

HERALD

The Catholic Weekly

Mission Statement

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

TERHAD

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Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. 18 For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.

Phil. 3:17-18



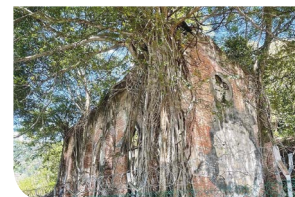
Enriching catechetical sessions in the Diocese of Penang

■ P5



Hope for a world in crisis

■ P6



Chapel of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary

■ P12

PRAYER is the only solace

VATICAN: Since February 24, the faithful, led by cardinals and bishops, have prayed the daily rosary in St Peter's Square for Pope Francis' recovery. "It is the Pope who gathers us here," said Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, one of the papal right-hand men.

"In this situation, we're helpless, so prayer is the only solace," he said, adding that it only seems like it's business as usual at the Vatican, "but it's not, because it feels very empty, without a spirit."

Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, the Polish prelate who heads the Vatican's Dicastery for the Service of Charity, serves as the Pope's key representative in distributing alms to the poor and needy, a focus central to Pope Francis' papacy. On March 2, he led the Rosary in St Peter's Square.

Cardinal Krajewski explained that people gather each night in St Peter's Square — "the heart of Rome, where everything is accomplished" — because it holds profound significance. "This is where martyrdom took place. St Peter's Square is the cemetery of Christians. It's also where every papal elec-

tion is announced. So when the pope suffers, it's only natural that we rush to this square, just as people did when Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI passed away. The Pope himself gathers us here."

Every evening, thousands of Catholics join in prayer, offering the Rosary for Pope Francis' recovery, as they turn to the Blessed Mother for comfort and guidance.

"The Mother of God stood at the foot of the cross, sharing in the suffering of her Son. She was helpless. And we, too, in the face of another's suffering, particularly the Holy Father's, are helpless, because we can do nothing. We can send him our well wishes, but the only real action we can take is to come together," said Cardinal Krajewski.

"We cannot do anything else during these prayers — there are no sermons, no speeches, no greetings," the Pope's almoner added. "Like Mary, we stand under the cross of suffering because it is in this cross that the Holy Father participates."

The cardinal emphasised that the Rosary is "the best prayer for this time," and reflected on the Pope's 12-year papacy: "I'll honestly admit that as I stand in this square, I am reminded of all the good Pope Francis has done. During these prayers, Lord Jesus reminds us of that — and we hope this pon-

tificate continues."

Before each decade of the Rosary, the cardinal noted, Catholics pray the 'Our Father', with its profound message: "Thy will be done, not mine." It's a complete surrender to the Lord Jesus, letting it be as God wills."

Cardinal Krajewski emphasised the power of the nightly prayer gatherings, which draw at least 5,000 faithful each evening, including Jubilee pilgrims. He described the experience as "beautiful to simply stand together with Mary before the great mystery of suffering."

"Nobody tells these people to come. They are driven by their own necessity, and they rush to the square — it's like a river flowing," the cardinal said. "Most of them are young, which shows how much they need guidance today, how much they long for a sign from someone like the Pope — a man of prayer, whose logic is the logic of the Gospel, and who teaches them about Jesus."

He added, "That's why I believe we are starting to miss this Pope so much."

The cardinal also reflected on the three qualities that Pope Francis has taught us to describe "the style of God" — closeness, tenderness, and gentleness. "So every evening when we gather for prayer, we embody God's style because we want to be close,

close to the suffering person. In this way, we show tenderness. We can't just enter the Holy Father's room in Gemelli, but by gathering—even at the ends of the earth — we demonstrate our closeness and tenderness. And we do so in the gentlest way possible, praying with Mary, who has already experienced this suffering."

The cardinal confirmed that the evening Rosaries will continue "until the Pope returns to the Vatican."

He also acknowledged that the faithful appreciate the clear and balanced communications from the Vatican regarding the Pope's health. "It's known to everyone that this illness is very tiring for him, so much so that he needs rest after the night. While the messages may seem brief, they are truthful. If the Pope didn't need rest, he wouldn't be in the hospital."

Cardinal Krajewski praised the wisdom of these communications, saying, "It's very beautiful that the Pope is telling us the truth — we don't need to guess, there's no room for speculation."

He concluded by noting that, while journalists may be focused on what will happen next, "the only thing we have is our prayer. And the Lord God is already directing the fate of the Church. We are not alone." OSV





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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

In every corner of the Church, volunteers play an essential yet often overlooked role. From organising parish events to preparing the church for significant liturgical celebrations, volunteers are the backbone of the Church's daily life and mission. Their selfless service sustains not just the physical and organisational aspects of parish life, but also reflects the very spirit of Christian discipleship. As Pope Francis often reminds us, the heart of the Church lies in service to others, and the spirit of volunteerism is not just an activity — it is a vocation.

On March 8 and 9, Rome became the centre of the world for a weekend, hosting around 25,000 pilgrims from over 100 countries for the fifth major Jubilee event dedicated to the World of Volunteering. This event served as a reminder of the immense contributions volunteers make, not only in the Church but across the globe.

The event also highlighted that volunteerism has been a part of the Church since its very beginning. Even during the time of Jesus, volunteers — most notably women — ensured that the needs of Jesus and His disciples were met. In the Gospels, we read about women like Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna, who “provided for them out of their resources” (Luke 8:3). These women were not only companions but also unsung heroes who made sure the logistical needs of Jesus and the apostles were taken care of, allowing them to focus on preaching, healing, and spreading the Good News. Their ministry exemplifies how volunteerism is woven into the very fabric of the Church's life from the start.

Today, volunteers in the parish continue this tradition, contributing to the fulfillment of the Church's mission. Whether it's setting up for major feast-day celebrations, preparing for Holy Week observances, cleaning the church for Easter

or Christmas, or assisting during crises like floods, volunteers embody the spirit of service Christ calls us to. Parishes rely heavily on volunteers, especially during special liturgies, to create an environment where the community can gather in worship and prayer. The Church is transformed — physically, emotionally, and spiritually — by the time, effort, and devotion of those who serve.

Behind every beautiful liturgy, every flower arrangement, every lit candle, and every prepared altar, countless volunteers are at work behind the scenes. It's not just about preparing the church building; it's about ensuring that liturgical events unfold smoothly so the community can focus on prayer and reflection. This is a labour of love done not for fame or recognition, but out of love for Christ and His Church.

During difficult times, such as when a parish is affected by floods or other crises, volunteers step up in a more urgent way. They clean up, support affected families, and provide practical assistance to ensure the parish remains a place of hope and healing. It is in such times that the Church truly shines — not only in its ministry but in its ability to rally together in both spirit and action. Pope Francis has repeatedly called for a Church that is “a field hospital after battle,” one that responds to the wounded not with grand gestures, but with humble service.

True volunteerism is not about seeking recognition or personal gain but about embodying the love of Christ, who came “not to be served, but to serve” (Mark 10:45). In this way, each volunteer becomes a reflection of Christ's own service and love.

In Church documents, volunteerism is recognised as an essential expression of the Christian vocation. The Second Vatican Council's *Apostolicam Actuositatem* emphasises that all

members of the faithful are called to participate in the mission of the Church, including through volunteer work. This call to serve is not just a practical necessity but a spiritual calling. Volunteers help create a living witness to Christ in the community, making the Church a place where people experience God's love in action.

However, it's important to remember that volunteerism is not about seeking fame or recognition. St Teresa of Calcutta once said, “Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love.” Volunteers, whether during times of crisis or in regular parish activities, do not seek accolades but the satisfaction of knowing they are contributing to the greater good. The act of giving without seeking recognition is, in itself, a form of holiness.

As we reflect on the importance of volunteers in the life of the Church, it becomes clear that the Church cannot function without these selfless men and women. Whether during special liturgies, in times of difficulty, or through every day parish life, volunteers are essential to the mission of the Church. We are all called to serve, and it is through volunteering that we, like the women in Jesus' time, participate in God's mission of love, healing, and hope.

So, let us ask ourselves: How can we serve our parish? How can we offer our time and talents to build a vibrant community of faith? Let us not wait for recognition but respond to the call of service, as volunteers have done for centuries in the life of the Church. In the words of Pope Francis, “When we serve others, we are truly serving God.” In doing so, we become the hands and feet of Christ in the world today.

Patricia Pereira

Faith, wisdom and divine revelation

On this Second Sunday of Lent, we are invited to journey deeper into the heart of God's revelation, encountering His promises, His glory, and the transformative power of faith. The readings today from Genesis, Philippians, and Luke offer us a profound reflection on God's covenant, the call to steadfast faith, and the radiant hope revealed in the Transfiguration of Jesus.

Let us begin with the first reading from Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18. Here we witness a pivotal moment in salvation history: God's covenant with Abram. God takes Abram outside and directs him to look at the stars, promising, “So shall your descendants be.” Abram believes, and his faith is credited to him as righteousness. This passage not only underscores God's faithfulness but also highlights a crucial epistemological principle of Scripture; that is faith is a way of knowing. Abram does not have empirical proof of God's promise. He cannot count his descendants nor see the fulfilment of the covenant. Yet, through faith, he comprehends an unseen reality through the trustworthiness of God's word.

Epistemology, the study of how we come to know what we know, often emphasises reason and experience. But Scripture reveals a higher form of knowledge: the knowledge that comes through divine revelation and faith. Abram's belief is not irrational; rather, it is supra-rational rooted in a confidence that transcends what human senses can grasp. This challenges us today: How often do we demand signs or visible assurances from God before trusting Him? Abram teaches us that faith is a lens through which we perceive God's eternal promises.

In the second reading from Philippians 3:17 – 4:1, St Paul continues this theme by urging the Christian community to “stand firm in the Lord.” He contrasts those whose “god is their stomach” and who focus solely on earthly matters with those who await their true citizenship in heaven. Paul's language reflects another layer of scriptural epistemology: the distinction between worldly

knowledge and divine wisdom. Those who fixate on earthly things rely solely on what can be seen, touched, or consumed. Yet, Paul reminds us that our true knowledge comes from an awareness of our heavenly destiny.

This passage calls us to lift our gaze from the transient to the eternal. Just as Abram looked up at the stars and saw a future shaped by God's promise, we too must look beyond the fleeting pleasures and struggles of this world. True wisdom involves recognising that our ultimate reality is shaped not by what is immediately visible but by God's unfolding plan for us.

Finally, the Gospel of Luke 9:28-36 presents the breathtaking scene of the Transfiguration. Jesus, accompanied by Peter, James, and John, ascends the mountain to pray. There, His face changes, and His clothes become dazzling white. Moses and Elijah appear, speaking of Jesus' departure, His “exodus,” which He will accomplish in Jerusalem. A cloud overshadows them, and a voice declares: “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to Him!”

The Transfiguration is a moment of divine revelation — an unveiling of Jesus' glory, not for its own sake, but to strengthen the disciples' faith as they approach the dark road to Calvary. This event is a profound lesson in epistemology: the disciples' understanding of Jesus deepens not through reason alone but through an encounter with God's presence. Peter, overwhelmed, desires to build tents to contain and prolong the moment. But God's voice redirects them: “Listen to Him.” Knowledge of God does not come from grasping or controlling divine moments but from listening to His Son.

This Gospel challenges us: Are we truly listening to Jesus? Or are we, like Peter, trying to confine God's work within our own understanding? Often, we want faith to be predictable, contained, and comfortable. But divine revelation calls us to let go of our need to control and to open our hearts to the unpredictable and transformative

Reflecting on our Sunday Readings with Fr George Vaithynathan

2nd Sunday of Lent (C)

Readings: Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18;

Philippians 3:17 – 4:1;

Gospel: Luke 9:28-36

power of God.

So, dear brothers and sisters, what can we take away from these readings today?

First, faith is a way of knowing. Like Abram, we are called to trust God's promises even when we cannot see their fulfilment. Faith opens our minds and hearts to realities beyond human comprehension.

Second, true wisdom comes from focusing on eternal truths, not on earthly distractions. St. Paul reminds us to keep our gaze fixed on our heavenly citizenship, for that is where our ultimate destiny lies.

Third, divine knowledge often comes through listening, not controlling. The Transfiguration teaches us that God's ways are higher than ours, and our task is not to build tents around His glory but to listen and follow His Son.

As we continue our Lenten journey, let us ask God for the grace to see with the eyes of faith, to think with the wisdom of eternity, and to listen with hearts open to His transforming voice. Let this Lent be a time not only of penance but of deeper understanding. A season where we grow not just in knowledge about God, but in ultimate knowledge of God.

May the Lord bless our journey, and may we, like Abram, Paul, and the disciples, walk by faith and not by sight.

Fr George Vaithynathan is the assistant parish priest at the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Ipoh.

Court rules Sacred Heart Convent land belongs to state

MELAKA: The High Court in Melaka has ruled that the land on which the 120-year-old Sacred Heart Convent school stands belongs to the state government.

Judge Datuk Mohd Radzi Abdul Hamid delivered the verdict by dismissing a legal bid by the Canossian Sisters and the Portuguese Mission to secure title to the land, known as Lot 6 (Portuguese Convent).

The lawsuit, filed in May 2022, was brought by two statutory entities seeking ownership of the property, which has been occupied and managed by the Portuguese Mission and the Canossian Sisters since 1905.

The first applicant, the Mother Superior of the Daughters of Charity of the Canossian Institute (Malaya), was established in 1957 to hold property belonging to the Canossian Sisters. The second applicant, the Agent of the Commission for the Administration of the Estates of the Portuguese Missions in China and Singapore, was founded under a 1910 colonial law and claimed legal ownership of the land.

The land, located near A'Famosa Hill, originally housed the Portuguese Mission Girls' School, which was later renamed Convent of the Sacred Heart and is now known as Sekolah Kebangsaan Sacred Heart

Convent.

The applicants claimed that a Dutch Title Deed had been issued for the land before the National Land Code Act of 1963 came into effect. However, the deed, said to have been in the possession of Fr Alvaro Martins Coroado, was lost after he was captured by the Japanese army in 1943.

In 2014, the applicants requested a replacement title deed from the state land and mines director, but the request was rejected. The respondent argued that the land is state property and was never legally registered under the applicants' names. They also stated that the Dutch Title Deed was merely a lot index, not an ownership document, and that they no longer had the authority to issue a replacement title.

The applicants contended that they had a legal and beneficial ownership interest in Lot 6 and that the refusal to issue a replacement title was illegal. In response, they filed for a judicial review.

Judge Mohd Radzi ruled that long-term occupation of land does not automatically confer ownership rights. He noted that there was no documentation proving the applicants' legal



title to Lot 6 and highlighted their delayed action, which suggested acquiescence on their part.

"The applicants had been in a long slumber, and it is now too late for them to pursue the claim," Judge Radzi said, adding that the opportunity to act had "left the station."

Lawyer Datuk Joy Appukuttan, representing the Canossian Sisters, stated that they will be appealing to the Federal Court.



The chapel at the Convent of the Sacred Heart. (photo/Bernard Anthony)

**KUALA LUMPUR
ARCHDIOCESE**

**Diary of Archbishop
Julian Leow**

March

18-19 Clergy Monthly Recollection
20 Bishops' Meeting – College General, Penang

Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #214

Dear friends of MJD,
 Ramadan is already here. We Catholics have entered Lent with Ash Wednesday. A holy time for review of life and change. The Pope's Lenten Message is this "Journeying together means... walking side-by-side, without shoving or stepping on others, without envy or hypocrisy, without letting anyone be left behind or excluded."

Shocks are never over. A new search for the unexplained disappearance of Malaysian Airlines MH370 has begun in the Indian Ocean. Azlina Othman, Minister in PM's Department said the AGC had granted DNAA (Discharge without Acquittal) to 18 VIPs between 2017 and 2024. Another MACC investigation into the RM170 million and 16kg of gold bars found lying around. A total of 1.2 million National Higher Education Fund Corporation (PTPTN) borrowers have yet to settle their loans, resulting in outstanding debts of RM10.8 billion as of Dec 31, 2023. *Wall Street Journal* reported that Malaysia is the number one most corrupted country in the world for doing business.

More and more young adults, the Gen Z and Millennials, who are ditching the stable 9-to-5 well-paying jobs and the climbing corporate ladder, for more fulfilling and flexible life, believe adulthood is about purpose, autonomy and wellbeing. They call this the new normal.

Caritas deplores slashing of Humanitarian Assistance, the drastic cuts to international development aid, as the betrayal of global responsibility. Some have more, some have none.

Going Beyond Times: it is not about feeling pious nor indulging in pious acts.

Many church groups target homes and institutes to dump rations, meals and cash during Lent. Ask the operators of these shelters, and they say only twice a year, there's so much hype.

The Pope says "journey together" ... the Caritas Internationalis calls us to "turn debts into hope". Servicing of national debts, debts to foreign fundings depletes resources for nation building and eradicating poverty. When we are blessed, it is to bless others. Gandhi once said that "there is enough from everyone's needs but not enough for people's greed". We can payback or pay forward by being volunteers too.

Volunteers are the backbone of social action or Caritas. It is the tithing of skills, time and self. The church needs volunteers. We never lose anything. In our giving, we receive. Give 10 per cent of yourself and see what happens. "A life is not important except in the impact it has on others"

A Thought for the Week: The Water Pump
 A man was lost in the desert, and was dying of thirst. He stumbled upon an abandoned house. There he found a pump. Stumbling, he began pumping. But no water came from the well. Then he noticed a small jug with a cork at the top and a note written on the side: "You have to prime the pump with water, my friend. P.S. And fill the jug again before you leave." He pulled out a cork and saw that the jug was full of water. He began to wonder: to finish the water and not die or pour it down the rusty pump as written on the note.

Something from inside told him to follow the advice and take the risk. He did as instructed. The water gushed out.

There was enough to drink, and enough to fill the jug. He corked the jug and left a note on the jug: "Believe me, it really works!"

The lesson from the desert: Sometimes one has to give away the only vital thing in order to get in return something better. Give and you shall receive.

QnQ! Q asks? Finding God? Is it that easy?
 "Every place is the place to find God, and God is in everything." *Sr Ilia Delio*
 1. People who accept themselves accept others. People who hate themselves hate others. Only Divine Light gives us permission, freedom, and courage to go all the way down into our depths and meet our shadow.
 2. When we become aware that we are not the persona (mask) we have been presenting to others; when we recognise our manufactured self-image; when we are able to face the reality that we are creations of our own minds, desire, choice and everyone else's opinion....we find ourselves, we find God. Be liberated. Grow in spiritual maturity. Meet God.
 3. Jesus came to change our minds about God — and about ourselves — and about where goodness and evil really lie.

The Holy Spirit @work: The Holy Spirit's main ministry is not to give thrills but to create in us Christlike character. *J. I. Packer*

Something To Tickle You: "We are not going in circles, we are going upwards. The path is a spiral; we have already climbed many steps." *Hermann Hesse*

Bishop Bernard Paul

PENANG DIOCESE

**Diary of Cardinal
Sebastian Francis**

March

20 Bishops' Meeting – College General, Penang
23 Mass – Church of the Assumption at 10.00am
23 Meeting – General Councillor of Canossian Daughters of Charity (FDCC) at 11.00am

**MALACCA JOHORE
DIOCESE**

**Diary of Bishop
Bernard Paul**

March

18-19 Clergy Monthly Recollection – Good Shepherd Seminary, Melaka
20 Bishops' Meeting – College General, Penang

SFA hosts jubilee of contemplative living pilgrimage

Priangka Elizabeth

CHERAS: The Church of St Francis of Assisi (SFA) recently hosted the Jubilee of Contemplative Living Pilgrimage, a spiritual journey aimed at renewing and deepening the faith of all participants. It was jointly organised by five of the church's ministries: the Beacon of Hope Ministry; Catholic Charismatic Renewal Ministry; Health and Wellness Ministry; Pilgrimage Ministry, and the World Community for Christian Meditation Ministry.

Held on March 1, the pilgrimage attracted 160 participants for the afternoon session, with an additional 50 attending the evening Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) session. Led by Fr Paul Cheong OFM, Cap, the event offered participants the chance to receive the Jubilee plenary indulgence — special grace granted during the Holy Year — while entering into a sacred stillness that allowed the Holy Spirit to purify, renew, and transform their souls.

The pilgrimage began with a talk by Fr Paul on *What is Contemplative Living?* He highlighted that mindful living is at the heart of contemplative living, reflecting the biblical principle, "We live by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor 5:7). Fr Paul encouraged participants to cultivate gratitude, offering thanks to God in all aspects of life.

This was followed by a *Mind-*

ful Living Workshop conducted by Dr Madelene Ong, who explored the significance of mindfulness in daily life. She introduced the concept of mindful eating, encouraging participants to cultivate awareness in every bite they take. By breaking free from unconscious eating habits, individuals can develop a more intentional and present approach to life. She also taught mindful breathing techniques, demonstrating how conscious breathing fosters calmness, focus, and relaxation, helping to centre one's thoughts in God's presence.

After a short tea break, the event continued with a session by Jason Lee from the World Community for Christian Meditation ministry. He highlighted the holistic benefits of Christian meditation, explaining how silence, stillness, and surrender open the heart to experience God's



Fr Paul Cheong OFM Cap

indwelling presence. Jason also provided practical guidance on achieving the proper meditation posture, encouraging participants to integrate this practice into their daily spiritual routines.

A highlight of the pilgrimage was the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Many who had not been to confession for a long time answered the call to seek God's mercy. It took six priests over an hour to hear all confessions, reflecting the deep yearning for spiritual renewal among the pilgrims.

Another key moment was the veneration of relics at the Chapel of Portiuncula. Pilgrims were given a detailed explanation of the relics, deepening their understanding of their spiritual significance. This allowed each participant to offer personal prayers and intentions, fostering a connection with the saints and their exemplary faith journeys.

The evening proceeded with novena and Mass, and a communal dinner where pilgrims continued to reflect and share their spiritual experiences of the day.

The final segment of the pilgrimage was the Praise and Worship session, gathering 200

faithful in the evening CCR session. Fr Paul delivered a talk titled *The Purifying Fire of the Spirit: Contemplation and Transformation*. He shared his personal journey of spiritual purification and transformation, recounting how the Legion of Mary and CCR played a crucial role in his spiritual growth.

Fr Paul emphasised that the purity of the spirit is reflected in the purity of the mind and body. He discussed various forms of prayer and identified the eight deadly thoughts that often challenge our spiritual journey. Through prayer, discipline, and contemplative practices, one can overcome temptations and trials.

A particularly intriguing aspect of his talk was his reference to *Qigong* and meditation as healing energies for the spirit. He explained how these practices, when rooted in Christian spirituality, help align the body, mind, and soul with God's divine presence.

Fr Paul concluded with this message: "CCR serves to ignite and awaken the fire of faith within us, fostering a new Pentecost. However, it is our responsibility to nurture, sustain, and grow this Pentecostal life through the practice of eight spiritual habits."

Participants left with renewed faith, a deeper commitment to contemplative living, and a greater awareness of God's presence in their daily lives.



The participants practising meditation.

Forty pilgrims embark on a spiritual journey at St Louis Kluang

KLUANG: On March 1, forty pilgrims from the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur embarked on a spiritual journey to the Church of St Louis a designated pilgrimage centre in the Malacca Johore Diocese.

The pilgrims spent the 3.5-hour journey by chartered bus with joy as they listened to spiritual hymns and prayed the Rosary; listened to the Gospel Reading and Reflection and briefing about what is a Jubilee Year and what is an indulgence and why we need indulgences and how to gain one and understanding what the Jubilee Indulgence is; which is a gift of grace from the Church.

Upon arriving at the church, the pilgrims were warmly welcomed by assistant parish priest Fr William Pillai, Deacon Louis Martin, and the parish team of volunteers.

Fr William, the pilgrims' Spiritual Director at St Louis, led a formation session on *Pilgrimage of Hope and Journey Discernment*, drawing from Deuteronomy 26:5. He explored the question, "Who is a pilgrim?" and shared insights from Pope Benedict XVI's Catechesis on Jacob's Ladder and Dream Spirituality. Fr William guided the pilgrims in reading scriptures from Genesis, Deuteronomy, and Romans, reflecting on Jacob's dream of a ladder reaching from earth to heaven (Genesis 28:12). He explained that this vision was God's first revelation to Israel, emphasising God's personal interest in us and establishing a relationship with His people.

Fr William encouraged the pilgrims to recognise God's constant



The pilgrims spending time in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament.

presence, even in times of confusion or depression, drawing parallels to Jacob's faith and confidence in God's promise. He also spoke about Setting the Invisible Coordinates Right, urging pilgrims to align their thoughts and seek a deeper understanding of their faith. He stressed that a pilgrimage journey cannot be sustained without recognising God as our Saviour and reminded the pilgrims to appreciate the sacraments, take God's grace seriously, and prepare for Lent through repentance and renewal.

After the formation, the pilgrims adjourned to the church for Mass, celebrated by Fr William and assisted by Deacon Louis. After Mass, Fr William blessed each pilgrim with holy oil. The pilgrims then

proceeded to the El-Bethel Pilgrim Parlour, where they prayed silently, reflecting on the Cross and the image of Christ, with a ladder standing nearby. Each pilgrim had their pilgrimage passport stamped and received holy water.

After lunch, the pilgrims entered the adoration room next to the sanctuary for adoration and benediction. A few also participated in confession. During adoration, each pilgrim followed a meditative sequence: starting with a silent gaze at the Blessed Sacrament, followed by thanksgiving and praise, sharing personal thoughts and requesting mercy, grace, and forgiveness, and listening for God's will. The session concluded with a *Lectio Divina* meditation, where they reflected on

a scripture, Romans 8:26: "...We don't know what we ought to pray for..." After an hour, Fr William returned from confession to conclude with benediction. This meditative practice provided a deeper connection to the Lord, helping the pilgrims align their spiritual focus.

The group then gathered for a photo with parish priest, Msgr Peter Ng, before proceeding to the newly renovated outdoor grotto for Rosary prayers.

The five-hour pilgrimage at St Louis was spiritually enriching and meaningful. In addition to the prayers and reflections, the pilgrims received a plenary indulgence, granting them a full remission of temporal punishment for their sins. **Bernard Anthony**



Fr William Pillai speaking on *Pilgrimage of Hope and Journey Discernment*.

Enriching catechetical sessions in the Diocese of Penang

Jennifer Duarte

PENANG: The Penang Diocesan Catechetical Commission (PDCC) recently invited Fr Dr Gilbert Choondal SDB *pic*, a priest from the Salesian Order of Don Bosco in Bangalore, India, to lead formation sessions for the evangelising catechists (ECs) in the Diocese of Penang.

Fr Gilbert has over 30 years of experience in catechetical ministry in India. He earned his Doctorate in Catechetics from the Salesian Pontifical University in Rome in 2001. Throughout his career, he has taught seminarians, priests, religious groups, and catechists. His extensive contributions to the field include publishing articles, books, catechetical kits, and pioneering Bible newspapers.

Two of his notable works are *Readings in Catechetics* and *Manual for the First Holy Communion*. The former, published in 2024, is the culmination of three decades of work and addresses fundamental catechetical questions. The latter is a comprehensive guide designed for both catechists and parents of First Holy Communions.

During his two-week stay in Malaysia, Fr Gilbert conducted an intensive series of 28 catechetical sessions across the Diocese of Penang. He led 24 sessions for parents, reaching approximately 600 individuals, and engaged with about 300 ECs. Additionally, he



held three one-hour sessions for the clergy during the Clergy Monthly Recollection at Stella Maris. By special request, he also delivered a two-hour session on *Liturgical Catechesis* for the clergy at the Minor Basilica of St Anne.

Fr Gilbert's formation sessions for the ECs and parents were organised at the deanery level — the Island, Perak, and Northern deaneries. In each deanery, he conducted an hour-long session for parents of catechism children, followed by a one-hour session for ECs. Additionally, he offered a three-hour session for approximately 100 ECs teaching First Holy Communion classes. To reach as many ECs, priests, and parents of young Catholics attending catechism classes as possible, his presentations were held at over 10 different locations across the diocese.

The hour-long sessions for parents focused on *Family Catechesis*.



Fr Dr Gilbert Choondal SDB at the evangelising catechists session in Taiping.

Fr Gilbert highlighted that many Catholics are losing their Catholic identity and emphasised the critical role parents play in helping to reclaim it, as they are the primary catechists in passing on the faith to their children. He noted that family prayer is often more evangelising than sermons at Mass or catechism classes. Drawing from Pope Francis' 2016 exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, Fr Gilbert offered parents practical tips for reviving their Catholic identity. These included fostering family prayer, teaching moral formation, and becoming more actively involved in community charity.

In his sessions for ECs, Fr Gilbert focused on the essential tasks and responsibilities of catechists, providing valuable insights for those eager to deepen their understanding and skills in evangelisation. He emphasised that ECs should teach the Four Pillars of Faith — the Creed, the Sacraments, the Commandments, and Prayer. To effectively teach these pillars, he

stressed the importance of catechists being well-versed in these areas and familiar with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, its *Compendium*, or *YOUCAT*. He also shared insightful teaching methodologies to enhance the effectiveness of catechism classes.

The three-hour sessions for ECs teaching First Holy Communion focused on enhancing catechetical methods and sharing best practices for preparing candidates for their First Holy Communion. As with his other sessions, the Four Pillars of Faith were emphasised. For each Pillar, Fr Gilbert suggested engaging activities to make classroom sessions more interactive and meaningful for children. For example, in teaching Prayer, he explained how prayers can be categorised into Blessing and Adoration, Petition, Intercession, Thanksgiving, and Praise. ECs could then encourage children to identify the type of prayer used in different parts of the Mass. He also recommended assigning Bible verses

for the children to classify according to the type of prayer. For more practical activity ideas, Fr Gilbert directed ECs to his book *Manual for the First Holy Communion*.

The feedback from the ECs and parents who attended the sessions was overwhelmingly positive. Participants found the sessions to be highly enriching, offering valuable insights and practical tools to enhance their ministry. The sessions also provided an opportunity for parents and catechists to engage with one another, share insights, and deepen their understanding of the Church's mission.

In gratitude, the PDCC extends its heartfelt thanks to Fr Gilbert for generously sharing his catechetical expertise with the Diocese of Penang. His guidance has equipped both ECs and parents to be more effective evangelisers and to form missionary disciples among the children. The next step is for everyone to put into practice what they have learned!

SFX parish hosts reflections on Pope Francis' teachings

PETALING JAYA: In celebration of the Jubilee Year of Hope, the Church of St. Francis Xavier (SFX) has launched a series of reflections focused on key documents by Pope Francis. The series, organised by the parish's Firm Foundation Ministry commenced on February 13 with a talk by Fr Alberto I. David SJ *pic* on *Gaudete et Exsultate – Rejoice and Be Glad*.

Throughout the year, the series will feature additional talks by Jesuit speakers, offering insights into Pope Francis' messages of hope. These reflections aim to inspire and guide participants in living out the Pope's teachings, encouraging them to embrace the message of hope central to the Jubilee Year.

Pope Francis' message for the Jubilee Year 2025 centres around the theme of hope — urging individuals to be bearers of hope, cultivate it within themselves, and grasp its profound significance in their lives. In alignment with this message, Fr Alberto encouraged attendees to *Rejoice and Be Glad*, calling on them to live out the Pope's message of hope throughout the year.

Fr Alberto highlighted Pope

Francis' concept of "middle-class holiness," a term first introduced in 2018. The core of this message is that holiness is not a distant, unattainable goal but a calling that belongs to every Christian. Whether your vocation is to be a teacher, doctor, or any other profession, your deeper purpose should be holiness. The beauty of holiness lies in its personal nature — each of us is called to it — but we are united in Christ, guided by His wisdom, and see our lives as a mission to grow in God's love.

In his sharing, Fr Alberto shed light on how this holiness is to be attained: through contemplative



prayer and active service for others. His message reminded us of the joy of striving for holiness and how blessed we are to be called to live a holy life.

Living out our holiness is not without its challenges. As Pope Francis points out, two threats — Gnosticism and Pelagianism — can distract us from this calling. Gnosticism focuses on intellectual knowledge of God while neglecting love, humility, and action. Pelagianism, on the other hand, believes that holiness can be achieved through effort alone, without relying on God's grace. Both views decentralise God, replacing Him with human effort and intellect, hinder-

ing our pursuit of true holiness.

Pope Francis reminds us that holiness requires humility and the understanding that we are not all-knowing, as God is. The Beatitudes, which are central to Christ's teachings on holiness, call us to live differently from the world's values. They offer a radical rethinking of what is important to God, urging us to be spiritually poor, meek, compassionate, just, pure in heart, peacemakers, and steadfast in faith despite persecution. These qualities defy society's norms and reflect the true essence of holiness.

Living out holiness is not limited to prayer but is expressed through merciful actions toward the suffering and oppressed. As

Fr Alvin Ng, SJ, reminded us prior to Fr Alberto's talk, there is nothing holy about being kind to those who can benefit us. True holiness requires selflessness — dying to oneself, as Christ taught.

Fr Alberto echoed Pope Francis' message of spiritual vigilance in our daily battle against evil. Christians must wield spiritual "weapons" — prayer, scripture, the Mass, Eucharistic adoration, Sacramental Reconciliation, charity, and community life — to maintain holiness and resist the temptations of the world.

Fr Alberto also stressed the importance of discernment, helping Christians recognise God's grace in everyday life. This lifelong process of shedding our ego and becoming more open to God's mysteries requires intentional openness and trust in His plans.

Holiness is a communal journey, with saints and Mary as our guides. Mary embodies the Beatitudes and perfect submission to God's will. Pope Francis affirms that holiness is attainable by balancing contemplation with action, bearing witness to God's presence in all areas of life. This is the grace bestowed upon a Pilgrim of Hope. **Joanna Destiny**



The participants listening intently to Fr Alberto David SJ.

Hope for a world in crisis

SIBU, Sarawak: The Episcopal Commission for Creation Justice of Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei (ECCJ-MSB) conducted a three-day workshop titled *Ecological Pathways in the Climate Emergency* from February 11-13. The event brought together 40 delegates from Creation Justice Commissions (CJCs), Creation Justice Ministries (CJMs), and other church ministries from Sibu, Miri, Kuching, Keningau, and Kota Kinabalu.

The workshop was a step up from earlier training by the ECCJ-MSB to cover the new challenges that the global climate emergency was presenting. A key objective of the workshop was to capacitate CJCs and CJMs as well as other church leaders to carry out the mission of advancing creation justice and resilience in the fast-changing scenario of climate solutions.

"As global temperatures move dangerously close to surpassing the 1.5C limit set by the Paris Agreement permanently, many new so-called climate solutions are emerging.

We need to be careful that these solutions don't end up doing more harm than good. The workshop was designed to build strong advocates and mobilisers who are courageous in confronting injustices and steadfast in offering true hope and robust ecological pathways that will advance hope, truth, resilience, justice, peace and compassion for all," said Clare Westwood, lead trainer and creator of the workshop. Her co-trainers were Hilary Kung from Third World Network and Rety Sendi from Sahabat Alam Malaysia.

The issues covered were critical updates on the climate emergency, climate justice, a just transition, renewal energy, false climate solutions/technologies, future scenarios and true ecological pathways through the lens of faith. The workshop went into some of these ecological pathways, especially building community resilience to climate change impacts and permaculture.

Many of the participants said the workshop was an "eye-opener" for them with many



Participants of the Sibu Resilience Workshop assessing a farm.

new topics and they also appreciated the interactive nature of the workshop. "A timely workshop, with updated scientific data. We ALL need to make changes in our lifestyles, to avert the catastrophic effects of climate change. It is another wake-up call. Things are not straightforward as everything is interconnected and the global situation has worsened," said Gabrielyn and William Gan, participants from CJC Miri. "The session connecting the climate emergency with the Bible really opened my eyes," shared Fr Ravi Pulagam, new CJC Spiritual Director for CJC Sibu.

In his closing remarks, Bishop Joseph Hii stressed that "Creation is the first Bible" and that we cannot fail to recognise Christ in all creation and act to save creation from degradation and destruction due to human actions including climate change.

This workshop was followed by another

three-day workshop organised by CJC Sibu on *Assessing Community Resilience to Climate Change Impacts* which was attended by 19 participants and conducted by Clare Westwood. Vulnerable communities are facing worse floods, droughts, storms, heat waves and with these, food and water shortages, loss of livelihood and serious health impacts as a result of the growing climate crisis. The critical question is: How can we help people face a climate-challenged future with competence, confidence, courage and hope? This course presented a framework on resilience building and trained participants on how to assess rural community resilience. "I learnt a lot about the factors of resilience, new things which I had not been aware of earlier. This is extremely useful capacity building for us," says Annie Law, a Sibu CJC Committee member.



Participants of the ECCJ-MSB Ecological Pathways workshop in Sibu.

Sensory gardening experience for individuals with autism

PETALING JAYA: On March 1, a planting activity took place at Pusat Jagaan Istimewa Nathanael under the Ministry for Special Needs, Archdiocesan Office for Human Development. The session brought together individuals with autism and a group of dedicated volunteers. It was made possible through a collaboration with the Creation Justice Ministry team, who had 20 volunteers to assist in making the day a success as well as 12 individuals with autism who actively took part in the planting.

The activity provided a unique opportunity for the individuals with special needs to get their hands in the soil and engage directly with nature, offering not only an enjoyable experience but also a therapeutic one. Gardening is a fantastic sensory activity, helping individuals to connect with their environment in a meaningful way. It allowed the participants to engage multiple senses — touching the soil, feeling the textures of the plants, smelling the flowers and experiencing the sounds of the environment around them.

A variety of plants were carefully planted during the event, with the individuals involved having the chance to practice essential skills such as planting, watering, and maintaining the plants. This hands-on experience was not just about nurturing nature, but also about creating a routine that can be especially beneficial for individuals with autism. Watering the plants and tending to them regularly provides structure, fosters responsibility, and encourages mindfulness in a way that is both calming and rewarding.

The activity provided an opportunity for the participants to grow alongside the plants they helped nurture. It was a reminder of how simple activities, like planting, can have profound benefits for sensory development, communication, and connection to the world around us. We would like to express our gratitude to Fr Andrew Manickam OFM Cap, the ecclesiastical assistant for the Creation Justice Ministry, Ronald Hor, the coordinator, and the entire Creation Justice Ministry team and volunteers for their dedication and support. Their efforts



Special needs children learning to plant, water and maintain the plants.

made this event a success, and we look forward to many more opportunities like this that promote connection, growth, and

development for individuals with special needs. **Gunavathi Thurchinamurthy, Coordinator Ministry for Special Needs**



The pilgrims participating in the Rosary walk.

Rawang parishioners visit Port Dickson jubilee centre

RAWANG: A group of parishioners from the Church of St Jude embarked on a pilgrimage to commemorate the 2025 Jubilee Holy Year. Organised by BECCOT assistant coordinator and PPC member Diana Ryan, the pilgrimage included visits to three parishes in the Negeri district.

Four buses, carrying 176 parishioners, departed from the parish at 7.30am, with their first stop at the jubilee designated centre of the Church of Immaculate Conception in Port Dickson. Upon arrival, they were warmly welcomed by Fr Edwin Peter and the parishioners, who offered refreshments to the pilgrims.

Fr Edwin and his team provided a brief-

ing on the day's activities, which included a rosary walk and confessions heard by Fr Edwin and Fr Albet Arockiasamy, parish priest of the Church of St John Marie Vianney in Tampin. The day culminated in Mass, followed by benediction, and the pilgrimage concluded with a communal lunch.

Veronica, one of the pilgrims, shared her gratitude, saying, "So many things we have learned together." Steven Joseph, a core team member, added, "The journey was prayerful, and I felt the presence of the Holy Spirit as I entered the church. Despite a few unforeseen situations, God's protection was with us."

The pilgrimage continued to the Tampin parish, where Fr Albet and his welcoming team gave a tour of the church, offering blessings and serving tea and cakes. A brief yet meaningful visit followed at the Church of Visitation in Seremban.

The group returned to Rawang by 8.30pm, tired but spiritually fulfilled. Reflecting on the day, Diana Ryan said, "I feel so blessed to see the joy on the faces of the pilgrims. No words can express the satisfaction and fulfilment they experienced."

The pilgrimage served as a powerful reminder of the Jubilee Year's message of hope and renewal, strengthening both faith and community. **Mercy Almeida Stellus**

Understanding the beauty of the Holy Mass

Evelyn Jock

SANDAKAN: A talk on the *Liturgy of the Holy Mass* was held on February 21 and 22, at the Cathedral of St Mary, with speakers from the parish clergy and religious engaging over 100 parishioners, including attendees from the outstation parishes of St Paul, Ulu Dusun and St Mark. The participants, serving in roles such as commentators, lectors, altar servers, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion and laity, gathered to deepen their understanding of the Mass.

On the evening of Feb 21, Fr Simon Kontou discussed

the role of sacred music in the liturgy, highlighting how music helps parishioners unite with God and participate in the Mass. He distinguished sacred music from spiritual or worldly music, emphasising its role in reflecting biblical texts and elevating the liturgical celebration. He used the *Our Father* prayer as an example, explaining the appropriateness of the traditional Mass rendition over versions with refrains.

Deacon Ricky Boy Hasim's session, titled *Adakah Misa itu Indah? (Is the Mass Beautiful?)*, addressed the perception that the Mass can be boring, especially for those attending out of obligation. Deacon

Ricky encouraged participants to prepare for Mass with a deeper understanding of its mysteries, as it is a celebration where believers recognise Jesus as King. He also explained the sacred vessels used in the Mass, allowing participants to view and touch them during the session.

On the morning of Feb 22, which was the Feast of the Chair of St Peter, Sr Dorothy Aron shared insights on St Peter's role in the Church, explaining that the Catholic faith began when Jesus entrusted the keys of the kingdom to St Peter. She encouraged Catholics to appreciate their faith, quoting, "For those who believe, no



Fr Simon Kontou discussing the role of sacred music in the liturgy with the participants at the Cathedral of St Mary.

explanation is necessary; for those who do not believe, no answer is possible." Sr Dorothy also discussed the significance of the Sacrament of Baptism as the beginning of our spiritual journey and the blessings of the Holy Trinity and Mother Mary's intercession.

The participants were also encouraged to actively participate in singing during Mass, as the choir's

role is to lead, not perform for, the congregation. Christopher Aban, the Choir leader, demonstrated proper microphone techniques, and Fr Mitchelly Kiun addressed questions raised by the participants.

The event was interactive, informative, and fostered a warm, friendly atmosphere where clergy, religious, and parishioners engaged positively.

Archbishop Julian celebrates Mass with the Orang Asli

SEREMBAN: As part of the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur's 2025 Lenten Campaign, *To Stand in Solidarity with the Orang Asli*, Archbishop Julian Leow celebrated Mass on February 28 at Rumah Besar Kessu (Kebangkitan Yesus), Kampung Belihoi, with Fr Christopher Soosaipillai concelebrating.

The congregation included members of the Temuan tribe from Kampung Belihoi, as well as visitors from Kampung Tekir, Kampung Sebir, and the Church of St Aloysius in Mantin.

Together, they recited the rosary, their voices united in a powerful expression of faith in Jesus Christ. In his homily, Archbishop Julian spoke about the importance of listening and discerning the voice of God in our lives. He reminded the congregation that, just as a tree needs strong roots to grow and stand tall, so too must we strengthen our faith and deepen our relationship with God. He encouraged everyone to spend more time in prayer, to nurture their families, and to walk together on the path toward heaven.

The children were delighted to



The Orang Asli receiving the rosary from Archbishop Julian Leow.

receive *ang pous* from Archbishop Julian, a gesture that brightened their day. As the congregation gathered in fellowship, each person was also given a blessed rosary, a cherished symbol of faith and devotion.

The day concluded with a sim-

ple meal, where everyone shared food, laughter, and stories, further strengthening the sense of community and friendship that has grown over the years, particularly when the archbishop, then Fr Julian, celebrated Mass with the community. Selva Manogary Arikrishnan

Children burn palms for Ash Wednesday

MANTIN: The catechism children of the Church of St Aloysius were invited to witness and participate in the ancient ritual of burning palms for Ash Wednesday, answering the frequently asked question, "Where does the ash come from?" The ritual, symbolising repentance and renewal, allowed the children to become an active part of this sacred tradition held in the parish on March 2.

A few children read the Gospel and psalm, deepening their involvement in the ceremony and making the experience more personal and significant. Following the readings, the children eagerly gathered around as palm branches

from the previous year's Palm Sunday were burned. Filled with excitement, the younger children were eager to cast the palms into the fire, their faces lighting up with joy as they took part in the hands-on ritual. Catechists and parents guided them gently, ensuring their safety as they participated.

Despite the warmth of the flames and the bright, sunny morning, the children's sense of joy and pride was evident. Everyone present shared in the sacred moment, with the children feeling proud to contribute a meaningful tradition for the Church. Selva Manogary



The children participating in the ritual of burning palms for Ash Wednesday.

Rite of Blessing and Inauguration at Sibu cathedral



Bishop Joseph Hii blessing the council members.

SIBU: On the evening of March 2, Rt Rev Joseph Hii, Bishop of Sibu, accompanied by the Rector of the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, Fr Philip Hu, celebrated the Rite of Blessing and Inauguration at the mother church of the Diocese of Sibu.

The ceremony marked the installation of various councils, apostolates, and committees within the cathedral, strengthening the parish's leadership and community involvement.

In his homily, Bishop Joseph reflected on the Gospel, emphasising, "A good man draws what is good from the store of goodness in his heart." He encouraged the newly in-

stalled leaders to "draw out the goodness of others, for in doing so, you will see the goodness in yourselves." The bishop reminded the congregation that all people are created in the image of God, and by focusing on that inherent goodness, they can discover God's presence in themselves.

After the homily, parishioners witnessed the Rite of Blessing and Inauguration of the Parish Pastoral Council; Parish Finance Council; Iban Pastoral Apostolate; Mandarin Pastoral Apostolate; English Pastoral Apostolate; Iban Pastoral Apostolate of Sibu Jaya, and the Parish Finance Council of Sibu Jaya. Additionally, there was a commissioning of newly

appointed Assistant Acolytes (AAs) and the renewal of appointments for existing AAs.

The inauguration and commissioning involved nearly 150 members of the parish community.

Bishop Joseph expressed his gratitude to the volunteers, urging them to serve with humility. "In serving with humility, you glorify the Holy name of God," he said.

Fr Philip is assisted at the cathedral by Fr Edward Raymond (1st assistant) from the Neo Catechumenal Way; Fr Raphael Samosir (second assistant), and Fr Francis Go (third assistant) from the Order of Friars Minor, Capuchins.

Farewell and welcome at St Mary's Cathedral

Evelyn Jock

SANDAKAN: The Cathedral of St Mary witnessed a reshuffling of its clergy recently.

Fr Raymond Lee Seng Huat, who has served as assistant parish priest since his ordination in May 2022, has been reassigned to the Church of the Holy Trinity in Tawau. He will now serve the large Chinese community there. Fr Raymond, known for his humble and jovial nature, has been a beloved figure at the Cathedral of St Mary. His fluency in Bahasa Malaysia and English has helped foster a sense of belonging among the Chinese community in Sandakan. His contributions have ranged from pastoral care and community outreach to organising activities for the elderly, such as singing, reading, and puzzles.

Fr Raymond expressed his



Fr Raymond Lee

gratitude to Bishop Dusin Gitom, the clergy, religious members, and the people of Sandakan for their unwavering support during his time in the parish. He requested continued prayers for him and for the community as he embarks on this new assignment.

Replacing Fr Raymond as assistant parish priest is Fr Mitchelly



Fr Mitchelly Kiun

Kiun, a 45-year-old priest from the Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu. Fr Mitchelly, who was ordained in February 2014, joins the Cathedral of St Mary on a temporary assignment. He hails from a non-Catholic family in Kota Kinabalu and has a diverse background in education and work, having studied accounts and worked as a fish ball seller and part-time



Deacon Ricki Boy

driver before pursuing the priesthood. Fr Mitchelly has previously served in various parishes, including St Theresa in Kota Marudu and St Peter in Kudat. Fluent in multiple languages, including Hakka, Cantonese, Mandarin, Bahasa Malaysia, English, and Dusun, he is excited to return to Sandakan after a 10-year absence, viewing the new

assignment as a calling from the Lord.

Additionally, Deacon Ricki Boy Hasim, who was ordained on November 24, 2024, continues his spiritual journey in assisting the priests of the Cathedral of St Mary. Previously posted to Lahad Datu to serve at the Church of St Dominic, Deacon Ricki has embraced his vocation with growing responsibility and is eager to contribute to the Diocese of Sandakan.

The community of the Cathedral of St Mary celebrated these transitions during a potluck fellowship on February 23. The parish acknowledged Fr Raymond's positive impact and wished him success in his new role. At the same time, the community warmly welcomed Fr Mitchelly Kiun and Deacon Ricki Boy Hasim, looking forward to working together in faith.

Fr Jonathan's spiritual gift to the Golden Eagles



Fr Jonathan Rao (extreme left) holds a home-made farewell card filled with autographs by Golden Eagles.

KUALAL LUMPUR: The Golden Eagles gathered for a farewell celebration in honour of Fr Jonathan Rao, who, in return, left them with a parting gift — a spiritual “3Ws formula” for storing treasures in heaven.

Before giving his message, the newly-ordained priest invited the seniors of the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist to reflect on Matthew 6:19-21, focusing on the notion of treasures, both earthly and heavenly, particularly the verse, “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be.”

Fr Jonathan first engaged them with a Scripture song video titled *Where Your Treasure Is*, to ignite their hearts. He then shared his wisdom: “While it's okay to store earthly treasures, our focus must remain on heavenly treasures. This is achieved by constantly reflecting on and living out God's Word, seeking and doing God's Will, and following God's Way to live a Christian life — loving both our neighbour and our enemy.”

Fr Jonathan began his journey as a deacon at the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist on October 3, 2024, quickly forming a bond with the Golden Eagles. He actively participated in their fortnightly fellowships and even joined them on a pilgrimage to the Church of the Sacred

Heart in Bentong. The Golden Eagles were also present at the Church of St Francis of Assisi to witness his priestly ordination on Jan 25, 2025.

Around 60 Golden Eagles attended the farewell fellowship at the parish house, joined by parish priest Fr Gerard Theraviam and assistant parish priest Fr Ferdinand Magimay.

In another farewell event organised by the parish, Fr Gerard highlighted Fr Jonathan's dedication, noting that, instead of a celebratory dinner on his last evening at the cathedral, he chose to embark on a street mission with the RCIA team.

In his farewell message to the parish community, Fr Jonathan expressed, “My greatest treasure has been the openness with which you have shared your lives in our interactions — through joyful sacred celebrations and parish activities. These moments have shaped the cathedral's journey towards communion, participation, and mission. You are a community supported by committed people in various ministries, all of whom have inspired a deep sense of belonging and unity in the cathedral.”

Effective March 3, Fr Jonathan serves as the assistant parish priest at the Church of St Jude in Rawang, where he completed his pastoral training and was ordained as a deacon. **Bob Ho**

St Jude parishioners pay tribute to Fr Vincent Thomas

RAWANG: Mixed emotions filled the Church of St Jude during the 10.30am Mass on February 23, as the congregation celebrated Fr Vincent Thomas' academic pursuits in Rome, while bidding farewell to a beloved and vibrant priest.

Following the final hymn, newly appointed Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) chairman Anand Pathinathan addressed the congregation and invited Fr Vincent to the front. He then called upon outgoing PPC chairperson Christine Vincent to deliver her speech.

In her address, Christine highlighted Fr Vincent's contributions during his three-year tenure, emphasising his commitment to building a strong community — a promise he made upon his arrival at the Church of St Jude.

Among his notable achievements were the establishment of the annual Clinic Madani medical camp in collaboration with SP Care Group doctors and nurses, the creation of air-conditioned classrooms for cat-



Parish Finance Committee chairman Thomas Jayasooria presenting Fr Vincent with a gift.

echism classes, and the restructuring of various ministries for greater efficiency.

Christine acknowledged that while three years was a short time, Fr Vincent's dedication and the collaborative spirit he fostered among the ministries, councils, and zones were truly commendable.

The event continued with Tamil Apostolate coordinator Albert

Creg reciting a heartfelt poem entitled *Blessings*. His wife, Francesca, presented Fr Vincent with a purse, and Albert draped a shawl around him and placed a bead garland around his neck, both traditional Indian gestures of respect and affection. Parish Finance Committee chairman Thomas Jayasooria also presented Fr Vincent with a gift.

In his address, Fr Vincent expressed that while the Church of the Holy Family in Kajang held a special place as his “first love,” St Jude's would always remain his “first wife,” a metaphor conveying his deep affection for the church in Rawang. He shared his regret at not having more time to fully realise his mission in the parish and commended the work of the Bahasa Apostolate, who honoured him with a song.

The celebration concluded with a luncheon attended by around 500 parishioners. **Mercy Almeida Stellus**

Chapel outreach brings hope to families in need

KUALA SELANGOR: On February 23, an outreach programme was held at the Chapel of the Holy Infant Jesus, benefiting ten underprivileged families from the Kuala Selangor area.

The event was jointly organised by the chapel committee and a group of Catholics from Kuala Lumpur. Chapel Administrator, Fr James Gabriel, who also serves as the parish priest of the Church of St Paul the Hermit in nearby Bestari Jaya, offered his blessing to the programme.

Jesudass, the chapel's chairperson, and his committee welcomed the families and the visitors with

a community prayer session focused on hope. A reflection on the importance of caring for the poor was shared, reinforcing the message that Catholics are called to be instruments of hope and compassion.

During the sign of peace, guests shook hands and exchanged warm greetings, which deeply touched everyone involved. A tea fellowship followed, where attendees enjoyed a time of camaraderie, making new friendships. The gathering was further enlivened by an indoor balloon game, with both children and parents participating and winning small prizes, bringing joy and laughter to all.

The families were overjoyed to receive essential food items. In addition, they were gifted children's educational books, bath towels, and pillows. The chapel also received five rosaries, and the chapel caretaker was given a bag of food items as a token of appreciation.

Jesudass expressed his gratitude to the Catholic group on this outreach initiative. As the event came to a close with closing prayers in both English and Tamil, the guests left the chapel with hearts full of joy, a reminder of the power of community and shared kindness. **Bernard Anthony**

Filipino cardinal urges sincerity in charity and fasting

PHILIPPINES:

Cardinal Pablo Virgilio David, President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), warned against hypocrisy in faith and public service, cautioning that acts of charity and devotion lose their meaning when done "in an obvious way just to boast."

In his Ash Wednesday homily on March 5, the Kalookan bishop called on Catholics to embrace genuine charity, holiness, and penance, rather than using them as a means for self-promotion or public recognition.

"When the true intention behind doing good is to draw attention to oneself, it has nothing to do with God," Cardinal David said.

"There is a difference between doing good deeds in front of others, which may be captured unknowingly in a video and shared, inspiring many people, and doing good deeds in an obvious way just to boast: 'Look how good I am!' or 'Look how holy I am!'" he added.



Catholic devotees praying after receiving the ashes. (LiCas News photo/Jire Carreon)

He warned against the Filipino trait of *pakitang-tao*, or performative goodness, which he described as pretence and deception.

"We might deceive others, but can we deceive God, who sees what is hidden deep in our hearts?" he asked, citing the Gospel reading from Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18. "We've heard it several times in the Gospel today: 'The God who sees what is hidden

will reward you.'"

Cardinal David particularly called out the misuse of charity for personal or political advantage, saying that giving is only meaningful when it is done without expecting something in return.

"Not all gifts are truly gifts, right? Some are simply bribes, with something expected in return," he said. "Some 'help' isn't really help — it's a form of manipulation or

an exchange, like buying votes with 'aid.'"

The prelate criticised the use of both personal and public funds as political tools.

"It is wrong even when personal money is used to buy votes. What is worse is when public funds, which come from the taxes of the people, are used as personal funds," he said. "You do not call it charity when the objective is to exploit the desperation of the poor. What will the nation gain if we put such people in power?"

Beyond material generosity, the CBCP president also emphasised that true holiness comes from sincerity and compassion, not from external displays of religiosity.

Cardinal David also addressed the meaning of fasting, warning against reducing it to mere dietary restrictions rather than a genuine act of spiritual renewal.

"How can you call it fasting if you order lobster or seabass in an expensive restaurant in place of meat?" he asked. "Let us not call it a Lenten fasting if the intention is just to lose weight or become sexier."

As millions of Filipino Catholics received ashes to mark the beginning of Lent, the CBCP president called on them to reflect on their true motives in practicing their faith.

"Training ourselves in unseen penance, holiness, and charity — this is the true purpose of the Lenten season," he said. **Mark Saludes, LiCAS News**

Baltimore archdiocese lowers confirmation age to strengthen family involvement

MARYLAND: Archbishop William E. Lori of Baltimore has announced a decision to lower the age of Confirmation to nine, a move aimed at increasing family engagement in the formation of youth. This initiative comes amid growing concerns over disaffiliation from the Catholic Church, with leaders across the US striving to strengthen catechesis by reducing the age at which young people receive the sacrament.

The Diocese of Baton Rouge and the Diocese of Salt Lake City made similar changes in December 2024, and other archdioceses, including Seattle, Boston, and Denver, have also adjusted their confirmation age requirements in recent years.

For Archbishop Lori, who has served in the Archdiocese of Baltimore for nearly 13 years, the key to addressing the catechesis crisis lies in family involvement. After extensive consultation with experts in Catholic theology, devel-

opmental psychology, and the experiences of other dioceses, the archbishop concluded that the decisive factor in young people remaining in the faith is the active involvement of their families.

In his January 22 pastoral letter, Archbishop Lori emphasised, "Purposeful engagement of families in the formation of their children is essential in our formation efforts." He expressed his hope that greater parental involvement in the confirmation preparation process would allow the graces of the sacrament to take root in the lives of young people, "sealing their missionary identity in the Spirit and sending them forth."

Disaffiliation from the Church has become an increasing issue in the US with recent studies showing rising numbers of people identifying as religiously unaffiliated, particularly among Generation Z. A 2024 Survey Centre on

American Life study found that nearly 4 in 10 Generation Z women identify as "unaffiliated," and a 2018 study revealed that many young people are leaving the Church as early as age 13.

However, Archbishop Lori acknowledged that changing the confirmation age alone cannot solve the complex issue of disaffiliation. He stressed that young people will still require "care, support, and intentional accompaniment," and called on parishes to strengthen their youth ministry efforts in ways that support growth in the Christian faith.

While many Catholics are accustomed to confirmation taking place in high school or late middle school, the Archdiocese of Baltimore believes that nine-year-olds are capable of receiving the sacrament. "We often underestimate the zeal and readiness of the youngest of our disciples," said Archbishop Lori.

The archdiocese emphasised that confirmation is not about how much one knows about the faith but about openness to the Holy Spirit. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, confirmation "completes" baptism and increases baptismal grace (Nos. 1303, 1305), marking the beginning of a person's Christian journey, rather than serving as a "graduation" from faith formation.

The transition to a younger confirmation age will begin in the 2025-2026 liturgical year and be implemented in phases, with each parish adapting the change over one to three years based on their specific demographics and needs. Some parishes have already piloted early-age confirmation programmes with positive results, particularly in fostering strong family engagement, according to Archbishop Lori. **CNA**



Archbishop William E. Lori confirms one of 44 children May 17 at St John in Westminster — the first group of 9-year-olds receiving the sacrament at the parish. (CR photo/St. John, Westminster)

Newspaper launched to rekindle reading habit among children

PANAJI: Around 55 schools in Goa, western India, have signed up to take the copies of a newly launched newspaper for children.

The "Go Unmute" aims "to spark their curiosity among children and make them fall in love with reading again," says Lajawanti D'Souza, editor and co-founder.

Besides carrying columns that attract children, the newspaper invites them to email their paintings, poems, stories, jokes, thoughts for publication.

D'Souza said she and the newspaper's co-founder Vivek Mendonza are on a mission to reignite the reading culture among kids and young adults.

"In a world where technology dominates every moment, we believe in the power of words — the kind that inform, inspire and shape you into the thinkers, and leaders of tomorrow. Just a little time spent reading today can open doors to a lifetime of wisdom, wonder and discovery," she said.

The editor wants her readers to "rediscover the magic of books and newspapers—to revel in the crisp rustle of turning pages and scent of the paper."

"Let us turn reading into a revolution, one page at a time," she said and promised children adventure of discovery, inspiration, and wonder through the paper priced at five rupees (RM0.25).

D'Souza wants children "to lose yourself in captivating stories, to embrace the quiet joy of deep thinking and the satisfaction of being truly well read." **Lissy Maruthanakuzhy, Matters India**



Fr Dr John Singarayar, SVD

Technology illuminates our Lenten spiritual journey

Lent is a season of waiting. For forty days, we walk with Jesus through the desert, facing the emptiness of our hearts and the hunger for something more. It is a time to slow down, to let go, to make space for God.

In this modern age, where artificial intelligence (AI) weaves itself into the fabric of our daily lives, Lent invites us to ask: Where do we find hope? How can something as cold and logical as machines speak to the warmth of our souls?

The answer lies not in the technology itself but in what it reflects back to us — the enduring truth that even in the driest deserts, God plants seeds of hope.

When we think of AI, we imagine algorithms, data, and machines that learn. It is easy to see it as a force separate from humanity, a tool that solves problems but cannot understand the human heart. Yet, Lent teaches us to look deeper. This season calls us to recognise that every creation, even the most advanced technology, carries traces of the Creator.

AI, in its own way, mirrors our longing for connection, our hunger for answers, and our desire to transcend limits. It is a reminder that we are made for more than what this world offers. Just as the desert reveals our dependence

on God, AI reveals our dependence on one another — and on the divine spark within us.

Hope is not a feeling that comes easily in a world filled with noise. We scroll through endless feeds, bombarded by tragedies, arguments, and distractions. Machines calculate, predict, and simulate, but they cannot feel the ache of a soul searching for meaning.

And yet, Lent reminds us that hope is not born from certainty. It is born from trust. When Jesus fasted in the desert, He faced temptation, loneliness, and weakness. But He also found strength in surrender. He trusted His Father's plan even when the path was unclear. In the same way, our hope as Christians is not rooted in having all the answers. It is rooted in knowing the One who does.

AI, for all its complexity, operates within the boundaries humans set. It cannot choose to love. It cannot sacrifice. It cannot hope. But we can. Lent calls us to reclaim what makes us human — the capacity to love without limits, to suffer with purpose, and to hope against hope.

Every time we use technology to connect with a loved one far away, to access prayers or Scripture, or to learn about the struggles of others, we are reminded that these tools are not replacements for grace. They are channels. They are modern-day “loaves and fishes,” simple offerings that God can multiply to feed our deepest hungers.

There is a story in the Bible of the prophet Elijah, who fled into the desert, afraid and exhausted. An angel brought him bread and water, saying, “Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you.” That bread did not solve Elijah's problems, but it gave him strength to keep going.

In a way, AI is like that bread. It is not the solution to our spiritual poverty, but it can sustain us as we seek the true Bread of Life. When we use technology to deepen our prayer, to serve others, or to grow in knowledge, we allow it to become a humble instrument of God's

providence.

Lent is also a time of silence. We turn off the distractions to hear God's whisper. But silence is rare in a world buzzing with notifications. AI thrives on constant input, yet our souls thrive on stillness. Here, we face a tension: How do we engage with technology without losing ourselves to it?

The answer lies in intentionality. Just as we fast from food or habits during Lent, we might fast from mindless scrolling or virtual clutter. We replace emptiness with purpose. Instead of letting algorithms dictate our thoughts, we let prayer shape them. In this way, every click, every search, and every moment online becomes an act of communion — a choice to seek God first.

The heart of Lent is the journey from death to resurrection. AI, in its relentless progress, mirrors humanity's struggle against decay. Machines break down. Data corrupts. Systems fail. But Lent assures us that brokenness is not the end. Christ entered into our broken world to redeem it. His resurrection is the ultimate promise that no darkness, no sin, and no failure is beyond healing.

When we see AI's imperfections — its biases, its errors, its inability to comprehend suffering — we are reminded that our hope is not in perfection. It is in redemption. We are all “works in progress,” and God is still writing our story.

In the Catholic tradition, the Eucharist is the source and summit of our faith. It is Christ's physical presence, a mystery that defies logic. AI cannot replicate this. It cannot manufacture grace. But it can point us toward the wonder of incarnation — the truth that God entered our world in the flesh.

Every time technology bridges a gap between souls, every time it inspires awe at human creativity, it echoes the divine truth: We are made in God's image. Our ability to invent, to explore, and to dream reflects His limitless creativity. Even in lines of code, we



find glimpses of the Word through whom all things were made.

This Lent, as we ponder the mystery of Christ's sacrifice, let us also ponder the mystery of our place in a digital age. Let us approach AI not with fear or blind optimism but with discernment. Machines may change how we live, but they cannot change why we live.

Our purpose remains the same: to love God and love one another. Hope flourishes when we use technology, not to escape the world but to engage with it more deeply — to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and comfort the lonely, just as Jesus taught.

The desert of Lent feels long, but Easter is coming. The stone will roll away. The light will conquer darkness. AI, for all its promises, cannot give us this light. But it can remind us to look for it.

Every time a machine solves a problem, let it remind us of the God who solves the unsolvable. Every time it connects us, let it remind us of the Body of Christ, united across time and space. And every time it fails, let it remind us that our true hope lies elsewhere — in a Person, not a program.

We are pilgrims, walking toward the eternal. Let us use the tools of this age not as crutches but as companions, guiding us closer to the One who is our hope. Lent teaches us that even in the desert, streams of living water flow. AI, like a stone in the wilderness, may yet become an altar — a place where we meet God and rediscover the hope that never fades.

SOCIAL JUSTICE



Making a Difference

Tony Magliano

The prophet Isaiah boldly challenges us to choose the way of fasting most acceptable to the Lord: “Releasing those bound unjustly ... setting free the oppressed ... sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the homeless, clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own.”

If we honestly examine our conscience — a healthy Lenten exercise — many of us will come to the conclusion that we can do more — probably much more — to share our bread with the hungry, shelter the homeless and set the oppressed free.

Excellent organisations like Catholic Relief Services (www.crs.org) and Bread for the World (www.bread.org) can help us improve our outreach.

In his social justice encyclical letter *Populorum Progressio* (On the Development

of Peoples) Pope St Paul VI boldly wrote, “Let each one examine his conscience, a conscience that conveys a new message for our times. Is he prepared to support, out of his own pocket, works and undertakings organized in favour of the most destitute? Is he ready to pay higher taxes so that the public authorities can intensify their efforts in favour of development?”

Increasing taxes, even for the destitute, is a tough sell anytime, especially during these difficult days. Yet, to the contrary, US President Donald Trump is moving to cut taxes — especially for the rich.

The moral obligation to assist the vulnerable and the poor to the best of our ability is not only an individual duty, but is also a serious obligation for the nation, and the nation's government.

Here Pope St Paul continues, “The same duty of solidarity that rests on individuals exists also for nations: ‘Advanced nations have a very heavy obligation to help the developing peoples.’”

Despite the Catholic Church's teachings which place the highest priority upon governments' moral responsibility to ensure that ad-

equated aid is appropriated to meet the needs of the poor and hungry, economically advanced nations continue to provide only a very small percentage of their annual budgets to life-saving, life enhancing projects which help the earth's poorest people.

And to make matters even worse, the Trump administration has frozen virtually all government funding for international poverty-focused foreign assistance, thus causing enormous preventable suffering for millions of desperately poor brothers and sisters.

Furthermore, the Trump administration also issued an order to freeze federal aid to domestic nonprofit poverty-focused organisations like the 168 Catholic Charities agencies throughout the US.

James Morris, former executive director of the United Nations World Food Programme, told a gathering in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, that about 18,000 children in the world die every single day from hunger and hunger-related diseases. And he added, “That doesn't have to be.”

He said if about \$7 billion a year was put towards ending child hunger, it would end! No

one, absolutely no one, should have to suffer from hunger. And wealthy nations — even the U.S. alone — could end this scourge upon so much of humanity. But we lack the one remaining ingredient: the will to do so.

But can't we at least feed every child? Can't we at least muster-up enough compassion to demand that governments divert the relatively tiny amount of \$7 billion (RM31 billion) from bloated military budgets, to end child hunger worldwide?

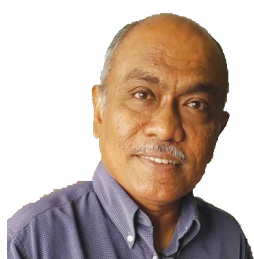
Of course, we can. The question is: Will we? Pope Francis has regularly chastised wealthy nations' lack of compassion as a major contributor to our global “culture of indifference.” And the prophet Isaiah supplies the remedy: “If you bestow your bread on the hungry and satisfy the afflicted; then light shall rise for you in the darkness, and the gloom shall become for you like midday!”

Tony Magliano is an internationally syndicated Catholic social justice and peace columnist. He is available to speak at diocesan or parish gatherings. Tony can be reached at tmag6@comcast.net.

A Lenten fast acceptable to the Lord

The role of godparents in catechesis

In examining the Church documents related to catechesis, such as, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1974), *Catechesi Tradendae* (1979) and the catechetical directories of 1971 or 1997, as well as the *Directory for Catechesis* (2020), it is noticed that godparents have a unique role in the Church in terms of the ministry of catechesis.



Echoing the Faith

DR STEVEN SELVARAJU

In reference to infant baptism

In infant baptism, the term 'godparent' is used in reference to the person or persons, who, together with the parents, "present the child for baptism and to help it live a Christian life befitting the baptised and faithfully to fulfil the duties inherent in baptism (Can. 872).

The duty of godparents begins by them being present at the baptism of the child.

By their presence, they "represent both the expanded spiritual family of the one to be baptised and the role of the Church as a mother" (General Introduction to Christian Initiation, 8). At the Rite, the godparents are asked by the presider: "Are you ready to help the parents of this child in their duty as Christian parents", to which they respond "We are".

During the Rite of Baptism, the role of godparents as witnesses of faith to the child becomes evident when they take active part in the Liturgy of the Word, intercessions and in the celebration of the sacrament. Together with the parents and the community, they profess the Church's faith into which the child is baptised and becomes a member. Godparents also present a candle lighted from the Easter candle to the newly baptised. The candle represents the light of Christ which will illuminate the path of the child on the journey of faith.

Therefore, traditionally, the godparent is seen as one who would help the parent in the Christian upbringing of the child, most especially, in cases where the parent is no longer able fulfil this responsibility. This is why godparents are called "co-workers

with parents" (*Directory for Catechesis*, 125). It makes clear that the responsibility of the godparent is a life-long commitment wherein he or she is obliged to ensure that the one initiated grows and perseveres in the faith.

In reference to Confirmation

A godparent is also required for Confirmation, where possible. The duty of the godparent here is to see that the confirmed person acts as a true witness to Christ. The Canon Law expresses that it is preferable that one who performed the role of godparent at Baptism also serves in that role for Confirmation (Can. 892 – 893).

Who can become a godparent?

Canon Law stipulates the requirements for the person who can be admitted to the office of godparent. The requirements are generally the same for infant and adult baptism.

1. Be appointed by the candidate for baptism or by the parents, or whoever stands in their place. Ordinarily, there can be one godparent, male or female, for each person to be baptised or there can be two godparents, one godfather and one godmother (Can. 873). The godparent must have the intention of performing his or her role, which is mainly to assume an ongoing spiritual relationship with the baptised person. In cases where there is a necessity, a godparent can be appointed by the parish priest (Can. 874.1).
2. Be at least sixteen years old, unless the diocesan bishop establishes another age or when the parish priest or the minister considers that there is a just reason for an exception to be made (Can. 874.2).
3. Be a fully initiated Catholic, that is,

one who has been confirmed and has received the Eucharist, and who leads a life of faith in harmony with the role he or she is undertaking (Can. 874.3).

4. Explicitly excluded from being a godparent is anyone who has incurred a canonical penalty that has been imposed or declared by a competent Church authority (Can. 874.4).

5. A godparent may not be the father or mother of the person being baptised. This is to help distinguish clearly the role of the parent and godparent. Christian parents have the primary responsibility for the Christian upbringing of their children while the godparent provides supplementary or additional support to the parents (Can. 874.5).

Conclusion

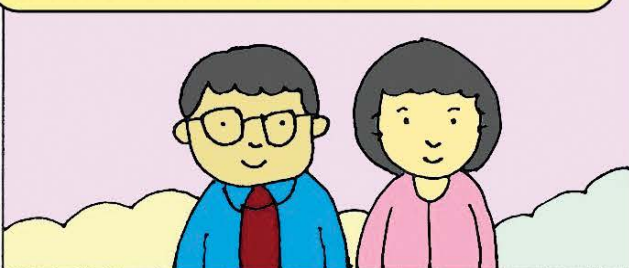
As we have seen, a godparent has a specific role in the Church which is especially related to the Sacraments of Initiation. It is hoped that this article will help those who are presently serving in the office of godparent or may wish to serve in this role in the future to become aware of their role and responsibilities as stated by the Church. In the next article, we will examine the role of the godparent in the RCIA.

Dr Steven Selvaraju, STD, STL, holds a Doctorate in Theology with Specialisation in Catechetics and Youth Ministry from Pontifical Salesian University, Rome. He serves as Director of the Archdiocesan Catechetical Centre, Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur.

The key ideas in the article are presented in an illustrated format below. The illustrations are by Dr Steven Selvaraju.

THE ROLE OF GODPARENTS IN CATECHESIS

The term "godparent" (*patrinus* in Latin) refers to an office (or ministry) in the Church. It is most closely linked to the sacrament of Baptism. To be appointed to this office, the person must be suitable and have the intention of fulfilling it (Can. 874.1).

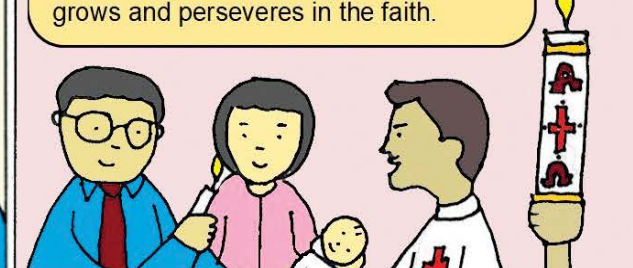


Are you ready to help the parents of this child in their duty as Christian parents?

We are!



The role of godparents as witnesses of faith to the child becomes evident in the Rite of Baptism. It makes clear that their responsibility is a life-long commitment in ensuring that the newly baptised grows and perseveres in the faith.



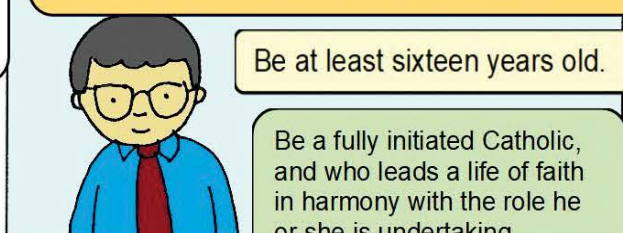
In the sacrament of Confirmation, the duty of the godparent is to see that the confirmed person acts as a true witness to Christ.



... be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit

Who can become a godparent?

He or she is appointed by the person to be baptised or by the parents or someone who stands in their place. There can be one godparent, male or female, for each person to be baptised, or two godparents, a godfather and a godmother.

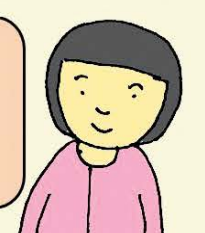


Be at least sixteen years old.

Be a fully initiated Catholic, and who leads a life of faith in harmony with the role he or she is undertaking.

Explicitly excluded from being a godparent is anyone who has incurred a canonical penalty that has been imposed or declared by a competent Church authority.

A godparent may not be the father or mother of the person being baptised. This is to help distinguish clearly the role of the parent and godparent.



Dr. StevenS 3/25

Chapel of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary

A legacy of faith and compassion on Pulau Jerejak

Christopher Kushi

Hidden within the dense vegetation of Pulau Jerejak, the Chapel of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary — also known as the Leper Asylum Church — stands as a poignant reminder of a bygone era. Built in 1896 by Fr Emile-Albert Joseph Mariette, a French missionary of the Missions Étrangères de Paris (MEP), the chapel was dedicated to the spiritual care of 80 Catholic leprosy patients under the stewardship of the Church of Our Lady of Sorrows in Penang.



Once a quarantine island, Pulau Jerejak was a refuge for those ostracised by society due to the stigma surrounding leprosy. Fr Mariette, moved by compassion, understood the need for not just medical care, but also spiritual solace. Recognising this, he took it upon himself to provide both,

establishing a sanctuary for those who had been cast aside by society. The chapel, consecrated on January 4, 1896, became a beacon of hope and a place of worship for those enduring the harsh realities of isolation.

The island's role as a quarantine station for leprosy patients, tuberculosis sufferers, and those with contagious diseases, persisted for several decades. As time passed, however, medical advancements led to the decline of leprosy asylums, and the need for the island's quarantine facilities diminished. With the island's purpose lost, the chapel was eventually abandoned and left to the mercy of nature.

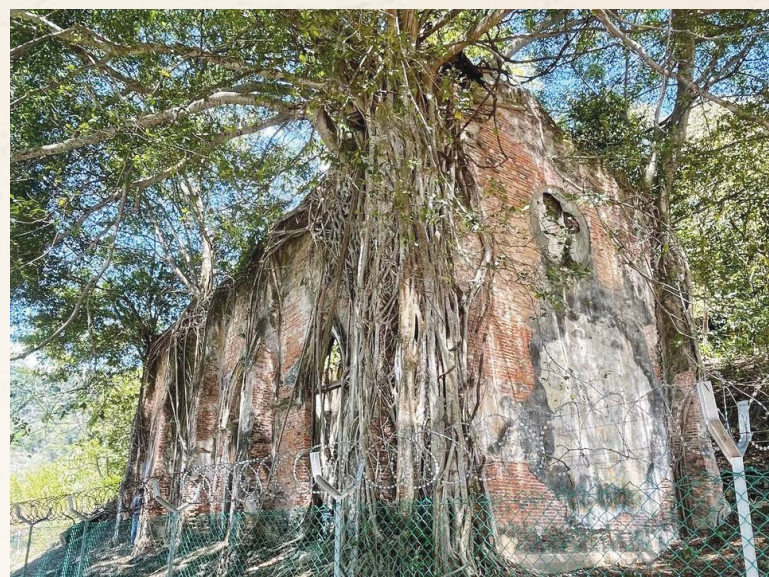
Today, what remains of this once-sacred sanctuary is a crumbling structure, overtaken by thick foliage. Yet, despite its state of ruin, the chapel endures as a powerful testament to the faith, dedication, and resilience of those who served the outcast and the forgotten.

The chapel was more than just a place of worship; it was a haven

of faith, hope, charity, and love for a community grappling with sickness and isolation. It stood alongside the Leprosy Hospital, with a priest's house and a Catholic cemetery on the adjacent hill. In 1926, according to the Catholic Diary of India, Ceylon, and Burma, Fr L. Gojeaetche (MEP) served as the chapel's vicar. By 1932, a Chinese catechist was stationed on the island to care for the 80 Catholic patients, under the supervision of the Vicarage of the Church of Our Lady of Sorrows, George Town.

In the 1950s, Fr Louis M. V. Riboud, the parish priest of the Church of St Francis Xavier in Georgetown, sent catechist Casimir Pillay to visit the Jerejak Quarantine Station. His task was to connect with newly arrived Roman Catholic immigrants, record their details, and relay this information to Fr Riboud, who would then inform parishes throughout Malaya and the Straits Settlements of their new parishioners.

The story of Pulau Jerejak's



Exterior front facade of the chapel.

association with leprosy began to draw to a close in October 1969, when the relocation of leprosy patients to the Sg Buloh Leprosarium in Selangor began. By the early 1970s, the island's role as a leprosy colony had ended. Today, the Chapel of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary stands as a reminder of the

sacrifices made, the faith upheld, and the love shared by those who served a forgotten community.

Special thanks are given to Mike Gibby, the author of *Jerejak – Penang's Untold Story*, whose work has shed light on the island's hidden history and the lives of those who once called it home.

Reflecting on the trials and suffering of the leprosy patients

On March 1, a memorial Mass marking 135 years of the Chapel of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary on Pulau Jerejak, Penang, was celebrated in reverence of its enduring legacy. The Mass was presided over by Cardinal Sebastian Francis, Bishop of Penang, and concelebrated by Fr Michael Raymond OFM Cap. from the Church of Divine Mercy in Sungai Ara; Fr Joachim Robert of College General Penang, and Fr Desmond Jansen from the Church of Our Lady of Sorrows, Georgetown. They were joined by members of the Penang Diocese Catholic Heritage Conservation Committee, together honouring the chapel's rich history.

This poignant Mass paid tribute to the chapel's legacy of faith and hope, offering prayers and blessings for the souls of the patients who once lived and died on the island. Cardinal Sebastian's homily reflected on the trials and suffering faced by those afflicted with disease on Pulau Jerejak. These individuals, united by their shared experiences of pain, isolation, and despair, walked into the chapel with unwavering faith, finding solace and love through the support of the missionary fathers and the community of believers. Through their struggles, the faithful on the island formed a resilient and growing community, bound by a spirit of mutual strength and support.

In the 1960s, a powerful wave of compassion and commitment swept through Pulau Jerejak, as Fr Arthur A. Julien, MEP, together with the Grey Sisters and seminarians from College General Penang, made pastoral visits to the

island. Among the seminarians was Fr Francis Anthony, now 85, former Rector of College General Penang, who recalls accompanying the Grey Sisters in providing healthcare for the leprosy patients.

Fr Francis remembers how the patients, despite their suffering, greeted them with joy and a desire to converse. Yet, there was a quiet, unspoken awareness among them — they knew their time on the island was limited. Fr Francis reflects that, as seminarians, these patients became their formators in the priesthood, teaching them the profound lessons of care, compassion, and comfort for the sick. Many of the patients had come to terms with their fate, knowing they would likely pass away on the island, but they still found solace in the visits, in the touch of human connection.

In the early 1970s, another seminarian, Brother Francis Xavier Gasper, now 77, a Gabrielite Brother and one of the founders of Montfort Sabah, recalls how he volunteered to join the Grey Sisters in their mission. His role was simple yet deeply impactful — offering



Maryann Robert genuflects before the cross.

a listening ear, providing solace, and being a comforting presence. The patients, though resigned to their fate, showed an inner peace, content with the care and love they received.

Following the memorial Mass, Cardinal Sebastian invited all

present to share their personal faith journeys. Each reflection was unique, yet all shared a common thread of gratitude and inspiration.

Fr Michael Raymond shared a powerful connection to St Francis of Assisi, founder of his Capuchin Order. St Francis, who found refuge in an abandoned church, received the call from the Lord: "Rebuild the Church" — a call to rebuild the inner life of the Church and journey towards full conformity with Christ.

Fr Joachim Robert reflected on the steadfast faith of the Catholics on Pulau Jerejak, acknowledging that their resilience continues to inspire hope in the present-day Church. Their unwavering faith, even in the face of adversity, reminds us that we are never alone in our struggles.

Fr Desmond Jansen spoke with deep reverence of the legacy left by the early missionaries, whose dedication brought light and hope to those in their darkest hours. He expressed profound gratitude for their sacrifices, and with hopeful hearts, he envisioned that the chapel would continue to be a place of pilgrimage — a pilgrimage of

hope for generations to come.

Maryann Robert, deeply moved, genuflected as she shared her emotive reflection. She expressed her joy and gratitude, feeling truly blessed to be at the Chapel of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary. Maryann spoke of her conviction that the Holy Spirit had been at work in this once-rejected and secluded community, through the missionary disciples who embodied a fervent passion for loving like Jesus.

Cardinal Sebastian bestowed his blessings upon the island, the chapel, and all the souls buried in their resting place, ensuring that their legacy of faith and perseverance will never be forgotten.

As we reflect on the past, we also remember the Grey Sisters of the Institute of Foreign Mission Sisters, whose motherhouse is at Notre Dame de La Motte, Seysses, France. These sisters devoted their lives to serving the sick on Pulau Jerejak, embodying their charism of sharing the life of the non-evangelised, the most underprivileged, and those far from Christ and the Church. Their mission was to announce the Good News of Salvation, bringing hope and love to those in need. Their dedication remains a shining example of selfless service and compassion.

In remembering the legacy of these early missionaries and the unwavering faith of the community of Pulau Jerejak, we are reminded of the profound power of love, service, and hope. May their example continue to inspire us all to serve with passion, to comfort with compassion, and to love with the heart of Christ.



Cardinal Sebastian Francis with the clergy and members of the Penang Diocese Catholic Heritage Conservation Committee.

Ash Wednesday marked the two-week passing of my father. Last September, at 82, he was diagnosed with severe stenosis of the heart. A chest infection triggered a heart episode on the third day of Chinese New Year, and though he was convalescing well enough, he had a respiratory crisis and after two days in ICU, his cardiologist asked to see my brother and I. Nothing ever prepares you for the words, "I believe you know that your father is dying. There is nothing more we can do for him except to keep him comfortable."

Two former colleagues of my father, both middle-aged Muslim men, came by to the nursing home where dad had chosen to die. They had not, at the time, been told of his passing, and had come to try to visit. When I told them that he had passed, the men asked if they could still come to see dad. Azlan, who had worked many years with my father, embraced and kissed his former manager, in a way I could only describe as filial.

Dad's wake saw an unprecedented number of well-wishers – quite extraordinary for such a low-key ordinary man. It showed me that the world needs these kind of people: self-effacing souls who never bother to ponder the deep questions like what one's purpose of life is, but who just get on with the business of living, and in that living, touch lives.

Because I posted about him and our relationship extensively on my Facebook page, even friends who did not directly benefit from his cooking and food gifts



Word in Progress

KAREN-MICHAELA TAN

came to bid farewell to dad. One friend said, "Your dad made up 300 per cent for all the wretched, abusive, irresponsible, toxic fathers out there." And it was true. My friends became his, and there was a bunch of them who visited him more than they did me.

Family from Singapore, Perth and Sydney flew in to speed my father on his last journey, and everyone commended my brother Christopher and I on the fantastic job we did.

The cleaning of the family home which I began while he was in hospital, in the hopes that he would come home, if only to live on the lower floor, became my prime focus. In two weeks, working full eight hour days and with the help of Chris, I threw myself in my work as a way of distancing from the world which had suddenly become less bright and welcoming without the man who had shaped me.

When Ash Wednesday approached, I pondered if I wanted to go to Mass, seeing that it was technically not a day of obligation. Because a BEC friend said she would drive me, I decided to attend, only to be faced with a crush of people at the 6.30am Mass which rivalled even the Christmas horde. Worse still was seeing the sympathy on the faces of the many people I knew in that parish, many who had come to pay respects and sit with me

at the wake.

After Mass, fasting be darned, I ate toast with the last bit of the bottle of nut butter my father had not finished before he died. For 14 days I had been in self-imposed exile, in the dungeon of my unexpressed grief, with no appetite, and when eating, taking no pleasure in the vittles. As I ate the hot, crisp bread with extravagant lashing of butter, I drew parallels to this meal, and that of the Eucharist.

The institution of the Eucharist gave Jesus' followers a reason to gather, and in that gathering, remember Him. And Jesus' plan was not just that a bunch of fishermen sit together and tell stories of their glory days when they were part of the miracle of multiplication and the power of exorcism. The Eucharist is more than just a memorial. By partaking in this sacred meal, the Twelve and we who have come after them, are also agreeing to be part of the continuing mission of our Lord and Master. Our faith is not one of sorrowing lassitude, but of vigour which comes from loss. When we do what we do for Christ, we are not just memorialising Him, but keeping His word and mission alive. As disciples we are now the ones who have to feed the hungry even if we have no powers of miraculous stretching of produce. As mature Catholics we realise our job is not to multiply, but to simply desire to share our portion of bread and fish.

It was in this time of my own breaking of bread that I realised that as long as I lived, my father would live in me. All his wisdom, kindness, caring and generosity

have been ingrained in me, and it would be an insult to his memory to pull away from community, friends and Church.

So there and then I called a BEC friend who I know does not cook, and sometimes faces a challenge on days of abstinence because takeaway food tends to have elements of meat in it. I volunteered a helping of the fish chowder my husband made for lunch, and also made a batch of overnight oats for that person so they would not go hungry the first week of Lent.

In this aspect of Martha-ness, this 'doing-ness' I was able to celebrate my father and his love of feeding all and sundry. Through this I was also able to draw closer to the cross, to embrace it for the sorrow it caused, but to also use it to help pull myself up so I could stand again, instead of being a crumpled heap of grief.

It is for moments of enlightenment like this that I am profoundly glad of my faith, and its ability to help me to understand that in death there is life, and that grief comes with its own consolation. For when we line up our sorrow against the cross, we will find that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross still towers above our own personal loss. And in the shadow of the cross, there is peace and acceptance.

Karen-Michaela Tan is a poet, writer and editor who seeks out God's presence in the human condition and looks for ways to put the Word of God into real action.

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

Act of service or act of self-pride?

Growing up in a staunch and fairly rigid Catholic household, one thing was clear to us from a young age — service to the Church came above all else. When my grandparents arrived in Malaya from Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) in 1916, they devoted their lives to serving the church, raising one of their sons to become a priest. This deep commitment to faith was passed down through my father and his siblings, as well as their cousins. Today, this legacy continues across multiple parishes in the Klang Valley, with many of us serving in various ministries — music ministry, Marriage Encounter, altar ladies, sacristans, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, and as patrons of the Little Sisters of the Poor.

Over the years, I've witnessed my family's steadfast dedication to serving the church, continually striving to give back for a deeper sense of fulfilment. However, like me, they too encountered challenges and adversity, particularly in dealing with certain individuals within the church while pursuing their mission.

In my case, I stepped away from the music ministry in 2005 at just 17 years old. While college and work commitments provided convenient excuses, few truly understand the deeper, underlying reasons behind my decision.

I began serving in the music ministry of my local church at just four years old, encouraged by my late aunt, who had been a dedicated member of the ministry for many years. My late father and his siblings were also involved in music ministries throughout their youth and young adult lives, eventually transitioning to other roles within the church as they

grew older. Naturally, being "inducted" to serve the church was a big deal in our family.

I devoted myself passionately to serving the church, as it was the only source of joy in my teenage years. Over time, priests came and went, and requirements and methods evolved, but one constant remained — the people of the church. Amidst the winds of change, they persisted, each serving where they were called, driven by their own unique reasons.

I like to believe that most people serve the church with pure intentions. However, there are times when I find myself wondering, "How did these individuals end up in church service?" While not everyone, the self-righteous behaviour of some can unfortunately ruin the church experience for people like me.

One incident that made me walk away was the shouting at others. We are all here to serve, and while we have an obligation to our roles, we should never be treated as subjects for those in power to dominate. It was during a choir practice leading up to Christmas when the then choir coordinator erupted in anger, screaming at the members and slamming the pews because some were not singing in tempo. It may not have been directed at me specifically, as we were singing as a group, but such behaviour was uncalled for.

I stormed out of the practice, unable to control my emotions, and never returned to the choir. Over the years, I've reflected



To be honest

MARTIN ARUL

on why I reacted that way, why the coordinator acted as they did, and why church service often feels like a corporate environment — with a boss, managers, and leaders at the top, while those doing the actual work are treated with little care or love, ironically, within the walls of the church.

As I grew older my desire to serve a church has depleted completely. Why you may ask? I have no tolerance for *some* people of the church who think that they are pillars that hold the church together.

Throughout my adult life, I've assisted many friends with their weddings across various churches in the Klang Valley, and I can honestly say that about 80 per cent of these experiences were far from pleasant. One thing that stood out was the self-inflated sense of importance some individuals impose on others simply because they manage a particular aspect of the church's operations. It's common for people to want to feel important, needed, or to own, pardon my corporate lingo, "a line of business," but at the end of the day, we are dealing with people. Church service is meant to serve others, not for self-glorification.

In all my experience assisting brides with their wedding preparations, every single interfaith partner has asked, "Why is the church doing this?" For example, at a recent wedding, the bride was in a panic just days before the ceremony due to a miscommunication about the flower

arrangements. This led to a very unhappy church administrator who raised their voice in frustration.

As the Church strives to move forward with inclusion, acceptance, and openness, these actions only serve to slam those doors shut in your face.

While not everyone behaves this way, even one or two incidents can leave a lasting impression and shape people's opinions of the church. The actions of a few individuals can tarnish the reputation of the entire church, rather than just affecting the individuals involved. Unfortunately, this attitude often drives people away from the church — when some believe that holding a position within the church grants them special privileges or a "fast track" to the Pearly Gates.

As we journey through this Lenten season, let us reflect on how Jesus treated an unchaste woman with dignity and exemplified love, even while hanging on the cross. In reflecting on our own actions, let us ask ourselves: Are we truly following in the footsteps of our Lord, or are we driven by a selfish need for validation, importance, or power? Do our actions reflect the teachings of the Church?

Blessed Lenten season, friends.

Martin Arul is a believer who questions everything that is wrong, believing that everyone is equal in the eyes of God, and one must live as a Christian more in deeds than in words, outside the conformities of the building of the church.

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



Fr Ron Rolheiser

Dark nights of the heart

There are times when our world unravels. Who hasn't had the feeling? "I'm falling apart! This is beyond me! My heart is broken! I feel betrayed by everything! Nothing makes sense anymore! Life is upside down!"

Jesus had a cosmic image for this. In the Gospels, He talks about how the world, as we experience it, will someday end: *"The sun will be darkened, the moon will not give forth its light, stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven will be shaken."* When Jesus says this, He is not talking as much about cosmic cataclysms as of cataclysms of the heart. Sometimes our inner world is shaken, turned upside down; it gets dark in the middle of the day, there's an earthquake in the heart; we experience the end of the world as we've known it.

However, in this upheaval, Jesus assures us that one thing remains sure: God's promise of fidelity. That doesn't get turned upside down and, in our disillusionment, we are given a chance to see what really is of substance, permanent, and worthy of our lives. Thus, ideally at least, when our trusted world is turned upside down, we are given the chance to grow, to become less selfish, and to see reality more clearly.

Christian mystics call this "a dark night of the soul" and they express it as if God were

actively turning our world upside down and deliberately causing all the heartache to purge and cleanse us.

The great Spanish mystic John of the Cross puts it this way: God gives us seasons of fervour and then takes them away. In our seasons of fervour, God gives us consolation, pleasure, and security inside our relationships, our prayers, and our work (sometimes with considerable passion and intensity). This is a gift from God and is meant to be enjoyed. But John tells us, at a certain point, God takes away the pleasure and consolation and we experience a certain dark night in that, where we once felt fire, passion, consolation, and security, we will now feel dryness, boredom, disillusion, and insecurity. For John of the Cross, all honeymoons eventually end.

Why? Why would God do this? Why can't a honeymoon last forever?

Because, initially, the good feelings themselves become a problem because we can get hung up on them rather than on what's behind them. All those wonderful feelings we feel when we first fall in love, when we first begin to pray deeply, and when we first begin to find our legs in the world eventually, though not initially, will block us from seeing straight. These are part of God's plan and God's way of drawing us forward. The

passion and consolation we feel help lead us out of ourselves, beyond fear and selfishness.

Honeymoons are wonderful; but, on a honeymoon, too often, we are more in love with being in love and all the wonderful energy this creates than we are in love with the person behind all those feelings. The same is true for faith and prayer. When we first begin to pray seriously, we are often more in love with the experience of praying and what it's doing for us than we are in love with God. On any honeymoon, no matter how intense and pure the feelings seem, those feelings are still partly about ourselves rather than purely about the person we think we love. Sadly, that is why many a warm, passionate honeymoon eventually turns into a cold, passionless relationship.

Until we are purified, and we are purified precisely through dark nights of disillusionment, we are too much still seeking ourselves in love and in everything else. Therese of Lisieux used to warn: *"Be careful not to seek yourself in love, you'll end up with a broken heart that way!"* We'd have fewer heartaches if we understood that. Also, before we are purified by disillusionment, most of the tears we shed, no matter how real the pain or loss, often say more about us than they say about the person or

situation we are supposedly mourning.

In all this, there's both bad news and good news: The bad news is that most everything we sense as precious will someday be taken from us. Everything gets crucified, including every feeling of warmth and security we have. But the good news is that it will all be given back again, more deeply, more purely, and even more passionately than before.

What dark nights of the soul and cataclysms of the heart do is to take away everything that feels like solid earth so that we end up in a free-fall, unable to grab on to anything that once supported us. But, in falling, we get closer to bedrock, to God, to reality, to truth, to love, to each other, beyond illusions, beyond selfishness, and beyond self-interested love that can masquerade as altruism. Clarity in eyesight comes after disillusionment, purity of heart comes after heartbreak, and real love comes after the honeymoon has passed.

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

Why confession matters more than you think

Confession is one of the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church, a sacred encounter where God's mercy meets our human frailty. Yet for many, Confession feels daunting, unnecessary, or even outdated.

When was the last time you went to confession? Perhaps you've thought about it but stopped short, unsure if it's truly necessary. Or maybe you've dismissed it entirely, thinking, "I don't have anything serious to confess," or "Does it really make a difference?"

But Confession isn't just a rule or a tradition. It's transformative. It's the key to peace, freedom, and a renewed relationship with God. And for many of us, its importance is something we tend to underestimate.

If you've ever felt restless or distant from God, could Confession be the step you've been avoiding?

The Hidden Weight of Guilt

We often carry guilt without realising how much it affects us. It might creep into our thoughts, weigh on our hearts, or even strain our relationships.

Take this example: imagine you've hurt someone close to you. You feel guilty but never take the step to apologise. Over time, the guilt creates distance, making every interaction with them feel strained. Confession works similarly. Guilt, when left unaddressed, quietly creates a barrier between us and God.

Many people avoid Confession because they think they haven't done anything "big" enough to confess or believe they have no sins at all. But sin isn't always dramatic — it can be found in the smaller ways we fail to love, whether through impatience, pride, or neglecting others in need. Confession helps us see these faults clearly and gives us the grace to grow.

Confession isn't about dwelling on guilt. It's about letting it go. It's about finally saying, "I'm sorry," and hearing God

respond, "You are forgiven."

Why Confess to a Priest?

One of the most frequent questions about Confession is, "Why do I need to confess to a priest? Can't I just go directly to God?"

While it's true that we can and should pray directly to God for forgiveness, Confession offers something more. Through the sacrament, the priest acts *in persona Christi* — in the person of Christ — extending God's mercy in a tangible and personal way.

Many people worry, "What if the priest remembers my sins later?" or even, "What if he judges me?" Priests are bound by the seal of Confession, which requires absolute confidentiality. They cannot, under any circumstances, reveal or act on what they hear in confession.

Confessing to a priest can sometimes feel intimidating, but remember that the priest isn't there to judge you. He's there to guide you, to help you uncover the areas of your life where God's grace can work most powerfully. Even if you feel unsure or forget the steps, don't let that hold you back. Just be honest, and the priest will gently guide you through the process. The focus is not on perfection but on taking the step towards reconciliation and healing.

Ultimately, Confession reminds us that forgiveness isn't just an internal experience. It's an encounter with God, mediated through the Church He established. Hearing the priest say, "I absolve you of your sins," is a powerful assurance of God's forgiveness — a reassurance we all need.

The Courage to Be Honest

Honesty in Confession isn't easy. It means admitting where we've fallen short and acknowledging our need for God's mercy. But that honesty is also deeply healing.

When was the last time you were completely honest — with yourself, with God, or with anyone? Confession is a

moment of raw vulnerability, and in that moment, God meets us not with judgment, but with love.

Think of confession as a spiritual mirror. It's not about listing sins for the sake of it. It's about seeing yourself clearly and understanding how much you need God's grace. It's not weakness to admit that we fall short. It's courage.

Confession and Its Impact on Relationships

Sin doesn't just affect your relationship with God. It impacts how you relate to others. It can make you irritable, impatient, or withdrawn.

Think about the last time you carried guilt for something you said or did. Did it make it harder to connect with the people around you? Did it affect how you treated them?

Confession doesn't just heal your soul. It helps you show up better for the people in your life. I remember hearing someone share how confessing a grudge they'd been holding freed them to truly forgive a family member. That forgiveness transformed their relationship.

By letting go of guilt and receiving God's mercy, you're freed to love others more fully.

Breaking the Cycle of Sin

Sin often works like a bad habit. At first, it's just a one-off action — a harsh word, a selfish choice. But over time, it becomes easier to repeat until it feels normal.

Confession breaks that cycle. It's a wake-up call, a chance to recognise where you've gone off track and choose a better path. It's not about punishment. It's about freedom.

Confession also reminds us of something profound: we're not self-sufficient. We need God's grace to grow and thrive. Asking for His help isn't a sign of weakness. It's an act of strength.

Confession Isn't About Shame — It's About Healing

For many people, the hardest part of confession is the fear of shame. But

confession isn't about reliving your mistakes. It's about leaving them behind.

For me, walking out of the confessional is like slamming the door on the devil and declaring, "You don't own me. I belong to God." It's a reminder of the victory that confession brings — not just forgiveness but true freedom.

The Freedom of Confession

Confession matters more than you think because it's not just about the past. It's about the future. It's about receiving God's mercy and finding the strength to move forward.

If you've been avoiding Confession, ask yourself: "What's holding me back?" Fear? Doubt? Pride? Whatever it is, God isn't waiting to condemn you. He's waiting to welcome you back with open arms.

Thank God for giving us this sacrament — a gift that allows us to encounter His mercy in a tangible way. God is love, and His love for us never falters, even when we fall short. While sin separates us from Him, His invitation to reconciliation is constant.

Confession reminds us that we don't have to carry the burden of sin on our own. Through this sacrament, God offers His mercy and grace, freeing us from guilt and restoring us to His peace. By confessing our sins, we not only repair our relationship with God but also prepare our hearts to receive Him more fully in the Eucharist.

The peace that follows confession is unlike anything else. It's the peace of being right with God, of being reminded that His love always has the final word. So take that step — because the victory of Confession is waiting for you.

Thomson Emmanuel Wong, a parishioner of the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Klang, is someone who deeply appreciates the beauty and richness of the Catholic faith.

● The views expressed are entirely the writer's own.

Little Catholics' corner

St. Joseph Puzzle March 19

The Gospel tells us that Saint Joseph was a just man.
What did he do?

Match the things that he did
(on the right) with the
circumstances on the left.

1. Before they were married and he found out that Mary was expecting a baby ____
2. When the angel came in a dream and told him to take Mary as his wife ____
3. When the government said that everyone had to register in their home town ____
4. When an angel came in a dream and told him that the soldiers were coming to kill baby Jesus ____
5. When Jesus stayed in the Temple instead of coming home with him ____
6. While Jesus was growing up ____

A. St. Joseph taught Jesus to be a carpenter.

B. St. Joseph looked for Jesus for three days until he found Him.

C. St. Joseph took Mary and baby Jesus to Egypt right away.

D. St. Joseph went to Bethlehem with Mary.

E. St. Joseph planned to break off his engagement quietly so that Mary wouldn't be ashamed.

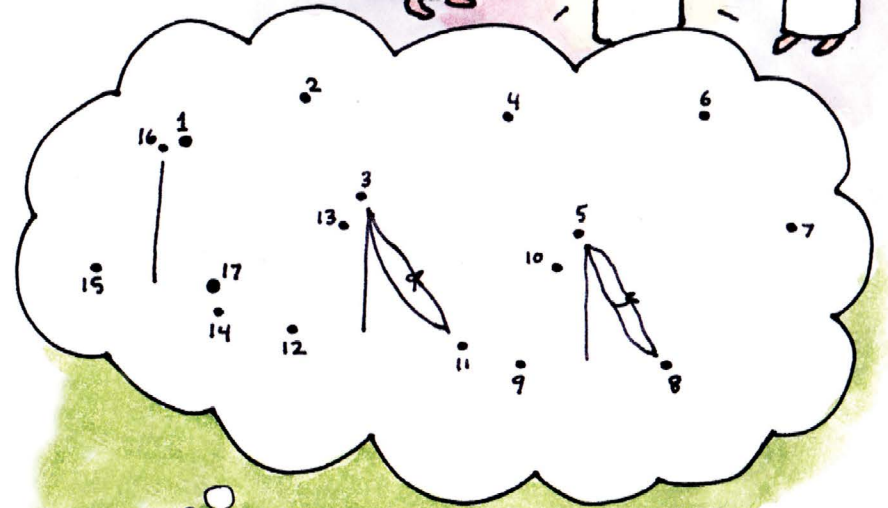
F. St. Joseph married Mary.



Answers: 1.E 2.F 3.D 4.C 5.B 6.A

Jesus shone like the sun when He took his three friends up the mountain.

Luke 9:28-36



Peter was confused and said something without thinking. What did he say he could make?

Connect the dots to find out!

Rearrange jumbled words to make complete sentences .

is This Son my , have
whom I listen him
chosen to .

(Luk 9:35)



Dear children,

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus took three of His apostles up a mountain where they saw Him shining like the sun and talking with Moses and Elijah.

They were talking about how Jesus was going to go to Jerusalem and be killed.

The Apostles were amazed and confused. Jesus let the Apostles see Him in glory to help them understand why He had to suffer and die.

We won't see Jesus in His glory until we see Him

in Heaven, but it is good for us to think about the things that He and Moses and Elijah were talking about.

Look at a crucifix or picture of Jesus on the cross every day.

Think about how much He loves you and think about how you act towards Him. What can you do to love Him better?

Lent is a good time to try to find ways to love Jesus more.

Love
Aunty Eliz



Camp Equip 2025: EMPOWERING YOUNG DISCIPLES

PENANG: On February 9, young adults from across Malaysia and Singapore gathered at the Monsignor Aloysius Spirituality Centre (MASC) for the inaugural Camp Equip 2025, a transformative two-week retreat designed to deepen their faith, discover their spiritual gifts, and embrace their calling as disciples of Christ.

In a world full of distractions and temptations, Camp Equip provided more than just spiritual enrichment — it was a life-changing experience that equipped young believers with the tools to grow in five key aspects of charismatic spirituality: *Worship*, *Intercession*, *Spiritual Gifts*, *Evangelisation*, and *Discipleship*. By the end of the retreat, participants were empowered to step out of their comfort zones, share their faith with boldness, and lead others toward Christ.

Ranging from 18 to 25, participants travelled from various locations, including Penang, Kuala Lumpur, Sitiawan, and even Singapore. Despite their diverse backgrounds, they united in anticipation of the life-altering impact this retreat would have on their lives. Throughout the retreat, dynamic speakers from the Seeds Ministry — Paul Julianose, Jonathan Charanraj, and Samuel Theivendran — as well as Norman Bismer and Michelle Antony from ABLAZE Ministry, guided participants through both practical teachings and heartfelt personal testimonies. These sessions helped attendees deepen their spiritual under-

standing and inspired them to serve others with love and compassion.

The retreat's modules centred on key aspects of Christian life. The *Worship* module emphasised gratitude, praise, and surrender, while *Intercession* taught participants how to pray prophetically for others. In the *Spiritual Gifts* module, attendees explored their unique talents and learned how to use them in service to God. *Evangelisation* equipped participants to share their faith courageously, and *Discipleship* challenged them to explore what it truly means to follow Christ.

One of the most impactful elements of Camp Equip was its focus on real-world application. Evening sessions gave participants opportunities to practise their learnings, whether through worship, prayer, or sharing their personal experiences. The Evangelisation missions were a highlight, where participants visited St Joseph's Home, a children's shelter, and the Lighthouse Feeding Centre, a service for the homeless. These experiences allowed attendees to express God's love in tangible ways and helped them overcome any fears associated with evangelism.

The street evangelisation along Karpal Singh Drive was especially challenging, as participants were encouraged to engage strangers and share the message of Christ. While intimidating at first, many participants found the courage to step into vulnerability and embrace their role as messengers of God's love. These encounters sparked a desire to continue spreading the Gospel long after the retreat ended.



Participants during the praise & worship session.

However, the true strength of Camp Equip lay in its sense of community. The fellowship — during shared meals, heartfelt conversations, and quiet moments of prayer — created a deep sense of belonging and love that would endure beyond the retreat. The relationships forged during these two weeks were rooted in a shared commitment to follow Christ, and they inspired participants to build similar communities in their own churches and youth groups.

The retreat reached its peak with the ARISE outreach event, a local gathering held by The Seeds Ministry in Penang. Here, participants had the opportunity to share their testimonies and reflect on the profound transformations they had experienced throughout the retreat. The programme concluded with Mass, celebrated by Cardinal Sebastian Francis, during which each participant was officially commissioned as a disciple, ready to bring the light of Christ to the world.

In a time when the world can often seem divided and uncertain, Camp Equip 2025 demonstrated the power of faith to transform lives and communities. The Seeds Ministry, in collaboration with ABLAZE Ministry, continues to empower young adults to become Spirit-filled missionaries, fostering a brighter, more faith-filled future. As these young disciples return to their daily lives, they carry with them a renewed passion for Christ and a commitment to share the love and message of God wherever they go.

TESTIMONIES

Aidan Alexander Franklin, from Kuala Lumpur, thought his spiritual life was "together" but soon realised his connection with God was surface-level. "Camp Equip showed me that I didn't know it all, and it drove me to go deeper," Aidan shared.

Matthias Njauw, a 19-year-old from Singapore, came to the camp in a spiritual dry spell, consumed by worldly distractions like gaming. But the camp's welcoming atmosphere and the powerful sessions on worship and healing helped him rediscover his faith. "Leading worship was so much fun, and I began to understand how to feed God's sheep," Matthias said, reflecting on the street evangelisation missions.

Marie Chan Simei, also from Singapore, thought her relationship with God was solid, but the camp opened her eyes to areas of her spiritual life that were lacking. "I was blinded by pride, thinking I was doing enough, but I wasn't intentionally praying," she admitted. Through Camp Equip, Marie developed a deeper prayer life and a newfound excitement for scripture.

Brianna Priya Shhalini, an 18-year-old from Penang, was struggling with suicidal thoughts and a lack of spiritual direction, she found healing and clarity at Camp Equip. "I experienced God like never before," she said. Brianna now feels called to pursue full-time missionary work.



Participants making their way to the Church of the Assumption, Penang for Adoration and Daily Mass.

Students on eight-month voyage at sea to spread hope

BARCELONA: The young people aboard the *Bel Espoir* will embody this mission, becoming ambassadors of dialogue and peace as they sail across the Mediterranean.

On March 1, the city of Barcelona, a historic gateway for pilgrims travelling through the Mediterranean, launched an extraordinary journey. The *Bel Espoir* (*Beautiful Hope*), a school-ship, will set sail with 200 young people from different faiths and cultures on an eight-month voyage across the Mediterranean, COPE informs. This initiative, called MED25, is promoted by the Archdioceses of Barcelona and Marseille to “cultivate encounters to break down divisions,” as Pope Francis said in Marseille in 2023.

Since the Middle Ages, Barcelona has been a key port for pilgrims journeying to the Holy Land. St Ignatius of Loyola himself departed from here on his spiritual quest before reaching Jerusalem.

Centuries later, the city continues this tradition of openness and hospital-

ity, now through a new generation seeking to spread hope in a divided world.

Navigating for dialogue

Divided into eight teams of 25, the participants will each spend two weeks aboard the *Bel Espoir*, under the guidance of the French association Amis du Jeudi-Dimanche (AJD). At every stop, they will take part in seminars on key Mediterranean issues, including intercultural dialogue, the environment, migration, and economic challenges.

The first leg of the journey took them from Barcelona to Tetouan (Morocco). From there, the ship will dock in 30 ports, including Palermo, Naples, Heraklion, Istanbul, and Beirut, fostering exchange and fraternity along the way.

At the end of each voyage segment, participants will disembark to reflect on their experiences and share what they have learned.

This unique structure ensures that each young traveller gains a perspective that com-

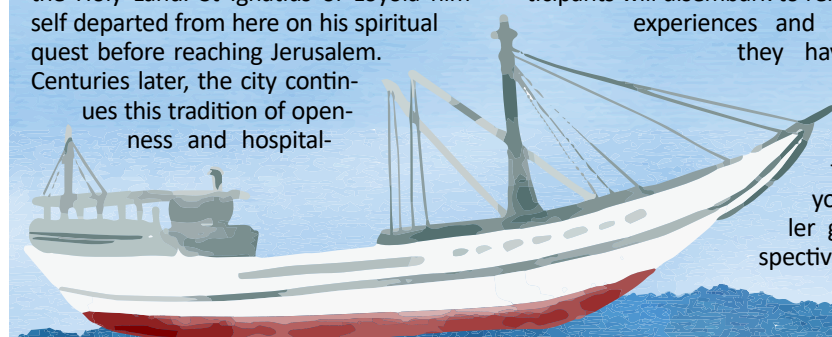
plements the experiences of others.

A mission of unity for the Jubilee 2025

This journey is not just an adventure at sea — it is a symbol of hope within the Jubilee Year 2025, whose theme is *Pilgrims of Hope*. The Jubilee, a tradition dating back to the Hebrew Bible and revived in Christianity, is a time of spiritual renewal, reconciliation, and pilgrimage. It calls believers to embrace mercy, bridge divisions, and walk together in faith.

Pope Francis has emphasised that this Jubilee should be a moment to rekindle hope in a fractured world, encouraging acts of charity and encounters that heal divisions. The young people aboard the *Bel Espoir* will embody this mission, becoming ambassadors of dialogue and peace as they sail across the waters that have, for centuries, connected diverse peoples and traditions.

Barcelona, with its rich history of faith and connection to the wider world, remains a beacon for those seeking to cross borders and build bridges. In a time of division, this ship reminds us that the Mediterranean does not separate — it unites. **Daniel Esparza, Aleteia**



(Freepik)

A Journey of faith and commitment



KOTA PADAWAN: The serene surroundings of St Lukas Centre became a hub of spiritual renewal and camaraderie as 62 altar servers from the Church of the Sacred Heart and Church of St Mark came together for the highly anticipated Altar Server Camp 2025 recently.

Organised under the theme, *Serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul* (Deuteronomy 10:12), the camp provided a unique opportunity for participants to deepen their commitment to serving in the Church while building a stronger sense of community.

Over three days and two nights, the camp featured a variety of enriching activities designed to inspire spiritual growth and foster teamwork. Highlights included reflection sessions, Mass, team-building games, and the vibrant Altar Server Talent Night, where

participants showcased their creativity.

Adding a special touch to the camp were two insightful workshops — one led by Clance and another by Fr Ramon Borja, SDB — both of which emphasised the sacredness of the altar servers' ministry and their vital role in the liturgy.

Despite the rainy weather on the first night, which cancelled the planned campfire, the organisers quickly adapted by moving the games indoors to the hall, ensuring the spirit of joy and fellowship continued uninterrupted. This resilience and adaptability became a testament to the shared commitment of the participants and the organisers.

The camp culminated in a heartwarming Appreciation Night Ceremony attended by Fr Paul Hu, CDD, followed by the celebration of Mass with Fr Felix Au as the celebrant.

The closing moments included a certificate and prize-giving ceremony, acknowledging the dedication and enthusiasm of the altar servers.

The success of this camp would not have been possible without the support of many individuals and groups. Special thanks go to rector Fr Felix, the Parish Pastoral Councils, parents, volunteers, and sponsors for their invaluable contributions. Their generosity and encouragement made this transformative experience possible.

As the servers returned home, their hearts were filled with gratitude, a renewed sense of purpose, and a deeper love for their ministry. God willing, the parish looks forward to organising similar events in the future, continuing to nurture and inspire young hearts to serve with faith and devotion. **Johnestine Joji, Today's Catholic**

A LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCE: TOB SESSION

The Theology of the Body session last month, at the Church of Christ the Light was truly eye-opening. Led by Sr Retta Savarianna FdCC and her team, the two-day programme brought together 32 students from the Church of Christ the Light, my own parish — the Chapel of Christ the King — and two new friends from Church of St Francis Xavier.

At first, I wasn't sure what to expect. I had heard of Theology of the Body before, but I didn't really understand what it was about. The night before the session, I remember asking my mum what it was all about because I wanted to be prepared. But, like all mums, she just smiled and said, “Just go with an open mind, and you'll learn better.” Basically, no spoilers! So, with no choice but to take her advice, I went in not knowing what to expect. Honestly, I was a bit sceptical. But as the sessions went on, I found myself drawn into the discussions and reflections. The way human sexuality was explained through the lens of faith made so much sense, and I started seeing things in a completely new light.

One of the best parts of the experience was hearing different perspectives. Many of the questions I had but was too afraid or shy to ask were answered in ways that brought me clarity and peace. More than just gaining knowledge, I felt like I was growing — both spiritually and personally.

The most meaningful moment for me wasn't even during a formal session. It was the Examination of Conscience, a quiet, reflective time that gave me strength and answered so many of my lingering questions. During that moment, I recalled the Bible verse 1 Samuel 3:10 — “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.” That verse stuck with me, reminding me of how important it is to be open to God's voice in my life.

Out of all the sessions, the one that stood out the most was the third session on love. At first, I didn't really get why we were learning about concepts like FTFF — Free, Total, Faithful, and Fruitful love — at our age. But as we went deeper, I started to see how this understanding of love is so much more than what the world portrays it to be. One statement, in particular, left a lasting impression: “A sacrifice is a choice, love is sacrifice.” That simple but powerful truth changed how I see love — not just as a feeling, but as a selfless and intentional act.

Looking back, I'm so grateful for this experience. The Theology of the Body session not only deepened my understanding of love and human dignity but also strengthened my faith and my relationship with God. I left with a renewed sense of purpose, a greater appreciation for God's plan, and a heart ready to embrace His will. **Marissa Joanna Melvin Moses**



MEMORIAM

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30th Anniversary
In Loving Memory of



Priscilla Robert Fernandez
6th November 1918 – 14th March 1995
Forever in our hearts and always remembered with love by her children and grandchildren.
May she rest in peace. Amen

In Memoriam
Beautiful Memory of Mum



Kamala Das
Departed: March 17th, 2024
“To Live with God Through Eternity”
From: Loving children, sons-in-law, daughters-in-law, grandchildren/spouses and great-grandchildren.

In Loving Memory of Margaret Francis
(1940-2024)



If you ever spent a morning in Kampung Pandan with Margaret, you'd remember the sound of music filling the air—Don Moen's timeless praise and worship classics playing from the radio as she began her day. She carried the same unwavering faith and devotion throughout her life, shaped by her years at the Infant Jesus Convent Cheras, growing up in the convent and later as a dedicated worker of 40 years while raising her seven children.

Margaret's life was a testament to love, faith, and selflessness. She devoted herself to God, her family, and those in need, always offering a helping hand and a warm smile. Even in the face of life's challenges, she met each day with laughter and grace, a true reflection of her unshakable spirit.

One year ago, she returned to the Lord after her long battle with cancer, surrounded by family at home. Though she is no longer with us, her love, wisdom, and kindness continue to guide us, and her presence is felt in every cherished memory.

Today, we honor and remember her with love, gratitude, and a deep sense of longing. Margaret fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith—leaving behind a legacy that will live on for generations to come.

You are missed beyond words but remembered with endless love.

Forever in our hearts, A.Francis

Javier García de Jalón:
A life that left a mark
A teacher of life and hope

The legacy of a good teacher is not measured only by the knowledge he transmits, but by the mark he leaves on his students. Javier García de Jalón, renowned engineer and university professor (Complutense University of Madrid and Tecnun, University of Navarra), not only taught about his speciality but turned his life into a lesson in faith, gratitude, and resilience.

His recent death has not only been a cause of sadness for those who knew him but also of deep gratitude. His example transcended the classroom, reminding us that greatness is not found in titles or awards, but in the way we face life and share with others.



Always with gratitude in the heart
“When someone leaves, it seems that everything is tinged with sadness. But some people have done so much good, that instead of tears, they leave us a smile of gratitude.”

This idea accompanied Javier throughout his life. His professional achievements were notable, with international awards and recognition, but he never used them as a reason for vanity. Instead, he preferred to celebrate them with small gestures of closeness, such as handing out sweets to his students.

He knew that what was truly important was not the awards, but rather the dedication and respect towards those who learned from him.

A disease assumed with courage
The diagnosis of Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) was an unexpected blow.

“I never imagined facing something like this. Sometimes I thought about the possibility of a heart attack, cancer... but never about ALS,” he admitted on one occasion.

Despite the harshness of the disease, he never doubted that his life had a purpose. For him, God was the “Scriptwriter” of his story, and he trusted that everything had a meaning, even in the most difficult moments.

Far from shutting himself away in despair, he turned his situation into an opportunity to raise awareness among his students and society about the importance of valuing life at all its stages. In his last class, the classroom was packed to the last corner. Students sat on the floor and at their desks, eager to hear his message.

He reminded them of a reflection that he considered essential: “Suffering is a wake-up call in a world that is often too distracted to listen.”

Defender of life and dignity
Javier was concerned about how in some sectors of society euthanasia was promoted as a solution to suffering. He firmly believed that the real problem was not physical pain — which can be alleviated with palliative care — but loneliness and the lack of support for those facing serious illnesses.

“No one who feels truly loved wants to end their life. What we need is not euthanasia, but greater investment in assistance, in support and in resources that allow us to live with dignity until the end,” he said with conviction.

He believed that before approving laws that shorten life, there were more urgent issues to resolve, such as improving support systems for dependent people and their families.

A lesson that transcends the classroom
Despite the harshness of his illness, he never let sadness dominate his life. He believed that each day was a gift, and that happiness was contagious:

“If you learn to accept your life with gratitude, those around you will also find reasons to smile. Everything has a purpose, even that which we do not understand.”

Therefore, his farewell is not just a goodbye, but a reminder of everything he left us. Beyond his engineering lessons, he taught us that faith, gratitude and love can turn any circumstance into an opportunity to grow and help others.

His legacy lives on in every person who had the privilege of knowing him and learning from his example.

Exaudi

6th Year Anniversary
of a Loving Wife, Mother
and Grandmother



Susan D. E Sundram
19th July 1949 – 10th March 2019
Deeply missed and lovingly remembered by her Husband, Children, Sons & Daughters-in-law and Grandchildren.

In Ever Loving Memory of
JOSEPHINE NICHOLSON
(Called to the Lord: 18 March 2016)



*Nine years have come and gone,
Since you left us, that fateful morn,
The world moves on, the years softly turn,
But in our hearts, a constant embers burn.*

*We pray to see you someday,
As we wait on that beautiful shore,
The ache we feel, will fade away
Seeing you smile, we grieve no more.*

*Nine years have passed, a testament to pain,
But love remains, a gentle, healing rain.*

Veteran journalist's death mourned

The Mumbai Press Club joined media persons to mourn the death of Ashley D'Mello, a stalwart journalist who covered a wide spectrum of issues during a career spanned over four decades.

D'Mello died after a brief illness in the evening of February 28 at Holy Family Hospital in Bandra, a Mumbai suburb. He was 69. The funeral was held on March 3 in Bandra.

“He worked for 25 years with *The Times of India* and earlier with *The Indian Express* and *The Free Press Journal*. He was also associated with the national news agency *United News of India* and wrote for *Time Magazine from India*,” stated a condolence message from the Club.

It observed that throughout “his illustrious career,” D'Mello covered politics, crime, civic affairs, environment, infrastructure, business, and community matters.

His journalistic excellence earned him a fellowship from Wolfson College, Cambridge, and he was also a visiting scholar at the Graduate School of Journalism, University of California, Berkeley.

Michael Gonsalves, D'Mello's former colleague, mourning the death said, “We have indeed lost a good journalist who wrote stories that mattered to society at large with-



out fear or favour,

Gonsalves, a former president of the Indian Catholic Press Association, said D'Mello was a “meticulous reporter, who also covered news about Church affairs independently and often critically to bring out the truth without bias.”

“He was a good journalist remaining faithful to his vocation as truth teller to make issues understandable to the reader,” added Gonsalves, who is now based in Pune.

Nirmala Carvalho, a Mumbai-based veteran journalist who reports for international Church publications, said she found in D'Mello an intellectual and idealistic person, who was friendly and helpful to others. “He often checked with me about Church politics – local and Vatican,” she said.

D'Mello was born in Mumbai and raised in Calcutta and New Delhi.

He studied English and History at St Stephen's College, New Delhi, did his masters in history at the University of Mumbai and received a diploma in journalism from Mumbai's Xavier Institute of Communications.

One of the highlights of his career was covering Goa as a state for the *Times of India* for four years. During this period, he wrote about politics in the state, environment problems, the challenges thrown up by tourism and social issues.

Matters India

Religious leaders join Sarawak Governor for breaking of fast

KUCHING: Religious leaders from various faiths came together with the Yang di-Pertua Negeri, Tun Pehin Sri Dr Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar, for a breaking of fast at Astana Negeri on March 4.

Among the attendees were Most Rev Dato' Simon Poh, Archbishop of Kuching; Rt Datuk Danald Jute, Bishop of the Anglican Church in Sarawak and Brunei and Unifor Director Dato Georgina Apphia Ngau.

Also present were Datuk Sharifah Hasidah Sayeed Aman Ghazali, Deputy Minister in the Premier of Sarawak's Department (Law, MA63 and State-Federal Relations); Azizul Annuar Adenan, Tanjung Datu assemblyman and Kuching Port Authority chairman, and Hamdan Jar'ee, Director of the Malaysian Islamic Development Department (Jakim) Sarawak.

The event, organised by Astana Negeri

and the Unit for Other Religions (Unifor), celebrated the spirit of unity and harmony among Sarawak's diverse religious communities.

In a post on his official Facebook page, Dr Wan Junaidi reflected on the significance of the gathering, emphasising that the presence of religious leaders from various backgrounds highlights Sarawak's cultural and religious diversity. He praised the state's continued commitment to preserving the values of respect and mutual understanding.

"I am grateful for this opportunity to gather in an atmosphere of harmony, which strengthens our relationships and fosters unity within our community. This is the true strength of Sarawak — rich in racial and religious diversity, and a model for how harmony and mutual understanding can thrive in society," Dr Wan Junaidi said. **Borneo Post**



Sarawak Yang di-Pertua Negeri Tun Dr Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar (left) greeting Archbishop Simon Poh, while Sarawak Sikh Temple Association president Datuk Kalwinder Singh Khaira (second right) and Sri Maha Mariamman Temple Association Kuching president Datuk Shankar Ram Asnani (right) look on. (photo/Astana Negeri Sarawak)

Sri Lankan nuns march for unwed mothers, abuse victims

NEGOMBO: Hundreds of Catholic nuns in Sri Lanka took to the streets on Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent, to call on the government and other groups to protect the rights of unwed mothers and abuse victims.

The nuns from Good Shepherd congregation, wearing their religious habits, carried white boxes as they rallied March 5 to collect donations to support victims of rape, abuse, child marriage and unwed mothers.

Sr Rosary Perera, head of the Ave Maria Convent near St Peter's Church in Negombo, a Catholic stronghold near the national capital Colombo, said the rally was part of a national campaign by her religious order.

"We are organising this local fundraising campaign across all 12 dioceses, supported by nuns and a few lay people, to care for orphaned children and unwed mothers, aiming to uplift the lives of women and girls in mortal danger," said Sr Rosary.

Many people generously donated money to support those in need.

A rape victim from Badulla city, who received support from the nuns said the nuns fill voids for abuse victims with protection and care.

"The nuns advise victims not to have abortions but give the children to them. They help parents besides the victims. They encourage those who seek abortion to contact them first," said the victim, a Hindu, who declined to reveal her identity.

"When an underage girl is raped and becomes pregnant, the rapist often escapes, while the girl faces rejection from her family, community, and society, with some resorting to sex work or suicide," she said.

"Due to the dedication and support of the compassionate and understanding nuns, both the mother and child are given a new



Good Shepherd nun Sister Rosary Perera collects donations for unwed mothers and abuse victims in Negombo, Sri Lanka on March 5. (ucanews photo)

chance at life," she added.

Between 800 and 1,000 abortions take place in the country daily despite abortion being illegal, media reports say.

The Sri Lankan Penal Code criminalises abortion except for cases when the mother's life is at risk.

However, many women, especially victims of sexual abuse, often seek abortion illegally with the help of medical doctors, to escape the social stigma related to rape and children born to unwed women.

Thousands of women and children are raped each year, and many cases go unreported as outdated laws and societal norms fail to protect victims, according to Equality Now, an organisation tracking violence against women and girls.

Sr Priyangani Hathurusinghe, principal of Ave Maria Convent, sent a letter to the parents of her students recently, urging

them to make generous contributions to support their mission for the poor, needy, and destitute.

"As you are already aware the Convent at Nayakakanda attends to a variety of their needs such as caring for abandoned children, to uplift the lives of women and girls in mortal danger and many others. In order to carry out these works of charity, we need your financial support and help," the nun's letter read.

George Dias, a businessman from Negombo who donated cash to the nuns, praised their mission, saying that it serves all religious communities.

"Their call for action transcends religious boundaries, with the nuns not only raising awareness but also seeking practical support to provide unwed mothers and children from traumatic situations with safe spaces and a better future," he said. **ucanews.com**

European bishops praying for peace during Lent

ROME: The Church in Europe is united in prayer for peace from Ash Wednesday throughout the Lenten season. In a statement issued on March 5, the Council of Bishops' Conferences of Europe (CCEE) shared that the initiative involves all its members, each committing to celebrate at least one Holy Mass during Lent. The Masses will focus on praying for the victims of war and invoking "a just and sustainable peace, especially in Ukraine and the Holy Land."

The CCEE emphasised that the initiative, called the 'Eucharistic Chain,' is designed to foster communion and serve as a visible sign of hope across Europe. The Council noted that Lent is a time of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, urging all to recognise their shared humanity and seek an end to war.

The statement also included a call to pray for the health of Pope Francis during these challenging times of suffering and illness.

The CCEE comprises 39 member organisations representing the Catholic Church in 45 European countries. **Vatican News**

