitz by the Pope — including his freshly aired interview with CBS' *60 Minutes* — is part of a consistent pattern by the modern popes in the use of social communications and media outreach. Pope Francis, however, is unique in his deliberate and aggressive embrace of interviews for television, radio, newspapers and magazines. So commonplace are the interviews and publications that they are undeniably part of a deliberate personal communications strategy tied to his wider leadership style and his programme of reform for the Church.

## Popes and the Secular Press

For most of Church history, the popes were important but distant figures, even to average Catholics across the globe. That began to change, of course, with the emergence of modern media. Pope Blessed Pius IX was the first pope to be photographed, in 1862, and Leo XIII holds the distinction of being the first pontiff to be filmed by a motion picture camera in 1896 and to have his voice recorded. Four years before that, Leo became the first pope to grant an interview to a secular journalist, Caroline Rémy de Guebhard, who wrote under the nom de plume of Séverine. The interview was published in *Le Figaro* and caused a bit of a stir, if for no other reason than the journalist was a famous socialist and atheist.

In keeping with his programme of aggiornamento and the subsequent call of the Second Vatican Council to utilise all the means of communications for the good of the Church, Pope St John XXIII made the watershed decision in 1959 to do an interview with the secular Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera*. He chose a secular paper specifically to reach beyond the Catholic world.

*Corriere della Sera* was again the newspaper of choice in 1965 when Pope St Paul VI — poised to close the Second Vatican Council — spoke with the Italian Vaticanista Alberto Cavallari about the crisis of faith in the world. Paul VI was later featured in a long-forgotten April 1977 *New York Times* profile, "A Day in the Life of the Pope," which followed the packed schedule for the already-frail 79-year-old Pontiff, who would die the next year.

Pope St John Paul II carried forward the legacy of papal media outreach in a significant but very specific way throughout his 25-year pontificate. He gave interviews from time to time (such as one to *La Stampa* in 1993); sanctioned what is considered the greatest papal biography of all time, George Weigel's *Witness to Hope*; and collaborated with Italian journalist Vittorio Messori on the



Pope Francis sits down with 'CBS Evening News' anchor Norah O'Donnell at the Vatican April 24, 2024, for an in-depth interview aired on 20 May. (OSV photo/Adam Verdugo, courtesy, 60 minutes, CBS NEWS)

1994 book *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, which was the result of a failed idea to do a television interview to mark the 15th anniversary of his papacy. It was a huge bestseller and was translated into 40 languages.

He also christened the in-flight papal press conference and made immense strides in developing the Vatican's Communications Office and the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, what is now the Dicastery for Communication. But John Paul II relied less on interviews with secular outlets and more on his unprecedented global travels to 129 countries, where he spoke directly to the faithful and to the media. He shaped public opinion by the power of the images and his impressive presence both as the leader of the Church and as a head of state.

Pope Benedict XVI — always a shy and scholarly figure — nevertheless understood the power of media. He coined the term "digital continent" as a new environment for evangelisation, but his forays into media were centred in book-length interviews, especially with Peter Seewald, and the papal in-flight pressers, which were themselves not without controversy.

## Francis Speaks for Himself

Pope Francis inherited a well-developed communications structure, but he preferred from the very beginning of his pontificate to make outreach to secular media his personal purview. Francis uses secular interviews — sprinkled with interviews with perceived friendly Catholic outlets — as a centrepiece of his papal communications strategy. He speaks for himself and rarely through the filter of the Vatican communications apparatus.

It is estimated that in the last decade, he has given well more than 100 interviews or pressers, most of them to secular publications. His style in interviews is earthy and blunt, filled with maxims and pithy phrases and a loose attention to theological precision. It has made him extremely quotable and popular with interviewers, but the approach is not

without risks. His off-the-cuff remarks can create challenges for himself and Vatican communications. Confusion abounded, for example, about what Francis supposedly said about the existence of hell in his interviews with the late Italian atheist editor of *La Repubblica*, Eugenio Scalfari, who reconstructed the conversations with the Pope entirely from memory.

The Vatican has been forced to issue clarifications on several other occasions after interviews. More recently, he infuriated the Ukrainians by suggesting that Ukraine should waive the "white flag" and negotiate a settlement with its Russian invaders. The Vatican tried to clarify what Francis meant, but the damage was done.

These are risks he is willing to take, however. In the preface to the interview book *Now Ask Your Questions*, in 2021, Francis said that interviews for him are a dialogue, not a lesson, that he does not prepare for them and declines to look at questions ahead of time. He knows that he might be misinterpreted, but he is determined it is the way forward for him. "Everything that I do has pastoral value, in one way or another," he wrote. "If I did not trust this, I would not allow interviews: For me, it is clear. It's a manner of communicating my ministry."

And that direct personal communication style possesses a greater structure and intent than might meet the eye. It allows him to shape the messaging very directly, especially now at what he sees is a critical crossroad for his legacy and his vision of a synodal Church and when resistance seems particularly pointed.

This brings us to his interview on May 19 with the CBS programme *60 Minutes*. The interview is a classic example of the communications strategy in play. A sycophantic reporter, in this case Norah O'Donnell, asks unchallenging and less-than-hard-hitting questions, providing him the opportunity to give a sharp rebuke to those he sees are hostage to ideologies and opposing his project of reform.

"You use the adjective 'conservatives,'" he says. "That is to say, a conservative is one who sticks to something and does not want to see anything else. It is a suicidal attitude."

Like several other criticisms of so-called conservative critics in the United States, Pope Francis' remarks went viral, and the Pontiff certainly understands that CBS provides him a very large platform and an opportunity to speak directly and pointedly to the American audience.

He also made the most of O'Donnell's softball questions on subjects the Holy Father has stressed throughout his pontificate: immigration, peace, being a welcoming Church to sinners and his own claims of continuity with his predecessors. These are all equally on display in two books published almost simultaneously this year — his autobiography and his reflections on his election and that of his predecessor, Pope Benedict. In the first, he recounts his life through the major events of the 20th century. Along the way, he provides valuable insights into his childhood, ordination and service as a bishop, archbishop and cardinal. But each chapter also connects his life and his experiences directly to key elements of his program — immigration, fighting ideologies, fraternity, and opposition to his reforms.

In the second, the interview book *El Sucesor: Mis Recuerdos de Benedicto XVI* (The Successor: My Memories of Benedict XVI) with Spanish journalist Javier Martínez-Brocal reveals details from Francis' perspective of the conclave that elected Pope Benedict and his relationship with the late Pope. He is shaping opinion about the conclaves that went before him but also blunting criticism that he somehow seeks a rupture in continuity with his predecessors.

As loose as his style might appear, the interviews are not random, nor are the points he makes. And where Francis may seem repetitive — witness the frequent recourse to what he describes in Italian as *indietrismo*, which translates into English as "backward-

ness" or "looking backward" — he is making the same points across different platforms, languages and audiences. It is a strategic positioning to maximise his messaging.

Francis has forged his own path in communication and in governance. He is trying to shape how the world

perceives him, how his reforms are received and implemented and how permanent his programme for the Church will be. He unquestionably stands in continuity with the modern popes in his embrace of the media, but he is unprecedented in the way he goes about it. How effective this strategy proves in the long-term will depend significantly on his successors but also, ironically, on the very media — Catholic and secular — he has tried to influence. — **By Matthew Bunson, Register**

"Francis said that interviews for him are a dialogue, not a lesson, that he does not prepare for them and declines to look at questions ahead of time."

"It allows him to shape the messaging very directly, especially now at what he sees is a critical crossroad for his legacy and his vision of a synodal Church and when resistance seems particularly pointed."



## Pope's prayer intention for June

# For migrants fleeing their homes

*"The last thing I remember of Syria, before we left, was when my mother was taking me from our place to our grandparents'. The roads were full of dead corpses. I saw dead people with no heads or no hands or legs. I was so shocked I couldn't stop crying. To calm me down, my grandfather told me they were mean people, but I still prayed for them, because even if some considered them mean, they were still dead human beings.*

*"Back at home, I left a friend in Syria, her name was Rou'a. I miss her a lot and I miss going to school with her."*

*Alia fled her home in Aleppo, Syria and is currently living in Damour, Lebanon. She shared her story through Gruppo Aleimar, an Italian NGO which provides free nutritious meals to refugees in the Damour area. Alia is seven years old.*

(Source: Miranda Cleland, *13 Powerful Refugee Stories From Around The World* - meduim.com)

The prayer intention of the Pope for June centres on the plight of refugees fleeing their homes due to war, hunger, and the subsequent perilous journeys they endure. This vital call to prayer urges us to open our hearts and borders to those in desperate need of refuge and to translate our prayers into meaningful support.

### The Global Crisis of Displacement

In recent years, the world has witnessed unprecedented levels of human displacement. Conflicts in countries like Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan and Myanmar have forced millions to flee their homes, seeking safety and stability elsewhere. Hunger, exacerbated by climate change and political instability, has driven countless others to undertake dangerous journeys in search of sustenance and a better life.

### The Impact of the Gaza Conflict

The recent conflicts in Gaza have also contributed significantly to the global refugee crisis. Escalating violence has resulted in substantial loss of life, widespread destruction, and the displacement of thousands of Palestinians. Families, once settled in their communities, have been forced to flee their homes under the constant threat of air-strikes and ground incursions. This dire situation has exacerbated the already critical humanitarian crisis in the region.



### PRAYER PRISM

Fr Fabian Dicom

lies, once settled in their communities, have been forced to flee their homes under the constant threat of air-strikes and ground incursions. This dire situation has exacerbated the already critical humanitarian crisis in the region.

Consider the story of Ahmed, a father of three from Gaza. When the conflict intensified, Ahmed's family home was destroyed by an air-strike. With no place to go, they joined the masses of displaced persons seeking refuge in overcrowded shelters and neighbouring countries. The journey was perilous, marked by scarcity of food, water, and medical supplies. Despite the uncertainties, Ahmed remains hopeful for a future where his children can live in peace and rebuild their lives.

### The Plight of Refugees in Malaysia

Closer to home, Malaysia has become a temporary haven for many refugees, particularly from Myanmar, including the Rohingya, a persecuted Muslim minority. Despite Malaysia not being a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, it hosts over 180,000 registered refugees and asylum seekers, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). However, the actual number is likely higher, as the registration process is lengthy and challenging. Many asylum seekers remain unregistered, not so much due to fear and uncertainty, but because the process of registration and refugee status determination (RSD) is long and tedious.

The process of registering and obtaining a UNHCR card, or, at the very least, a letter stating that an asylum seeker is a 'Person of Concern' serves as a form of protection against arbitrary harassment, arrest and detention, enables a form of discounted access to health



care and provides a general sense of security and identity in an otherwise alien and unfamiliar surroundings. However, many seeking asylum do not easily get registered or obtain relevant documents. The chances of obtaining these documents are higher if there is some form of vulnerability, such as medical conditions or accidents affecting quality of life and also if one is subject to domestic violence.

Deteriorating conditions in Myanmar and in neighbouring Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar Refugee Camp are driving scores of underage Rohingya girls to Malaysia for arranged marriages with Rohingya men who frequently abuse them.

In an article entitled *I feel trapped: Scores of underage Rohingya girls forced into abusive marriages in Malaysia* in *Associated Press News*, Kristen Galineau writes the following: "In a bedroom in Malaysia that has become a prison, the 14-year-old girl wipes away tears as she sits cross-legged on the concrete floor. It is here, she says, where her 35-year-old husband rapes her nearly every night." Her journey to Malaysia, arranged by a neighbour who facilitated the marriage in exchange for financial support for her family, was filled with terror. And so, the teenager tearfully hugged her parents goodbye. Then she climbed into a trafficker's car packed with children. Now, here in Malaysia, trapped in a room devoid of furniture and cloaked in

teddy bear pyjamas, she expresses a longing to return home, but feels imprisoned and hopeless. "I want to go back home, but I can't," she says in a small voice barely above a murmur. "I feel trapped."

Also consider the experience of Sulaiman, a 33-year-old Rohingya refugee, who fled Myanmar for Bangladesh after military attacks on his village. He joined nearly a million others in the Cox's Bazar Refugee Camp, enduring severe poverty, lack of clean water, inadequate education, and poor medical care. Seeking a better life, Sulaiman aimed for Malaysia, despite its lack of formal refugee recognition and high risks. In 2012, he survived a perilous two-month boat journey with minimal supplies, facing death and witnessing many perish. Upon arrival, he endured arrests, beatings, and severe poverty due to employment restrictions.

In 2018, Sulaiman received a UNHCR card and began teaching English to refugee children through an NGO. He believes education is crucial for breaking the cycle of poverty and advocates for better resources, volunteer teachers, and community support. Despite hardships, he dreams of a future where these children are educated and can contribute to society. For the Rohingya, repatriation is impossible and resettlement opportunities are rare. Local integration in Malaysia, supported by the community, is the most viable path forward.

## Translating our prayer into action: A Catholic perspective in Malaysia

While prayer is our primary means to intercede with God for help and is a powerful tool for expressing solidarity and compassion, it is crucial to translate prayer into tangible forms of actions that make a difference in the lives of refugees. Guided by Scripture and the Social Teachings of the Church, here's how Catholics in Malaysia can embody our prayer through practical steps:

### 1. Change the Lens through which we See

To truly embody the spirit of our prayer, we must first change the lens through which we view refugees. According to Catholic teaching, every person is made in God's image (Genesis 1:27). Seeing refugees as fellow humans, with families, needs, and dreams, is imperative. They have stories and hopes, just like us. When we view refugees this way, we develop empathy and better understand their struggles. This change helps us take meaningful action and offer compassionate support.

Reflecting on our emotions when witnessing hatred directed at refugees and when observing "vigilantes" harassing refugees striving to make a living can reveal our true stance on the refugee situation in our midst.

### 2. Embrace Solidarity

Solidarity is a core principle of Catholic Social Teaching, emphasising the interdependence of humanity. Solidarity is more than just a lofty ideal; it is those simple, everyday actions that affirm the dignity of others. A gesture as small as a smile can have a profound impact, restoring a sense of humanity and worth to those who have faced dehumanising circumstances. Solidarity involves reaching out and connecting on a human level, showing refugees that they are not alone and that their struggles are seen and understood. This can be the foundation for building trust and providing more substantial support.

### 3. Advocacy and Awareness

Raising awareness about the dire circumstances faced by refugees is absolutely crucial. Utilising social media platforms, hosting community gatherings, and participating in public forums are powerful avenues to amplify their stories and highlight the daunting challenges they endure, including the alarming reports of mistreatment within Malaysian detention camps. Advocacy becomes even more imperative in pushing for policies that not only safeguard their rights but also create opportunities for them to rebuild their shattered lives. By staying well-informed and raising our voices, we can rally broader support and catalyse essential change. This advocacy effort is deeply rooted in the Catholic call to justice and peace, which demands the protection of the rights and dignity of every individual, especially those suffering inhumane conditions within detention facilities in Malaysia.

### 4. Bridge the Gap with Collaborative Compassion

The challenges faced by refugees are complex and multifaceted, requiring a collective response rooted in the spirit of compassion and cooperation. To truly embody our faith, it is essential to collaborate with various organisations and individuals, each contributing their unique strengths and resources. By working together, we can ensure that our efforts are not duplicated but, rather, complement each other, leading to more effective and efficient support for refugees. This cooperation mirrors the interconnectedness emphasised in Catholic Social Teaching, highlighting the importance of solidarity and the common good.

Collaborative compassion involves partnering with local parishes, diocesan and episcopal integral human development structures, non-governmental organisations, and community groups to create a robust support network. This network can provide a range of services, from immediate relief, such as food and shelter, to long-term initiatives like education and job training. By

bridging the gap through these partnerships, we can offer comprehensive and sustainable solutions that uphold the dignity and rights of refugees, reflecting the love and mercy that are at the heart of our faith.

Working together in this way allows us to transform our prayer into concrete and concerted actions, providing hope and opening a pathway to a better future for those who have been forcibly displaced. Through such collective effort, we translate the teachings of Christ into manifest action even as He precisely calls us to serve and uplift the most vulnerable among us.

### Conclusion

The Pope's June prayer intention reminds us of our shared humanity and moral duty to support those in need. By advocating for better protections and providing direct support, we can foster an inclusive society that embraces refugees and asylum seekers with compassion and dignity.

Through this month's papal intention, let us once more renew our perspective on them through a compassionate and caring lens, embrace their reality through human solidarity, promote and defend their rights through means of social and political advocacy and work corroboratively across the board with all others of good will to ensure that every refugee, every asylum seeker and every forcibly displaced person may find friendship, solace and protection in us and in our midst.

*I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the following persons for their invaluable insights and inputs: Dr Ramona Pereira from Médecins Sans Frontières, Glorene Das Executive Director of Tenaganita, Fr Paul Dass SJ, Anil Netto President of Aliran, James Lochhead of the Penang Stop Human Trafficking Campaign (PSHTC) and Francis Tan of Caritas Penang.*

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



# Nebraska bishop shares mental illness story, offers message of hope



*Bishop James Conley of the Diocese of Lincoln credits the support of friends, family, medical professionals, and his golden retriever, Stella, with his recovery from mental illness. (CNA photo courtesy: Dennis Kellog)*

After seven years of heading the Diocese of Lincoln, Nebraska, Bishop James Conley found himself “buckling” under all of his duties and experiencing severe anxiety, insomnia, and depression.

Several years later, after addressing his mental health needs, the bishop shared his reflections on mental health and Christ in a May 16 pastoral letter in which he emphasised the importance of support from his friends, family, medical professionals — and his golden retriever, Stella.

“I was overwhelmed by my responsibilities as bishop and relying too much on my own strength,” Conley wrote in an introduction to his pastoral letter in the Southern Nebraska Register. “As I received good professional care, I learned that weakness is part of the human condition, but the more we rely exclusively on ourselves, the more those weaknesses are exacerbated.”

Mental health is a growing concern in the United States. The percentage of US adults diagnosed with depression has risen almost 10 per cent since 2015, reaching 29 per cent according to a 2023 Gallup poll, and data from the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention shows that almost half of US teens report experiencing persistent sadness and hopelessness.

The Catholic Church is taking steps to prioritise support and resources for those struggling with mental illness and challenges. From Phoenix to Washington, dioceses are offering Masses and retreats for people struggling with mental illness, while the Association of Catholic Mental Health Ministers (CMHM) is establishing mental health resources in parishes worldwide.

## A bishop's healing

In his pastoral letter, Conley shared about how stress, overwork, and self-reliance led to the deterioration of his mental, physical, and spiritual health. The road to wellness would be a long one, but when Conley shared why he was taking a leave of absence, he received overwhelming support from the people of his diocese.

“About seven years after becoming bishop of Lincoln I started buckling under my episcopal duties,” Conley wrote in the May 16 letter. “The people of this diocese have a beautiful faith, and I wanted to be the strong, invincible leader I thought they deserved. Day in and day out, I tried to fix the problems brought to me instead of surrendering them to the Lord.”

Overwhelmed by the work, Conley noted that over time, he “slackened in taking care of my own physical and mental well-being.”

“The first thing to go was my sleep because my brain would run nonstop,” Conley wrote. “All night I would lie in bed rehashing the day’s events, wrongly believing everything depended on me, that I was responsible for all the outcomes in the diocese. Although the wear and tear of this lifestyle was taking its toll, I kept trying to muscle through.”

An experienced runner, Conley eventually had to stop running his biannual half-marathons “due to a lack of energy.” He was hardly sleeping and ate “irregularly or not at all.”

“My physical deterioration led to emotional and psychological decline and, before I knew it, I was barely holding onto the last thread of my spiritual health,” he recalled.

Eventually diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, major depression, anxiety, and tinnitus, which can be amplified by stress, Conley “was forced to confront my denial.” But unsure if he could take time off for mental health issues, Conley said he “minimised my problems.”

“Thankfully, my sister, friends, and medical professionals helped me recognise that it wasn’t selfish to take care of myself,” Conley noted.

At the end of 2019, Pope Francis granted Conley permission to take a leave of absence to recover from his mental health issues. Though it was “extremely hard to step away,” Conley said he received an “outpouring of support and prayer” from his diocese.

“I would need all that grace since the hardest part of my journey was still ahead,” he said.

While Conley was recovering, COVID-19 hit, causing the bishop’s “three anchors” of Mass, the Rosary, and the Liturgy of the Hours to have “little solace” for him as he often had to offer Mass alone. Thrown into spiritual darkness, Conley “grappled” with the question “Where was God?”

Through meditating on his reliance on Christ, Conley began to recover from “unhealthy self-reliance” while developing his trust in God.

“I started to experience the freedom of surrender as I gradually allowed Jesus to shoulder burdens I had been carrying on my own,” he wrote.

“The last gift of this difficult healing season was my dog, Stella,” he continued. “My good friend Bishop James Wall of Gallup was in the process of getting a puppy and he convinced me to do likewise. We took a seven-and-a-half-hour road trip to El Paso to pick up four eight-week-old golden retrievers, two for us and two for other friends.”

“Looking back, it’s funny to think that a 10-pound puppy was crucial in beginning to bring joy back into my life,” he continued. “Stella goes nearly everywhere with me now and is loved by all. Since I live alone, she provides needed companionship and ensures I get outside every day for walks.”

Conley ultimately returned from his leave of absence in November 2020, recovering with the help of several qualified Catholic doctors, including a psychologist and psychiatrist.

## Catholicism and mental health

Preserving faith through depression can be a challenge, but according to a 2012 study, being religiously involved can help people recover faster from depression. Resources for Catholics struggling with mental health vary; some parishes offer retreats or group ministries, while others provide referrals to therapy or other

resources.

Conley noted that in times of spiritual despair, we “must protect” the “treasure” of hope that comes from God.

“When hope wanes, let us remember the countless ways God has blessed us, the particular instances in our lives where He has ‘come through,’ and the dark times when He felt absent but, in hindsight, we could discern His presence,” he wrote.

“A Catholic view of mental health is necessary because it defines well-being according to reason and revelation,” Conley wrote.

“One might rightly ask, if we don’t speak of a Catholic physics or a Catholic biology, why do we need a Catholic understanding of mental health?” he continued. “The answer is because any notion of mental health is laden with beliefs about the human person, about true human anthropology ... But notions of human flourishing depend on one’s beliefs about the human person’s origins, purpose, and destiny.”

Many saints have struggled with mental illness, Conley observed, and their lives are a reminder “that God is active in every life at all times in history.”

“How comforting to know many saints struggled like us — St Ignatius of Loyola contemplated suicide, St Jane Frances de Chantal suffered from depression for over 40 years, St John of God had a mental breakdown that resulted in hospitalisation, and St Elizabeth Ann Seton struggled with anxiety and depression,” he wrote. “They all grew closer to God through their struggles and so can we.”

“Both body and soul must be attended to, for we reflect and glorify God through both,” he continued. “In this understanding of the human person, we can see how issues in body or soul potentially harm mental health.” — **By Kate Quiñones, CNA**

# Ugandan ministry awarded for living the values taught by St John Paul II



*The Ugandan John Paul II Justice and Peace Centre volunteers are seen taking part in a “green initiative” in an undated photo. The centre has been awarded the inaugural Premio San Giovanni Paolo II award. (OSV News photo/John Paul II Vatican Foundation)*

The Ugandan John Paul II Justice and Peace Centre has been honoured with the first *Premio San Giovanni Paolo II* by the Vatican’s John Paul II Foundation, acknowledging significant contributions aligned with St John Paul II’s teachings. Established in 2006 in Kampala, the Centre emerged from the combined efforts of seven religious congregations following the 1995 papal exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*, which emphasised the Church’s dedication to justice, solidarity, and human rights.

Fr Leonard Olobo, the Centre’s chairman, expressed surprise at the global recognition of their efforts. The Centre, founded after Pope John Paul II’s death, aims to perpetuate his legacy in social justice. It was created amidst the aftermath of a brutal two-decade war in northern Uganda, where the community faced severe hardships including violence and displacement. The seven congregations—Comboni Missionaries, Holy Cross Missionaries, Mill Hill Missionaries, Missionaries of Africa, and the Society of Jesus—came together under the motto “Faith Doing Justice” to address these challenges.

The Centre’s initiatives include tackling

human trafficking through educational workshops, community outreach, and media engagement. They also support refugees and internally displaced persons through dialogue, conflict resolution, and economic empowerment programmes such as agro-ecology, tailoring, and beekeeping. Uganda, hosting over 1.6 million refugees primarily from South Sudan, benefits significantly from these efforts.

Inspired by Pope Francis’ encyclical *Laudato Si’*, the Centre also emphasises environmental stewardship through projects like the “one-baptism-one-tree” programme and food security initiatives promoting agro-ecology. Furthermore, they advocate for girls’ education and conduct anti-corruption and anti-violence workshops for law enforcement. This advocacy sometimes creates friction with powerful human traffickers and local authorities.

As Uganda approaches its 2026 elections, the Centre is dedicated to fostering democratic practices and citizen participation, addressing the country’s history of electoral violence and irregularities. — **By Ngala Killian Chintom, OSV**





## ON THE FENCE

Jacelyn Johnson

# Marriage: Must have or nice to have

The expression “marriage” might have indeed acquired somewhat of an apathetic emanation around certain parts of the modern world, especially among millennials, and for pretty justifiable reasons. But is being married really all that bad?

I was mostly single for a good 10 years of my life, between being in a long-term relationship that did not work out and actually finding someone I wanted to be married to. I enjoyed the most part of my thirties happily and independently single, living a whirlwind life, living as an expat in another country, spending my time travelling solo to more than 30 countries, doing my Masters, being career focused, the works, but all of these still to the utter despair of my mom, as nothing would seem like success until her daughter was married.

Through this time, many of my childhood friends got married, had kids, had different friends and lifestyles. While some have had very happy marriages, some got divorced, or have weird marriages, and some are even in marriages where they fear their husbands, or have stopped communications with their own family and friends.

These notions petrified me and made me feel proud and confident that I did not need a man. I hated those words “settle down” — because clearly, who in their right minds would choose to just settle!? Through those exciting years, I was surrounded by many like-minded successful women, who were all happily single, yet we would make lists of ‘must haves’ and ‘nice to haves’ in a partner. The list would consist of crazy, impractical and random wants in a partner. I mean, my husband covered 70 per cent of it, except for the important things like “must have a horse.”

I stand by my point, which in fact I made in my wedding speech, “Please stay single until you find someone who truly loves and appreciates you, and makes you feel comfortable living in your own skin, every day.”

I have been blessed to have found a partner

who is my equal, who makes me laugh every day, and whom I find pleasure waking up to every morning. But it still did take a toll on me when I finally “settled down.” It is a lot of work to keep a marriage alive. In our first year of marriage, I would threaten to walk out over the simplest argument, citing ‘irreconcilable differences’ (in my head of course) because I thought I did not need to be in this situation.

For example, while we both identify as ‘foodies’ — my husband’s food choices are specific to the Indian variety. We’ve had lots of arguments surrounding this, as I can’t possibly eat rice and curry every day, what more cook it. My mom bought me a rice cooker when we were newly married, and I’ve managed to screw up cooking rice on multiple occasions. I attempted *sambar* (dhall curry) once in our two years of marriage, and I don’t plan on doing it again — it is simply too much effort for a pot of something you can’t eat on its own. We’ve eventually compromised on me cooking oven-baked dishes, and anything Indian is imported from either of our mom’s kitchens.

I could of course argue that he should learn to cook it himself, but I took the passive aggressive way out. One day, as I said grace — “Lord, bless us, bless our food, and bless my hands. Amen!” Because I really did make the food — all by myself! My husband thought it was rather ostentatious, despite not contributing to the process... but I’m not one to be modest about making food... so I was pretty pleased with my self-centred prayer. Well, that ended the Indian cooking days. We’ve moved on to Grab food.

The other biggest compromise is material



pursuits, and it’s not the big stuff. He is used to living in a bigger space, while I, having lived in Hong Kong for five years, am used to tiny living spaces with minimal storage space. We now live in a 700 sq. ft. apartment. Hence shopping has to be limited to items absolutely necessary. We have no space for extra shoes or bags.

If something new comes in, something old needs to be thrown out. Well, in an attempt to manage it, I hold his hands while walking aimlessly at malls to keep him from buying more things. I shop online, so he doesn’t need to know.

As you can see, we have a funny way of making things work. Marriage can be fun and games, love and laughter is non-negotiable, but there are times when we get mad. We say things to each other that we don’t mean. It’s how we react to the situation after a blow-out that makes a difference. It is not easy to control yourself when something triggers your angst, but where there is love, there is a way.

While we are taught to practise all the moralistic virtues, as a Catholic, or as a normal human being, like patience and kindness, but in the heat of the moment, it is difficult to keep in check — I often blow up for absolutely no reason. But my husband is just more patient than me, so it works.

Having been married for just two years, I can say now that the ‘must haves’ in a partner is someone whom you can trust to have your back and to be your safe space no matter what, to share the load, be it financially, emotionally, physically, to go the extra mile to support each other in achieving all the dreams and aspirations as a unit, and to love each other through the worst situations and back each

other up through the noise of the extras.

I am in no position to preach about marriage, as I am still trying to figure it out as we go along. I mean, you have to be married for at least five years to even attend the ‘Marriage Encounter Weekend.’

Marriage is not easy, but it is not that difficult either. Yes, every article or spokesperson on marriage talks about compromising and communication. Of course, anything where more than one person is concerned requires compromise, but the communication through discussing this compromise is where the issue lies.

Our wedding Gospel reading, “Remain in My love... this is My commandment, love one another as I have loved you,” lives as the cornerstone of our married lives, and I hope this reading will remain with us through any ‘irreconcilable differences.’

The celebrant at our wedding said in his homily “You may both think that you chose each other, but I would rather say that God chose you for each other. There will be a lot of things in your life that will need that symbol of humility, there will be times when your spouse is the most irritating specimen in the world, but you love each other, and you will stay with each other, because you want a ‘tahan lasak’ marriage.”

I will always stand for the rights of anyone who needs a divorce for reasons of domestic abuse and mental health, or any justifiable reason, but while divorce is an easy way out, a marriage is work, there is no easy way out of work. While a marriage is about respect, honesty, communication and compromise, sometimes a little fun and laughter, with lots of love, goes a long way in protecting the sanctity of a marriage.

Marriage is absolutely not a must have, but to me, it is nice to have.

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



## WORD MADE FRESH

Nicholas Lye

# Love at first sight

My love for the Blessed Sacrament began with a rough start. It was rough not because of Jesus, but because of a break-up that my then-girlfriend initiated during my younger years. We were both in the same church choir, which meant that I would still see her in church every Sunday. To avoid the awkwardness and pain of seeing her after Mass, I would run straight to the adoration room, pretending to be praying, and not really to adore Jesus.

It was only after weeks of this weekly routine that I finally decided to speak to Jesus, since He was right in front of me. My first words were not kind, for they consisted of rants and complaints of how cruel Jesus was in giving someone so amazing to me, only to take her away after a year or so. Surprisingly, I felt so much better after pouring my woes onto Him. I soon realised that the best thing about ‘scolding’ God was that He doesn’t scold you back, but quietly listens and takes in all my emotions. So, week after week I would return to do just that, and anger soon turned into tears and pleas to take the pain away.

“As He was in agony, He prayed even more earnestly and great drops of blood formed like

sweat and fell to the ground.” (Luke 22:44)

One day, as I knelt before the Blessed Sacrament, an image of Jesus kneeling at the Garden of Gethsemane came to mind, with Him sweating drops of blood. In that moment, I imagined how the pain I was going through was only a tiny fraction of the pain and suffering Jesus went through for my sake. It then suddenly dawned upon me how much Jesus truly loved me, and was willing to go through the pain with me and for me. For the first time in my life, through the very real pain I was going through, I experienced Jesus’ very real love for me.

Since then, the Blessed Sacrament became a great source of comfort and strength for me, especially in times of pain or distress. As my affection for the Blessed Sacrament grew, so did the frequency and duration of my visits. When I eventually entered the seminary to discern my call to the priesthood, I was inspired by my rector then to spend at least an hour before the Blessed Sacrament every day. It was in those precious moments that my intimacy with Jesus deepened.

“When you look at the crucifix, you see how Jesus loved you then. When you look at the Blessed Sacrament, you see how much Jesus loves you now.” (Saint Mother Teresa)

Once, during a retreat for the seminarians, our retreat master invited us to look at Jesus

looking back at us. As I began to gaze into Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, I imagine Him gazing back at me with so much tenderness and love, something I know that I don’t usually do for myself. Through Jesus, I have learnt to see myself with more love and gentleness, in the same way that He looks at me, even with all my flaws or shortcomings. Through His eyes, I am better able to look past my failings and still recognise the beauty and goodness within me.

When I eventually discovered my deeper calling to be a lay missionary, I started to get rather restless while being in the adoration room. No longer did I seem to experience the same intimacy with the Lord as I used to. Finally, the Lord invited me to spend my holy hour outside, through walks that I actually love. Soon, I began to experience the Lord in the things that I see around me, and in the people that I come across. I began to discover how I can also find God not only in the Blessed Sacrament, but in all of His creation.

“Because the human person is made in God’s image and is called to communion with Him, the human body also bears the capacity to make God present in a visible way... It has been created to transfer into the visible reality of the world the mystery hidden from eternity in God, and thus to be a sign of it” (St John Paul II’s Theology of the Body, 19:5)

One day, the Lord revealed to me that I

too am the Tabernacle where He resides. He reminds me that while I can adore Him in the Blessed Sacrament, I too can adore Him wherever I am for He is also present in me wherever I go. In fact, beyond just adoring Him in the Blessed Sacrament, He now invites me to be a Sacrament for others, by being Christ to others through my words and actions. As a lay missionary, though I may not be the one turning bread into Christ, Christ is the one turning me into Him, especially through the Eucharist, so that I can also be bread broken for others. It was this revelation that truly affirmed my call into the world, and to help others find Christ through me, and through art and creativity.

Now, not only do I see the Body of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, I am beginning to also see myself as His Body, and discover how I can share the same love that He pours into me, with the people around me. Just as I have come to experience His love through my sight of Him in the Blessed Sacrament, I hope to be able to help others experience His love through their sight of Christ in me.

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





Fr Ron Rolheiser

# Reacting to criticism

In much of the secularised world today, we live in a climate that's somewhat anti-Christian and anti-Church (as contradictory as this may sound in a culture that still considers itself Christian). But the truth is that in many circles today it is fashionable to bash Christianity, especially its churches, be they Roman Catholic, Protestant, or Evangelical. Invariably the criticism will focus on inconsistencies, faults, and historical sins inside these churches. Indeed, the expression, *I am spiritual but not religious*, carries a not-so-subtle critique of the churches. *I want God, but not Christianity and the churches*.

How serious is this? What's to be our response? While it's irritating, ultimately, it's not a major cause for concern. As a Church, we are not fundamentally threatened by this and we should not overreact. Why?

First, because a certain amount of this criticism does us good. We have real faults and shortcomings and our culture generously points them out. The present criticism of the Church is healthily humbling us and pushing us towards a more courageous internal purification. Our critics show us our faults; they do us a favour. Besides, for too long we enjoyed a situation of privilege, never a good thing for the Church. We tend to be healthier as Christians whenever we

are living in a time of dis-privilege rather than in a time of privilege, albeit it isn't as pleasant. Moreover, there's something weightier at stake.

We must be careful not to overreact to the present anti-ecclesial climate because this can lead to an unhealthy defensiveness and put us too much in the position of adversary vis-a-vis the culture. That's not where the Gospel wants us to be, not at all. Our task, instead, is to absorb this criticism, painful though it can be, gently point to its unfairness, but resist every temptation to be overly defensive. Why? Why not aggressively defend ourselves?

Because we are strong enough not to, pure and simple. We can withstand this without having to become hard and defensive. No matter how prevalent or unfair the criticism, the Church is not about to go under or away any time soon. We are more than two billion Christians in the world, stand within a two-thousand-year-old tradition, have among ourselves a universally accepted Scripture, have two thousand years of doctrinal entrenchment and refinement, have massive centuries-old institutions, are embedded in the very roots of Western culture and technology, constitute one of the biggest multi-national groups in the world, and are growing in numbers worldwide. We are hardly a reed

shaking in the wind, reeling, a ship about to go under. We are strong, stable, blessed by God, an elder in the culture. Because of this we owe the culture graciousness and understanding.

Beyond that, and more important than our historical strengths, is the fact that we have Christ's promise to be with us and the reality of the resurrection to sustain us. Given all this, I think it's fair to say that we can absorb a fair amount of criticism without fear of losing our identity. Moreover, we must not let this criticism make us lose sight of why we exist in the first place.

The Church does not exist for its own sake or to ensure its own survival. It exists for the sake of the world. We can too easily forget this and, in all sincerity, lose sight of what the Gospel asks of us. For example, compare these two responses: at a press conference, someone once asked the late Cardinal Basil Hume what he considered the foremost challenge facing the Church today. He replied: "To save the planet." Some years later, another Cardinal (unnamed here because of his answer) in a television interview was asked roughly the same question, "What do you see as your first task in taking over this diocese?" His reply: "To defend the faith." A very different answer, clearly.

Everything about Jesus suggests that

Hume's view is closer to the Gospel than the other. When Jesus says, *My flesh is food for the life of the world*, He is telling us that the major task of the Church is not to defend itself, to ensure its continuity, or to keep the world from grinding it up. The Church exists for the sake of the world, not for its own sake. That's why Jesus was born in a trough, a place where animals come to eat, and it's why He gives Himself on a table, to be eaten. Being ground up is part of what Jesus is about. Everything about Him suggests vulnerability over defensiveness, risk over safety, trust in a divine promise over any human defence and insurance.

The very essence of the Gospel is a call to risk beyond defensiveness, to absorb what's unjust, to not be defensive – *Forgive them for they know not what they do*. We are meant to be food for the world, not anxious about our own survival. We must be the food of understanding, graciousness, and forgiveness for the world.

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



## As I was contemplating

Fr Gerard Steve Theraviam

The Feast of Corpus Christi, or more correctly the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ is one of the highlights of the Church's calendar. Here at the Central District of the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, the four parishes involved have decided to celebrate it by coming together at the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist to celebrate Masses in all the different languages. In these last few weeks it has been exciting to see the different language groups coming together to plan, discuss, meet and rehearse together for the masses that we hope will be a point of unity as parishioners of the different churches come together and truly manifest ourselves as The Body of Christ.

The Solemnity originated in the Diocese of Liege in 1246 as the feast of Corpus Christi. In the reforms of Vatican II, Corpus Christi was combined with the feast of the Precious Blood (July 1) to become the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of the Lord. Often, it is celebrated with the masses as the highpoint, in addition to the processions and Benediction. Permits for the public manifestations have sometimes been difficult to obtain from the local civic authorities but today the climate has been kinder. Sadly, some shy away from the crowds and it can be daunting for some of the elderly. Nevertheless, this is one of the highlights of the Church's calendar.

So what exactly is the purpose of this feast as it had developed over the centuries?

It is to come together as a community of faith to give God thanks for the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist and to honour him. For us Catholics, the Eucharist is not merely bread and wine being shared among us. *"The Catholic Church teaches that in the Eucharist, the Body and Blood of the God-man are really, truly, substantially, and abidingly*

*present together with his soul and divinity by reason of the Transubstantiation of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. This takes place in the unbloody sacrifice of the Mass."* (Council of Trent, 1551; CCC # 1374).

Thus 'Corpus Christi' is a wonderful opportunity to instruct the faithful in the Mystery, Faith and devotion surrounding the Eucharist. We need to learn to appreciate and make use of the Holy Eucharist, both as a Sacrament and as a sacrifice.

Our belief in this Real Presence of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist is biblical. It comes from the literal interpretation of Christ's promise to give us his Body and Blood for our spiritual food and drink, as found in the sixth chapter St John's Gospel. We also see this in the four accounts of the Last Supper (Mt 26; Mk 14; Lk 22; 1 Cor 11). As mentioned earlier, we understand the Real Presence by a process called transubstantiation — the entire substance of bread and wine is changed into the entire substance of the risen, living, and glorified Body and Blood of Christ, retaining only the "accidents" (taste, colour, shape) of bread and wine.

If we have a true Eucharistic faith, then we will be fully present each week (and perhaps, even daily!) to participate in the Eucharist and to receive him in the Word and Sacrament. Perhaps the Pandemic has affected some who see their physical presence at Mass as unnecessary since online Masses and spiritual communion were possible. Yet they fail to see that those were extraordinary times where 'online masses' were at least better than no masses at all. Now that it is safe to venture out again, 'online Masses' must surely be an option only for the seriously sick and housebound.

Corpus Christi is an opportunity for us to re-examine our attitudes towards the Eucharist and our participation in it. Do I come with the sense of expectation that I come into the Divine Presence of Almighty God? Do I

## Living the Eucharist – We are the Body of Christ!

### TAKE

*Then he took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me."*

### TAKE

Take me, Lord, as I am with my imperfections as well as the gifts and goodness you have endowed me with. Draw me away from my self-centredness and comfort zone to where you want me to be.

### BLESS

*Then he took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me."*

### BLESS

Bless me, not just for my own selfish wants and desires. Instead, may I be a blessing for others.

### BREAK

*Then he took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me."*

### BREAK

Break away from me, all that is not of You, O God — my sin, selfishness, harmful habits and addictions. Prune me so that I might bear more fruit, fruit that will last! In my brokenness, may I rise from the ashes, a new person. May I break free from me and instead abide in You.

### GIVE

*Then he took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me."*

### GIVE

Give me as bread to a hungry world. May I unselfishly give of myself to people around me who are in need, without counting the cost or holding back. Teach me generosity. May I give without expecting anything in return.

unite myself to the actions of Jesus at the Last Supper and his giving up of himself on the Cross for the salvation of all? Do I take it so lightly that come unprepared or late? Does my physical posture and even dressing reflect that I am coming for a Divine Banquet? Perhaps, looking up the readings might help me enter into the celebration better. Appreciate the moments of silence as opportunities to allow God to speak to you. Switch off the phone and do not allow any distractions to get to me — perhaps, sit as close to the front that I might be able to see all that happens.

What happens when we leave church is perhaps the best test of the efficacy of the mass in my own life. How do I live the Eucharist in my daily life?

St Augustine says, *"Become what you eat!"* He invites us to go beyond merely partaking of the Eucharist in the physical sense. We are instead called to be and become the Body

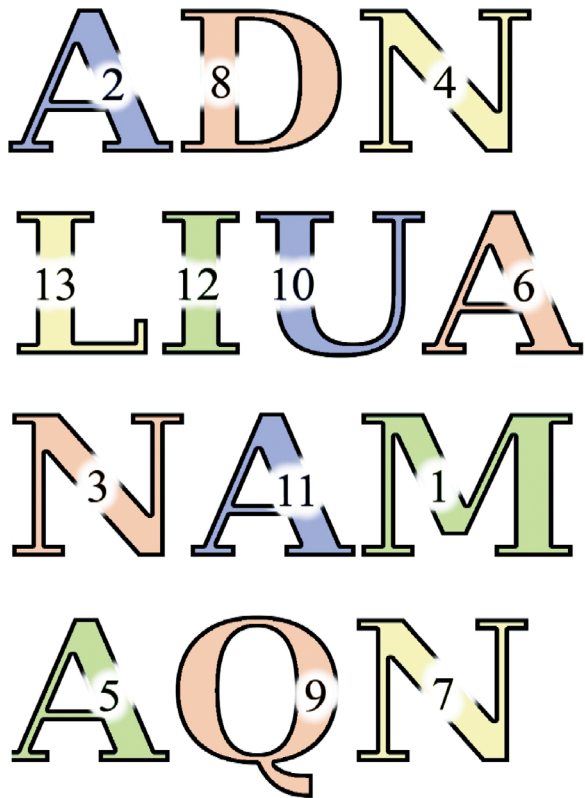
of Christ — to be fully aware of our call to belong to Christ and our sisters and brothers who make up the Body. If this is to be so, then surely it is not just bread and wine that are transformed at the Eucharist. So are we, all of us — the community who partake of it!

At the Offertory, we offer not just bread and wine but also our own selves — inviting the Lord to also **take, bless, break and give us** to a hungry world. Thus the Eucharist is not just a ritual that we celebrate at church but rather a reality that is lived out in our daily lives. The Eucharist is thus not something that we 'do' on Sundays but rather what we are, every single moment of each day.

● **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



Exodus 16:2-4, 12-15

In Exodus 16, the people of Israel were starving in the desert.  
When Moses prayed to God, He sent them food.  
What was it?  
Sort out the letters by their numbers to find out!

**JESUS IS**

Can you crack the secret code to read the rest of Jesus' message?

**L** 😊

🔔 **I**

**T** ♠️

**A** 🌀

**H** ✚

**D** \*\*

**B** ✕

**E** 🖐️

**R** ⚡

**O** ❤️

**F** 👍

## The Body and Blood of Our Lord

Dear children,  
Today we celebrate the feast of the Body and Blood of Our Lord in the Holy Eucharist.  
At the Last Supper, Jesus changed bread and wine into His own Body and Blood.  
He had the power

to do this because He is God.  
He did this because He wanted to stay with us even after He died and went up to Heaven.  
Jesus comes to us in every Mass.  
The priest takes the place of Jesus, saying the words

that Jesus said at the Last Supper and the bread and wine become the real Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus even though they still look like bread and wine.

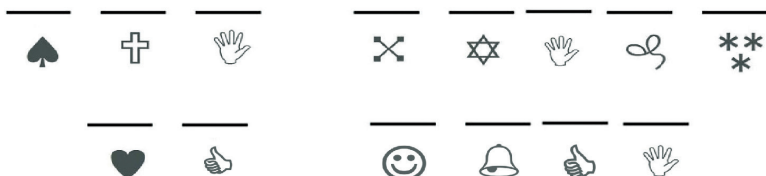
Love  
Aunty Eliz



### Can you match up the first parts with the second parts?



- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>I am the living bread <b>A</b></p> <p>if any one eats of this bread, <b>B</b></p> <p>the bread which I shall give for the life of the world <b>C</b></p> <p>Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, <b>D</b></p> <p>For my flesh is <b>E</b></p> <p>and my blood <b>F</b></p> <p>He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood <b>G</b></p> | <p><b>1</b> food indeed,</p> <p><b>2</b> which came down from heaven;</p> <p><b>3</b> abides in me, and I in him.</p> <p><b>4</b> you have no life in you</p> <p><b>5</b> is drink indeed.</p> <p><b>6</b> he will live for ever;</p> <p><b>7</b> is my flesh.</p> |
|---|--|





## YOUTH

June 2, 2024

# NEW DOCUMENTARY 'Your Fat Friend' explores acceptance of body diversity

**"Just say 'fat.' Not 'curvy' or 'chubby' or 'chunky' or 'fluffy' or 'more to love' or 'big guy' or 'full-figured' or 'big-boned' or 'queen-sized' or 'husky' or 'obese' or 'overweight.' Just say 'fat.'"**

Aubrey Gordon's journey as a fat acceptance activist began in 2016 with an anonymous blog post. Originally titled *A Request from Your Fat Friend*, her open letter asked friends to accept her experiences of anti-fat bias. Within a week, 30,000 people had read it.

Since then, Aubrey has continued to advocate for respect for all bodies through her anonymous writings, public activism, two books, and a podcast, "Maintenance Phase." She emphasises that a society that discriminates based on jean size is unjust.

Now, Aubrey's activism has taken the form of a documentary. *Your Fat Friend*, directed by Jeanie Finlay, began screening in the UK this January and is now showing in select US cities.

The film chronicles Aubrey's rise from anonymous blogger to celebrity activist. It showcases her journey, including a book deal, facing internet trolls who exposed her personal information, and her decision to reveal her identity to her readers.

We celebrate with Aubrey when she is thanked by singer Adele for addressing the media's focus on the pop star's weight loss. We beam with her during her successful first public reading of her debut book at Powell's bookstore in Portland, Oregon.

The documentary also highlights the injustices faced by the fat community. It shows how



Aubrey Gordon shows a vintage religious diet book in the film "Your Fat Friend." (NCR screenshot/YouTube/Jeanie Finlay)

finding comfortable public seating is nearly impossible, airlines cancel fat people's tickets without refunds, and how society dictates what fat people can or cannot do. For example, a woman once removed a melon from Aubrey's grocery cart, saying, "This has too much sugar for you."

Aubrey also discusses her atypical anorexia, where despite exhibiting anorexic behaviours, she remains fat. She explains her frustration with the medical community's bias against fat people, which makes finding adequate treatment difficult.

We watch as Aubrey attempts a new way to relate to her own body: she seeks to embrace the body she has. This radical acceptance starts with honesty, saying out loud the uncomfortable truth about the shape and size and experi-

ence of inhabiting our unique forms.

She tells Finlay, "When I describe myself as fat, my favourite and least favourite reaction is people going, 'No, sweetie, you are not, don't say that about yourself.' And I say, 'Hey guys, have we met?'"

She explains, "I think they think I'm saying I'm lazy or stupid or unlovable [when I say 'fat']. But I don't feel any of those things. I just am fat. The end. Well, what are we going to do about it? Not much to do. Tried everything. Here we are."

The narrative also delves into Aubrey's family history and their struggles with weight and body acceptance.

Her father, Rusty, continued the monitoring habits of his military father, and her mother, Pam, imposed numerous diet fads on Aubrey from a young age, viewing her size as her responsibility.

Despite these challenges, Aubrey advocates for embracing one's body. She argues that dieting changes not the body but one's relationship to it. Studies show most dieters regain more weight than they initially lost.

Aubrey's journey towards radical self-acceptance starts with honesty about her body. She challenges the stigma by openly calling herself "fat" and rejecting the negative connotations associated with the word.

The documentary and Aubrey's message resonate with a broader cultural critique: American society's narrow beauty standards do not reflect the reality that nearly three-quarters of women do not fit these ideals.



Aubrey questions whether hating our bodies is beneficial and suggests an alternative approach of acceptance and gratitude.

This perspective aligns with biblical teachings, which emphasise inner qualities over outward appearance. Verses like 1 Samuel

16:7 and Isaiah 53:2 remind us that God values the heart, not physical beauty. The Bible regards each body as a bearer of the divine image, encouraging gratitude for our physical form.

Aubrey's philosophy, which advocates loving one's body as it is, echoes these biblical sentiments.

She writes, "Try to learn to love the lush overgrowth of your body.

Let it grow wild and untamed as a garden you loved as a child. Love it for the way it sustains you, keeps you warm, goes to such lengths not to let you get hurt."

Embracing our bodies as gifts from God aligns with Christian values. Each body, regardless of its shape or size, bears the *imago dei*. By focusing on God's mercies rather than calories, we can celebrate our bodies as cherished creations. Our bodies sustain us and keep us safe; they are gifts to be celebrated and thanked for daily. — **By Liz Charlotte Grant, NCR**

**EACH BODY  
- EACH OF OUR FAT.  
CROOKED, DISABLED,  
SHORT, GANGLY, GIANT,  
PAINFUL, ROLY-POLY BODIES.  
THE EXACT BODY YOU HAVE  
RIGHT NOW - BEARS THE  
IMAGO DEI. THERE ARE  
NO EXCEPTIONS**

## Educational session on drugs and cyber harassment for teens

KUALA LUMPUR: The Prison Ministry of the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus organised a session on drugs and cyber harassment for teenagers on May 12 at the parish hall.

Encik Saiful and his team from the National Anti-Drug Agency (AADK) shared important information about stalkers, sexual harassment, cybersex, and other related issues. Approximately 125 participants, comprising Catechism students, teachers, and parents, attended this informative session.

Prison Ministry coordinator Ann Elizabeth thanked Encik Saiful and his team for their contribution, and her assistant coordinator, Nelson, presented them with a token of appreciation.

Ann expressed her gratitude and confidence that the session was beneficial, not only for the attendees' safety and awareness but also for the broader community.

The parish Prison Ministry concluded the event with a luncheon for the AADK team and the volunteers who helped make the event a success. — **By Cecilia Grace**



Encik Saiful with the AADK team sharing information with the teenagers.



# FOSTERING RESILIENCE AND INDEPENDENCE among Migrant youths

The dire situation in Myanmar has led to a significant exodus, with many Myanmar people seeking refuge in neighbouring countries, including Malaysia. Among these refugees are 43 young individuals who, despite the trauma of airstrikes, mass destruction, and loss, hold a deep yearning to return home and rebuild their lives. Their hope is tempered by fears of military exploitation and economic hardships in Myanmar. In Malaysia, they face the complexities of adapting to a new country and uncertain legal status, a process that can take years to navigate.

To assist in this transition, Young Lives Malaysia, an initiative by Fondacio Malaysia, launched the *Crossroads 2.0* programme. This initiative, held from April 28 to May 3, builds on the success of its pilot in October 2023. It is designed in collaboration with Health Equity Initiatives (HEI), North South Initiatives (NSI), and the Coalition of Burma Ethnic Groups

Malaysia (COBEM). The programme aims to equip newly arrived refugees with essential knowledge and skills for integration into Malaysian society.

*Crossroads 2.0* offers an intensive orientation covering local laws, languages, and cultures. It emphasises life skills, self-care, and coping mechanisms, while providing guidance on health, education, and employment opportunities. Sessions on human rights and legal frameworks empower participants to understand their rights and navigate interactions with authorities. The programme also connects refugees with key organisations like UNHCR, Asylum Access Malaysia (AAM), and the Myanmar Ethnic Women Refugee Organisation (MEWRO), ensuring they have access to crucial advice and assistance. Visionary exercises, such as creating Vision Boards, help participants imagine a brighter future, fostering optimism and purpose.

The impact of the programme is sig-



*Youth making collage of words that reflects their feelings.*

nificant, with participants emerging better equipped to face the challenges of displacement, fostering resilience and hope. The positive response has motivated Young Lives to explore further avenues for empowering these individuals to rebuild their lives with greater independence and resilience.

One participant shared their story, highlighting the profound personal impact of the programme. Coming from an urban area in Myanmar and holding a degree in botany, they recounted the loss of their father, a philanthropist killed while helping in a village attack. This tragic event devastated them, but also inspired a determination to emulate their father's spirit of service. The participant dreams of returning to Myanmar to rebuild their home and contribute to their community through agriculture.

The success of *Crossroads 2.0* was made possible by the support of various organisa-

tions and individuals. The Cathedral of St John the Evangelist, along with numerous partners and collaborators, played a crucial role. The presence of Archbishop Julian Leow at the closing ceremony, alongside representatives from UNHCR, Myanmar ethnic leaders, and other supportive entities, underscored the programme's importance.

Fondacio Malaysia extends a call to action for individuals or groups interested in contributing to this cause. Support can make a tangible difference in the lives of refugees striving to overcome adversity. For those looking to get involved, contact details are provided: [younglives.kl@fondacio-asia.org](mailto:younglives.kl@fondacio-asia.org).

Established in 1981, Fondacio Malaysia is an international Catholic ecclesial movement dedicated to serving marginalised communities, including migrants and refugees, through various support initiatives. —

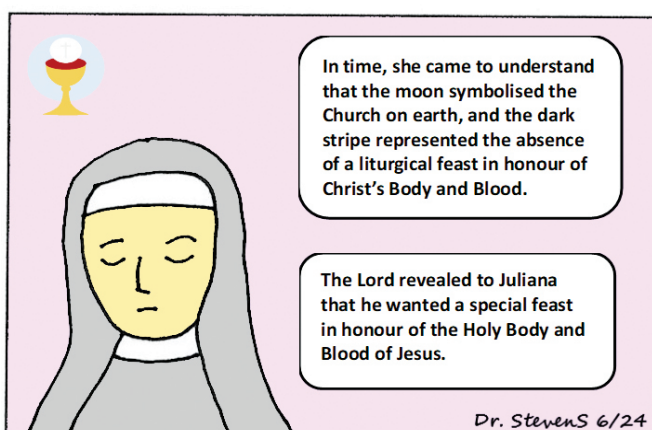
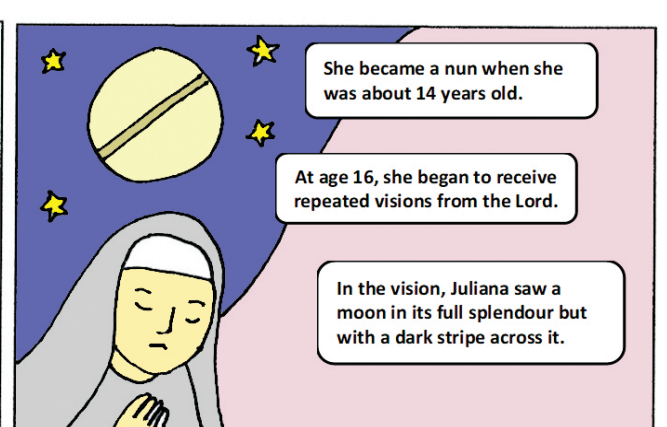
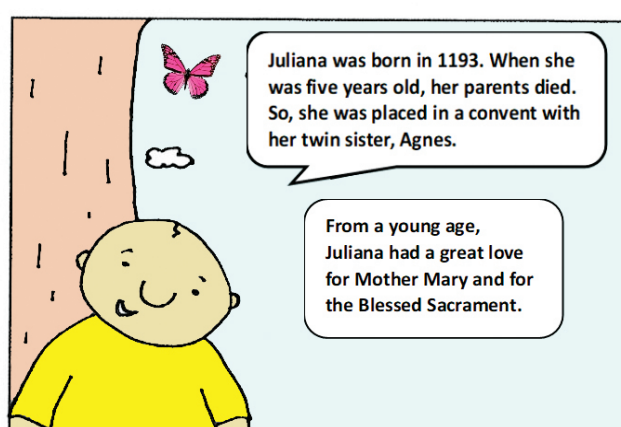
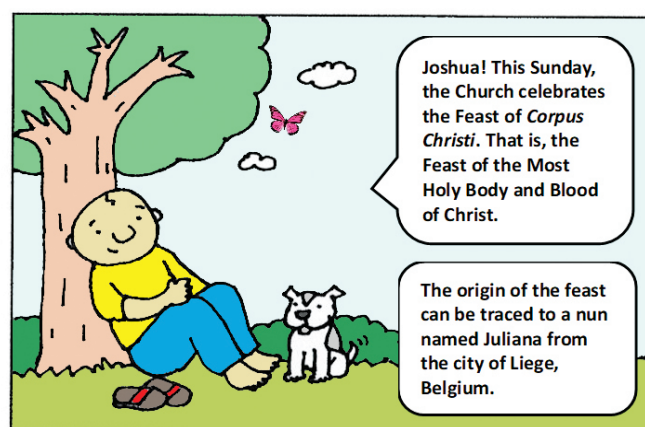
*By Maria Yan and Young Lives Team*



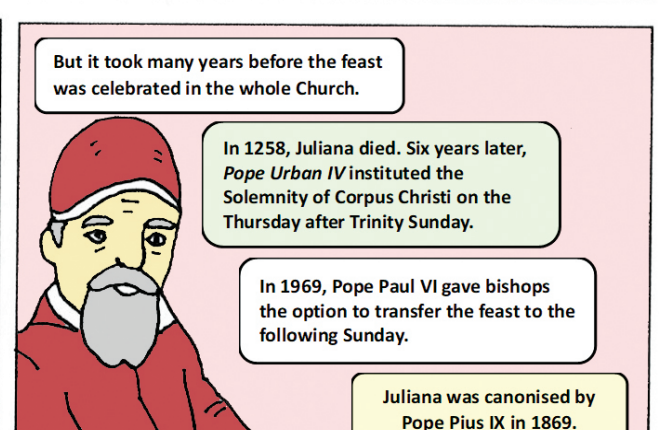
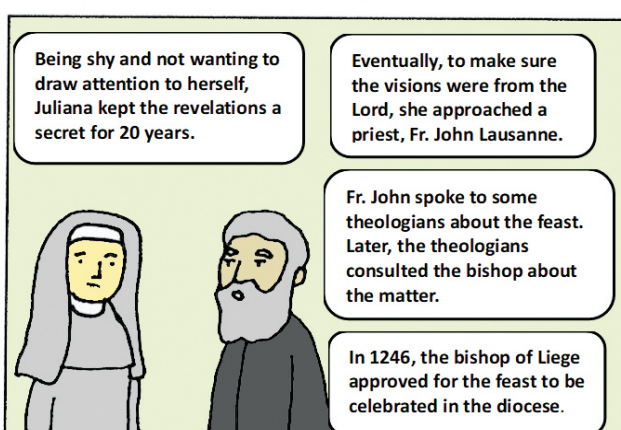
*Archbishop Julian Leow spending time with the migrants.*

## THE SIMPLE LIFE...

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



*Dr. Stevens 6/24*



*Dr.steven/simplelife*



# A tribute to the late Fr Aloysius Deeney, OCD

SEREMBAN: Recently, the Secular Carmelites of Kuala Lumpur offered a memorial Mass for the repose of the soul of the late Fr Aloysius Deeney, OCD, who was called home to the Lord on March 14 in Indonesia. The memorial Mass was celebrated on what was supposed to have been the 50th anniversary or Golden Jubilee of his ordination as a priest.

Fr Aloysius Deeney was an American Carmelite friar of Irish descent. He entered the Carmelite seminary in his youth and was ordained a priest at the age of 26 in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia on 18 May 1974.

In 1990 he was elected Provincial in Oklahoma and served as Provincial for over seven years before he was assigned to Rome. As Provincial he advocated Hispanic vocations and introduced bilingual liturgy to the Province.

In 1998, the Superior General of the Discalced Carmelite Order in Rome appointed him as the first General Delegate for the forty thousand-odd Secular Carmelites throughout the world at that time. This assignment found him in most corners of the world; an experience which Fr Deeney embraced with much love, dedication and determination.

In 2001, Fr Deeney finally landed on the shores of our Mantin Carmel and wasted no time in exhorting us, Secular Carmelites, to formulate our own Constitutions. He emphasised that we Seculars were as equally Carmelite as the friars and the nuns. After much dialogue and team work between Fr Deeney and the Seculars throughout the world, the first version of the Secular Carmelite (OCDS) Constitutions was approved by the OCD General House on



June 13, 2003.

Fr Deeney will forever be remembered for his strong conviction of the purpose and beauty of the Secular Carmelite vocation. Being highly intelligent and practical, he coined the six M's to practical Carmelite living: Meditation, Morning and Evening prayer, Mass, Mary, Meetings and Mission. His legacy has left us an entire Youtube channel of our Constitutions explained, several books on how to live the Carmelite life and reflections on St Teresa and St John of the Cross.

His love for Malaysia naturally gave rise to the seventh M which is *Makan*. Over a meal of his favourite Sarawak *laksa* and *roti canai*, Fr Deeney would juggle between giving us formation and sharing stories from his youth and religious life, often mingled with inspiring spiritual insights. Farewell dear Fr Deeney, till we meet again.



## Pope expresses 'spiritual closeness' to Iran after death of president in helicopter crash

VATICAN: Pope Francis sent condolences to Iran following a helicopter crash that claimed the lives of President Ebrahim Raisi (pic) and Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahain, assuring of his prayers for their families and the nation.

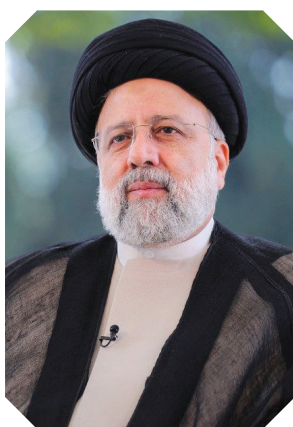
In the telegram, the Pope said, "I send condolences upon the deaths of President Ebrahim Raisi, Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahain, and all who perished in the helicopter crash."

"Entrusting the souls of the deceased to the mercy of the Almighty, and with prayers for those who mourn their loss, especially their families, I send the assurance of spiritual closeness to the nation at this difficult time," he said.

The May 20 telegram was addressed to Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Hosseini Khamenei, Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Raisi, 63, and Abdollahain, 60, were among those who died in a May 19 helicopter crash in a mountainous area of northwestern Iran near the border with Azerbaijan, while returning from a meeting between Raisi and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, and from the opening of the Qiz Qalasi and Khodaafarin dams.

Initial reports indicated the helicopter, carrying the men and their entourage, had



made a hard landing in foggy conditions. However, subsequent reports confirmed the crash, with no survivors.

In the wake of the crash, Khamenei has announced five days of mourning, and local media report that elections for a new president have been scheduled for June 28.

Vice-President Mohammad Mokhber has taken over presidential duties in the interim, and deputy Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri Kani

was appointed by Iran's cabinet as acting foreign minister.

Raisi, a hardline cleric whose 2021 election consolidated conservative control of the Islamic Republic, had been favoured as a potential successor to the supreme leader.

The Holy Father had spoken with Raisi last November about a month after the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war. In that discussion, the Iranian president reportedly asked the Pope to use his influence to bring an end to Israel's offensive in Gaza.

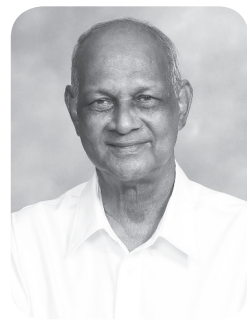
Raisi reportedly also asked the Pope to "correctly explain the position of the oppressor and the oppressed" in the conflict. Iran and Israel have been engaged in a decades-long "proxy war."

Amir-Abdollahain, meanwhile, spoke with Vatican foreign minister Archbishop Paul Gallagher in October, with the two diplomats also discussing the Israel-Hamas war. — *Agencies*

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so that everyone who believes in him may not die  
but have eternal life" – John 3: 16

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# Palliative care is a collective responsibility

TORONTO, Canada: Palliative care transcends a traditional medical approach focused solely on curing illness and encompasses a holistic method that addresses physical, emotional, spiritual, and social needs.

Shining the light on this comprehensive care approach, Msgr Renzo Pegoraro said it is the only way to ensure that the inalienable dignity of every person is respected in every moment of their life.

"Palliative care is not just about managing pain and symptoms," the Chancellor of the Pontifical Academy for Life said speaking to Vatican Radio's Christopher Wells, "It's about recognising the whole person and providing care that respects their dignity and humanity."

The Symposium, entitled *Towards a Narrative of Hope: An International Interfaith Symposium on Palliative Care* ended May 23. It was organised by the Conference of Canadian Catholic Bishops in collaboration with the Pontifical Academy for Life.

More than seven years ago, the Pontifical Academy for Life launched the "PallLife" project to highlight the importance of palliative care worldwide. Msgr Pegoraro explained that this initiative produced a "White Book" advocating for palliative care, aiming to sustain its development and accessibility globally.

Collaborations with various entities, such as the Canadian Bishops' Conference and with Bishop Noel Simard, he continued, have fostered cultural and social support for palliative care, reflecting a much-needed synergy between ecclesiastical and medical efforts.

Highlighting the need for a holistic perspec-

tive on palliative care, Msgr Pegoraro said "Palliative care is not just about managing pain and symptoms (...). It's about recognising the whole person and providing care that respects their dignity and humanity. This approach aligns deeply with the core values of compassion and respect for human life."

The Chancellor pointed to the importance of prioritising the patient's quality of life, saying that "In the face of terminal illness, the ethical response is to provide comfort, alleviate suffering, and support the patient and their family."

"This approach resonates with the teachings of the Church, which advocates for the sanctity of life and the compassionate care of those who are vulnerable," he said.

In view of improving palliative care in the years to come, Msgr Pegoraro called for increased education and advocacy to promote palliative care worldwide.

He said there is a need for healthcare professionals, policymakers, and society at large to understand the value of palliative care and integrate it into healthcare systems effectively.

"Education is crucial. We need to train more healthcare providers in palliative care and raise awareness about its benefits," he said. "Moreover, advocating for policies that support palliative care services is essential to ensure that everyone has access to this compassionate care."

The Toronto symposium aimed to foster a multidisciplinary and interactive network for palliative care. By bringing together bishops, doctors, and palliative care experts, the event sought to create a stable cooperation framework, enhancing access to palliative care in

Canada and providing a model for all.

"This opportunity is very interesting because we have people from across Canada sharing their experiences and expertise," the monsignor noted. "Our goal is to define a framework for future activities to improve access to palliative care, inform the public, and support initiatives that create hope for many ill people and their families."

The gathering also emphasised the importance of an international and interfaith approach to palliative care.

Msgr Pegoraro highlighted the benefits of sharing knowledge and experiences across different cultural and social contexts and observed that the discussions on preventing euthanasia and assisted suicide, present in various countries' legislations, underscore the need for a stronger palliative care culture and awareness.

"Understanding the debates and initiatives in palliative care globally is crucial," he said. "This international approach allows us to learn from different contexts and promote a universal perspective on palliative care."

The Church, the Chancellor noted has a crucial role in advocating for and supporting palliative care and The Pontifical Academy for Life is dedicated to promoting palliative care as an essential aspect of healthcare.

"Our faith teaches us to care for the sick and dying with love and compassion," he added. "The Church's role is to support palliative care initiatives, provide spiritual care, and be a voice for those who are suffering," and the Symposium was a call to action. — *Vatican News*



near the monastery.

"At the end of my visit, I celebrated the Feast of Pentecost with the parish of Gaza, on Sunday, May 19, and administered the sacrament of Confirmation to two parishioners," he said.

"I emphasised two important things: The necessity of maintaining unity among each other, which I saw and bear witness to. And the crucial role played by the priests and sisters in the community in the past period. I also urged them, with the power of the Holy Spirit, to keep the flame of hope alive in their hearts and lives, and assured them that as a Church, we will not abandon them and will be among the first to help rebuild Gaza and assist its people in achieving a dignified life," the cardinal said.

"What else can I say: I want to send a clear message to decision-makers. Enough killing! The war must end, and avenues for various aid must be opened to avoid an imminent humanitarian crisis. I hope this nightmare ends quickly," Pizzaballa said. — *Cruz*

## Pope recognises miracle needed for Church's first 'millennial' saint



VATICAN: Pope Francis formally recognised a miracle attributed to the intercession of Blessed Carlo Acutis, a 15-year-old Italian teenager whose birth in 1991 will make him the first "millennial" to become a saint.

In a meeting May 23 with Cardinal Marcello Semeraro, prefect of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints, the Pope signed decrees advancing the sainthood causes of Acutis, as well as one woman, and six men.

The Vatican announced May 23 that the Pope had signed the decrees and that he would convene a consistory to set a date for the canonisation of Acutis and other future saints: Blesseds Giuseppe Allamano; Marie-Léonie Paradis of Québec, Canada; Elena Guerra; and eight Franciscan friars and three Maronite laymen who were martyred in Damascus, Syria, in 1860.

For young Catholics, the most interesting is surely the recognition of a miracle attributed to Blessed Carlo Acutis.

The young layman was born on May 3, 1991, in London, England, and died on October 12, 2006, in Monza, Italy, succumbing to leukemia at the age of 15.

Pope Francis beatified the millennial in 2020 in Assisi, where Blessed Carlo had made multiple pilgrimages and where his mortal remains rest.

The miracle Pope Francis recognised May 23 that paves the way for the blessed's canonisation involved a young woman who was born in Costa Rica in 2001 and moved to Florence in 2018 to study.

The woman, Valeria, fell from her bicycle at 4 a.m. July 2, 2022, and suffered a serious head injury, according to the dicastery website. Even after emergency surgery removing part of her skull to reduce severe intracranial pressure, doctors warned her family she could die at any moment.

An associate of the young woman's mother began praying to Acutis the same day, and the mother, Liliana, went to Assisi and prayed at the Blessed's tomb, July 8 — the same day the young woman began to breathe on her own again. She slowly recovered basic mobility and a CT scan showed the haemorrhage was gone. After a period of rehabilitation therapy and a complete recovery, Valeria and Liliana visited the tomb of Blessed Acutis on Sept 2 to thank him for his intercession. — *Agencies*

## Holy Land cardinal speaks after Gaza visit: 'Enough killing!'

JERUSALEM: Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, urged an end to the war between Israel and Hamas after his May 15-19 visit to Gaza.

"I entered Gaza during the week of Pentecost, in which we pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. For sure, it was a great blessing to be with the parishioners of Gaza," he said on May 20.

Hamas, the Islamist group that rules Gaza, attacked Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, killing 1,200 Israelis and taking over 200 more as hostages.

Since that time, Israel has launched a war against Gaza, where the health minister says over 35,000 Palestinians have been killed.

"I was among my people who are currently enduring much suffering from the war and the destruction it has left. I brought with me the promise of a new life, and I was very surprised that they were the ones who taught me a lesson I will never forget: Their steadfast faith, carried with heartwarming smiles, left a mark on me and my life," Pizzaballa said.

He told his press office after he returned to Jerusalem he conducted the pastoral visit "to verify the conditions of the Christian community in Gaza."

"The scale of the destruction I witnessed is unbelievable, and the poor living conditions, such as the lack of water and electricity and the

absence of security, are dire," the cardinal said.

"The sound of bombing is frequent and is felt at every moment. Despite this, I saw unity among them, organising their daily lives in the monastery, and managing their use of electricity, water, and food so that nothing would be lacking," he continued.

Pizzaballa also visited the Orthodox Church, prayed with its members, and spent time at the monastery to meet all its residents, together with their parish priest and their bishop, who he said were very welcoming.

"The situation is equally terrible for all. I spoke to them about their daily lives and aspirations once the war ends and peace is established," the cardinal said.

"I did not hesitate to visit and bless the bakery, owned by a Christian family, that had recently resumed its operations, and serves everyone in the community, even if in small and sometimes insufficient quantities," he continued.

"The perseverance of the faithful of Gaza in celebrating Mass and adoring Christ in the Eucharist, the Bread of Life, without any interruptions or weariness, has indeed lifted their spirits and instilled in them strength, hope, and joy," Pizzaballa said.

The cardinal also visited the cemetery, where he blessed the graves of the faithful departed, especially the two people killed by a sniper