

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence.

Hebr. 5:7-9



Equipping Catholic leaders to face global challenges ■ P5



Addressing Sex Ed and LGBTQ understanding ■ P7



Realities are greater than ideas The MCYMC initiative in MJD ■ P16

THE JUBILEE PRAYER

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



God never tires of forgiving

VATICAN: Confession, the Sacrament of God's forgiveness, allows us to start again on the journey of new life that began with our Baptism, Pope Francis said during a penitential liturgy recently.

The celebration, which took place in the Roman parish of St Pius V on March 8, kicked off the annual "24 Hours for the Lord," a Lenten initiative established by Pope Francis with the aim of keeping churches open throughout the day to offer opportunities for prayer and confession. This annual celebration, which the Pope established in 2014, is promoted by the Dicastery for Evangelisation and is held on the eve of the fourth Sunday in Lent, or Laetare Sunday.

In his reflection at the service, Pope Francis focused on the theme of this year's event, *Walking in the New Life*, stressing that the Lenten journey is a moment of interior reflection and transformation and that God never tires of forgiving.

The Holy Father implored the assembly to not "renounce God's forgiveness, the Sacrament of Reconciliation," stressing that it is "not a practice of devotion but the foundation of Christian existence."

At one point he turned to the faithful and asked them to repeat in unison: "God never tires of forgiving."

"It is not a question of knowing how to express sins well but of recognising ourselves as sinners and throwing ourselves into the arms of Jesus crucified to be freed. It is not a moralistic gesture but the resurrection of the heart," the Pope continued.

In the journey of our daily life, the Pope observed, we can often lose sight of the beauty

of our new life in Christ, with harmful consequences for our relationships with God and with others.

"This new life," the Pope explained, "is the life that carries us forward in our truest identity, that of being beloved children of the Father, so that every sadness and obstacle, every effort and tribulation cannot prevail over this wonderful reality that grounds us."

Highlighting the frenzy of modern life and the multitude of responsibilities that come with it, the Pope observed the ease with which we can become distracted and led astray, forgetting "that there is already a new life that flows within us and that, like embers under the ashes, waits to blaze up and shed light on everything."

"With the face of God clouded, those of our brothers and sisters clouded, the greatness we carry within us blurred, we remain on the path, but we need new signs, a change of pace, a direction that helps us find the way back to baptism, our original beauty, the sense of moving forward," the pontiff continued.

"We remain on our way, but we need a new signpost, a change of pace, direction to help us find again the way of our Baptism, our original beauty, the sense of going forward," he said.

"Brothers and sisters," Pope Francis continued, "what is the way to resume the path of new life? It is the way of God's forgiveness." God's forgiveness "puts us back together again... cleanses us within, returning us to the condition of our baptismal rebirth."

But, the Pope said, while it is necessary for us to have open and contrite hearts – like the leper who cried out to Jesus, "If you will, You can make me clean" – our own efforts are not enough. "Only God knows and heals the heart; only He can deliver it from evil."

Pope Francis emphasised that this is what

Jesus wants for us, so that we might be renewed, free, happy, and able to continue along the path of our new life.

Lent, the Pope explained, is the best way to get recalibrated and to get back on a path of spiritual renewal. He observed that this task is contingent upon a willingness to connect with God and to seek his forgiveness.

It is "divine forgiveness" that "makes us new again," the Pope said, and "cleans us inside, making us return to the condition of baptismal rebirth. It makes the fresh waters of grace flow again in the heart, dried up by sadness and dusty by sins."

"Let us not grieve Him; let us not put off our encounter with His forgiveness, for only if put back on our feet by Him can we get back on the road and see the defeat of our sin, wiped out forever," the Pope said. "Let us not forsake God's forgiveness, the Sacrament of Reconciliation," which is not just a devotional exercise, but "the foundation of Christian existence."

Pope Francis called on those who administer the Sacrament of Confession to "put God's forgiveness back at the centre of the Church."

He invited priests to always grant forgiveness to those who ask for it, and to help those who might be afraid to confess their sins "to approach the Sacrament of healing and joy with confidence."

Pope Francis closed his homily by asking the faithful to "welcome this new life," after which the faithful joined the pontiff in repeating seven times aloud: "Jesus, if You want, You can purify me."

Following the homily, the celebration continued with Eucharistic adoration while the Pope moved from the sanctuary to the right aisle of the mid-20th-century church to hear confessions. — *CNA/Vatican News*

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GUEST EDITORIAL

A journey through Catholic teachings and values

In the heart of every Catholic organisation lies a mission — a testament to the Church's lasting commitment to spread the Good News. Yet, the effectiveness of this mission is profoundly influenced by the calibre of its leaders. As recent graduates of the Graduate Certificate in Leadership and Catholic Culture from the Australian Catholic University, we've embarked on a journey of reflection, learning how essential leadership is within our faith communities. The cornerstone of effective leadership, we've discovered, is not rooted in authority or power, but in service and humility, exemplified by none other than Jesus Christ. Our exploration has led us to share our insights, hoping to illuminate the path for current and future leaders in our faith communities.

Jesus' approach to leadership was revolutionary. His interactions, such as the compassionate encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4), illustrate His method of servant leadership. He met people where they were, listened to their needs, and guided them towards spiritual enlightenment without judgment. His method was transformational, centred on building trust and fostering relationships that encourage and enable others to grow in their faith and understanding. This narrative is not just a historical account; it's a blueprint for leading within the Catholic ethos.

Servant leadership, intertwined with transformational leadership, provides a model that is both nurturing and visionary. It encourages leaders to inspire and motivate, to articulate a future that reflects the teachings of Christ while attending to the immediate needs of their com-



The graduates from the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur. From left: Amanda Pumala, Cheryl Kristine and Eppy Nyirun.

munities. Such leadership doesn't just aim for goals but looks to create an environment where every team member feels valued and understood, echoing the inclusivity Jesus practiced.

However, the path of leadership is fraught with challenges, requiring leaders to introspect and ensure their actions generate more light than darkness. This inner reflection is critical, for a leader's influence can uplift or diminish the spirit of their followers. Emulating Jesus means embodying love, humility, and a steadfast commitment to the Holy Spirit's guidance, ensuring that our leadership fosters a community that mirrors the values of the Kingdom of Heaven.

For those called to leadership within Catholic organisations, ministries, or parishes, the mission extends beyond administration; it is a call to live out the principles of love, justice, solidarity, and respect for life that form the core of

our faith. The Church's social teachings compel us to advocate for the dignity of every person, particularly the weak and marginalised, demanding a societal shift towards greater equity and compassion.

Effective Catholic leadership demands a balance of qualities: self-reflection, prayerful discernment, vulnerability, openness to diverse perspectives, attentiveness, incisiveness, and a responsible, well-communicated decision-making process. These attributes are not just functional skills but are manifestations of a deep spiritual commitment to serving God's people.

As we embrace our various leadership roles, we are reminded that our actions, inspired by the Holy Spirit, must always strive to reveal the unseen and to know the unknown. Leadership in the Catholic context is not just a position but a vocation — a sacred calling to serve with the heart of Jesus, ensuring that through our leadership, we reflect His transformative love and mercy to all.

In this journey, we are not alone. The Holy Spirit accompanies us, guiding and inspiring us to lead with integrity and compassion. We embrace this call with open hearts, committed to being leaders who not only envision a future in the likeness of Christ's teachings but also actively work towards making it a reality in the here and now. — **By Amanda Pumala (ArchKL Chancery Office); Cheryl Kristine (Archdiocesan Office for Human Development) and Eppy Nyirun (Stella Maris International School Damansara)**

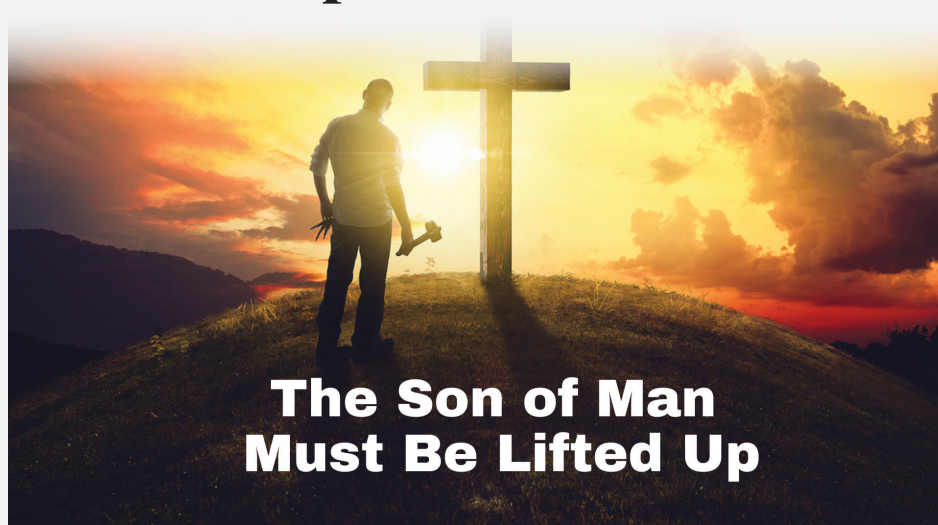
● See also Page 5

Putting to death all that separates us from God

If we were to tell someone the words of Christ from today's Gospel regarding life and death, they would probably think that we have gone off the deep end. Imagine telling a non-Christian that, in a quote from the movie John Wick 4, "One who clings to life, dies and one who clings to death, lives." What kind of reaction would we get? To someone who clings to the things of this world, this sentence will never make sense. Yet this is what Jesus is telling us today when He said that unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground, it remains but a grain of wheat but if it falls and dies, then it will yield an abundant harvest.

In the age where humanity is trying to extend their own life span, there is always talk of prolonging life. The thing is - humanity is fixated on living longer and longer and clinging on to this life on earth. However, my question would be - even if we live to be a thousand years old, what would our life mean, if it had no purpose? After all, wanting to live as long as possible can indicate either one wanting to enjoy life as much as possible or one wanting to help others as long as one can. No matter how we try, we know our bodies are finite and it will start to break down eventually. Naturally, we can never escape the clutches of death.

When Jesus talks about the death of the grain, that is referring to us, He is not referring to our physical bodies but rather, to our sinful nature. We all know that all of us are weak and are prone to falling into sin.



Sin is not just about offending God; sin is also a wilful separation from His love and from our brothers and sisters in Christ. Sin is never personal, no matter how we try to justify them. It will affect others around us, directly or indirectly. It is our inclination to sin that we need to put to death. Of course, it is always easier said than done but we are called to try our best.

When we cling too much to our life in this world, there will always be the danger of losing ourselves to this world. There are so many things that can occupy our minds and hearts and easily take us away from God. The most dangerous thought would be, "I can handle it." That is pride talking, and that will be the starting point of our fall. As long as our focus is on the world,

we will not be able to die to ourselves. If our focus is on God and His kingdom, then we will certainly make more effort to put to death all that separates us from God, not out of fear of punishment but for the love of God and neighbour.

When we put to death our inclination towards sin and our desires for temporal gain and pleasures, what gives us life is no longer the things of this world — which will eventually pass on — but the things of God. Virtues like compassion, love, kindness and selflessness will replace vices like jealousy, envy, greed and selfishness. Virtues centre our life on God and we begin to depend on His grace to live our daily lives. Vices, on the other hand, centre on ourselves and we begin to depend on the things of this world.

Reflecting on our Sunday Readings

with Fr Philip Tay, OCD

5th Sunday of Lent (B)

Readings: Jeremiah 31:31-34;

Hebrews 5:7-9;

Gospel: John 12:20-33

A grain that falls to the ground and dies will yield its fruit. So it is with us who put all that is not of God in us to death. As Jesus said, a good tree will bear good fruit. If our roots are in this world and find nourishment from them, then we will only bear the fruits suitable for this world. If our roots are in God, then our fruits will be those that are pleasing to God and beneficial to all people. That is how we can measure the effectiveness of our Christian life. We can pray and receive the Sacraments, but if it does not change us to be more like Christ, then we seriously need to examine ourselves and see which part of our life needs to be put to death. We will not be able to put to death everything in us that is not of God, it is a lifetime journey and even at the end of our life, we may not be fully purged. Which is why further purification is done in Purgatory. However, in the words of St Teresa of Calcutta, we are not called to be successful, we are called to be faithful. With God's grace, let us continue to be faithful to God and not to this world.

IMPORTANT DATES

March 24:
Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord

March 28:
Holy Thursday

March 29:
Good Friday of the Passion of the Lord

March 30
Holy Saturday



KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

March

- 18 EXCO Meeting – Christian Federation of Malaysia
- 19 Chrism Mass – Church of Christ the Light
- 19-20 Clergy Recollection
- 28 MCCBCHST Exco Meeting



PENANG DIOCESE

Diary of Cardinal Sebastian Francis

March

- 18 Chrism Mass – Church of Immaculate Conception, Pulau Tikus at 8.00pm
- 18-19 Council of Priests (COP) and Clergy Monthly Recollection – Stella Maris, Penang
- 19 Meeting – Superior General of Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception (FSIC) at 12.00pm – Stella Maris, Penang
- 21-31 Palm Sunday and Holy Week – Church of Our Lady of Fatima of the Holy Rosary, Kota Bharu, Kelantan



MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

March

- 21 Meeting – MJD Young People Network at Bishop's Office
- 22 MAJODI Centre Outdoor Meditative Way of the Cross at 3.00pm followed by Mass – St James Chapel
- 26-27 Clergy Monthly Recollection – Church of St Philip, Segamat
- 26 Chrism Mass – Church of St Philip, Segamat
- 28-31 Easter Triduum & Easter Masses – Church of St Peter, Melaka

LSS to prepare for Easter

By Francis Leong

KUANTAN: The Church of St Thomas the Apostle, organised a Life in the Spirit Seminar (LSS) during the Lenten season in preparation for Easter.

The LSS was held over two days, March 2 and 3 and was facilitated by the CHARIS Service Team of the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur. With a turnout of 50 adult participants and around 20 youth, the seminar was a dynamic gathering of individuals seeking spiritual enrichment.

The two-day programme featured a variety of enriching activities, including

Praise and Worship sessions, insightful spiritual talks, engaging group discussions, and moments of heartfelt prayer. Parish priest Fr George Packiasamy extended a warm welcome to all attendees and facilitators, delivering an opening address following the enthronement of the Bible.

On the first day, Fr Clement Lim from the parish of the Sacred Heart in Bentong, led a Benediction and Healing session, invoking the presence of the Blessed Sacrament for individual participants. The next day, CHARIS core team members guided participants in prayer to receive the

Baptism of the Holy Spirit. The atmosphere was charged with spiritual energy for all present, and several participants, including youth, shared their inspiring testimonies during the concluding session.

The LSS has revived the faith of our parishioners and provided us with an opportunity to discover or rediscover ourselves. It has helped us renew our relationship with God and with one another, making us more committed to serving the Church.

The participants expressed their gratitude to the CHARIS team, particularly Christine Loh, for expertly organising the sessions.



The participants listening intently to the presenter.



DIOCESE OF PENANG
PKK/BDN/2023/08/165

Notifications and Updates

I greet you with JOY, MERCY and HOPE in your synodal journey of Lenten Penance as Missionary Disciples of Christ.

May you PRAY, FAST, GIVE and RECEIVE with an unwavering focus on our Father in Heaven. Encouraged by the Lenten Message of Pope Francis, "Through the Desert God Leads us to Freedom", let us make a personal journey of reflection leading us to action according to His Will.

The Holy Spirit who stirs us for communion and mission, will help us in this journey. I assure all of you my unity during this grace-filled season as we accompany our Elect in prayer, for their preparation to answer the call of Baptism.

1. Annual Collection for Holy Land
The annual collection for the Holy Land is on Maundy Thursday.

Parishes can make their contributions by cheque or online transfer. Payable to: DIOCESE OF PENANG, RHB Account No: 2-07082-0005132-4. Kindly notify payment to: trefn@gmail.com

2. Solidarity Fund for the Diocese of Penang

The parish monthly collection for the solidarity fund of all parishes in the Diocese of Penang can also be made following the same banking details and method as above.

3. RCIA Elect for Baptism at Easter

The Rite of Election for the Diocese of Penang took place on February 17 and 18 at the Church of the Assumption, Penang and Church of Our Mother of Perpetual Help, Ipoh.

I am delighted to inform you that about 250 adults, which includes the RCIA candidates together with several

other adults, will be baptised at Easter in our diocese. Please join me in praying for them, every day until their Baptism.

4. Priest for the Korean Community
We welcome Fr Antony Lee Chang Seub, a Catholic priest from the Diocese of Chuncheon, South Korea to the Korean Catholic Community of the Diocese of Penang.

5. Penang CHARIS team

I am pleased to share with you the team of CHARIS PENANG, a service of communion with all the expressions of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal of the Church in the Diocese of Penang. <https://shorturl.at/eoBDQ>

6. ARISE Youth Day (May 30 - June 1, 2024) at Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam

Young People, ARISE and shine! Let's rejoice in Christ with this unforgettable gathering presented by CHARIS Peninsular Malaysia - Catholic Charismatic Renewal. Prepare for an inspiring journey featuring Fr Rob Galea as our keynote speaker, known for his dynamic sermons and soul-stirring music ministry. <https://shorturl.at/foIY8> Register now via bit.ly/ARISEYouthDay!

7. Clergy Retirement Home for the Diocese at Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam

Priests from the Diocese of Penang who have gracefully reached the age of retirement of 75 or prior due to medical reasons, may reside at the retirement home for priests situated within the Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam. Priests who are interested, may contact Fr Dominic Santhiyagu directly. <https://shorturl.at/lr169>

8. Administrator for the Parish of Our Lady of Fatima of the Holy Rosary, Kota Bharu, Kelantan
Sr Angela Wong Chin Chin, FMM will be the Administrator for the Parish of Our Lady of Fatima of the Holy Rosary, Kota Bharu, Kelantan with effect from March 1, 2024.

We thank Fr Konstend Gnanapragasam for his dedicated and committed services in his priestly ministry at the parish, and welcome Sr Angela Wong with gratitude for her generous availability in accepting this new role and mission.

Fr Konstend will be going to India for an ongoing formation. Msgr Henry Rajoo, the Dean 1 of Northern Deanery will assist Sr. Angela Wong in allocating priests for weekend Masses.

9. A Letter from Brother Matthew of Taizé, "Journeying Together"

With gratitude for the ecumenical prayer vigil that took place on September 30, 2023, I am pleased to share with you a letter entitled *Journeying Together* written by the current Prior of Taizé, Bro Matthew who took over from Bro Roger, the founder of the Taizé Community. Let us reflect on this beautiful letter as we journey together as pilgrims of peace. <https://shorturl.at/abrXh>

10. The Dicastery for Evangelisation offers resource for the Year of Prayer
As we move closer to the Jubilee of 2025, Pope Francis wants 2024 to be dedicated to prayer. Thus, he is inviting the whole Church to a time of intense commitment in preparation for the Opening of the Holy Door. <https://shorturl.at/blq68>

Sebastian Francis
Cardinal Sebastian Francis

Minor basilica's commitment to recycling

By Karen Ann Theseira

BUKIT MERTAJAM: The Minor Basilica of St Anne is poised to celebrate a significant milestone in 2025 as its recycling programme reaches its 25th anniversary. The programme, a cornerstone of the parish's commitment to environmental stewardship, has become a model of sustainability and community engagement.

Vincent Yong, head of the parish Creation Justice Ministry (CJM), outlined the standard operating procedures of the recycling programme. He explained that each year, groups and ministries within the parish are invited, via the bulletin to take on the monthly recycling duty. Upon acceptance, they are assigned a specific month for their recycling responsibilities. At the end of each month, a designated contractor collects recyclables and issues receipts, which are meticulously recorded by the administration office. The funds generated from recycling activities are deposited into the church's account, and expenses are approved by the head of administration.

In January 2024, CJM received RM1,500 from the recycling



St Anne's Recycling Collection Centre.

proceeds, enhancing their ability to support ministry activities. Other groups, such as the Tamil Women's League and St Anne Seniors, have also benefited from the programme, using the funds for community celebrations and welfare initiatives.

The origins of the recycling programme trace back to a newspaper article that inspired parishioner Donat Anthony Theseira and his wife, Mylene, to initiate a collection drive in their neighbourhood of Taman Bukit Indah in 1996. The recipient of the first collection was Mount Miriam Cancer Hospital in

Penang. The success of their efforts led to the establishment of a similar programme at St Anne's in 2000, approved by then-parish priest Fr Michael Cheah, with the dual aims of waste reduction and fundraising.

After a successful run, the recycling programme in Taman Bukit Indah held its final collection on June 30, 2016. Over two decades, the initiative amassed a total of RM99,768.60, preventing 368.82 tonnes of valuable resources from reaching landfills. All proceeds were allocated to various charitable organisations, including the



Volunteers helping to sort the recyclable items.

Penang Caring Dialysis Centre, Persatuan Kebajikan Kanak-Kanak Cacat Yee Ran Jing Sheh, and Little Sisters of the Poor.

Over the years, the programme has evolved, with dedicated volunteers like Joseph Lim, chairman of St Anne Seniors, overseeing sorting efforts and ensuring that recyclables are properly processed. The involvement of youth groups, led by Deacon Dave Kameron and his wife Marianne, underscores the parish's commitment to instilling environmental consciousness in future generations.

In collaboration with CJM, the

St Anne Recycling Management Committee meets annually to plan the recycling schedule and educate parishioners on best practices. Together, they exemplify the parish's dedication to environmental sustainability and community welfare.

As the parish commemorates 25 years of recycling, Vincent Yong encourages others to emulate their success, emphasising the spiritual significance of caring for creation. For more information on starting a recycling programme in your parish, contact Vincent Yong at cjmstanne@gmail.com.

Senior parishioners honoured with recognition award



KUALA LUMPUR: The Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus hosted the Golden Petals Service Recognition Award ceremony on Sunday, March 3, during the 9.30am Mass in English. Following the Mass, a fellowship was held for all senior citizens aged 60 years and above in the parish hall.

This marked the inaugural occasion for the Evergreen support group within the Family Life Ministry, spearheading the recognition award project with the blessing of parish priest, Msgr Stanislaus Soosamariam.

Recipients were chosen based on their voluntary service to the church since its establishment un-

til the year 2000, as well as those aged above 65 years old in 2024.

The church also honoured the family members of the award recipients who had passed away, migrated overseas, or moved to other parishes due to unforeseen circumstances.

The event aimed to acknowledge parishioners who had generously and zealously contributed their remarkable services for the betterment of the parish since its inception.

During the fellowship gathering in the hall, 25 recipients out of the final approved names were present to receive the recognition award certificate from Msgr Stanislaus.

A visit to LUAS - 'Friends of the River'

SELANGOR: Members of the *Laudato Si'* and Creation Justice group from several parishes, led by Fr Andrew Manickam, OFM, Cap, embarked on an educational excursion to Lembaga Urus Air Selangor (LUAS) in Shah Alam on February 21.

The objective was to gain insight into LUAS's functions, jurisdiction, and its role as *Friends of the River*. During the visit, we received a comprehensive briefing on the impact of river pollution on ecology, our current drinking water system, the different water concessionaires for various states, and their long-term plans to address climate change. This experience broadened our understanding of the importance of treasuring water, a creation of God, and the need to use it wisely.

LUAS's slogan, "Water for All," underscores its commitment to ensuring a sustainable water supply. Encik Ishak Kamaruzaman, head of corporate communications at LUAS, explained that maintain-



LUAS staff demonstrating the water sample techniques.

ing Sungai Selangor at 300 million liters per day is crucial. As a state agency under Selangor, established jointly by the Federal and state governments, LUAS employs 218 staff members responsible for managing rivers, ponds, land and underground

water, and coastal areas under Enactment 6(C) of LUAS 1999.

The Selangor Water Management Authority Enactment 1999 empowers LUAS to regulate and safeguard water resources in Selangor. LUAS enforces the "polluters pay principle" and a "zero discharge policy," with authority to fine offenders under Section 70 of the Enactment. Additionally, LUAS spearheads the *Friends of the River* initiative, encouraging communities to adopt river sections for conservation under their corporate social responsibility efforts.

During our visit, we observed water sampling techniques using portable water test kits and pH indicators. We learned about the process of analysing water samples for court proceedings against polluters. The trip concluded with a lunch provided by LUAS, ending around 1.00pm. We extend our gratitude to the LUAS team for their warm hospitality. — By **Dorothy M. Fernandez & Elena Shim**



Equipping Catholic leaders to face global challenges

By Patricia Pereira

KUALA LUMPUR: Thirteen individuals from the arch/dioceses of Kuala Lumpur, Penang, and Malacca Johore were conferred with the Graduate Certificate in Leadership and Catholic Culture (GCLCC) by the Australian Catholic University (ACU). The presentation ceremony took place at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Institute on March 5.

This group marks the second Malaysian cohort to successfully complete a rigorous two-year distance learning programme tailored for priests, religious individuals, board members, and managers of Catholic diocesan commissions, associations, schools, and organisations. The programme, designed to cultivate effective leadership skills and promote corporate governance, plays a pivotal role in preparing individuals to navigate contemporary global challenges while fostering sustainable growth.

Present at the ceremony were Cardinal Sebastian Francis, bishop of Penang; Archbishop Julian Leow of Kuala Lumpur archdiocese; Bishop Bernard Paul of Malacca



The graduates with their testamurs and gift.

Johore diocese; ACU's National Head of School for Theology within the Faculty of Theology & Philosophy, Associate Professor Joel Hodge; Brig-Gen (Rtd) Datuk Richard Robless, Chairman of Yayasan Tan Sri Dominic Vendargon as well as family and friends of the graduates.

The ceremony began with the opening speech by Bishop Bernard, followed by a video message from the ACU's Executive Dean

of the Faculty of Theology and Philosophy, Associate Professor Richard Colledge. Dr Joel Hodge then delivered his address.

Despite their busy schedules and being spread out across three dioceses, the graduates managed to craft a video introduction that offered a window into their personal journeys, revealing the transformative impact of the programme on their lives.

Following the engaging video presentation,

Dr Joel took to the stage to award the graduates their testamurs. The event proceeded with a speech from a student representative. Archbishop Julian then graced the stage to personally hand each graduate a custom plaque, a symbol of appreciation from the trio of bishops.

Cardinal Sebastian then gave the closing address adding some communal aspirations to the evening's narrative. The culmination of the ceremony saw the three bishops collectively bestow blessings and commission the graduates for their future endeavours.

As the ceremony transitioned into an evening of celebration, the graduates took the spotlight once again, this time showcasing their diverse talents. With an impressive array of cultural dances, melodious songs, and a captivating poem recital, they demonstrated their broad range of skills and interests, further enchanting the attendees.

This multifaceted showcase of talent and the blend of formal accolades with personal achievements created a memorable evening that celebrated both the academic and personal growth of the graduates.

Bishop Bernard Paul who delivered the opening address commended the graduates for completing the programme and congratulated them on their achievements.

Addressing the graduates who comprised professionals, pastoral workers, diocesan staff, educators, and clergy, Bishop Bernard urged them to understand the ever-changing world they are currently in. Reflecting on the shifts from a VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous) world to a BANI (brittle, anxious, non-linear, incomprehensible) world, the prelate emphasised the importance of resilience, flexibility, empathy, and mindfulness in navigating these complexities.

Acknowledging the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on human existence and the Church's response, Bishop Bernard urged these Catholic leaders to remain relevant to the times, driven by the ethos of compassion, justice, and solidarity. He emphasised the need for Catholic leaders to connect, collaborate, and engage in contemplative action with a spirit of synodality.

Quoting Socrates and Gandhi, the bishop emphasised the importance of reflection and ethical living in leadership roles. He encouraged the graduates to move from taught knowledge to revealed knowledge, stressing that awareness brings about change.

Drawing parallels between Jesus' bridging of heaven and earth and the graduates' role as bridges between the secular and the divine, Bishop Bernard urged them to make their workplaces and marketplaces realms where the light of hope is felt by all who enter.

In conclusion, the prelate offered his blessings to the graduates, urging them to be bridges that delight the Lord and bring forth positive change in the world.

Message from the stakeholders

Dr Joel Hodge (pic) shed light on the transformative phase of Church leadership and the pivotal moment the Church is facing. With a noticeable decrease in traditional vocations, especially in countries such as Malaysia and Australia, he pointed out in his speech that the laity are increasingly taking on prominent roles in Church leadership and involvement.

Highlighting the educational achievements of the graduates, Dr Hodge praised their commitment to learning and their readiness to lead in these challenging times. The programme, which covered key areas such as Catholic ethos, ethics, and social thought, culminated in a capstone



unit that integrated these themes in the context of leading mission-oriented Catholic organisations.

He pointed out the increasing call for the laity's active engagement in the Church's mission, emphasising the collaborative effort required among lay, religious, and ordained members to serve God's grace authentically and effectively.

Addressing the modern context's challenges, including consumerism, individualism, and the rise of technology, the associate professor identified the shifts towards inwardness and aggressive identity assertion as significant obstacles. However, he also saw these trends as opportunities for the Church to engage more deeply with

the contemporary human condition, advocating for a balanced approach of inward spirituality and outward mission.

He outlined the dual calling of Christian leaders and disciples to develop interior depth and commit to mission, avoiding self-referential attitudes and instead promoting dignity and the common good. He highlighted the universal search for existential meaning, urging the Church to witness God's love as the ultimate purpose of life.

Dr Hodge thanked the bishops and institutions that supported the programme and expressed hope for continued collaboration between ACU and the Malaysian Church to further the mission of forming effective leaders and members within the Church.

Jason Tioh (pic), a former youth ministry worker from the Diocese of Penang gave a speech on behalf of his fellow graduates, highlighting the transformative experience of their Catholic leadership course.

The course, spanning four units, delved deep into the essence of Catholic leadership and its practical application. Notably, the first three units were conducted online due to the pandemic, fostering connections with peers



from Australia, while the fourth unit convened physically at the Stella Maris Retreat Centre in Penang.

Jason recounted the teachings of Dr Christiaan Jacobs on *Catholic Ethos and Care of the Person*, emphasising the core value of being a life-giver echoing the teachings of Jesus Christ. Dr Sandie Cornish's exploration of *Catholic Social Thought in Practice* showcased the profound impact of Catholic social teachings on humanity, while Dr Stewart Braun's *Ethics in a Faith-Based Context* challenged participants to navigate ethical dilemmas in diverse workplaces.

The most memorable unit, *Leading the Mission in Catholic Organisations*, led by Dr Lisa McDonald, provided a rich interactive experience, prompting participants to reflect on their readiness to lead as intentional disciples of Jesus.

Jason expressed gratitude to his family and friends for their unwavering support and also thanked his course mates for their enriching discussions and camaraderie over the past two years.

In conclusion, he underscored the importance of a revitalised sense of purpose and mutual understanding within the cohort, committing to imbue their organisations with the principles of faith.

In his closing address **Cardinal Sebastian Francis** on behalf of the Peninsular Malaysia bishops, conveyed his blessings to all gathered.

He also congratulated the graduates and affirmed that education is a life long journey.

"When we stop learning, we not only stagnate but regress (go backwards). We may think that we can stagnate and focus on 'maintenance' but we do not realise that we are regressing."

He then connected his address to the vision of Pope Francis and the synodal Church stressing that everyone is a disciple sent forth on mission.

He ended by thanking Andy Choong for his tireless work in ensuring the success of the programme since its inception.

To ensure the continuity of the programme, the bishops have appointed *HERALD* as the official liaison with the Australian Catholic University.



Cardinal Sebastian Francis with Archbishop Julian Leow and Bishop Bernard Paul praying over the ACU graduates.

Formation for new catechists

By Jared Yap Xian Min

KUALA LUMPUR: On March 2 and 3, the KL Archdiocesan Catechetical Ministry organised a *New Catechists' Formation* to fortify the catechising efforts undertaken by ordinary individuals.

Held at the Archdiocese Pastoral Centre, the two-day event surprised me with its diverse age range of participants. I had erroneously assumed that “new” catechists would predominantly be in their early twenties, but mingling with the attendees quickly dispelled that notion. Their stories varied: some had finally embraced a calling they’d felt for years, while others had returned to the ministry after a long hiatus. One individual even shared how they initially resisted God’s calling, only to find themselves drawn closer to Him through catechism — truly a testament to divine irony.

The sessions of the first day delved into weighty topics, yet their relevance was un-



Jared Yap receiving his certificate from Dr Steven Selavaraju.

deniable. Commencing with reflections on the meaning of our vocation and the mission entrusted to us, the sessions prompted a reevaluation of our identities as catechists and emphasised the importance of our collaborative role within the community. While

the mission of catechism is shared among all Catholics, we, as catechists, are called to execute it systematically and in alignment with God’s will and the teachings of the Church. This renewed sense of purpose imbued our service with deeper meaning.

The subsequent sessions before dinner explored the catechetical process, theories of learning, and lesson planning and assessment in depth. As someone with only two years of experience, these sessions provided invaluable insights into improving lesson delivery, understanding students on a deeper level, and refining communication methods to enhance the learning process. It was a pivotal moment for self-reflection, prompting me to discard ineffective approaches and strive for continual improvement in my teaching methods.

Drawing inspiration from John 15:4-5, which speaks of bearing fruit through abiding in God, one of the key takeaways emphasised during the formation was the importance of a catechist’s spirituality. It was

reiterated that our strength as catechists stems from our spiritual connection with God — a truth that resonated deeply. Recognising the need to nurture my own spirituality, I wholeheartedly engaged in the final session titled *Spirituality*, which involved various guided activities such as *lectio divina*, intercessory prayers, self-examination, and worship. It was a humbling realisation that this aspect of catechism, despite its profound significance, had been neglected in my practice. Hence, I resolved to revive it, starting with the Sacrament of Reconciliation the following morning — an overdue step towards spiritual renewal.

The second day focused on applying the learnings from the previous day through a mock classroom setting, allowing participants to receive constructive feedback from experienced individuals. Despite the initial apprehension of being nominated to teach, I embraced the opportunity to put theory into practice. The feedback received was invaluable, highlighting areas for improvement and reaffirming the importance of learning through trial and error.

As the event concluded with final reflections, sharing, and the presentation of certificates, it became evident that the formation was more than just a skill-building exercise — it was a gathering of diverse individuals united by a common vocation. It provided a platform to exchange stories, share experiences, and collectively strive for personal and communal growth. Ultimately, the goal remains to serve others and foster their spiritual development, and I pray that our collective efforts bear fruit in the lives of those we touch.



Building bridges of compassion

KUALA LUMPUR: In a world fraught with challenges, the essence of humanity often shines brightest in acts of compassion and solidarity. The recent trip of the Archdiocesan Office for Human Development (AOHD) to Singapore was one, where we embarked on a multifaceted mission of learning, collaboration, and compassion.

The primary objective of the trip was twofold: to engage in an Overseas Humanitarian Foundation Course organised by CHARIS (Caritas Humanitarian Aid and Relief Initiatives Singapore) and to undertake an official visit to CARITAS Singapore at Agape Village, CHARIS at the Singapore Catholic Centre and the Enabling Village. These endeavours were emblematic of the commitment to global welfare and community building that AOHD fervently upholds.

The full day course hosted by CHARIS

served as the intellectual cornerstone of the trip, offering participants a deep dive into the theoretical underpinnings and practical applications of humanitarian work. Led by coordinators from CHARIS member organisations and practitioners in the field, the course covered a wide array of topics ranging from disaster response, sustainable development and human rights advocacy. The participants from AOHD were exposed to real-world case studies, interactive workshops, and stimulating discussions that challenged conventional perspectives and fostered critical thinking. The course equipped the team with not only invaluable knowledge and skills but also instilled in us a profound sense of duty and responsibility toward the global community.

For the next leg of our journey, we were joined by the Caritas MJD team and a highlight of the journey was the official visit to



The AOHD, CHARIS and CARITAS MJD teams posing for a group photo.

Agape Village, a testament to Singapore’s unwavering commitment to social inclusion and community empowerment. Hosted by Caritas Singapore, the visit provided participants with a firsthand glimpse into the transformative power of grassroots initiatives and collective action. Agape Village, through Caritas Singapore and its member organisations, stands as a beacon of hope and resilience, offering a holistic range of services and support to marginalised individuals and families.

We then headed to the Catholic Centre to visit CHARIS; participants engaged in meaningful exchange with Linus Ng, the Executive Director of CHARIS. The visit underscored the importance of partnership and collaboration in fostering sustainable change and promoting social justice. We then headed to the Enabling Village, a community space in support of various social enterprises and communities. They are a collective of individuals and organisations that serve — and are supported by — people with diverse abilities. Their goal is to make the

Enabling Village a place where people with different abilities can move independently; where they can feel accepted for who they are, and be valued for their contributions and gifts.

As our journey in Singapore came to an end, we packed our bags and headed across the causeway to Johor Bahru, where we were hosted by the team from Caritas Malacca Johore Diocese. We started our days bright and early with breakfast, followed with a tour of the Caritas MJD HQ within the compound of the Church of the Immaculate Conception by Andrew Leo, the executive director. He then gave us insights into the programmes running within the Diocese of Malacca Johore, especially with their Lenten Campaign.

In the face of adversity and uncertainty, commissions like AOHD and institutions like CHARIS, Caritas Singapore and Caritas MJD stand as beacons of hope, illuminating the path towards a future defined by empathy, solidarity, and shared humanity. — **Dwayne Sadris**

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Addressing Sex Ed and LGBTQ understanding

By Deacon Dr Leslie Petrus

JOHOR: In response to growing concerns over sex education and the understanding of sexuality among today's youth, the Diocesan Commission Family, Laity and Life of the Diocese of Malacca Johore organised a virtual discussion titled *Conversation on Talking Sexuality to Young Children and Teenagers* on March 3.

The two-hour Zoom event aimed to address the challenges faced by parents, catechists, and others interested in discussing issues related to non-heterosexuality and LGBTQ topics. The panel featured Dr Francis Lek-Lim Chan, President of Natural Fertility Awareness Malaysia, Fr Martinian Lee, parish priest of the Church of the Holy Family, Ulu Tiram, Johor, and Andrew Chew, a member of the commission and a parent.

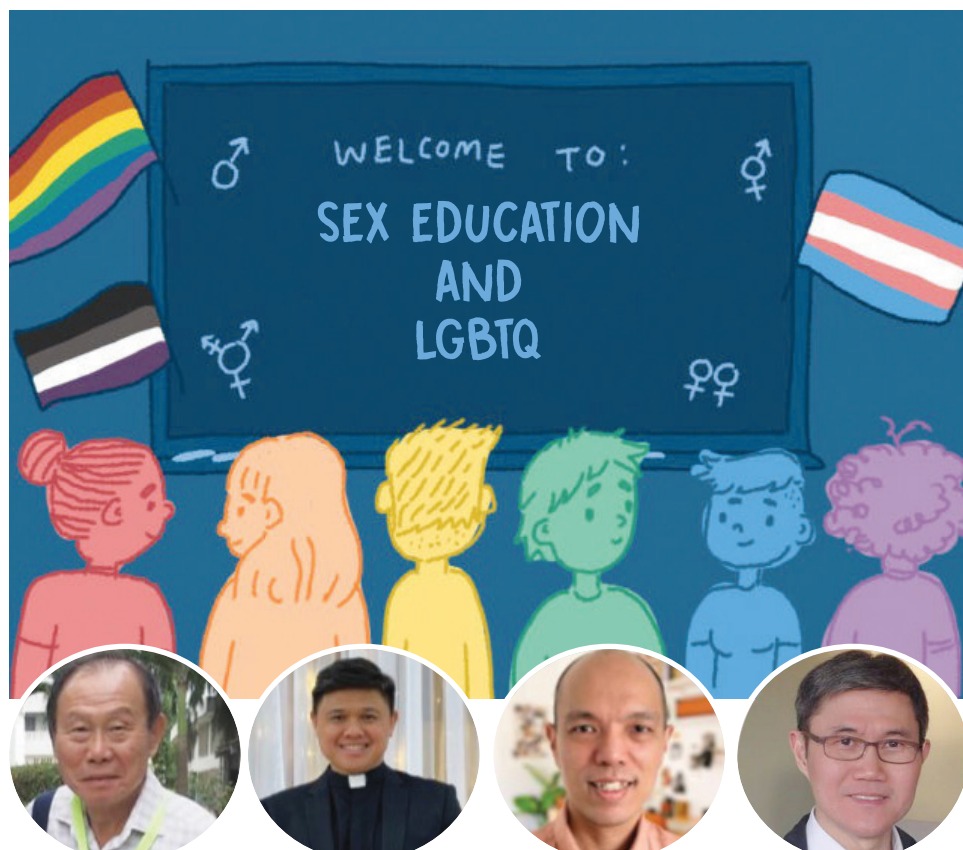
Fr Martinian emphasised the crucial role parents play in shaping their children's lives. He acknowledged that while children often look to their parents for guidance on life issues, the reality is that parents are often busy working, leading to others, particularly social media, taking on this role. He urged parents to prioritise their roles, especially when their children are young, and to fulfil these roles to the best of their ability.

Andrew shared his concerns about sexual awareness among primary school children at his son's school in Singapore. He asked

what parents should do if a teenager makes a pro-choice decision regarding their sexuality. Fr Martinian advised that the first response should be to pray and discern. He also emphasised the importance of talking to the child, engaging in dialogue, and journeying with them, trusting in the work of the Holy Spirit. He suggested seeking help from others, as each situation is unique and there is no 'one-size-fits-all' advice for parents in such challenging situations.

Dr Francis Chan emphasised the significance of introducing Catholic teachings on sexuality early on. He proposed, "We can begin with educating our girls, guiding them to monitor their cycles and understand their sexual health." He pointed out that a considerable number of young Catholics engage in premarital sexual activities, and subsequently, a significant portion of marriages end in divorce. Dr Chan also highlighted the importance of Theology of the Body (TOB), urging parents to familiarise themselves with TOB. He expressed his hope that parish catechetical programmes would incorporate TOB education for young people.

Bryan Crucis Shen, a renowned counsellor affiliated to the Singapore Counselling Ministry, was invited as a guest speaker. Author of two notable works, *Understanding Homosexuality: The Unaffirmed Core and Reaffirmed Core*, Bryan brought to light scientific insights and psychological perspectives on non-heterosexuality. He



From L-R: Dr Chan Lek Lim, Fr Martinian Lee, Andrew Chew and Bryan Crucis Shen.

clarified the distinctions between Same-Sex Attraction (SSA) and LGBTQ+ identities, emphasising the significance of these understandings for both parents and the Church community.

Andrew, as a parent, recognises the daunting challenges modern parents face. To initiate change, he advocates for active parental involvement within their communities,

urging them to engage in parish activities and orchestrate camps and sessions tailored for teenagers. By nurturing their faith and spirituality, parents can set an inspiring example for their children. This proactive approach not only addresses parental concerns but also fosters open dialogue within the Catholic community about sensitive topics like sexuality.

Church's efforts to safeguard minors must not wane

VATICAN: As the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors came together for its plenary assembly, Pope Francis took the opportunity to invite its members to continue strengthening the Church's efforts to prevent abuse.

The Pope thanked the Commission's members for their personal and collective witness, and acknowledged that many of them have dedicated their lives to caring for victims of abuse.

He called their work "a courageous vocation that comes from the heart of the Church and helps her to be purified and to grow."

The Pontifical Commission, he added, has expanded its efforts over the past 10 years in response to his call to "make the Church an increasingly safe place for minors and vulnerable adults."

Pope Francis admitted that those who work in the safeguarding field could grow discouraged as they witness "the scandal of abuse and the suffering of victims".

Yet, he said, "our commitment must not wane" as the Church seeks to restore the fabric of broken lives and heal victims' pain.

Their work, he said, seeks to make the Church become, "always and everywhere, a place where everyone can feel at home and each person is treated as sacred."

The Pope urged members of the Protection Commission to draw inspiration from Christ's compassion and His example of coming into contact with the "wounds of humanity."

"We, too, have come to realise this," he said. "We cannot help others to bear their burdens unless we shoulder them ourselves, unless we show genuine closeness and compassion."

The Pope went on to say that closeness to victims is not an abstract concept but "a very concrete reality, comprised of listening, intervening, preventing, and assisting."

He encouraged the Commission's members, and all Church authorities, to ac-



Pope Francis shares a moment with children after his weekly general audience in St Peter's Square at the Vatican, March 6, 2024. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

knowledge the suffering caused by abuse and listen directly to the voices of victims.

"Our response to those who have been abused is born of this loving gaze, this heartfelt closeness," he said. "These brothers and sisters of ours must be welcomed and listened to, since neglecting to do so can greatly aggravate their suffering."

Pope Francis invited the Commission to carry out their work in respect for victims, while making visible the Church's closeness through their efforts to implement best practices to safeguard minors.

He expressed support for the Memorare initiative, which aims to assist local Churches worldwide in training and strengthening the prevention and safeguarding capacities for children and vulnerable adults.

The Memorare initiative, he added, "will create a network of solidarity with victims and those who promote their rights, especially where resources and experience are limited."

In conclusion, the Pope thanked the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors for its annual safeguarding report, saying it keeps the Church moving in the right direction.

The Protection Commission's service, he concluded, helps the Church "continue to be fully committed to the prevention of abuse, its firm condemnation, the provision of compassionate care for victims and ongoing commitment to being a welcoming and safe place." — By Devin Watkins, *Vatican News*



Pope Francis meets with the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors (Vatican Media)

Church prepares 'Holy Games' for 2024 Olympics

PARIS: In anticipation of the 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris, the Catholic Diocese of Versailles has launched an athletic programme integrating the common values of Christianity and sports, such as the solidarity and endurance spoken of by St Paul the Apostle.

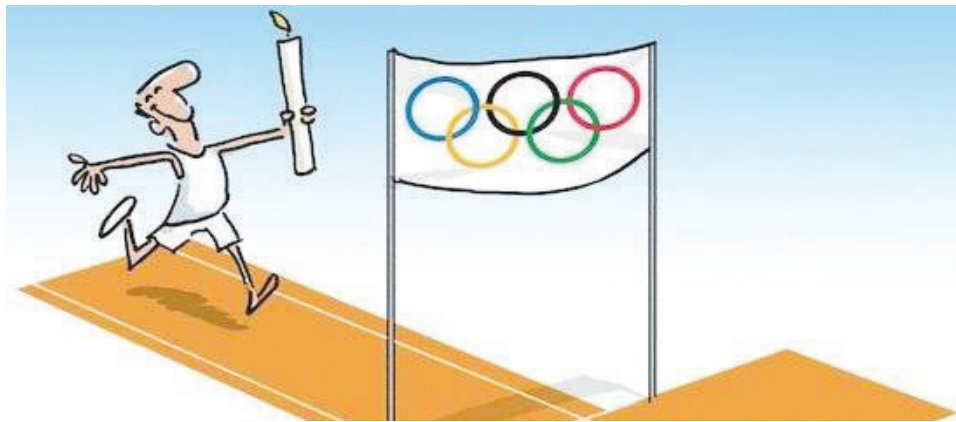
The diocese's programme is a part of "Holy Games", an initiative of the French Bishops' Conference (CEF) that hopes to capitalise on the upcoming Summer Games as an opportunity to evangelise through sports. More than 10,000 athletes from 205 nations, and roughly 40,000 volunteers, will be participating in the Olympics and Paralympics, which will stretch from late July to early September. And the eight dioceses in the Greater Paris region have begun initiating various activities that target both the Catholic faithful and other participants.

Young people gathered in eastern Paris in January for a Christian-themed *Escape Game*. A basketball tournament held on March 9 brought together about 20 teams representing parishes of the Nanterre diocese. Olympic and Paralympic challenges are also planned for 600 students from Catholic schools in the Diocese of Pontoise.

The Holy Games will culminate in "summer routes" that will bring approximately 2,300 young Catholics throughout France into the city of Paris, where they will watch the Olympics and engage in faith-based activities similar to those at World Youth Day.

"This year, the priests are getting into all the sporting events as well," says Patrick Rabarison, a parish priest who is director of youth ministry for the Diocese of St-Denis.

The Catholic Church in France sees the Olympics as an opportunity to rally its parishes around sports in order to spread missionary zeal and create connections with athletes and sports clubs. To facilitate this, delegates from the various dioceses have been appointed to represent the Holy Games.



A flame of peace and hope was given to the parishes of Versailles Diocese for Lent, where it will remain until the end of the Paralympics. (DELIGNE)

"Sports encourage a sense of brotherhood and allows us to gently proclaim the faith," says Frédéric Deren, a permanent deacon is the delegate for the Versailles diocese. "Each parish is invited to make this event shine," he says.

"We want to show the face of a Church that is welcoming and energetic," adds Roger Villegas, a parish priest representing Nanterre Diocese. "It's about fostering a team spirit, reminding everyone that no one is alone and promoting a sense of solidarity."

In this spirit, Deren says that a symbolic flame was handed over to the parishes of the Versailles diocese for Lent, where it will remain until the end of the Olympics "so that parishioners can positively welcome the Games". The diocese has prepared large events in anticipation of the Olympics, but "parishes are not sure of how to approach it, and their commitment varies", acknowledges the deacon.

The Olympics offers the French dioceses an opportunity to emphasise solidarity.

"Further, Higher, in Brotherhood" is the motto the Diocese of Créteil has adopted for the Games. It's based on the Olympic motto, "Faster, Higher, Stronger", that was coined by

French priest Henri Didon.

Although only two cycling races will pass through its canonical territory, the diocese is aiming to use the Games to strengthen its ties with other religions in the area. It plans to facilitate faith-sharing meetings with disabled athletes and assist them with accommodations. Here, hospitality is of primary importance.

"There is a real challenge in providing support," says Rabarison, the priest from St-Denis.

"Some parishes will be very attentive to what people will undergo during the Games," says Deren, pointing out that the summer heat will only add to the normal tension that is part of the competition. "The issue is being taken very seriously," says the deacon.

Hosting numerous events is seen as an opportunity to open up to others, welcome tourists, families of athletes, offer Mass in other languages in churches near Olympic and Paralympic sites, and showcase local religious heritage.

"And to ensure that our churches are accessible to people with disabilities," adds Roger Villegas, the Nanterre priest. — **By Pascale Tessier, LCI** (<https://international.la-croix.com>)

Religions must work together for brighter future

ROME: War, faith, and interreligious dialogue were some of the themes touched on by Judge Mohamed Abdelsalam, the Secretary-General of the Muslim Council of Elders, at a recent summit in Rome.

Judge Abdelsalam was speaking at 'The Summit of the Future' conference, jointly organised by the Vatican's Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences and the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network



Judge Mohamed Abdelsalam greets Pope Francis. (Vatican Media)

In his address to the conference, the Secretary-General emphasised the importance of restoring hope and trust in the international community's capacity to secure peace in the current context of war.

He noted that our common future will hinge on this restoration, particularly in light of the deep wounds and divisions inflicted by events such as those in Gaza.

Judge Abdelsalam went on to stress the pressing need for community leaders and religious figures to play a more significant role in putting an end to these conflicts.

Highlighting the Muslim Council of Elders' successful track record of involving the voice of religions in addressing global challenges, Abdelsalam underlined the importance of community leaders and religious figures in resolving conflicts and disputes worldwide.

He cited the ongoing suffering in Gaza and criticised the global inaction to address it, particularly condemning the use of veto power to prevent ceasefire resolutions.

The Secretary-General went on to reference the Document on Human Fraternity, signed in 2019 in Abu Dhabi by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmad Al-Tayyeb.

"As we consider the future of peace in our world," Judge Abdelsalam said, "we not only recognise the relevance of this Document but also explore ways to implement its principles. These principles acknowledge that severe political crises, injustice, and the lack of fair distribution of natural resources contribute to ongoing deadly conflicts in many countries. We are also challenged to sustain the hope for peace through dialogue, coexistence, and human fraternity, especially for the millions of war victims who have witnessed the failure of these values to protect them from war and aggression."

The Secretary-General also discussed the role of the Muslim Council of Elders, an independent international organization which is dedicated to fostering peace within Islamic communities and between them and other societies.

He emphasised the need for a multi-level understanding of the dynamics of relationships, including those of violence and peace, and highlighted the invitation from United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres to hold the Future Summit in September.

Judge Abdelsalam, finally, underscored the importance of enhancing interfaith and intercultural dialogue on issues of solidarity and sustainable development in the face of war and the pursuit of peace. He noted the Muslim Council of Elders' involvement in initiatives such as the Global Faith Leaders' Summit on Climate Change, aimed at addressing crises like climate change. — **Vatican News**

Missionary schools face fresh threat over Christian symbols

ASSAM, India: The leader of a Hindu group in northeastern Assam state plans legal action against Church-run schools in the state after they ignored a deadline to remove Christian symbols from school premises.

Satya Ranjan Borah, who heads the Kutumba Surakshya Parishad (family safety council), told UCA News that his preparations are complete to file a case in the high court, the state's top court.

"I have adequate documents to support my demand," he said.

Borah's council had set a 15-day deadline on February 7 for all Christian schools to remove

all Christian symbols such as crosses and statues from school premises and classrooms.

The Feb 7 press meeting, addressed by 10 other right-wing outfits, also demanded priests and nuns to come to schools in civil dress rather than in their religious dress.

Borah publicly made these demands and warned of dire consequences in case of failure.

The government in the state is run by the pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"I am not against Jesus Christ or Christianity. But my demand is to free mis-

sionary schools from religious symbols of all forms," said Borah.

"We are against all forms of religious symbols in any school premises in the state," he added.

"A missionary school is to educate children in a secular environment and therefore, there is no scope for installing statues of a religion or adopting a dress code associated with a religion by its staff and students," Borah said.

Borah had written a letter to Archbishop John Moolachira of Guwahati to keep missionary schools free of Christian symbols.

Reacting to the fresh threat, Archbishop Moolachira said that Borah "is free to file a petition in the court like any other citizen of India."

"We too have given complaints to the government," the prelate said and dismissed the allegation that missionary schools were being used to promote Christianity.

Christian missionaries have been engaged in educational service for several decades in the remote areas of Assam, where poor tribal people live.

"Our education institutions serve the poor and the needy and thus the nation. But, unfortunately, such institutions are unnecessarily dragged into false charges such as religious conversion," the prelate noted.

On March 5, Borah wrote a letter to the chief secretary, the top official in the state, demanding action against missionary schools.

The letter, also sent to the state's chief minister and governor, a nominee of the federal government, wanted to prevent priests and nuns from wearing their religious dress in schools. — **ucanews.com**

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International Women's Day Celebrations in synod season explore hopes



Xavière Missionary Sister Nathalie Becquart, undersecretary of the Synod of Bishops, right, speaks at the conference, "Women Leaders: Toward a Brighter Future," March 6, 2024, at the Jesuit headquarters in Rome. (CNS photo/courtesy Kathrin Ziegler)

VATICAN: International Women's Day has long been an occasion for women and men connected to the Vatican to gather to discuss the role of women in the Church and society.

But with the full participation of women at the synod on synodality and the assembly's reflection on the dignity and responsibility of all the baptised, many of the questions raised this year were more focused than in the past and it was clear that the "women's" issues were not set aside just for that one special day.

The two major events that took place in Rome for the March 8, celebration of International Women's Day. They were a day-long conference on "women leaders" sponsored by the British and Australian embassies to the Holy See and Caritas Internationalis and a two-day conference on women as "builders of humanity" hosted by the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross and co-sponsored by several pontifical universities.

Pope Francis met on March 7 with people participating in the universities' conference and sent a brief message to the embassies' March 6 conference, praying that it would "bear fruit in an ever-greater commitment on the part of all, in the Church and across the world, to promote respect for the equal and complementary dignity of women and men."

The discussions at the conferences ranged from the example of women saints to ways women, lay and religious, are promoting development, dignity and inclusion among women in Africa, Latin America and Asia.

Chiara Porro, the Australian ambassador to the Holy See, began her introductory remarks by paying "homage to those who have opened

pathways before us, those who paved the way by championing values, many of which we now take for granted."

"I think sharing our experiences and elevating the voices of women is so critical, and having women as role models is," she said March 6. Quoting Marian Wright Edelman, she said, "Really, 'you can't be what you can't see,' so I think for the new generation, it's so important to see that these things are possible."

The conference on women leaders, sponsored by Caritas and the embassies, included a healthy dose of theological reflection.

"Theology can sound like a specialised field reserved for minorities who study a lot and like obscure terms. I beg to differ," said Maeve Heaney, director of the Xavier Centre for Theological Formation at the Australian Catholic University and a consecrated member of the Verbum Dei community. "I contend that theology affects how we live, move and breathe and that it feeds off real questions; 'Women in leadership, why not and how?' is one of them."

As the Church tries to promote a more synodal, collaborative way of being, one in which all the baptised take responsibility for its life and mission and place their gifts at the service of the whole, Heaney said, the traditional tie between ordination and governance or authority requires further study.

"We need some robust scriptural, theological and historical reflection on baptism and on the ministerial presbyterate so as to untie the knot between governance, power and ministerial priesthood and thus allow women and other laity to help us make church structures and agencies more effective, collaborative and, hope-

fully, more in line with how Jesus imagines his body."

Heaney praised the late Swiss Father Hans Urs von Balthasar as a theologian, but said that like other theologians, she had problems with his reflection on "the Marian and Petrine principles in the Church," notions which Francis himself has used to explain why only men are priests, but women, like Mary, have a "more important" role.

The discourse about "complementarity" between men and women and their roles in the Church also needs further study and nuance, she said. While the gifts of each baptised person should complement the others, some people use complementarity to "name the contribution of women as essentially different to that of men, pitching love, spirituality and nurturing against authority, leadership and intellect."

"I'm not suggesting that there are no differences between women and men," she said. "I'm simply asking us not to radicalise, or essentialise them."

Xavière Missionary Sr Nathalie Becquart, undersecretary of the Synod of Bishops, said the whole process of the synod on synodality — from local listening sessions to the synodal assemblies last October and this coming October — has been "a process to give more voice to women."

"The synod is trying to highlight and foster this vision of the Church as a Church of brothers and sisters in Christ with this new ecclesial style of listening, dialogue and encounter and

really insisting on a key word, which is inclusion, because it's about participation of all," she said.

The synod process, Sr Becquart said, also made clear that just as all the male participants did not have the same position on key issues, neither do the women, but they do want to be heard.

The same goes for women in religious orders, said Loreto Sr Patricia Murray, executive secretary of the International Union of Superiors General. "We care about the Church and its mission. We want to bring our experiences, insights and perspectives to shaping the mission of Christ in the world."

"We have welcomed the appointment of women, both religious and lay, to positions within Vatican dicasteries, knowing that they bring with them a diversity of perspectives and experiences," she said.

The discernment necessary to answer the doctrinal, liturgical, canonical and pastoral questions the synod has raised — including about the possibility of ordaining women to the diaconate, for example — "is not a quick process," Murray said, and that process of prayer, dialogue and study will need to continue even after the synod assembly in October.

"We, as women have set out on the synodal journey with hope as the participation and leadership of women begins to flourish within the Church and society," she said. "But there is still much to be done." — **By Cindy Wooden, CNA**

Indian women pledge to save constitution, democracy

PATNA, India: Some 200 women, representing mostly slums in the eastern Indian city of Patna, celebrated the International Women's Day by pledging to protect the country's Constitution and democracy.

The March 6 programme was inspired by the "Kittur Declaration" that urged Indian women to fight for the land and rights of people of the country, women's dignity and livelihood.

The declaration was issued by more than 3,500 women from across the country who gathered at Kittur town in Karnataka on February 21 to commemorate the 200th anniversary of Rani Chennamma, a folk hero in Karnataka and the 19th century queen of Kittur princely state who revolted against the British.

At Kittur, some 460 km northwest of Bengaluru, the women's organisations launched *Naanoo Rani Chennamma* (I too am Rani Chennamma), a nationwide campaign to secure the rights as enshrined in the Constitution, to preserve the social fabric, restore communal harmony and to stand up for the rights of citizens to Reclaim India and reject authoritarianism.

The Kittur declaration was released at Patna too. The participants gathered at Aashray Abhiyan (campaign for shelter), an NGO



Patna women with their pledge cards.

managed by a Catholic nun in Patna, with the theme, *Role of women in saving the Constitution and democracy of India*.

Felicita Roelofsen, a cancer surgeon from Germany, was the chief guest, and the special guest was Mukund Singh, spokesperson of the Rashtriya Janata Dal party. Uma Dafftarur from the Am Admi Party also attended.

After the release of the Kittur declaration, Singh invited the gathering to stand up and stretch their right hand and to take an oath to safeguard the Indian constitution and democracy. The Indian Constitution, she added, has kept people bounded as Indians. "We need to

uphold this value and relate to each other as human beings," she said.

Singh spoke about the challenges she faces in politics being a woman from a minority community. Singh said she comes from a family of six girls whose main support was their mother. Today all the girls are well placed in society. She encouraged mothers to hold their daughters' hands as the first step to their empowerment.

She invited young women to encourage each other and move ahead with determination to develop their talents and assert their space in the world.

Presentation Sr Dorothy Fernandes, direc-

tor of the NGO, noted that the participants were women from all castes, classes, and creeds, and they reviewed women's contribution to society over the centuries.

"We will put every effort to resolve all differences and to spread love, harmony and fraternity as enshrined in our constitution. We will celebrate our sisterhood, which knows no language, no caste, no class, we stand together with humanity, who are struggling to make both ends meet," said the activist nun.

She regretted that inflation has affected the women the most, forcing them to make choices to feed, cloth, and educate the family.

"In addition to this, we also see our role as contributing to the economy of the family as we realise in these difficult times, we have to support the family. We have learnt the art of balancing home and work; so, when we speak of governance, we know what we are speaking about," Sr Fernandes asserted.

Young women from the settlements credited their mothers with supporting them to realise their dreams.

The participants regretted that women's contribution has gone unrecognised in India because of the patriarchal society that allowed men to use their power and politics to subjugate women. — **Matters India**

The Eucharist is the 'source and summit' of Christian life

By Bishop Michael F. Olson

The call for Eucharistic revival we have heard in the Church is particularly important to priests. Why? Because we are responsible for presiding over and offering the Mass, which priests do *in persona Christi*. This configuration to Christ as head and shepherd of the Church that takes place at our ordination as priests, comes to its full expression gradually, through our devoted pastoral ministry and care for God's people. This expression is centred upon Christ present in the sacrifice and offering of the Eucharist that then is extended through the other sacraments and apostolic works that we celebrate and administer to the faithful.

The development and fruition of this configuration is entirely owed to grace. We read in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* that "the Eucharist is 'the source and summit of the Christian life.' All sacraments, ministries, and works of the apostolate are bound up and oriented to the Eucharist" (No. 1324).

I would offer, however, that we currently might be placing a disproportionate emphasis upon the Eucharist as the summit of Christian life through our intense focus on the form of liturgical celebration and its accompanying emotional consolation — one strictly identified with interior healing — while overlooking or even ignoring the Eucharist offered and received in its sacrificial character as the source of Christian life.

This disproportionate emphasis soon leads us to value the Mass only as the object of our desires and priorities, to the point that its celebration becomes something functional that we do for ourselves, to which we invite God. When we approach Mass this way, we begin to subordinate the Eucharist into an instrument for evangelisation, instead of the other way around. We confuse ends and means, cause and effect; the Eucharist soon becomes reduced to spectacle, whether at Mass or in procession and adoration.

The contemporary challenge of evangelisation for the Church should be at the heart of our pastoral ministry and mission as priests, configured to Christ as head and shepherd of the Church, entrusted by Him to offer the sacred mysteries and preach His Gospel. In praying the Mass, we are reminded that Christ is not the instrument of evangelisation: We are His instruments. Similarly, we are not the primary agents of evangelisation: Christ is.

When we priests offer the elements of bread and wine, unworthy as we are to do so, we also place our entire selves upon the altar as an oblation. To place our entire selves upon the altar means that we surrender to the might and love of God the three powers of our soul: memory, understanding and will. Do we remember what Christ has done for us in forgiving us, healing us and teaching us? Do we remember what He has done for us in calling us to follow Him as priests? Do we understand the mystery of our vocation: that He must increase and that we must decrease? Are we willing to be conformed to His real example in every aspect of our human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral

What does that really mean?

The National Eucharistic Congress is an event that will take place in July 2024 as part of the National Eucharistic Revival, a three-year initiative sponsored by the Bishops of the United States. The purpose of the revival is to inspire and prepare the People of God to be formed, healed, converted, united, and sent out to a hurting and hungry world through a renewed encounter with Jesus in the Eucharist — the source and summit of our Catholic faith.



(OSV News photo/Bob Roller)

formation, so that people might encounter Christ the Good Shepherd when they encounter us?

At Mass, the priest enters the mystery of the incarnate Word through His preaching and presiding, by giving His human voice and hands to the divine work of the eternal sacrifice of the Mass for the sanctification and salvation of the people of God. The sacrifice of Christ that we offer as priests is not a type of conditional giving. It requires on our part the entire (albeit imperfect) offering of ourselves *in persona Christi* to be presented and sacrificed to God. While we offer bread and wine, we also offer ourselves in persona Christi as one with the offering.

"This is my body; this is my blood." If we hold back, if we compromise, if we choose to withhold our powers and capacities and keep them to ourselves in a refusal to be converted, then what we do not offer to God does not remain our own but is stolen and corrupted by the evil one. Similarly, when we make worship a personal project — which is the temptation when we disproportionately emphasise the Eucharist as the summit of the Christian life while ignoring the Eucharist as the source of Christian

life — we forget the necessary truth that worship is the human and divine response to an exclusively divine initiative.

Worship cannot start with us, because we cannot give God what He deserves without the aid of God's grace. We need a mediator, who is Jesus Christ the priest, Who is at once fully human and divine. God initiates worship. It is this sacred mediation that Christ shares with His priests, which, if it is truly to benefit the priest, requires ongoing conversion by the priest to imitate the mysteries that he celebrates.

Our choice is stark and clear. It is a choice between conversion to Christ or inversion of Christ. Inversion of Christ brands Christ as a mascot for our own agenda instead of offering our entire selves to Him for His purposes and priorities at the altar of sacrifice. If we invert Christ, the Eucharist soon becomes

mistreated as a spectacle instead of being embraced as a mystery to be received that requires our full and active response and participation.

As Pope Benedict XVI wrote in *Deus Caritas Est*:

We have come to believe in God's love: in these words, the Christian can express the fundamental decision of his life. Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction [No. 1].

Perhaps we would be more effective at evangelisation if instead of inviting a non-Catholic or an inactive Catholic friend to Mass, we would instead invite these friends into our lives. From that invitation, flowing from the perfect sacrifice of Christ offered and received at Mass, people might be introduced to the Mass, not as something to be observed, analysed and criticised but rather, as that which is to be encountered as the living fount of true Christian life and virtue.

Perhaps we would be more effective at evangelisation if instead of inviting a non-Catholic or an inactive Catholic friend to Mass, we would instead invite these friends into our lives.

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus instructed His disciples to listen to the scribes and Pharisees but not to do as they do. Why not? Because "they preach but they do not practise. They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on people's shoulders, but they will not lift a finger to move them. All their works are performed to be seen" (Mt 23:3-4).

For us as priests and bishops to be spared the same admonition that Jesus gives to His disciples about the scribes and Pharisees, we must speak, act and love as Jesus does, as He shares with us His seat upon the throne of humble greatness, the cross. As the Church in the United States answers the call to Eucharistic revival, priests and bishops cannot overlook the necessity for sacramental confession in their own lives. Their own conversion will be impeded if they are not the first penitents to become compassionate and generous confessors.

For the Eucharistic revival to be effective in the life of the Church, it cannot simply be a large event and a spectacle. The revival must be an occasion for conversion, initiated and sustained by God's grace. This requires that we recognise the Eucharist as both the source and summit of our lives. We run the risk of underestimating the heights of the summit of Christian life if we underestimate the depths of Christian life; we also need to keep in our thoughts the pierced side of Christ, from which water and blood flowed forth on the cross at Calvary.

One of the forms of dismissal from Mass in the current translation of the Roman Missal requires the deacon or priest to direct the gathered assembly to "go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your lives." It is this glory — made manifest through ministry, witness and discipleship in the daily lives of faithful Catholics — that

serves as a chief conduit for evangelisation. These are the most ordinary means by which people are introduced to the Lord Jesus Christ, whose gift of the Eucharist is the source and summit of our lives as Christians. — *America*

● **Most Reverend Michael F. Olson is the bishop of the Diocese of Fort Worth, Texas.**



Catechising in a changing world

Over the past decade, there has been increasing concerns about the lack of knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith among the youth. Catholics are also worried as to why many young people do not come back to Church after receiving Confirmation: “After years of catechism, why are our young people not coming to Church?”, they ask. There are also some Catholics who feel that this “problem” is the result of the poor quality of catechesis that is being offered in the parish. As such, they are often ready to place the blame on those involved in the catechetical ministry, and especially the parish catechists.

Surely, I would be the first to admit that there are certain areas that have to be improved as to how catechesis is being carried out in the parish. However, placing the blame on a particular group of people actually demonstrates a serious lack of understanding as to who is primarily responsible for catechesis and the nature of catechesis itself. As I have mentioned several times in previous articles, catechesis is the responsibility of the entire Christian community, and also that catechesis is not something that happens only in the classroom.

Understanding the situation

Catholic theologians and commentators have underlined certain trends that are taking place in the world today that are affecting the teaching of the faith to the young. These developments cannot be ignored. These include, the corrosion of the image of God, breakdown of the family/marriage, decline of moral values, rise of religious fundamentalism, the rise of a sense of entitlement, the bioethics revolution, rise of a digital world and social media, rise of the gender ideology and many others.

Catholics, in general, and especially par-



ECHOING THE FAITH

Dr Steven Selvaraju

ents, look at these developments and other trends with great concern. They frequently ask, “*Is catechesis provided in the parish helping our children to face these challenges? Is it helping them to grow as Christians? How can our children and youth be taught in such a way that makes a difference to their lives?*” Why can’t catechists make the classes more engaging and exciting?” and so on. Certainly, these are important questions. However, there are no easy answers.

The responsibility of parents

Let me attempt to respond to these questions firstly, by pointing out a fundamental aspect in the ministry of catechesis, that is, the responsibility of parents in the faith formation of their children. According to the Church, among the main responsibilities of Catholic parents is to take seriously the call to become the primary faith educators of their children.

Here, it is essential for all parents to know that this responsibility is not given to them by the bishop or parish priest. It is a responsibility that they take upon themselves on their wedding day, when they promise “to accept children lovingly from God and to bring them up according to the law of Christ and His Church”. It is a promise they made before God and the community. Therefore, it is an obligation that they have to do their very best to fulfil.

In fact, it is through the Sacrament of Marriage that a man and a woman receive

“the grace and the ministry of the Christian education of their children...” (General Directory for Catechesis (GDC), 227). Parents, therefore, are the first proclaimers or heralds of the Gospel to their children. They are the first to hand on the faith to their children and educate them in it. How is this done? The Church says, “through the witness of their daily Christian life... lived in accordance with the Gospel” (Apostolicum Actuositatem, 11). Or as the Directory for Catechesis (DC) states, “... parents, with their daily example of life, have the most effective capacity to transmit the beauty of the faith to their children” (DC, 124).

In fact, it is from the moment of the child’s birth that faith formation begins. The GDC states that, “The first roots of the religious and moral life appear at the very beginning of human life. In the families of believers, the first months and years of life, which are of the greatest importance for the man’s [and woman’s] balance in the years to come, can already provide the right conditions for developing a Christian personality. From then onwards, the child “... absorbs into himself [or herself] as though through an “osmosis process”, the manner of acting and the attitudes of the members of the family.” (GCD, 78).

The family as the first setting for catechesis

As such, beginning with the parents, the family becomes “the first community called to announce the Gospel to the human person during growth and to bring him or her, through a progressive education and catechesis, to full human and Christian maturity” (Familiaris Consortio, 2). The family provides the main and initial setting or “classroom” for a child’s faith formation, where the awakening of the sense of God,

the first steps in prayer, education of the moral conscience, and formation in the Christian understanding of human love and sexuality, take place.

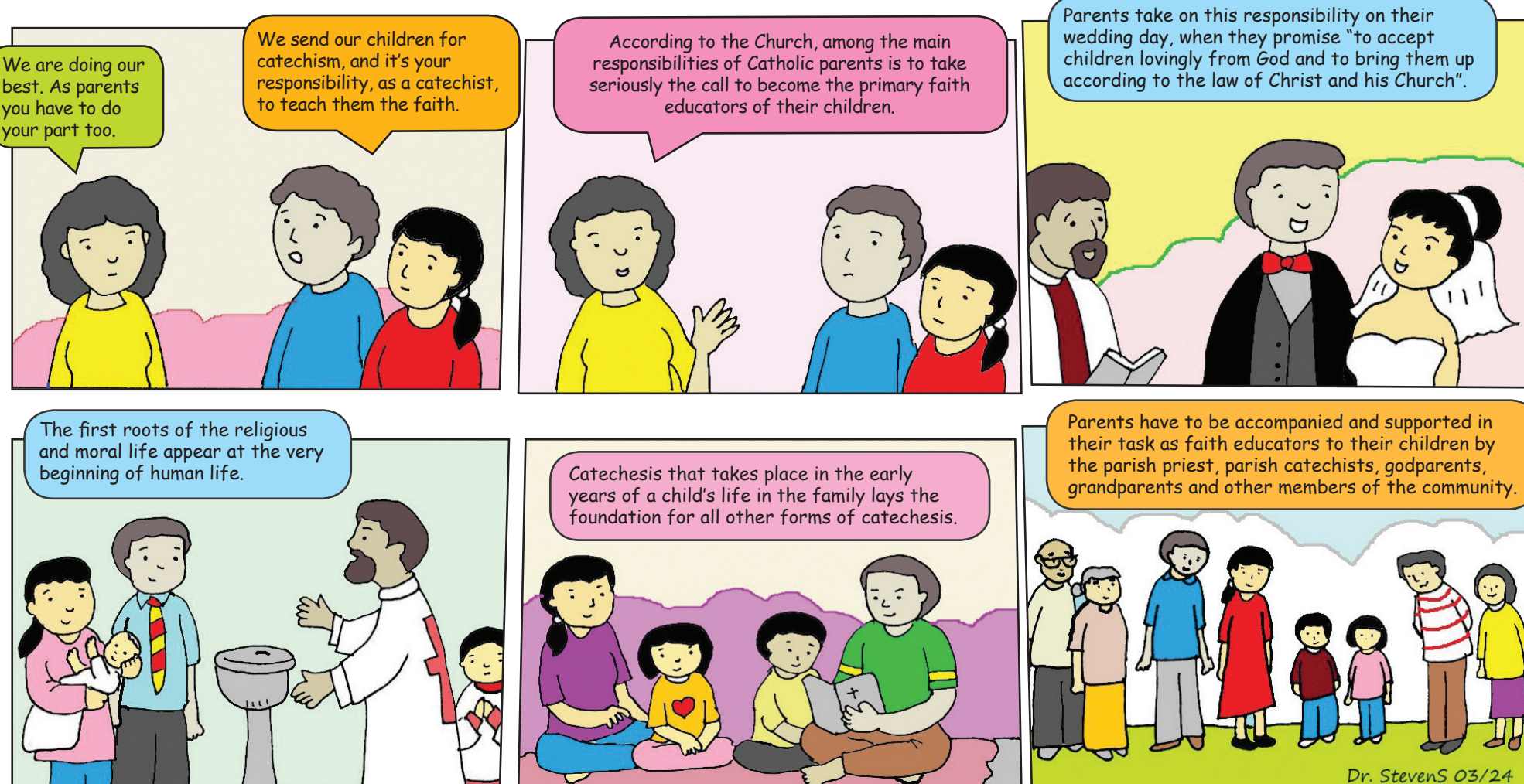
This is why the Church emphasises that, “Family catechesis precedes, accompanies and enriches all forms of catechesis” (Catechesi Tradendae, 68). As such, catechesis that takes place in the early years of a child’s life in the family lays the foundation for all other forms of catechesis. Therefore, the Church reminds parents to overcome the “mentality of delegation”, namely, leaving the responsibility of faith formation totally to others, especially the catechists in the parish (CD, 124). Parents cannot merely “drop-off” their children for catechism class and think that they have fulfilled their responsibility.

However, it is not enough for us to say that parents are responsible for the faith formation of their children and to leave it at that. Parents have to be accompanied and supported in this important task by the bishop, parish priests, parish catechists, godparents, grandparents, consecrated persons and all members of the community. In other words, as the Church says, “All of us are responsible”.

The key ideas of the article are presented in a simple illustrated format as below. The illustrations are my own. The images are from the MCS books.

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CATECHISING IN A CHANGING WORLD





What does it feel like

BEING HOMELESS?

By Melina Yeoh

KUALA LUMPUR: Being homeless for a night was a heart-warming lesson in human fraternity among the last, the lost and the least. Participating in this Archdiocesan Office for Human Development (AOHD) Lenten Campaign with the Ministry of Poor, was a humbling experience for us 17 Catholics, who went to sleep on the streets of Chow Kit to be with the homeless and to know them better. At every interaction we experienced their “love thy neighbour” when they helped us in words and in deeds.

Our day started with Mass at Cardijn House chapel by AOHD Ecclesiastical Assistant, Fr Albet Arockiasamy, at 5.00pm followed by a briefing from Ms Shanti of Yayasan Chow Kit and Encik Awaludin from Chow Kit Youth at KL Krash Pad on Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman at 7.00pm. Then off we went with only the clothes on our backs, cardboards tucked under our arms and our IC for police checks.

Our group of 17 bravehearts, aged from 17 to 79 years old, came from eight different parishes in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, including the Church of the Visitation, Seremban. As hungry souls we rushed to the soup kitchen at Medan Tuanku but it was past the 8.00pm closing time. So, we headed to a street behind KL Krash Pad near a hotel and found the homeless queueing for *nasi lemak*, drinking water and having a packet of Chrysanthemum tea each. Here we met two uncles who advised us to be alert. One said he was robbed while sleeping in the Bangkok Bank area and lost everything including his IC. He told us to take turns sleeping so that those awake could be on guard. He shared that he used to sleep on the streets, now he has a room. He still comes here every evening to be with his friends.

A group of *pak ciks* across the road told us that we were lucky because no food was distributed on some Mondays, and that more food was given out from Thursdays until the weekends. During the *puasa* month, food is even more in abundance. It turned out there was no worry about food. In the two hours here, we had five rounds of hot meals of ei-

ther *nasi lemak* or *nasi lauk kari ayam*. There was even one meal with fish, rice, chicken with pineapple curry and Chinese herbal tea.

We also saw mothers with their young children. One truck arrived to drop off pre-loved clothes and children’s toys. When a boy did not get the toy he wanted, a Samaritan offered to buy him ice cream. Soon a group of children followed him to a nearby 7-Eleven. What was surprising was half of the children opted for instant cup noodle instead of ice cream. After a couple of hours, we explored other streets. We split into four groups and went our separate ways. We also distributed the excess meal boxes and drinks we had.

The love from our street brothers is always flowing, even when we searched for a safe place to sleep. One street brother advised us to find a brightly lit place to avoid mosquitoes. Also to avoid banks as the security guards would chase us away. When we chose a clean, unoccupied brightly lit corridor a street brother walked up and told us that we would be drenched if it rained. Then he showed us a more suitable adjacent block where he was sleeping. It is sheltered and the aunty who opens the shop only comes at 8.30am. The corridor next to his was empty but he said that the shop lot is vacant and no one has cleaned the corridor for a long time. A street brother, Fred (not his real name), shares a space with an uncle who loves to

play snooker and speaks excellent English. They were so friendly that all four of us decided to set up home in the same corridor even though there was a clean empty lot two corridors away. Fred is a very lively character. He confessed he had done bad things but did not elaborate. He said his *bilik bocor air* and that’s why he’s sleeping on the streets. When the shop opens, he usually goes to an NGO further up the street for food and a shower. The sweater he wore came from the NGO. Fred advised us to put our sandals, shoes and any belongings under the cardboard or they would be stolen. The weather was hot and humid, making it difficult to sleep. Only Joshua, one of the participants, managed to sleep for four hours. I, who usually sleep like a log, woke up each hour due to the unbearable heat. Johnny, another participant, slept the least, he kept thinking about his air-conditioned bedroom and his soft fluffy pillows.

Two of the other groups found refuge sleeping on an overhead bridge. They said it was cool but the revving motorbike noise of the Mat Rempits throughout the night made it difficult to sleep. For toilet facilities, some went to the *mamak* restaurant across the road. Johnny went to the Shell station further up and he felt it was quite dangerous as a couple of drug addicts were having a big argument.

The streets were busy at night, people

passed by without giving us much notice. Somewhere in the night, I asked a passer-by for the time. He told me and one hour later, while I was sleeping, he came back and gave me his watch. I was very surprised and touched. As for food, even at 12.50am (I now had a watch), while we were sleeping, someone passed each of us a packet of rice with *ayam masak merah*. Johnny and I were only half asleep, so we ate.

During the night, a drunk street brother came by, stared at us but then just reached out to get his cardboard which was slotted underneath the pipes on the wall. He then laid his bed further up next door and slept. I didn’t feel that I was in danger, probably because I was in a group. An AOHD “security team” was also on patrol, discreetly checking on us. The hours dragged by, it was difficult to sleep with the heat and humidity. If I was alone on the streets, I would feel the danger of being exposed to all risks, I would be afraid that my IC and other precious possessions would be stolen. I only did it for one night; Fred and friends do it every day.

On an emotional level, now whenever I see anyone walking on the streets carrying a cardboard, I feel more connected to them, that we have shared an experience together. I pray that they find a safe place to sleep, that they are shielded from rain and any external danger. As for our dear friend Fred, we promised to share that *wantan mee* he yearned for.

At 6.00am, we all gathered back at KL Krash Pad and we headed to a nearby *mamak* stall for breakfast with Fr Andrew Manickam OFM Cap, reflecting on what we had been through and knowing the struggle of what the homeless people have to go through every day. We pray that through this activity, we will change our way of living and be more appreciative of what we have and what we can do to help more people in need.

Melina Yeoh participated in the ‘Being Homeless for a Night’, Ministry of the Poor Lenten outreach activity held recently.





CANVAS

Fr Richard
Anthonsamy, SJ

Towards freedom in Lent

The Greek philosophers saw the human person as consisting of body and spirit. Some schools, e.g. the Pythagoreans, for example, believed the spirit was trapped in the body. The body was like a tomb. Thus, the spirit constantly strove to free itself. The struggle for freedom is experienced in feelings of restlessness, frustration, inner turmoil, etc. It is not uncommon for each of us to experience moments when our soul wants to do one thing but the body pulls in a different direction. We notice an inner conversation enveloped in feelings of restlessness, sometimes fleeting and at other times, controlling. Yes, a conversation, a self-talk nuancing the desire to be set free.

In his Message for Lent 2024 entitled *Through the Desert God leads us to Freedom*, Pope Francis elaborates about the journey to freedom God wants to take us through. The Lenten journey is a journey towards spiritual freedom. Our spiritual self-discipline should awaken us to the areas in our life where we remain entrapped or enslaved. It should enable us to get beyond the surface. That Lent is a season with lasts more than a month and not just a day or a week is a clear indication that Lent is a journey. Pope Francis recalls the 40 years the Israelites were in the desert. It was a journey through the desert that led to freedom.

We could embrace and participate in the road to freedom during Lent in two ways. Every season of Lent, the faithful are called to repentance. The prophet Joel (2:12-18) exhorts us to a journey of change and transformation (1st reading on Ash Wednesday). This journey is to be made individually and communally. In the Catholic Church, parishes increase time set aside for the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession). The first way to embrace and participate in the road to freedom during Lent is to prepare well for Confession.

In the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius, paragraphs 55-61 are dedicated to a meditation on our sins. In paragraph 56-57, St Ignatius invites the retreatant to understand his or her sins by taking note of the place where it (the sin) happened, the dealings with people he or she may have had, and the office or position he or she may have occupied. In short, we are being made to see the context in which a particular sin was committed. We are asked to note the people involved, and the dynamics of power. This is not to mitigate the sin or rationalise it away. Rather, it is to have a growing awareness of how this sin came about (and probably continues to be present in one's life).

Too often people share that they do not understand why they are struggling with

certain sins. For some, the awareness that they keep repeating a particular sin leads them to feel discouraged and even doubt in the mercy of God. And the devil is most delighted to encourage us in the path of discouragement and doubt.

However, taking time to prepare before Sacramental Reconciliation by contextualising it brings about awareness. With awareness, we can work towards changing the direction of, or life in relation, to that sin. As my Jesuit novice director once said, "If you see a dog lying quietly by a gate but with a big chain around its neck, that should tell you what precautions you need to take." Yes, proper preparation will lead to better awareness and a more meaningful confession and repentance. And this, in turn, lead to freedom. This is the first way.

The second way we are moved towards freedom is to embrace the path offered to us by God. It is the light from the Word of God. Turning away involves turning towards something. On Easter vigil night, at the beginning of the liturgy, the entire church is in darkness. A fire is lit and from its flames the new Easter candle is lit. And that light is processed into the darkness, and from the flame of that candle, the other candles are lit. A new light enters the church. We begin

to see again, slowly but surely. The light of Christ both draws our attention, and it works to enlighten us. The second way to freedom involves allowing the light to come us. It involves accepting the light by looking to it even as we eagerly await our own candles to be lit. To the Israelites who journeyed through the desert, the light of God given them was the Ten Commandments. This was to be their sure path of freedom, more than any geographical land. Embracing and living the commandments would guide and shape them into a people. It would provide them the light of life.

The light of Christ that comes to us through the Easter candle brings light to the church, and leads us into the second part of the liturgy, namely, the proclamation of the Scriptures. Put another way, as soon as light is given, we are being directed to the Word of God. There we find the second way to freedom, just as the Israelites did through the Ten Commandments. Our ongoing path to freedom will be intimately related to our embracing of the proclaimed Word.

May our journey to freedom be indeed a freeing experience.

● **Fr Richard Anthonsamy SJ** is involved in parish ministry, spiritual direction, and faith formation work.



At the start of the last week of February, while some may have spent the time wondering what exciting and significant thing to do on February 29 — the extra day of the leap year, I had little to no time for such daydreaming as I found myself immersed in a two-day workshop in the heart of KL, ruminating with somewhat like-minded individuals and stakeholders on the KL Urban Climate Change Resilience (KLUCCR) Workshop.

It was time to connect and reconnect with familiar and new faces in the environment circles. To listen and weigh in on some of the valuable insights and deliberations on how we can collectively work towards building climate change resilience in our urban communities — drawing from the wealth of knowledge and wisdom, and vast expertise of experts and environmental champions alike. While there were many, young dynamic individuals who brought new and fresh ideas to the discussion, these were balanced by more nuanced perspectives from more seasoned stakeholders.

Three points hit home for me and here are some of my ruminations on this:

Vulnerable communities

Have I considered the devastating impact of climate change and disasters on vulnerable communities including the poor, the homeless and the marginalised including the country's migrant workers? How can I be part of the solution?

As we approach the climax of the Season of Lent — Holy Week, the Church continues to remind us to stay on course and remain relentless in our efforts to keep our hearts, minds and focus on the three pillars of Lent: prayer, fasting and almsgiving — and rightly so. It got me thinking: how can we make our efforts

Lent: our opportunity for sustainable change

and disciplines more sustainable beyond Lent, just as our corporal works of mercy.

How do our actions (and inactions), our lifestyle choices/decisions, contribute to alleviating the plight of the poor, the homeless and the marginalised including the country's migrant workers?

For instance, at a very personal level, as a consumer and an online shopper particularly, how much packaging do I consume/use/receive? Packaging is said to make a major portion of Malaysia's waste, given the steady rise in domestic use of plastic packaging. Since the pandemic lockdown, and the boom in delivery services nationwide, customers have been more brazen — with packaging waste spotted on streets, in open drains and eventually causing blockage in the sewers which triggers and exacerbates our flood situation. Despite the best efforts of the city councils to carry out drain cleaning, weekly or sometimes twice a week, across the city's 25 flood hotspots, perhaps the greater solution lies with us — do less online shopping, and create less waste. Let's aim for zero waste!

When our cities are plagued with flash floods, ever wondered where our urban street dwellers — the homeless, find their refuge and place of rest for the night? How the devastating floods across the country has displaced tens of thousands, particularly the disproportionately poor families who struggle to rebuild their lives after.

Similarly, with food waste: aside from our Lenten fast (abstinence) and penance, perhaps Lent presents us with a unique opportunity to revisit our consumption and eating habits: maybe it's a call to eat less and less lavishly, while striving to avoid food waste altogether. Instead, opt to feed the homeless or provide food rations for a family or refugee/migrant community in need near you. For F&B businesses and events with excess food, reach to credible charity arms and social enterprises dedicated to address food security for such vulnerable communities. But where and how do I, as an individual diner, or as a party host, contribute towards this?

Religious organisations: forerunner and catalyst for sustainable change

Interestingly, the moderator at one of the sessions, notable a young adult, highlighted the importance of religious organisations as a catalyst for sustainable change. She was on to something: in a country where religion continues to be an important moral compass for many, actively promoting good values and virtues, and the seedbed for nurturing good lifestyle choices, it's imperative for religious leaders — clergy and lay alike, to inspire, lead, remind and teach our communities (both in word and example) how to effectively live out the call to Care for our Creation cohesively through responsible environmental stewardship in a holistic, systematic and sustainable way: Is our diocese, apostolates and parishes ready to embark on this approach?

How effectively are we catechising the young and the adults on the Catholic Social Teachings? Even long before *Laudato Si'*, the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* during the papacy of St John Paul II dedicated the entire chapter 10 on the importance of Safeguarding the Environment.

One of many interesting nuggets from this document is his highlight on the importance of adopting a new lifestyle. Even then Pope John Paul II pointed that serious ecological problems call for an effective change of mentality to the new adoption of new lifestyles in which the quest for truth, beauty and goodness and communion for others for the sake of the common good are factors that determine consumer choices, savings and investments.

He called for "a lifestyle inspired by sobriety, temperance, and self-discipline at both the individual and social levels" — mindful of the basic human needs of all.

"These attitudes, sustained by a renewed awareness of the interdependence of all the inhabitants of the earth, will contribute to eliminating the numerous causes of ecological disasters as well as guaranteeing

the ability to respond quickly when such disasters strike peoples and territories".

Our efforts, he pointed out "must, above all, become a strong motivation for an authentic solidarity of worldwide dimensions".

With an attitude of gratitude, and a genuine disposition of awe and wonder of God, the Creator who made all things true, good and beautiful, we may be genuinely inspired to strive to be good stewards of the creation He has entrusted to us. Pope John cautioned: "If the relationship with God is placed aside, nature is stripped of its profound meaning and impoverished".

On that note, are we ready, as Church, to take bold steps to adopt a lifestyle change perhaps at operational level, adopting long-term, sustainable green procurement and practices — in dioceses and parish offices, at our clergy recollections, our meeting and conferences.

Lifestyle changes unfolding at diocese and parish levels, and together with proper catechesis and formation for the faithful, would perhaps be a catalyst — and gamechanger for parish ministries, BECs, communities and the domestic churches (families) to adopt and make it their own too.

But truth be told, we don't need to wait on the hierarchy to change: the question for us Catholics this Lent is: how much have I grown to love the Creator of all things true, good and beautiful? What is the ONE lifestyle change I can make this Lent and beyond for the common good — for the environment and the vulnerable communities near me.

Dear Lord, grant me the grace to be the change I want to see in our world today.
Amen!

● *In the Beginning* is a series of ruminations from **Mary Terra**, a not-so-young Catholic striving for holiness with a desire to grow in grace and leave behind a legacy of love for God, for others and all His creatures. and hopefully leave this earth with a significantly reduced ecological footprint.



Ageing as a natural monastery

Fr Ron Rolheiser

What is a monastery? How do monasteries work? St Benedict (480-547 AD), who is considered the founder of Western monasticism, offered this counsel as an essential rule for his monks: *Stay in your cell and it will teach all you need to know.* Properly understood, this is a rich metaphor, not a literal counsel. When he is telling a monk to stay in his cell and let it teach him what he needs to know, he is not referring to a literal monk's cell in a monastery. He is referring to the state of life in which a monk or anyone else finds himself or herself.

Sometimes this has been expressed in Christian spirituality as being faithful to *your duties of state*. The idea here being, that if you are faithful in love and in good heart to the situation in life in which you find yourself, life itself will bring you to maturity and virtue. For example, a mother who gives herself over in selflessness and fidelity to raising her children will be brought to maturity and altruism through that process. Her home will be her monk's cell and she will be metaphorically the Abbess of the monastery (with some very young monks) and staying inside that monastery, her home, will teach her all she needs to know. She will be raising children, but they will also be raising her. Motherhood

will teach her what she needs to know and will turn her into a wise elder, a biblical and archetypal Sophia.

The process of ageing is a natural monastery. If we live long enough, eventually the ageing process turns everyone into a monk. Monks take four vows: poverty, chastity, obedience, and perseverance. The process of ageing, which moves us (seemingly without mercy) toward marginalisation, dependence on others, away from an active sex life, and into a living situation from which there will be no escape, in a manner of speaking, imposes those four vows on us. But, as St Benedict counsels, this can teach us all we need to know, and has a unique power to mature us in a very deep way. Monks have secrets worth knowing. So does the aging process.

This can be particularly instructive vis-à-vis how we can make our final days and our death a more radical gift to others. In the first centuries of Christianity, martyrdom was seen as the ideal way for a Christian to end his or her days here on earth. It was seen as a radical way of imitating Christ and giving your death away as a gift. Of course, this had to be rethought after Christianity became the state religion and emperors no longer mar-

tyred Christians. What followed then were various attempts at doing this, metaphorical martyrdom. One fairly popular way of doing it was that, after raising their children and reaching retirement, a couple would leave each other and each would go off to a separate monastery and live out the rest of his or her life as a monk or a nun.

Classical Christian mystics speak about how in the last phase of our lives we should enter something they call the *dark night of the spirit*, namely, that we proactively make a radical decision grounded in faith to move into a situation in life where we can no longer take care of ourselves but must trust, in raw faith, that God will provide for us. This parallels Hindu spirituality which suggests that in the last, fully mature stage of life we should become a *sannyasin*, an old holy beggar.

I suspect that most of us will never proactively cut off all our former securities and, on purpose, place ourselves in a situation within which we are helpless to provide for and take care of ourselves. But this is where nature steps in. The ageing process will do it for us. It will turn us into a *sannyasin* and put us into the dark night of the spirit.

How? As we age and our health declines and we find ourselves more marginalised

in terms of having a vital place within society, we will progressively lose our capacity to take care of ourselves. Eventually, if we live long enough, for most of us it will mean moving into an assisted facility, which is in effect a natural monastery.

What an apt metaphor! An assisted living facility as a natural monastery. The metaphor is also apropos for what it means to (by conscription) enter the *dark night of the spirit* and what it means to be an old holy beggar, a *sannyasin*. In essence it means this: When someone is in an assisted living facility, irrespective of whether he or she is a millionaire or a pauper, the rules are the same for everyone. Since you can no longer take care of yourself (and indeed you don't have to) you live a monastic life of obedience and dependence.

In assisted living, you live by the monastic bell and you die as an old holy beggar.

● **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

'The Mass Revealed' teaches young people the parts of the Mass

The difficult but necessary realisation that Western countries have become mission lands to the full, due to the advance of de-Christianisation everywhere, is beginning to make its way into the minds of Church leaders. At a time when more and more people with a Christian culture are completely ignorant of their faith, and thus unable to pass it on to new generations, many understand the need to re-catechise minds by returning to the fundamentals forgotten by the crowds, foremost among which is the Holy Mass and its meaning.

It was with this mindset, reinforced by the alarming figures on the collapse of young people's belief in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, that Fr Ricardo Reyes Castillo set about writing a book, small in size but opulent in the teachings it contains.

Originally from Panama, Fr Reyes Castillo has been a priest in the Diocese of Rome since 2003. He has held various

BOOK REVIEW

positions within the Vatican as a liturgical expert, and is the author of several popular books, notably about the centrality of the Mass and the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

The Mass Revealed, published in spring 2023, fulfils the mission of explaining the course of the Holy Mass and the deeper meaning of each of its steps, encouraging young participants to become more involved. "Why do we make the Sign of the Cross and utter the name of God at the same time? Why the Cross? What does 'And with your spirit' mean? What is the Gloria? What is the Collect? Why do we pray the 'Our Father'?" These are some of the questions posed in a didactic dialogue between a child and a wise monkey, enhanced by illustrations by Sr Eleonora Maria Calvo.

It was precisely through contact with

young people in greatest need of Gospel proclamation — a community of people with addiction problems, in a treatment centre near Lourdes (France) — that Fr Reyes developed the content of the book. "I met some truly special youngsters who deeply cried out from their hearts to find meaning to their lives," he wrote in the introduction of the book, in which he also recounts the period of spiritual aridity and fatigue that afflicted him the year he decided to take this extended sabbatical in 2021, at the age of 45.

Over the years, he had held a number of positions of responsibility in the Vatican, and his life had boiled down to a pursuit of prestige that robbed him of the missionary zeal he had felt in his youth — a zeal that had led him to embrace the priesthood.

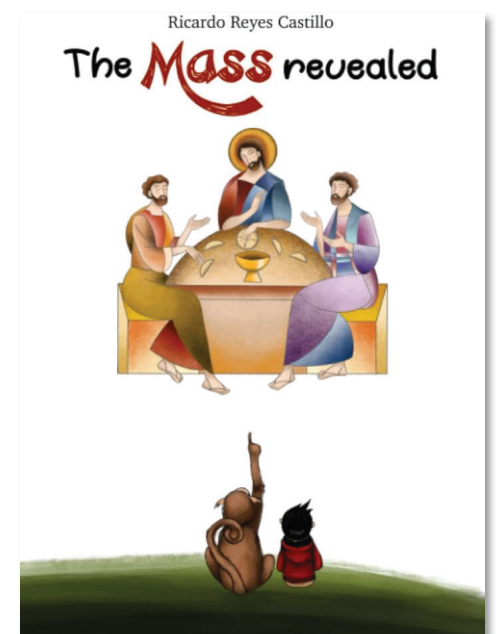
Far from the pomp and noise of Rome, Reyes returned to the simplicity of the land, in the heart of the French Pyrenees, to find the breath and inspiration he'd been missing, alongside young people wounded by life.

In assisting these people in their day-to-day lives, trying to give them a living witness to Christ's love, he reclaimed for himself the pure joy of celebrating the Eucharist.

"The Eucharist is the encounter with the Beloved, who desires to lead us to absolute fullness, to the unity of both our inner and outer self, to true freedom," he wrote about his personal experience.

"If we are to meet Him, however, we need to lay ourselves bare. We need to go out to meet Him without our garments, stripped of all our certitudes, to allow ourselves to be held by His presence. This is like interlocking: we were created for Him, and in finding Him we find ourselves, and in finding ourselves again we see Him in a much clearer way."

In unfolding his thoughts on the Eucharist, he also revisits a number of



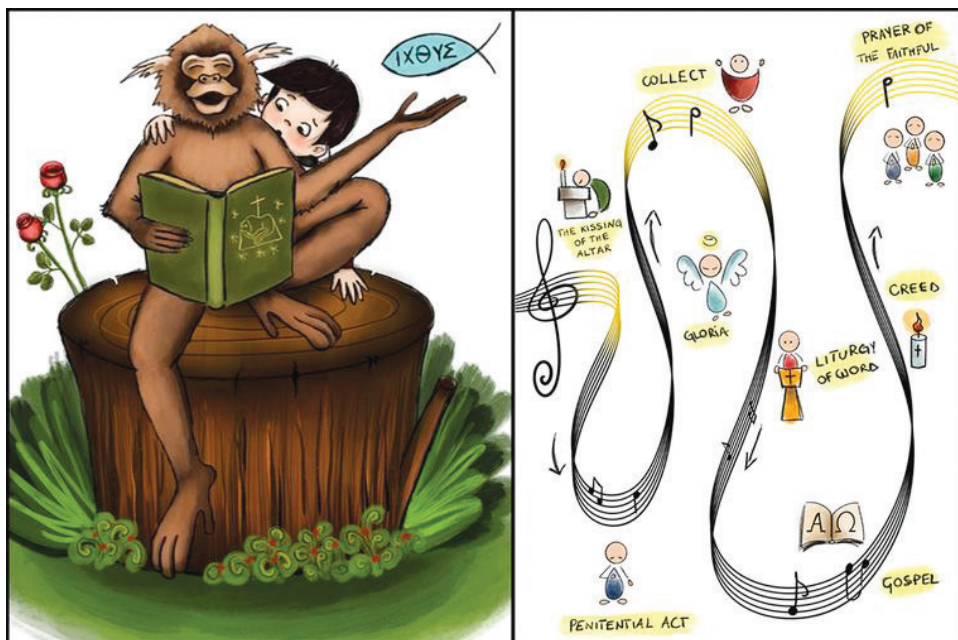
"The Mass Revealed" by Ricardo Reyes Castillo (Author), Eleonora Maria Calvo (Illustrator), Paolo Strudthoff (Translator)

Amazon – Paperback \$13.99 (RM66.17)

Catholic dogmas and concepts, explaining them with poetic clarity, whether it be sin as a "missed target," the Virgin Mary as the ultimate model of the "free Woman" who allows the Word to become flesh and dwell in her womb, or the liturgy as a "movement" comparable to that of the cosmos, of the universe as a whole.

"The liturgy is a sinuous movement filled with ascents and descents, an outstretched wave that spirals upward to connect us to the cosmic dimension of God's creative act," he wrote. "The liturgy is indeed cosmic, for we make real contact with the God who turns chaos into cosmos. This is the key moment of the celebration."

This mix of practical teachings, personal anecdotes and profound reflections on the meaning of life, death and faith in the Risen Christ makes it an excellent tool for catechesis and evangelisation, to be widely distributed to today's young people, at any stage of their faith journey. — **By Solène Tadié, Register**



Little Catholics' corner

Jesus knew He was going to die soon. It made Him sad, but He knew that He had to do it. He told the Apostles, "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." Be-

Have you ever tried planting seeds? The little seeds are hard and dry and seem to be dead. We put them into some damp soil, and cover them up.

After a few days, you can see little sprouts coming out of the soil

Our Lord was telling His friends that He had to be like a seed. He would die and be buried, and then after a few days, come back to life! And like a plant that grows and produces more seed, the

Saints are people that are ready to give up their good things and even their lives for their love of God, just like Jesus. Are you ready to be a saint?

Aunty Eliz



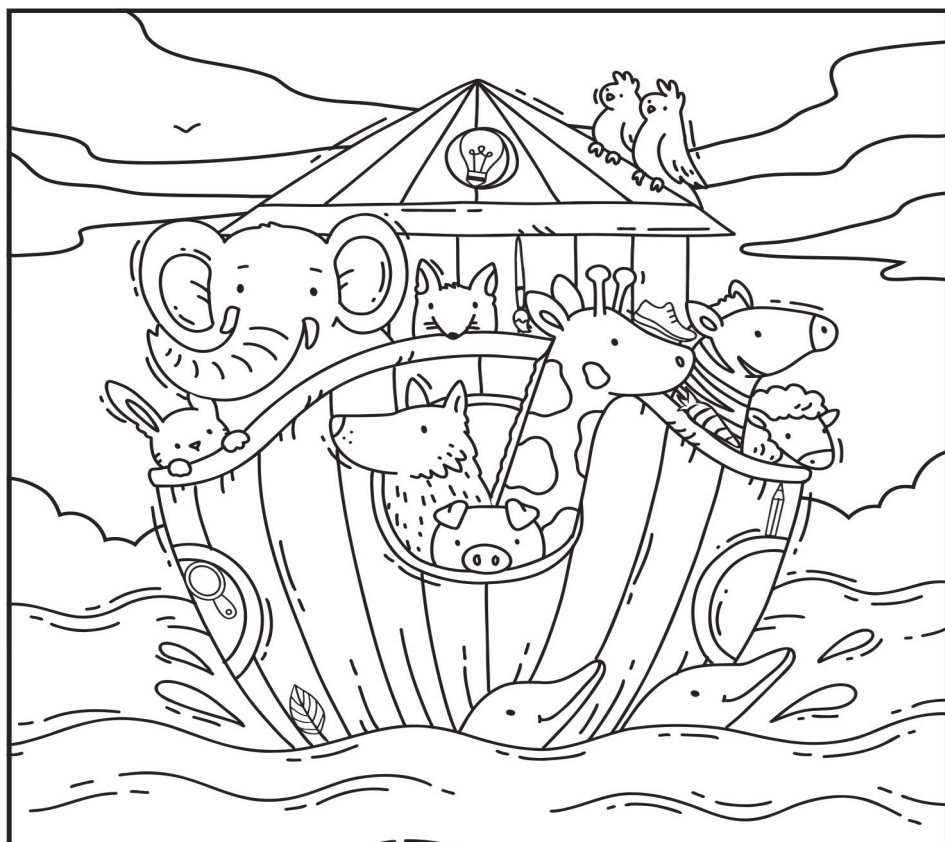
In today's Gospel reading Jesus says, *"Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."* Can you find your way from this grain of wheat to the new seeds at to top?

Find the words on the list that are hidden in the puzzle. The words can be left to right, up and down, or diagonally.

**SON
WONDERFUL**

Noah's Ark With Animals

Hidden Objects!



Bible Verse Box Writing

Write the Bible verse in the boxes below.

Blessed is the one who does not walk in
step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take or
sit in the company of mockers

The image displays 20 distinct polyominoes, each composed of 10 squares, arranged in five rows of four. The shapes are outlined in black and set against a background of a wavy line and a grid of dots.

YOUTH

March 17, 2024

REALITIES ARE GREATER THAN IDEAS

By Francisco Overee, MJDYPN

MELAKA: Inspired by the call of Pope Francis' for a synodal Church and the upcoming Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026, the Malaysian Catholic Youth Ministers Committee (MCYMC) have been engaging in grassroots initiatives throughout the nine arch/dioceses of Malaysia. The goal is to discover and present the voices of young people at the Malaysian Catholic Young People Assembly 2025 (MCYPA 2025). The Catholic youth ministers' desire to do this by prioritizing the least accessible young people, accompanying them in

The MCYMC Initiative in MJD has been the pastoral thrust and framework of the diocese since 2016 and the recent theme of the MJD50 Anniversary celebrations; history – story – mission.

fulfilling a service and by immersing themselves in the realities of young people.

The Malacca Johore Diocese Young People Network (MJDYPN), in collaboration with the Jawatankuasa Pembangunan dan Keselamatan Kampung (JPKK) of the Portuguese Settlement, Melaka and the young leaders of the Church of St Peter's, Melaka youth ministry organised the grassroots immersion experience in the Malacca Johore Diocese from February 21-26. Eighteen young people from across Malaysia, comprising youth ministers, youth leaders, volunteers and friends of the MCYMC attended. The MJD initiative sought to provide the space and time for an immersion experience through the MJD's 4E spirituality that

Following these two frameworks, the programme was divided to different sections and engagement activities that allowed for the participants to immerse themselves in the realities of the Portuguese Settlement and MJD. They were given the space and time to experience the 4E spirituality process of encountering, enlightening, empowering, and evangelising by being themselves encountered, enlightened, empowered, and evangelised. These actions and process were contextualised in the framework of being attentive to the great love story of salvation that God is revealing in history, lived out and shared in personal stories, and responded in the mission of building God's Kingdom together.



Block rosary at Portuguese Settlement.



Encounter - experiencing realities as they are

Throughout the five days, the participants were given opportunities for encounters to experience realities as they are by staying with foster families, in the Portuguese Settlement, visiting the homes of the residents and engaging with them in sharing and fellowship, community celebrations and cultural activities like playing traditional games, learning the traditional songs and dances of the community. They also encountered the spiritual realities of the faith through the celebration of the Eucharist, Eucharistic Adoration, the praying of the Divine Office together, and participating in the devotional practices of the Settlement, such as block Rosary and the Stations of the Cross.

The block Rosary, a devotional heritage in the Portuguese Settlement, is the practice of praying the Rosary as a community at one of the homes of a resident. The home of the resident would host the statue of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception for three days and the statue would then be moved to another home in procession, with hymns. Serena Jonius, a pastoral worker for the young people in the Penang Diocese Youth Network re-

marked the following of the experience, "On the first day itself, we had a block Rosary with the Portuguese Settlement Community. For me, the Rosary prayer was a channel for the community to be one in Christ, strengthen their bond as a community, remain faithful, and pray for each other. I was happy to be there, and I felt the warm welcome from the Portuguese community after the prayer."

Dorin Peter, a friend of MCYMC from the Archdiocesan Youth Commission of Kota Kinabalu said, "I am very grateful that I can join the block Rosary. I hope this kind of Rosary prayer continues and I plan to bring this way prayer to my village community."



Enlighten - contextualising realities

In order to allow the participants to make sense

of the realities they encounter, these realities have to be situated or placed in their proper context. Understanding how a reality got to be the way it is allows for the treating of that reality not as a singular or isolated event, but facilitates a more wholesome view of it and it restores agency to the reality or the person encountering it to make a better choice.

Among the activities in this category was the pilgrimage walk along the trail of St Francis Xavier; a prayer walk designed to visit the sites that St Francis Xavier would have visited and ministered in when he lived in Malacca. The walk was led Colin Goh who facilitated the pilgrimage and explained the different historical sites of the town centre and their significance for the Catholic historical heritage, not only for Malacca, but for Malaysia.

Rita Pauline, a friend of MCYMC from the Diocese of Penang said, "The pilgrimage walks on the trail of St Francis Xavier made me admire St Francis because of his initiatives and enthusiasm to bring back the preaching and instruction of Christian doctrine that were neglected under the rule of the Portuguese. St Francis chose to do his mission in serving the poor, the neglected, and the forgotten, for the greater glory of God although he struggled a lot. I learned and realise that I should not give up in doing God's mission when facing problems and struggles, like St Francis."

Numerous socio-historical formations were also organised. Of note were the engagements with Martin Theseira and Sara Federica Sta Maria, both who labour in the preservation of the traditions, customs, language and cultural aspects of the Portuguese Eurasian community, like the fiestas, songs and dances.

Martin focused on the demographic and ecological aspects of the Portuguese Eurasian community in Malacca; on how the rapid development and ecological damage on the seafront of the Portuguese Settlement has caused a destruction of its ecosystem, which in turn effects the livelihoods of the local fishermen. A loss of interest in fishing affected another major economic source in the Settlement namely the restaurants. Due to a loss of easy access to fish, many restaurants would, in turn, raise their prices and seek for supply outside of the Settlement. The loss of these two main sources of income inevitably affects the jobs for of the local young people. Young people would have to venture outside of the village, the city, or even the country, in order to make a living for themselves. When this happens, there is a break of transmission of not only language, culture, and traditions but a break in the transmission of faith and values because there is no one to hand down this heritage, and priorities change to accommodate the need to find a living outside of the local context.

• Continued on Page 17

KUALA LUMPUR: On March 3, the altar servers from the Church of St Aloysius, Mantin (CSAM) and Church of St Theresa, Nilai (CSTN), accompanied by their chaperones, embarked on an enriching journey. Filled with excitement, they departed from CSAM at 6.45am and CSTN at 7.20am for a day dedicated to exploration and spiritual growth at the Church of St Ignatius, Petaling Jaya, the Church of the Holy Rosary, Brickfields and the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist, Bukit Nanas. This trip was intended for them to meet and connect with fellow altar servers from these parishes.

This enlightening excursion was initiated by Fr Christopher Soosaipillai, parish priest of CSAM and CSTN, aiming to broaden their horizons regarding altar server practices across different parishes. Fr Christopher's vision was to deepen their service understanding and link these experiences to the foundational beliefs of their faith.

Their adventure began at the Church of St Ignatius, where they received a warm welcome from the parish priest, Fr Lawrence Ng, CDD and participated in the 8.45am Mass. Following the Mass, they engaged in meaningful conversations and met with assistant parish priest, Fr Martin Thien, CDD, capped off with a delightful lunch.



The journey continued to the Church of the Holy Rosary, where they were graciously received by the parish priest, Fr Dominic Tan. Engaging discussions with seminarian Bro Dennis further enriched their understanding.

Along the way, they were treated to captivating insights into the rich histories of these sacred spaces, coupled with short tours that sparked their curiosity.

A significant moment was the visit to the

Cathedral of St John at 3.00pm, where they participated in insightful sharing sessions with Fr Gerard Theraviam and Archbishop Julian Leow, followed by an enjoyable high tea.

Their visit concluded with a stop at Archbishop Julian's residence, where they were invited into the chapel. The archbishop enlightened them with stories of the chapel's history, its mural art, and a thoughtful Q&A

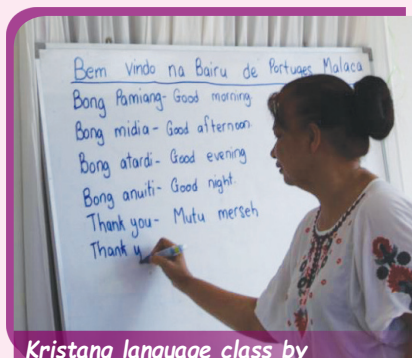
session, leaving a profound impact on the young servers.

Throughout their journey, they wholeheartedly embraced the principles of service and hospitality, delving deep into the core of their faith and forming personal connections. Although brief, their experience was packed with skill-enhancing encounters, fostering a stronger sense of purpose and belonging among them. — **By Jennifer Peter**

• Continued from Page 16

Sara treated the participants to a class on the Kristang language, the local customs pertaining to courtship and marriage, dresswear, local cuisine, the traditional songs and dances, along with an exploration of the various fiestas that are celebrated throughout the year in the Portuguese Settlement. The participants were given a chance to sing the songs and dance the traditional dances at the communal gathering on their last night in the Settlement and at the cultural performance for the participants and Bishop Bernard Paul after the Sunday Eucharist on Feb 25. Sara noted that some of the fiestas that are celebrated in the Portuguese Settlement have lost its meaning due to there being a lack of transmission of the customs to the younger generation.

"The yearly *Festival of Intrudu*, which is celebrated on the Sunday before Ash Wednesday with the splashing of water on each other, has now become more like *Songkran* in Thailand rather than a spir-



Kristang language class by Sara Santa Maria.

itual exercise or an occasion for the strengthening of communal bonds through reconciliation," she said. She also showed the participants the writings of her father, the late Francisco Sta Maria, a beloved local catechist and composer of various *Kristang* hymns

that are still sung to this day in the Portuguese Settlement. She remembers fondly how her father explained to her that the splashing of water was a reminder of the waters of baptism, used to awaken the person being splashed to the reality of the coming Lenten season. It was customary for the person who splashes another person with water to offer him a shot of an alcoholic drink — on the practical side to warm the person up after being drenched with water but on the communal side, a sign of reconciliation, forgiveness and belonging.

Fr Rajan CMF, from the youth office of

the Diocese of Sibiu reflected on these activities that seek to contextualise realities in the following words: "One of the most memorable aspects of my experience was the cultural exchange that took place within the confines of our shared home. Interacting with residents of the settlement allowed me to gain insights into their rich heritage, customs, and the Catholic way of life. From traditional dances to culinary delights, every interaction served as a window into the soul of the community. The warmth and hospitality of the locals quickly dissolved all the barriers. Living among the residents provided me with a first-hand understanding of the challenges they confront. From economic hardships to preservation of cultural iden-

tity in the face of modernisation, the community grapples with a myriad of issues."

Another enlightening experience of note was the visit to St Peter's Church, Melaka, the oldest functioning Catholic Church in Malaysia. The participants were greeted by the parish pastor, Fr Lionel Thomas, who gave a brief introduction of the history of the church, the various pastoral efforts he has undertaken while serving as the parish priest of the community and the aesthetic work he has done for the church building itself. Fr Lionel also took the opportunity to lead the participants in a short time of Eucharistic Adoration, reminding the participants of the importance of adoring Jesus present in the Blessed Sacrament.



Participants in their traditional attire with Bishop Bernard Paul.

Empowering – Restoring freedom to reality

In the four movements of the 4E spirituality, the stage of empowerment is the most often misunderstood or misapplied movement as a consequence of treating encountered realities as vacuums or disconnected events. Empowerment is understood in the framework of the Christian's first encounter with the love of God. The late Pope Benedict XVI puts this movement in a most beautiful way in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, paragraph 1, where he writes, "We have come to believe in God's love: in these words, the Christian can express the fundamental decision of his life. Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction."

The participants were first introduced to the 4E spirituality on the first day of the initiative and then given space and time to apply it in their own personal Scripture

reflection, using the MJD initiative journal and guidebook.

Different tools of empowerment, after appropriate enlightenment or formation, were given to the participants in order for them to expand their own freedom and choose freely to participate fully in the initiative.

Among these tools are the MJD Initiative Guidebook and Journal which provided different activities for practising the 4E spirituality and also applying the 4E methodology to daily reflection and journaling. The participants were also encouraged to use the spiritual conversation method informally in their visits and fellowship with the residents.

For the clergy and pastoral ministers who participated, a short booklet containing different rites of blessings from the Book of Blessings, along with a small bottle of holy

water, was also provided. The different rites of blessings were carefully selected so that either a priest or a layperson could celebrate them, or if the situation was permissible, guide a member of the family that they had visited to preside over the rite of blessing.

On the last night of the stay in the Portuguese Settlement, a campfire barbecue was held in collaboration with the JPKK of the Portuguese Settlement, the foster families, the participants and other young people from the Settlement itself. "The visit was a wonderful opportunity for cultural exchange and community bonding, as the visitors were able to experience the traditional hospitality and warmth of the Portuguese Settlement residents. The shared experience surely left a lasting impression on both the visitors and their hosts, fostering a sense of unity and friendship among everyone involved. We were also incredibly fortunate to be visited by Bishop Bernard Paul during our campfire event, and to have him celebrate Mass in the Chapel of the Immaculate Conception the next morning," remarked the JPKK



Bishop Bernard Paul blessing the youth ministers and young people at the Chapel of Immaculate Conception in the Portuguese Settlement.

• Continued in the next issue

MEMORIAM

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He who dwells in
the shelter of the
Most High will
abide in the
shadow of the
Almighty.

I will say to the
Lord, "My refuge
and my fortress,
my God, in
whom I trust."

For he will deliver
you from the
snare of the
fowler
and from the
deadly pestilence.
He will cover you
with his pinions,
and under his
wings you will
find refuge;
his faithfulness
is a shield
and buckler.
You will not fear
the terror
of the night,
nor the arrow
that flies by day,
nor the pestilence
that stalks in
darkness,
nor the
destruction that
wastes at
noonday.

A thousand may
fall at your side,
ten thousand at
your right hand,
but it will not
come near you.

Psalms 91:1-7

1st Anniversary
In Loving Memory of
ALFRED SIOW MEI SHIN
蕭美勝



Born: 7 September 1947
Departed: 9 March 2023

*Dearly loved husband, son, brother,
father and grandfather.
Always remembered,
never forgotten.*

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17th Anniversary
In Loving
Memory of
**Josephine
Agnes Harding**
(nee Nonis)

Departed:
18-03-2007

In our hearts you will always live
your Love, your Laughter,
And your Smile
are forever imprinted on our minds.

Fondly remembered by
husband John and all her family.

Eternal rest grant unto her, O Lord,
and may your perpetual light shine upon her.

1st Anniversary
In Loving Memory of



**HENRY GEORGE
RETNAM**
25th September 1930 -
20th March 2023

*A wonderful Dad,
gone to rest.
For us he did his best.
His love was great and
his heart was kind.
Love you Dad,
rest in peace.*

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



*Your life was a blessing
Your memory, a treasure
You are loved beyond words
And missed beyond measure.*

Thinking of you today and every day
Our mother, our angel, our everything.

5TH ANNIVERSARY



In Loving
Memory of
**MARTIN
NEWTON
D'CRUZ**

April 19, 1930 -
March 16, 2019

*Well done, good and faithful servant.
Enter into the joy of your master.*

Matthew 25:21

Dearest Acha,

We miss your presence:

*The fortitude of your faith
Your unwavering love for family
Your joy in good friendships
Your celebration of community.*

We honour your values:

*Your commitment to the unjust
Your helping hand to the poor
Your wisdom for those who seek guidance
A life of knowledge, integrity, truth.*

We celebrate your legacy:

*Family near and far who hold you in esteem
Students far and wide who continue to make you proud
Friends who speak of a man who stood
with them through thick and thin
Colleagues who respect your wisdom, insight and ingenuity
Your writings on justice for the ordinary man
The legacy of your lush gardens that now strive in our homes
Your history and traditions that give us roots
A family united in faith and love.*

We live up to your teachings:

*To learn, to teach, to share, to lead
To trust that the best is yet to come
To believe that there is always more in us
And always, always, to keep the faith.*

Loving you deeply & missing you greatly,
Your beloved wife Sarojam,
your children, the late Rebecca & Anthony, Sue & Terence,
Joseph & Jasmine, Antony & Nikki,
and grandchildren Hannah, Isaac & Dominic.

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REST IN PEACE

ADVERTORIAL

SIGNIS Malaysia Celebrates Pope Francis' Spiritual and Pastoral Leadership

In an era of rapid technological evolution that is affecting the world of information and communication, Pope Francis stands as a steadfast beacon, constantly urging communicators and media professionals to be more human, and to navigate this landscape with integrity and purpose.

Strongly aligned to the call of the Holy Father, SIGNIS, the World Catholic Association for Communication, is missioned to help transform our cultures in the light of the Gospel by promoting human dignity, justice and reconciliation.

As a member of this global lay non-governmental organisation, SIGNIS Malaysia is committed to working with media professionals and communicators to use their skills and platforms to foster a culture of peace. Primarily focused on providing media education and communication skills workshops, the organisation also strongly advocates ethical and responsible use of the media and the internet.



Local journalists and activists crafting their story during a visual story-telling session in 2023.



Young Asian journalists engaging in content production during a roundtable session in 2017.

SIGNIS Malaysia continues to collaborate with like-minded partners, such as Fondacio, North-South Initiative (NSI) and others, to empower more segments of the society, including the underserved, in using the media and the internet as a means of advocacy and community transformation. Some of its initiatives include journalism courses, visual story-telling and content productions on social media, and other social awareness programmes.

Globally, SIGNIS brings together professionals who are engaged in social media, radio, TV, cinema, video, journalism and media education. SIGNIS is the largest international network of Catholic communicators with members in over 100 countries.

SIGNIS was formed in 2001 from the merger of Unda and OCIC, two international Catholic media associations established in 1928. SIGNIS is a lay association recognised by the Dicastery for Laity, Family & Life, and which collaborates with the Dicastery for Communication. 'SIGNIS' is a combination of the words SIGNUM (Latin for 'sign') and IGNIS (Latin for 'fire'), which symbolise the Holy Spirit.



As the worldwide Catholic community commemorates and celebrates with Pope Francis the 11th anniversary of his pontificate, SIGNIS Malaysia and the Fraternity of Social Communicators convey our congratulations and felicitations to him, and earnestly invoke God's blessings for his continued spiritual and pastoral leadership, and good health.

Pope Francis confers knighthood on two SIGNIS Malaysia members

SIGNIS Malaysia is privileged and thankful to acknowledge that Pope Francis has bestowed the honour of *Papal Knight of the Equestrian Order of St. Sylvester, Pope and Martyr*, on her members Sir Augustine Loorthusamy & Sir Lawrence John Sinniah.

This esteemed conferral highlights their substantial contributions to social communications on both local and global levels. These honours not only recognise their individual achievements but also stand as a testament to the impactful work of SIGNIS in the field of social communications.



Sir Lawrence receiving the Papal Knighthood in 2023 from Dr. Paolo Ruffini (Prefect, Dicastery for Communication) who represented the Pope; Sir Augustine meeting Pope Francis before receiving the Papal Knighthood in 2014.



If you are a media professional, freelance content producer or interested in the work of media or social communication, you too can be part of this global network of media professionals. Email signismalaysia@gmail.com for membership, and/or visit www.signis.world for more information.