

# HERALD

The Catholic Weekly

## Mission Statement

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

TERHAD

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When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written  
*1 Cor. 15:54*



Celebrating the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes in Ipoh

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Parenting is a mission of love

■ P7



Exciting preparations underway for MCYD

■ P16

# Get well soon Papa!

**VATICAN: Pope Francis, who has been receiving medical care at Rome's Gemelli Hospital since February 14 for bilateral pneumonia and bronchitis, continues to inspire heartfelt messages and prayers from religious leaders, political figures, and communities across the world. Despite a difficult week that saw the Pope suffer a respiratory crisis and require a blood transfusion, his condition has been reported as stable, though still critical.**

The 88-year-old pontiff's medical situation has drawn attention and concern globally, with messages of support flooding in from every corner of the globe. The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew I, wrote a heartfelt letter to the Pope, referring to him as his "beloved brother," and wishing him a "swift and complete recovery" as well as a return to his important duties, "with God's help."

Similar expressions of solidarity have been shared by Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the Latin Patriarch of

Jerusalem, who called on the faithful to unite in prayer for the Pope's health. "As a spiritual family, we are called to stand together, united in prayer," he wrote. Other religious leaders have also offered prayers, including Cardinal Béchara Boutros Pierre Raï, Patriarch of Antioch of the Maronites, and the Symposium of Bishops' Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), which has expressed "spiritual closeness" to the Pope and the global Catholic community.

The Holy Father's homeland of Argentina has also joined the global chorus of support. Archbishop Jorge Ignacio García Cuerva of Buenos Aires urged the faithful to pray for Pope Francis' recovery, calling on God to grant him strength and restore his health. In Latin America, prayers have poured in from dioceses across Brazil, Uruguay, Mexico, Ecuador, Chile, and other countries. Cardinal Jaime Spengler, President of the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM), expressed hope for the Pope's healing, encouraging Catholics to offer special prayers during Mass ahead of the Feast of the Chair of St. Peter.

In Canada, Bishop William McGrattan of Calgary led prayers for the Pope's recovery, inviting families and communities to join in asking for renewed strength and health for the Pontiff. A similar call was

made by the Bishops of the United States, who shared a special prayer on their website, reinforcing the worldwide support for Pope Francis.

The faithful in Asia have also joined in praying for the Pope, with Cardinal Pablo Virgilio David of the Philippines urging prayers for his healing. In China, Catholics have rallied with fasting and prayer for the Pope's recovery, keeping updated on his condition through xinde.org, a Chinese Catholic website. In Malaysia, several parishes held prayer vigils and offered special Mass for the Holy Father's healing and recovery.

Alongside these religious leaders, political figures have expressed their concern and good wishes for Pope Francis. Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni visited the Pope in the hospital on February 19, and UN Secretary-General António Guterres spoke with Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State of the Holy See, to offer his support. Guterres emphasised the Pope's importance not only to the Catholic Church but also to the entire world.

Amid the outpouring of support, Pope Francis has also received a special gesture of affection from the children of Rome. Over the weekend, dozens of schoolchildren sent get-well cards and hand-drawn illustrations to the Pope, some featuring

touching messages of love and prayers for his swift recovery. One card read, "Dear Pope, I hope you get well soon so I can hug you. I love you so much," accompanied by a drawing of the Pope reaching out to a young girl. Other illustrations included a 3D rendering of Pope Francis opening the Holy Door of St Peter's Basilica and a drawing of Blessed Carlo Acutis.

The Vatican confirmed on February 23, that the Pope is "alert and well-oriented" despite his critical condition, and he continues to receive oxygen therapy. His medical team remains cautious, noting that his prognosis remains reserved due to the complexity of his situation. However, the Pope's resilience is evident; he participated in Mass on Sunday with the medical staff at Gemelli Hospital, showing his unwavering dedication to his spiritual duties even in the midst of illness.

As Pope Francis remains in the hospital, he is surrounded by the prayers and love of millions of people across the world. His medical team has stated that his condition is not life-threatening, and while he is not out of danger yet, they remain hopeful for his recovery. In the meantime, the global community continues to hold him in their thoughts, sending messages of love and strength in hopes of his swift and full recovery. **Agencies**

(photo/ACI Stampa)





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## FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

**A**s I write this, Pope Francis remains in the hospital. His condition has drawn the attention of the world, and like millions of Catholics, I join in fervent prayer for his swift and complete recovery, trusting in God's providence for his healing.

I have long admired Pope Francis for his transformative papacy, which has not only reshaped the Church but also touched the lives of countless people around the globe. His consistent and tireless efforts to elevate women within the Church's mission have been particularly inspiring. The pontiff has not only recognised the invaluable role of women but has actively taken bold steps to ensure they are given a more visible and impactful place in the Church. His approach has empowered so many of us, showing that the voice, insights, and leadership of women are not only needed but essential in the life of the Church.

Yet, Pope Francis' influence reaches far beyond advocating for gender equality. He has boldly addressed numerous critical issues that affect both the Church and the world at large. His focus on the environment, exemplified in his landmark encyclical *Laudato Si'*, serves as a resounding call to action. This encyclical reverberates not only through the corridors of power but also within the hearts of everyday people. Through it, Pope Francis has reminded us of our sacred duty as stewards of God's creation, urging us to protect the Earth for the sake of future generations. At a time when the environment faces unprecedented challenges, Pope Francis has been a steadfast voice for sustainability and ecological justice.

His concern for the well-being of all people, particularly the poor, the marginalised, and the vulnerable, lies at the very core of his ministry. His impassioned plea to see the face of Christ in the poorest of the poor has inspired countless acts of charity and social justice worldwide. Pope Francis has never shied away from confronting difficult social issues, even when it has meant speaking truth to power. His commitment to peace, his compassionate stance on refugees and migrants, and his advocacy for the oppressed have made him a moral compass in a world increasingly marked by division, inequality, and indifference.

Pope Francis has also emphasised the importance of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. In a world too often divided by religious differences, he has worked tirelessly to build bridges, fostering understanding and cooperation between faiths. His outreach to other Christian denominations, as well as leaders of other world religions, has been a living testament to his belief in the power of unity and mutual respect. He has shown us that dialogue, rather than division, is the true path to peace, reconciliation, and healing.

One of Pope Francis' most lasting legacies will undoubtedly be his insightful encyclicals. These documents have guided not only Catholics but people of goodwill across the globe. His writings on love, the environment, and social justice remind us that the Church's mission extends far beyond its walls — it reaches into the very heart of society. Through his words, Pope Francis calls the world to reflect on issues of deep significance — issues that affect our shared

humanity, such as poverty, inequality, human dignity, and the need for solidarity.

The Holy Father has also been a courageous voice urging world leaders to take meaningful action on these critical issues. His steadfast commitment to peace, justice, and the care of creation has often placed him in direct opposition to the status quo. Yet, rather than shrinking from controversy, Pope Francis has used his position to challenge those in power to act for the common good. His calls for a global economy that serves all people — not just the privileged few — and his demand for an end to the arms race are but a few examples of his tireless advocacy for a just, peaceful, and compassionate world.

In this Jubilee Year of Hope, we are reminded of the Pope's powerful words: hope is not merely an emotion but a call to action. It is a call to trust in God's providence, to seek justice, and to care for the most vulnerable among us. As we reflect on the remarkable achievements of Pope Francis' papacy in this special year, we cannot help but feel there is still so much more he can accomplish. The world so desperately needs the peace, love, and justice he so fervently advocates. As we continue to pray for his health, we also pray for his continued leadership, and for the strength and wisdom needed to meet the challenges ahead. May God grant him many more years to continue this transformative journey, guiding us all toward a more just and compassionate world.

Patricia Pereira

## A stubborn God

**“O**of.” That was my first and honest reaction while reading the Gospel for this Sunday. The words of Jesus are painful to hear because it confronts my own hypocrisy. “Can one blind man guide another?” (Lk 6:39). I am aware of the many blind spots in my vision; I can be biased, partial, and judgemental, despite my best efforts not to be. Then, there are all those other defects that are unknown to me but are obvious to everyone else! This awareness can make the call to discipleship heavy, even something to be avoided. The “oof” turns into an “ouch” at the following words: “Why do you observe the splinter in your brother's eye and never notice the plank in your own?” (Lk 6:41).

The self-awareness of hypocrisy and incoherency can lead someone to extremes. One extreme is to give up completely on themselves and others by being indifferent and relativistic. Another extreme is to be insidiously demanding of oneself and others, imposing unbending rules that can disguise itself as religious zeal and moralism. Both extremes are a response to something fundamental in man — the heart. Jesus points this out, “A good man draws what is good from the store of goodness in his heart; a bad man draws what is bad from the store of badness. For a man's words flow out of what fills his heart,” (Lk 6:45).

By ‘heart’, I do not mean it in the sense of pop psychology or a simplistic Christian idealism that seeks to flatten and dismiss reality. Nor am I referring to an understanding given by individualistic self-help pseudo-psychological analysis found in religious moralism. I am referring to the most ‘profound core, in every man and woman,’ that ‘dwelling-place of

love in all its spiritual, psychic and even physical dimensions,’ (cf. *Dilexit Nos* 21). The heart is where I encounter my most true self, where no masks are worn. The heart is ‘the naked truth about ourselves’ (cf. *Dilexit Nos* 5). In other words, it is my heart that said “oof” and “ouch” earlier. It is this same heart that types these words with fear and excitement as it seeks to articulate something greater than itself.

It is my heart that asks, “How is it that I am saved by grace and yet continue to fail, despite my best efforts?” Here, Jesus speaks to my heart, to that naked truth about myself. He knows the masks my heart wears; He sees through the clown makeup that I put on and yet wants my heart just the same. Jesus is stubborn for my heart. He is stubborn for your heart. The novelty of the Christian faith is that a perfect God wants, yes, wants, to deal with our human hearts. He chooses to deal with our hearts with a human heart Himself. He chooses to dwell in our human hearts through the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. 2 Cor 1:22, Rom 5:5).

The heart is fragile; inconsistent and hypocritical; weak and sinful. Yet from it, goodness, mercy, love and beauty also flow. This is its reality. Through the Incarnation, Jesus chooses to deal with this reality in a holistic way. As a disciple, a follower of this same Jesus, I am called to live and deal with this reality, in myself and others, in the same manner. In the Second Reading, we see St Paul dealing with this human reality. This struggle between the earthly man and the heavenly man. He deals with it in Romans 7 as well; the drama between knowing what is good and yet failing to choose it; knowing love and yet choosing sin.

Reflecting on our  
Sunday Readings

with Francisco Overee

## 8th Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)

Readings: Sirach 27:4-7;  
1 Corinthians 15:54-58;  
Gospel: Luke 6:39-45

In both passages, he claims victory in Jesus (cf. 1 Cor 15:57, Rom 7:25). This victory is ours too. Our daily lives, in the midst of our own inconsistencies, is a call to exercise that victory in freedom, until Christ Jesus is fully formed in us — Jesus says: “The disciple is not superior to his teacher; the fully trained disciple will always be like his teacher,” (cf. Lk 6:40). This is our hope. In this life, we are sifted, until all our rubbish is left behind, (cf. Ecc 27:4). Discipleship forms us into Christ. We live with the tension of being both a sinner and a saint. Christ knows this and continues to speak to our hearts from His own heart, revealing to us what it means to be His, until we are completely His; until we claim His heart as our own, until the “oof” and “ouch” becomes a song of unending worship to the Father.

What shall we do? “Never give in... never admit defeat; keep on working at the Lord's work always, knowing that, in the Lord, you cannot be labouring in vain,” (cf. 1 Cor 15:58). St Paul calls us to be stubborn with our discipleship. To be stubborn with a stubborn God. Thank God for the victory in Christ Jesus who was, and still is stubborn for us; stubborn to the point of death. Are we willing to be stubborn? To be stubborn until Christ is formed in us? To be stubborn with others as Christ forms them into Himself?

# MCCBCHST responds to UMNO's rejection of non-Muslim minister

KUALA LUMPUR: The Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Taoism (MCCBCHST) has issued a statement dated February 18, responding to remarks made by UMNO Secretary-General Asyraf Wajdi Dusuki regarding a proposal by YB Chow Yu Hui for the appointment of a Minister for Non-Muslim Affairs.

Dusuki rejected the proposal, citing Article 3 of the Federal Constitution, which designates Islam as the religion of the Federation, and called on YB Chow to "show respect to Article 3." Dusuki further emphasised that non-Muslim leaders from coalition parties had agreed not to challenge the Constitution's stance on Islam, the special position of Malays and Bumiputras, the Malay rulers, and the national language.

In response, the MCCBCHST clarified

that proposing the appointment of a minister for non-Muslim affairs should not be viewed as disrespecting Islam. While the MCCBCHST does not comment on the necessity of such a role, it reaffirmed its support for the provisions in the Constitution that uphold Islam as the religion of the Federation, the special position of Malays and natives of Sabah and Sarawak, the position of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong and the Malay rulers, and the Malay language as the national language.

The MCCBCHST further emphasised the need to revisit the meaning of Article 3(1), which states that "Islam is the religion of the Federation, but other religions may be practised in peace and harmony in any part of the Federation." The MCCBCHST highlighted the landmark ruling in the 1988 case of *Che Omar bin Che Soh v. Public Prosecutor*, where the Supreme Court

clarified that the term "Islam" in Article 3 refers to rituals and ceremonies, rather than a complete way of life. The ruling clarified that if the Constitution intended for Islamic law to override other laws, it would have explicitly provided for such provisions, which it did not. The Court also noted that Article 162 of the Constitution maintains the continuity of secular law unless it contradicts the Constitution.

The MCCBCHST pointed out that the ruling in *Che Omar bin Che Soh* and subsequent decisions, including *Indira Gandhi A/P Mutho v. Pengarah Jabatan Agama Islam Perak (2018)*, *Iki Putra Bin Mubarak v. Kerajaan Negeri Selangor (2021)*, and *Nik Elin Zurina Binti Nik Abdul Rashid & Anor v. Kerajaan Negeri Kelantan (2024)*, reaffirmed that the scope of Article 3(1) is limited to Islamic rituals and ceremonies and does not affect other

constitutional rights or provisions.

Furthermore, the MCCBCHST referenced Article 3(4), which stipulates that "Nothing in this Article derogates from any other provision of this Constitution," ensuring that Article 3(1) cannot override other constitutional provisions. According to Professor Dr Shad Saleem Faruqi, Article 3(4) prevents Article 3(1) from abolishing or extinguishing any rights or laws enshrined in the Constitution.

In conclusion, the MCCBCHST reiterated that proposals such as the call for a Minister for Non-Muslim Affairs cannot be dismissed simply by invoking Article 3(1), as it does not have the power to alter fundamental rights and provisions in the Constitution. The MCCBCHST called for greater education on the Federal Constitution in schools to promote understanding of these key principles.



## KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

### Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

#### March

- 1 Meeting – Kuala Lumpur Archdiocesan Pastoral Team
- 3 Meeting – Sri Seronok BOM
- 4 Meeting – PMPT Core Team at APC, KL
- 4 Meeting – Peninsular Bishops Finance
- 8 MCYD Commissioning Mass – Cathedral of St John, KL
- 9 Rite of Election – Church of the Holy Family



## PENANG DIOCESE

### Diary of Cardinal Sebastian Francis

#### March

- 4 Meeting – PMPT Core Team at APC, KL



## MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

### Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

#### March

- 4 Meeting – PMPT Core Team at APC, KL
- 6 Meeting – Diocesan Finance Committee
- 7 South Johor Vicariate Pastoral Council – Church of St Theresa, Masai
- 9 Rite of Election – Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, JB



## Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #212

F12  
MJD NEWS  
UPDATES

**Dear friends of MJD,** the holy Season of Lent and the Muslim's holy month of Ramadan is just around the corner.

**Statistics amaze, frighten or enlighten us.** They reveal trends, preferences and warning signs. Already 1.3 million pilgrims have passed through the Holy Door. Archbishop Fisichella emphasised, it is not about numbers, watch the heart. International Christian Concern (ICC) reported that an estimated 300 million Christians worldwide are facing persecution, with religious nationalism, authoritarian crackdowns, displacement, and extremist violence; and enduring under hostile governments, terrorist groups, and societal discrimination.

A total of 8,076 Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) examination candidates were absent from all of their written papers, as of Feb 6, said the Ministry of Education. Were they unprepared, or see no value in the SPM certificate, or found "taking up jobs" appealing?

Unemployment rates dropped to 3.1 per cent in Dec 2024, except in Sabah. Malaysia's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2024 score remained unchanged, at 50 points. TTI-M suspects the series of discounts, discharges not amounting to an acquittal, could be the reason. Old standards and approaches do not work nor appeal to today's generation.

**Step-in Times:** In a matter of weeks, the latest US foreign-aid policy under the Trump Administration paused nearly all US foreign-aid programmes for review and dismantling USAID. Faith-based organisations, Medical Teams International and other world aid groups fear that millions will be denied access to basic health care. Another humanitarian crisis is looming, some say.

But historians say the Church has done this before and it must do it again. The countless institutions — hospitals,

schools, social services were built, not by governments — but by the Church. The Church built the first universities, championed human rights before governments ever enshrined them into law. And this is the Church's calling and purpose.

The Church's work was never about government funding. It has always been about answering a call higher than politics, responding to needs greater than our own, and trusting that justice will prevail — not because governments demand it, but because it is what God invites us into.

#### A Thought for the Week: *Chuan and Jing*

Chuan and Jing joined a wholesale company together just after graduation. Both worked very hard. After several years, the boss promoted Jing to sales executive but Chuan remained a sales rep. Chuan could not take it. He decided to resign, feeling not valued.

The boss knew that Chuan worked very hard for years, but in order to help Chuan realise the difference between him and Jing, the boss asked Chuan to go and find out if anyone is selling watermelon in the market?

Chuan returned and said yes. Then the boss asked how much per kg? Chuan went back to the market to ask and returned to inform the boss the price was \$12 per kg.

Boss told Chuan, I will ask Jing the same question? Jing went, returned and said, boss, only one person selling watermelon. Price is \$12 per kg, \$100 for 10 kg, he has a stock of 340 melons. On the table are 58 melons, every melon weigh about 15 kg, sourced from the South two days ago, they are fresh and red, good quality.

Chuan decided not to resign but to learn from Jing.

*The lesson from the boss:* Successful persons are more observant, see more, see different aspects and understand

the dynamics. They see what's ahead, possibilities and potentials.

#### QnQ! Q asks? People say the world is about to tip over? What say you?

1. From any angle, humanity stands at the edge, teetering between Superman and animal.
2. Superman — what we call the higher self, soul, or spirit — is the part of us that seeks expansion, wisdom, and divinity. The part that reaches for something beyond survival, beyond impulse, beyond limitation.
3. The animal — our primal, reactive nature — is driven by survival, fear, instinct, and desire. It's not wrong; it's part of us. But if we live only through this lens, we stay in cycles of scarcity, conflict, and reaction.
4. So the question becomes: Are my actions being driven by survival, or am I choosing them from my soul? Am I moving through life reacting, defending, consuming, fearing — like an animal just trying to make it through? Or am I moving through life creating, expanding, transcending, loving — like the higher being I know I am? May the higher self listen to the Spirit at work in the "near death experiences" of the world.

**The Holy Spirit @ work:** In the darkness and ignorance of this life the Holy Spirit enlightens the poor in spirit. He is the love that draws them on, the sweetness that attracts them, the way in which a man approaches God." *William of Saint-Thierry*

**Something To Tickle You:** "I've been protected, I've been directed, I've been corrected. I've kept God in my life and it's kept me humble. I didn't always stick with Him but He always stuck with me." *Denzel Washington*

*Bernard Paul*

Bishop Bernard Paul



# A fruitful parish assembly at SMC

Jennifer Duarte

IPOH: The parish assembly held at the Church of St Michael (SMC) on February 16, saw a packed hall of engaged parishioners. Prior to the assembly, parish priest Fr Aloysius Tan had encouraged the faithful to attend the event during weekend Masses.

Fr Aloysius emphasised the importance of each parishioner's involvement, stating, "The participation of every parishioner can promote the growth of the parish, and every parishioner can make a contribution to the parish. Nothing is insignificant. Only by working together can the parishioners live out God's mission."

The gathering highlighted the parish's commitment to fostering unity and collaboration among its members.

Msgr Jude Miranda, chairman of the Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Team, served as the guest speaker at the assembly. In his address, he emphasised two key themes for the parish community. Firstly, he spoke on the importance of embracing the mindset of "a synodal community" within the Catholic Church. He encouraged the faithful to journey together as the People of God, walking side by side, listening to one another, and discerning the Holy Spirit's guidance in their shared mission.

Secondly, he urged the congregation to broaden and deepen their understanding of the image of the "tent," which has held significant meaning throughout history. Drawing from the Book of Exodus, he reminded the assembly that the Tent of Meeting was where God and mankind encountered one another. Today, he explained, the "tent" is the Church, and each member of the Church is a living reflection of God's presence among us.

Following Msgr Jude's address, participants at the parish assembly divided according to language groups (English and Mandarin) for a deeper, more reflective experience. The



Msgr Jude Miranda and Fr Aloysius Tan during the assembly.

assembly broke into smaller groups of eight to practice "Conversation in the Spirit," focusing on listening and discerning together.

Focusing on two key areas — Church and Society — participants were invited to engage in spiritual conversation around two thought-provoking questions: 'How can we make our Church more meaningful as we journey together as a community?' and 'Keeping the spirit of Synodality, how can our society be more united despite the differences and challenges we go through in life?'

This exercise allowed the parishioners to

share insights, deepen their reflections, and foster a sense of unity as they listened to one another in the spirit of discernment.

After hearing representatives from each group share their conclusions, Msgr Jude summarised the three fundamental needs for the parish's growth:

- **Building Relationships:** We must grow in relationship with one another, valuing each other, as strong relationships reflect God's presence in our lives.
- **Welcoming and Inclusive Community:** The parish must be a place where everyone

feels welcomed, included, and united, fostering a spirit of community.

● **Increased Parish Involvement:** It is essential to create platforms that allow parishioners to engage more actively in ministry and contribute to the parish's mission.

Fr Aloysius expressed gratitude to the parishioners for their active participation in the assembly, emphasising that despite our differences, being present and engaged was the key. "We can listen, share, and participate with one another to achieve communion," he said.

Building on the 'Conversation in the Spirit', Fr Aloysius proposed focusing on discipleship in parish life and living out our Christian witness. He outlined a three-year plan for the parish: 2025 — The jubilee year, marking the 135th anniversary of the church's founding. This year will focus on preparation and celebration; 2026 — The year of training and nurturing new members and 2027 — The year of celebrating the mission of the parish.

He concluded by stressing that, by 2027, all parishioners — especially the youth and those currently uninvolved — must be formed and engaged in ministry. He encouraged more individuals to step up as new leaders within the parish.



Parishioners listening intently to the presentation during the assembly.

## Jubilee celebration honours nation's security forces and veterans

CHERAS: The Church of St Francis of Assisi hosted the Jubilee of Armed Forces, Police & Security Personnel and Veterans on February 15. This six-hour event was not only a celebration but a reminder of the many ways our armed forces protect our lives, nation, and freedom.

The gathering brought together representatives from the Army, Navy, Air Force, Veterans, SMART, Bomba, the Police, and parish security, each playing an integral role in the day's proceedings. Families of security personnel were also present, joining in the recognition of their loved ones' dedication to safeguarding the nation. Their positive response reflected the strong sense of unity and pride within these groups, as well as the supportive foundation that empowers these men and women to carry out their vital duties.

One highlight was a demonstration of the

specialised work performed by the Bomba and SMART teams during natural disasters. The display highlighted the preparedness and dedication of these emergency responders, who are always ready to assist in times of crisis, such as floods and fires. It served as a powerful reminder of how the security forces, often working behind the scenes, step forward to support and protect our communities in times of need.

This celebration brought together parishioners from nearby churches reinforcing the sense of unity and shared purpose among the faithful. It also highlighted the collective desire to honour and acknowledge the immense responsibility of our security forces.

As part of the event, a meaningful 'Order of Gifts' presentation took place, honouring various key organisations for their long-standing contributions to the nation's security



Security personnel participating in the outdoor Way of the Cross.

from the parish. The recipients included the Safety and Security Volunteers (established in 2020); the Royal Malaysian Air Force (1958); the Royal Malaysian Navy (1934); the Royal Malaysian Army (1933); the Malaysian ATM Veteran Association (1922), and the Police Di Raja Malaysia (1807), each recognised for their dedication and service.

A special talk was delivered by Inspector Tereance Gabrill, Senior Investigating Officer from the Commercial Crime Investigation Division at IPPD Kajang, Selangor. He addressed the issue of financial scams, sharing valuable insights and encouraging the audience to share their own experiences. This segment emphasised the importance of awareness and vigilance in today's world, helping to educate and empower the community against such threats.

The day not only served as a reflection on the past but also set a strong foundation for future recognition and awareness of the sacrifices made by our armed forces. It was a moment of gratitude, education, and community — an opportunity for everyone to reflect on the invaluable role that these brave men and women play in keeping our nation safe.

Major (R) Joseph Savirimuthu, one of the key figures in the event, emphasised the importance of educating young parishioners about the sacrifices made by these brave individuals, especially in the face of both internal and external threats to the country. His message underscored the necessity for the younger generation to appreciate the commitment of those who serve, ensuring that their contributions are never forgotten. **Priangka Elizabeth**



Representatives from the different divisions with their gifts.



## Third cohort of Diploma in Theology launched in the KL Archdiocese

KUALA LUMPUR: The collaboration between the Archdiocesan Pastoral Institute (API) of the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur and Vidyajyoti College of Theology in New Delhi, India, continues with the launch of the third cohort for the Distance Education Programme - Diploma in Theology (DEPT).

The third cohort consists of enthusiastic participants from across Peninsular Malaysia, Sarawak, and even two students from neighbouring countries. This diverse group includes men and women, laity and religious sisters, grandparents, parents, and young adults, all seeking to deepen their knowledge of the faith

— some for personal growth, and others to better equip themselves for service in their respective parishes and dioceses through various ministries.

On February 15 and 16, API organised the first contact class to help orient the new batch of students with the relevant apps, resources and

methodology required to complete the three-year diploma programme. The students had the privilege of listening to Fr Gerard Theraviam who spoke on Scripture, Fr Mitchel Anthony who gave an overview on the Vatican II documents and Sr Margaret Sta Maria, FdCC who gave an introduction into Moral Theology.

Over the next three years (2025-2028), the 40 plus students will cover over 30 modules learning about Scripture, Canon Law, Ecumenism, Sacraments, and the History of the Catholic Church in Malaysia, to name a few. If you are also looking to deepen your knowledge in faith, do keep a lookout in your parish bulletins for the next enrolment for the DEPT programme and other formative programmes provided by API. **Gregory Pravin**



The participants for the Diploma in Theology.

### Pauline Sundram

IPOH: The parish of Our Lady of Lourdes (OLOL) celebrated their feast day with novena prayers from February 7 to 15. This year's theme, *Pilgrims of Hope in the Immaculate Conception*, was the focus of the celebration.

Masses during the nine days were celebrated in English and Tamil by Rt Rev Dr Jeevanandam Amalanathan, Bishop of Kumbakonam, Tamil Nadu, India, Fr Albert Pushparaj, and Fr Thomas Devadoss from the Diocese of Kumbakonam, along with OLOL's parish priest, Fr Robert Daniel, assistant priest Fr George Vaithyanathan, and Fr Eugene Fernandez CSsR.

The novena Masses offered parishioners a chance to deepen their relationship with God and prepare their hearts for the upcoming celebrations. Each day, the preachers delivered dynamic homilies and captivating messages, offering a unique focus that enriched and inspired all who attended.

The parish also organised a Lourdes Experience on Feb 8, allowing the community to encounter the abundant graces of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Pilgrims who attended felt a deep connection, experiencing the grace, peace, and healing of our Blessed Mother.

On Feb 11, the Mass for the Anointing of the Sick was celebrated in conjunction with the World Day of the Sick. Parishioners from near and far registered for the anointing. It was a moment to reflect on how the Lord remains close to those who are suffering and as the Church invites us to become Pilgrims of Hope, the word of God accompanies us and offers us, in the words of St Paul, an encour-



## Celebrating the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes in Ipoh

aging message: "Hope does not disappoint" (Rom 5:5); indeed, it strengthens us in times of trial.

The highlight of the event was the Feast Day Mass, which began with novena prayers to Our Lady of Lourdes, followed by a High Mass. The beautifully decorated church was filled with people, creating an atmosphere of reverence and joy. Bishop Dr Jeevanandam presided over the Mass, and in his homily, he spoke about the virtues and roles of the Blessed Mother, who is the model of faith. He also reflected on how the places where she appeared became renowned due to her presence.

The festivities culminated in a vibrant outdoor candlelight procession, with priests carrying the Blessed Sacrament and the faithful following the adorned statue of Our Lady of



The candlelight procession with the priest carrying the Blessed Sacrament and the faithful following.

Lourdes, reciting the Rosary and asking Mary to pray for us as we seek to grow closer to her Son, Jesus.

The celebration reached its peak with a

Thanksgiving Mass on Feb 16, bringing together all the prayers, reflections, and celebrations of the previous days in a unified offering of gratitude to God.

## Jejak Harmoni fosters stronger interfaith unity

KUALA LUMPUR: The *Jejak Harmoni* programme on February 15, led by Minister of National Unity of Malaysia YB Dato' Sri Aaron Ago Dagang, brought together the National Unity Ministry, the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism (MCCBCHST), and Polis Diraja Malaysia (PDRM).

Held in conjunction with *Minggu Keharmonian Antara Penganut Agama*

*Sedunia* (World Interfaith Harmony Week), the event featured visits to several places of worship in Sentul, including the Al Hidayah Mosque, Church of St Joseph, Athi Eeswaran Temple, Buddhist Vihara, and Gurdwara Sentul.

The initiative celebrated Malaysia's rich cultural and religious diversity, offering participants the opportunity to explore and understand the traditions, practices, and values of various faiths, fostering mutual respect



Unity Minister YB Dato' Sri Aaron Ago Dagang with members of the Ministry of National Unity, the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism (MCCBCHST), and Polis Diraja Malaysia (PDRM). (Kementerian Perpaduan Negara facebook)



Unity Minister YB Dato' Sri Aaron Ago Dagang exchanging gifts with Archbishop Julian Leow. (ArchKL facebook)

and appreciation. The programme highlighted the importance of unity in a multicultural society, encouraging dialogue and collaboration among communities.

YB Dato' Sri Aaron emphasised the significance of such efforts in building a harmonious nation, stating, "Understanding each other's cultures and religions is the foundation of unity. Programmes like *Jejak Harmoni* remind us that our diversity is our strength."

Held from 7.30am to 1.00pm, the event was met with overwhelming positivity. At-

tendees described it as "simply amazing" and a testament to Malaysia's spirit of togetherness. As the day concluded, participants left with a renewed sense of hope and commitment to fostering peace and harmony in the country.

*Jejak Harmoni* serves as a shining example of how mutual understanding and respect can bridge divides, creating a brighter future for all. God bless Malaysia! **Victor Soosai**



# Educational excursion on rubber tapping

SUNGAI BULOH, Selangor: The KL Archdiocesan Creation Justice Ministry (CJM) organised an excursion to Akademi HEVEA Malaysia in Sungai Buloh on February 7. Sixty-six nature enthusiasts participated in this hands-on experience of rubber tapping, a much-anticipated opportunity.

The rubber tree, a species native to the tropical rainforest, is grown on approximately 10 million hectares worldwide and provides the raw latex for over 40,000 industrial and consumer products essential to daily life.

The session took place amidst neatly lined-up rubber trees, which were planted four metres apart. Each acre of land contains around 500 trees. For many participants, this was an opportunity to learn more about the rubber plant, while

for a few, it brought back childhood memories of witnessing elders tapping rubber.

Various tools of different sizes were displayed. The facilitator explained that the size of the tool doesn't matter; what's crucial is the skill to tap rubber. The essential items for tapping include a plastic cup, a hanger, a spring that expands, and a blade. The latex is harvested by slicing a groove into the tree's bark at a depth of about one-quarter inch with a hooked knife and peeling back the bark.

Participants had the chance to try tapping and quickly realised that the skill requires a lot of practice and precision. Each subsequent cut is made directly below the previous one. After heavy tapping, trees are often given a rest period. Production typically begins when a tree is

five or six years old, and with proper care, its productive life can extend for more than 20 years.

Natural rubber latex is sourced from the sap of the *Hevea brasiliensis* tree, which is widely cultivated in Malaysia and plays a significant role in global environmental protection. Studies show that rubber trees planted worldwide can absorb 363,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide annually, replacing it with 264,000 tonnes of oxygen through photosynthesis. Notably, latex is not collected during rainfall.

A visit to the gallery, which highlighted the diverse uses of rubber across various industries — from aerospace to maritime — was truly enriching. The display featured various grades of latex and rubber products used in different sectors. One key takeaway was that natural



The facilitator demonstrating the steps to rubber tapping.

rubber and its products biodegrade through a natural biological process. As a result, products such as latex gloves, catheters, and breathing bags made from Malaysian natural rubber are genuinely environmentally friendly.

Participant James shared, "The information on the rubber crop was in-

valuable and provided a great education." Another participant remarked, "The session felt like a revision class and a nostalgic trip back to the good old days of rubber tapping."

The next educational trip will be to the Malaysian Cocoa Board. **Archdiocese of KL Creation Justice Ministry**

## OMPH Ipoh takes a step towards ecological conversion

IPOH: The parish of Our Mother of Perpetual Help (OMPH), which recently signed a pledge to become an ecological parish, co-organised an Ecology Formation event on February 16. It was in collaboration with the Creation Justice Commission (CJC) of Penang.

Magdalene Chiang emphasised the Catholic commitment to environmental care. She drew inspiration from the Book of Genesis and saints like St Francis of Assisi, as well as teachings from Popes ranging from Paul VI to Pope Francis. Magdalene also highlighted *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical on global ecological conversion, and discussed the impacts of industrialisation, farming, deforestation, and livestock on climate change.

Suzerian Francis then addressed the issue of the "throwaway culture." She referenced Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* (21), which highlights the escalating waste crisis, including industrial, medical, plastic, and electronic waste. The Earth is increasingly becoming "an immense pile of filth," damaging landscapes and ecosystems. Mismanaged plastic waste



Fr Patrick Massang CSsR with the participants and facilitators.

is harming wildlife, while microplastics now found in human bodies pose growing health risks.

During the smaller group discussions, different scenarios were presented on how climate change affects families in different social strata.

Robert Arokiasamy shared his thoughts, saying, "Natural disasters affect everyone, but it is the poor who suffer the most, while the wealthy are able to manage their way through with their resources. The rich are primarily responsible for pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, yet it is the poor who bear the brunt of environmental destruction, losing lives, income, and property. While the wealthy remain largely unaffected, it is the poorer communities that face the harshest impacts of pollution and

deforestation. In the end, the Earth suffers due to human activities, and the poor carry the heaviest burden."

Dr Rosalind Simon noted that climate change impacts families in different ways. While the wealthy continue with their lives, untouched by disaster, the poor — who contribute least to carbon emissions — suffer loss of life and daily disruptions. Many of the poor, however, are conscious of their carbon footprint, striving to live sustainably while caring for their families. These stories highlight how the cries of both the poor and the Earth are often ignored by the rich and powerful.

Other participants also shared their perspectives, emphasising the importance of using and consuming only what we truly need, not what

we want. Ultimately, the Earth suffers due to human actions, and the poor bear the heaviest burden. The cries of the Earth and the poor go unheard by those in power, and we, as bystanders, must also take responsibility.

Jeanne J. Saw, a *Laudato Si'* Animator of Animators for Asia and advocate for zero waste, who leads the Creation Justice Movement at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit in Penang, shared a sobering vision of the future impacted by climate change. By 2030, climate change could push 100 million people into poverty, and by 2050, environmental hazards may displace 1 billion people. Over 570 coastal cities could be affected by rising sea levels.

The 60 participants left with an

understanding that ecological conversion involves transforming hearts and minds toward a greater love for God, one another, and creation. They were moved by the appeals from the facilitators.

Halina Gooi, leader of the Friends of Creation ministry at the Church of Divine Mercy Penang, guided the group through a spiritual journey of ecological conversion, a grace of the Holy Spirit. "To receive this grace, one must open oneself through prayer and commitment," she explained. "Recognising the harm done to creation and feeling genuine repentance are crucial steps." She emphasised that by turning to the Creator, we can seek guidance, forgiveness, and renew our commitment to caring for the Earth and all its inhabitants.

OMPH assistant parish priest Fr Patrick Massang, CSsR, signed the Ecology Pledge, witnessed by all present. He acknowledged the challenge ahead, stating, "It's a daunting task, and we can't save the world in a day. But with small steps, we can make a difference that inspires others to change as well."

**Monica Dicom**

## Tampin parish honours golden jubilee couples

TAMPIN: On February 16, the Church of St John Marie Vianney hosted a Golden Jubilee celebration to honour couples married for 50 years or more. The Mass, celebrated by Archbishop Julian Leow and concelebrated by Fr Albet Arockiasamy, Fr Nicholas Hoh, OCD, and Fr Lawrence Ng, CDD, was a tribute to enduring love, faith, and commitment. The church was filled as these couples, who have weathered life's many seasons together, celebrated extraordinary milestones in their marital journeys.

The celebration brought together 14 couples from Tampin, Bahau, Kuala Pilah, Gato, Palong, Gemas,

and Gemencheh — towns that Fr Albet faithfully visits for biweekly Masses. Among the couples were those celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary, including one couple who celebrated an impressive 67 years of marriage, the longest in the group. Family members also attended, adding extra warmth and joy to the celebration.

In his homily, Archbishop Julian reminded the congregation that true happiness and peace come from trusting in Jesus, rather than relying solely on our own wisdom and strength. "In this world, our own wisdom and strength are not enough. Whether we've been married for six years or fifty, we must

place our trust in Jesus. When trust is lost, we must learn to trust again. Only then can we find stability and receive what we need. Dependence and trust in Him will guide us," he said. He reminded the faithful that Jesus is the source of true love and lasting peace.

The couples were then invited to renew their vows to one another. The celebration embraced cultural diversity, highlighting different customs that spoke to the hearts of the Tamil, Chinese, and English-speaking communities.

After Mass, the congregation gathered for fellowship and a cake cutting. Musical entertainment added to the joy. **Priscilla Wilson**



Archbishop Julian Leow and Fr Albet Arockiasamy with the couple celebrating 67 years of marriage.



# Parenting is a mission of love

Deacon Dr Leslie Petrus

MASAI, Johor: Parenting is a sacred mission of love, entrusted by God to Christian parents to pass on His love and teachings to their children. Parents are called to reflect the love of God that Jesus demonstrated, showing us the way to true love, peace, and joy. Every baptised Catholic can experience these blessings by choosing to live in obedience to His commandments.

To deepen their understanding of God's love, a special one-day parenting programme was held on February 15 at the Church of St Theresa. The focus of the event was for parents of children who will be receiving their First Holy Communion this year. The programme was led by Andrew and Andrenne Teoh, and Joseph and Anita Pragasam, members of the "Evening for Parents" team from the Kuala Lumpur Archdiocesan Family Life Commission. Participants from four parishes — St Theresa Masai, St Joseph Plentong, Holy Family Ulu Tiram, and Christ the King Kulai — attended the event, which was organised by the Diocesan Family, Laity & Life Ministry of the Diocese of Malacca Johore.

The programme featured four sessions, including input talks, self-reflection, and group discussions. The group discussions were open and heartfelt, allowing parents to share their struggles, joys, and build new friendships. These conversations highlighted that everyone is facing similar challenges, fostering a sense of unity. The discussions also emphasised the importance of ongoing formation and growth in their parenting journey.

The parents were guided through four key ways to prepare their ten-year-olds for the sacrament of First Holy Communion. In the opening talk, Joseph and Anita shared how their own memories — both good and bad — shaped their parenting



Andrew and Andrenne Teoh presenting to the parents and children.

approach with their two daughters. They highlighted that, when couples marry, no one is taught how to parent; instead, they often reflect on how their own parents raised them. While acknowledging that difficult memories can arise, they encouraged parents to focus on creating positive and lasting memories for their children.

In the second session, Andrew and Andrenne emphasised the importance of listening. They explained that children need their parents' attention, but due to busy work schedules and career pressures, parents often fail to listen when their children seek time and support. The speakers urged parents to recognise the significance of making time to listen to their children, as failing to do so could lead children to seek guidance elsewhere, particularly from social media.

The next session, led by Joseph and Anita, focused on the concept of 'replay' — how we often replicate the parenting styles we experienced growing up. They shared personal stories, reflecting on how their own upbringing influenced their marriage and, in turn, their approach to parenting their two children. One key point

they emphasised was that the quality of the marital relationship, whether positive or negative, inevitably impacts parenting. They also acknowledged that single parents face even greater challenges in this regard.

In the final session, Andrew and Andrenne discussed how parents can be life-giving to their children. They highlighted the importance of living out their faith, sharing the teachings of Jesus Christ, and actively engaging in the Catholic faith by attending Mass every Sunday and participating in parish catechism classes. Parents are encouraged to cultivate a personal relationship with Jesus first, as this strengthens their ability to be good spouses and parents. They also acknowledged the challenges faced by single parents and emphasised the need for the church community to offer support and assistance to them.

Many parents recognised the importance of ongoing formation, as it prompted them to reflect on and reassess their parenting approaches. They were encouraged to return to their parishes, form parenting groups, and organise similar programmes to benefit other parents as well.

## Raising awareness on online safety and child protection

BUKIT MERTAJAM: Caritas Penang, in the third series of its *Safeguarding of Minors and Vulnerable Persons* initiative, hosted a discourse on February 16 to raise awareness among its members and associates about the dangers of harmful online content, including cyberbullying, sexual and violent material, and content related to self-harm.

Caritas Penang remains steadfast in its commitment to recognising and addressing the needs of children and vulnerable individuals, ensuring the creation and maintenance of a safe and protective environment for them.

During the talk, lawyer Christopher Kushi introduced participants to the term Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM), which has replaced Child Pornography in the Sexual Offences Against Children Act 2017. CSAM more accurately reflects the criminal nature of such material, as children can never consent to its creation.

With the growing prevalence of abusive and harmful content involving minors on the internet, it is crucial for the public to understand that all CSAM is a form of child abuse. This abuse can occur in isolated settings, where children are coerced into performing explicit acts for videos that are then sold online. Increased awareness will encourage parents and church members to stay vigilant. Additionally, Malaysia is currently in the process of legislating an Online Safety Bill.

Dr Mary Bharathy, a psychiatrist, addressed the *Psychological Effects*

of Child Sexual Abuse during the talk. She emphasised that the first step in addressing abuse is recognising the signs and symptoms in affected children. These may include engaging in sexual play with peers, imitating sexual acts, showing an obsession with pornography, or participating in explicit conversations. Affected children may also become withdrawn, depressed, and struggle with school performance.

Dr Mary also highlighted the issue of child sexual grooming, where an individual gains a child's trust to cross personal boundaries and gain sexual access. Grooming is increasingly happening through social media platforms, online gaming, and dating websites. Children often find it difficult to disclose their experiences of abuse. As a result, Caritas members must be vigilant in recognising the signs of grooming, responding appropriately, and offering support to the affected children.

To build trust and encourage more people to come forward, Christopher Kushi recommended replacing the term "complaint" with "concern." This shift aims to empower individuals to report any issues they observe related to the protection of children and vulnerable persons. By using the phrase "raising a concern" instead of "making a complaint," individuals are more likely to speak up without feeling they are making an accusation or causing trouble.

This change fosters a culture where raising concerns is viewed as a positive and essential action for ensuring the safety and well-being of children and vulnerable individuals.



Christopher Kushi speaking about Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM).

## Pilgrims from three parishes unite in devotion

PORT DICKSON: On February 11, several families from the Church of St Aloysius, Mantin, Church of St Theresa, Nilai and Church of the Good Shepherd, Setapak, embarked on a Pilgrimage of Hope to the Church of the Immaculate Conception (CIC), led by Fr Christopher Wilvaraj. This pilgrimage was not merely a physical journey, but a spiritual odyssey that brought together parishioners from different backgrounds, united in their devotion and faith.

The pilgrimage commenced with a warm welcome at CIC. The day's activities began with morning prayers, setting a solemn and peaceful tone for the journey ahead. As the pilgrims prepared for the Rosary Walk, there was a palpable sense of unity and purpose.

The highlight was undoubtedly the Rosary Walk, which began at the grotto of Mother Mary.



Pilgrims praying the rosary.

Participants, both young and old, reverently recited the Rosary in all four languages — English, Tamil, Mandarin, and Bahasa Malaysia — demonstrating the rich cultural diversity and unity within the Catholic community. The inclusion of multiple languages highlighted the universality of the Catholic faith, transcending linguistic barriers and bringing people together in prayer.

While the adults engaged in the Rosary Walk, the little ones below the age of 12 were taken to a specially prepared sand pit area where they enjoyed activities under the supervision of volunteers. This thoughtful arrangement ensured that children could also experience joy and companionship while their parents participated in the solemn walk.

The Rosary Walk took pilgrims from the grotto along a serene path to the front of the church, then up the stairs into the classroom, before descending again and completing the walk at the side of the church. Each step of the journey was filled with devotion, as the rhythmic prayers of the Rosary echoed through the church grounds. The natural beauty of the surroundings

added to the sense of peace and reflection.

Fr Christopher in his homily emphasised the importance of hope and faith in the lives of believers, reminding everyone that despite life's challenges, our faith in Christ provides strength and direction. His words resonated with the pilgrims, inspiring them to continue their journey with Christ and fostering a sense of belonging and spiritual renewal.

After the Mass, a special devotion to the Eucharist took place, allowing pilgrims to reflect on the presence of Christ in their lives.

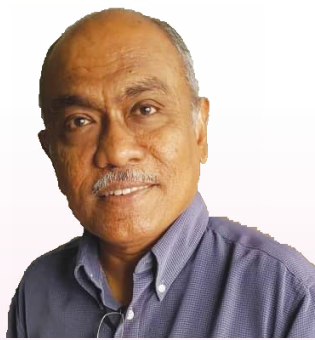
The day concluded with a simple fellowship, where participants shared meals, stories, and laughter. This time of togetherness reinforced the bonds of community and friendship, making the pilgrimage not just a spiritual journey but also a social one. **Selva Manogary**



# Empowering catechists with skills and knowledge

KUALA LUMPUR: A historic milestone was achieved in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur with the launch of the 'Certificate in Catechetics' course on February 15. Organised by the Archdiocesan Catechetical Centre (ACC), this course will run monthly from February to November, focusing on the theological and pastoral aspects of catechesis. Its goal is to educate participants on the nature, purpose, tasks, key themes, and principles of catechesis.

Dr Steven Selvaraju (pic),



Director of the ACC and principal contributor to the course, explained that the course

material is primarily drawn from the Church's catechetical and other relevant documents. He hopes that, through their studies, participants will become more familiar with these documents and that they will serve as a source of insight and inspiration for their ministries.

The 'Certificate in Catechetics' is a higher-level certification course offered by ACC for catechists in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur. It consists of 70 study hours and covers catechetical themes such as

the Identity of Catechesis, the Aim and Tasks of Catechesis, Pedagogy of Faith, Adult catechesis, RCIA and others. Sessions are held once a month on Saturdays and will currently be organised once every two years.

ACC also offers a basic certification course entitled *The Sower and the Seed* that is organised annually and is open to all catechists (ref: *HERALD*, February 23, 2025); and an intermediate level course called, *Journey Through the Catechism of the Catholic*

*Church* (JCCC).

JCCC is a basic theology course for catechists, which was launched in 2024 and is also organised once every two years. "We hope that by offering these courses" says Dr Steven, "our catechists will be certified for the ministry and encouraged to continue growing in the knowledge of the Faith and in equipping themselves with the skills required to become effective and dynamic evangelising catechists." **KL Archdiocesan Catechetical Ministry**

## The first step of a new journey for catechists

KUALA LUMPUR: The inaugural session for the 'Certificate in Catechetics' course titled *Catechesis in the Church's Mission of Evangelisation*, was presented by Dr Steven Selvaraju at the Church of the Holy Rosary on February 15.

Starting with an introduction to the *Directory for Catechesis* that was published in 2020, Dr Steven who is the Director of the Archdiocesan Catechetical Centre led participants on a journey through the various documents and developments that led to its publication: the call for a new approach to catechesis since the Second Vatican Council, new perspectives that came from the writings of Pope Francis, as well as the present realities in the world that have an impact on the ministry of catechesis.

The second session on *God's Revelation and Evangelisation*, emphasised that all catechetical efforts find their source in God's revealing of Himself to us, without which, we could not know God nor His message of salvation. God's self-revelation culminated in the coming of Jesus Christ, the Son of God made Man, who through His life and words, revealed the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Before ascending to heaven, Jesus entrusted His message of salvation to His Apostles with this mandate: 'Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations, baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you...' (Matthew 28: 19-20). This is the origin of the Church's mission

to evangelise, to make known God's message of salvation to the world. Faithful to the teachings they received from Jesus, the Apostles passed on His message through their preaching and writing, which form the foundation of the Church's teachings today.

In the past, the work of transmitting the Good News to non-believers was generally known as "mission". However, in 1974, Pope St Paul VI brought in a new perspective with the term 'evangelisation', stating: to evangelise is to bring "the Good News into all strata of humanity and through its influence transform humanity from within and make it new". Henceforth, the term 'evangelisation' became more commonly used in the Church.

Concluding with the third and final topic for the day, *The Link between Evangelisation and Catechesis*, Dr Steven pointed out that evangelisation is a process that begins with the first proclamation, followed by catechesis and ongoing formation; each of which has its specific role in conversion and faith. The first proclamation introduces the individual to Jesus, leading to an initial faith experience and conversion. Following this, catechesis and ongoing formation help them deepen and mature in their faith, respectively. Therefore, catechesis is closely connected to the first proclamation and ongoing faith formation. Without any one of these aspects, catechesis can lose its impact.

There is, however, a golden

thread that runs through the entire process of evangelisation, known as the *kerygma*. It forms the core-message of the Gospel of salvation. According to Pope Francis, by announcing the *kerygma*, we proclaim the very essence of the Christian faith: "Jesus Christ loves you; He gave His life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you". This central message has to be heard again and again by each one of us. Hence, Christ-centred catechesis is necessary to evangelisation and the mission of the Church; and every catechist is called to be an "evangelising catechist", playing a crucial role in building the Kingdom of God. **KL Archdiocesan Catechetical Ministry**

## PD parish hosts recollection for catechists and RCIA facilitators

PORT DICKSON: The Church of Immaculate Conception held a recollection on February 15 for its catechists and RCIA facilitators. The event, organised by parish priest, Fr Edwin Peter, invited Brother Ron Fernandez, a seminarian currently on pastoral assignment at the Church of the Holy Rosary in Kuala Lumpur, to lead the session.

A total of 25 catechists and RCIA facilitators attended the recollection, which took place at the parish hall. The primary goal of the event was to reflect on the vocation and mission of the catechists, and to conduct the commissioning ceremony, renewing the

promises made by these dedicated members.

The commissioning ceremony serves as an important ritual within the Church, marking the reaffirmation of commitment by catechists and RCIA facilitators to their roles in guiding others on their spiritual journeys. It is an opportunity for these individuals to renew their promises, rededicating themselves to their service within the Church and the broader mission of spreading the Catholic faith. The ceremony highlights the importance of having such spiritual leaders step forward, as their roles are essential in strengthening the community and fostering a

deeper connection to the faith.

Brother Ron Fernandez's leadership and support throughout the recollection were pivotal in making the event meaningful. His contributions underscored the significant role that committed individuals like him play in the parish's mission.

The event concluded with an overwhelming sense of fulfilment, as the participation of all members transformed the recollection into a successful and impactful experience. The presentation was insightful, enriching all those present with valuable knowledge and a renewed sense of purpose.

**Katherine Anthony**



Catechists and RCIA facilitators from the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Port Dickson.



## Chapel Cahaya Kristus celebrates ninth anniversary

NEGERI SEMBILAN: On February 16, Chapel Cahaya Kristus in Kampung Orang Asli Sebir, Labu, Negeri Sembilan, celebrated its 9th anniversary with a simple gathering. The occasion brought together faithful from Kampung Belihoi, Kampung Tekir, the Church of the Visitation, Seremban and the Church of St Aloysius, Mantin, all united in joy and gratitude.

The chapel, which serves as a vital spiritual home for the Orang Asli families in the area, was once a distant destination for Mass. Now, it stands as a place of refuge and hope, meeting the spiritual needs of the community. The anniversary Mass, led by Fr Philip Tay OCD, was a mo-

ment of reflection on the blessings of the past nine years. In his homily, Fr Philip encouraged everyone to continue nurturing their faith and stay steadfast on the path towards Christ.

After the Mass, around 80 people gathered for fellowship, strengthening the bonds of unity that Chapel Cahaya Kristus has fostered since its inception. Despite its remote location, the chapel has become much more than just a place of worship—it's a beacon of faith, love, and togetherness. The anniversary celebration was a beautiful reminder of how faith can transcend challenges and distances, bringing people closer to one another and to God. **Selva Manogary**



# Indonesian Church launches novena for environmental stewardship

JAKARTA: The Archdiocese of Semarang in Indonesia has launched a nine-month Novena for the Integrity of Creation in the Western Yogyakarta Vicariate as part of the Jubilee Year of Hope.

The initiative aligns with the 10th anniversary of *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis' encyclical on environmental care, and aims to promote ecological awareness and action within the

faith community.

The novena, spearheaded by the Commission for Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC), in collaboration with the Liturgy and Social Communications Commissions, is designed to promote reflection and action on environmental issues.

The initiative involves a series of monthly pilgrimages to nine sacred sites across the

vicariate, reinforcing the Church's role in advocating for sustainability and responsible stewardship.

The inaugural event took place on February 9 at the Church of Our Lady of Good Counsel in Wates. The programme emphasised the need for lifestyle changes, including sustainable food consumption, water conservation, and environmental responsibility.

The event concluded with the symbolic handover of tree seedlings, marking the start of a reforestation effort that aims to plant 6,000 trees in the Western Yogyakarta Vicariate's pilgrimage sites.

The next novena pilgrimage is scheduled for March 9 at Maria Dhamparing Kawicaksanan Prayer Garden in Ngembesan, Kapanewon Turi, Sleman. **LiCAS News**

# Stronger global solidarity needed for humanitarian efforts

SRI LANKA:

Dr Benedict Alo D'Rozario

pic,

President of Caritas

Asia, underscored

the importance of

fraternal cooperation

and Caritas' identity

as a faith-driven

humanitarian

organisation during

his speech at the *Partners' Forum of Caritas Sri Lanka* in Colombo.

He emphasised the centrality of charity in the Church's mission and called for strengthened solidarity among Caritas organisations worldwide.

Speaking on the foundation of Caritas' work, Dr D'Rozario highlighted that "Caritas' identity is rooted in the Gospel and Catholic Social Teaching."

He referenced Matthew 25:31-46, explaining that charity is not just an obligation but a measure of faith. "Loving your neighbour means feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, and so forth," he said, stressing that this reflects both love for God and solidarity with the suffering.

Quoting Pope Benedict XVI's *Deus Caritas Est*, Dr D'Rozario reiterated that "the Church's deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: of proclaiming the Word of God, celebrating the sacraments and exercising the ministry of charity."

He also affirmed that "charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others but is part of her nature, an



A UNHCR staff member at the Jordan border hands out juice and biscuits to newly arrived Syrian refugees. (UNHCR/J.Kohler)

indispensable part of her very being."

He traced the evolution of Caritas' approach, from earlier economic-focused aid to a more holistic model of "integral human development."

This shift, he noted, aligns with the teachings of Pope John Paul II, who emphasised that development must encompass economic, social, and spiritual dimensions. "Each person is responsible for developing him or herself and, therefore, he or she has to become agents of their own development," he explained.

Pope Francis' vision of Caritas was also emphasised, particularly his description of the organisation as "the caress of the Church to its people, the caress of the Mother Church to her children, her tenderness and closeness."

Dr D'Rozario detailed the key Catholic Social Teaching principles that guide Caritas' humanitarian work, including the dignity of the human person, preferential option for the poor, economic justice, and care for creation.

He stressed that these principles must be actively implemented in Caritas' mission across different regions.

He also focused on the concept of fraternal cooperation, describing it as "working together with a common purpose, shared vision and co-responsibility."

He highlighted Caritas Internationalis as a prime example, stating that its initiatives "encourage a shared understanding of service, communion, and mission."

Dr D'Rozario pointed out that authentic fraternal cooperation should be "character-

ised by honest feedback and joint planning, accompaniment, transparency and accountability on both sides, and a genuine openness and sensitivity to others' needs, feelings, expertise, experience, and wisdom."

He added that it should be based on "mutual respect, trust, and goodwill."

Dr D'Rozario also addressed the challenges of Caritas' presence in different countries, emphasising that such representation must "enhance Caritas fraternal cooperation and not diminish it."

He outlined specific principles guiding Caritas' presence abroad, including securing agreement with local bishops and national Caritas offices and ensuring alignment with national social pastoral plans.

He called for stronger collaboration not only within Caritas but also with external organisations, provided that such partnerships align with Caritas' mission.

"To work with respect for the values and ethos inherent in other organisations" is essential, he noted, while ensuring that Caritas' own principles remain clear and uncompromised.

Dr D'Rozario concluded with a call for a deeper commitment to solidarity, emphasising the need to embrace a culture of listening and understanding.

"Listening with heart, seeing by our heart, and taking from our heart is our 'way of proceeding' or 'modus operandi' to facilitate coordination, fraternal cooperation, and collective work in serving, accompanying and defending the poor," he said. **Mark Saludes, LiCAS News**

# US bishops sue Trump administration over refugee funding freeze

WASHINGTON: The US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) is suing the Trump administration over what the bishops say is an unlawful suspension of funding for refugee programmes in the United States.

Upon taking office in January, President Donald Trump issued sweeping executive orders that, among other measures, directed a freeze on foreign assistance funds and grants, with the White House seeking to uproot left-wing initiatives in federally funded programmes.

The orders have led to a flurry of legal challenges from advocates and nonprofit groups arguing that the funding freeze is unlawful. Other groups such as Catholic Charities have urged the Trump administration to reconsider the freeze, citing the "crucial care" the funding helps provide.

In their lawsuit, filed on February 18 in US district court in Washington, DC, the USCCB notes that it has worked with the US Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration for "nearly half a century" in order to assist with refugee resettlement in the US.

The refugee bureau has committed "around \$65 million in federal funding" to the USCCB and its affiliates for refugee services, the

bishops say in their suit. Yet on Jan 24 the State Department suspended funding "without prior notice," with the bishops receiving a " cursory, two-page letter" informing them of the suspension.

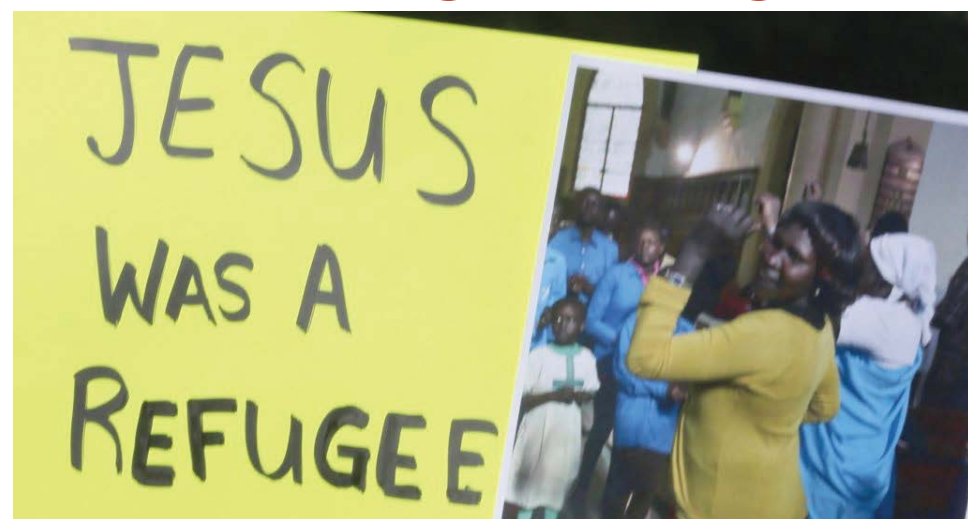
The results of the suspension have been "devastating," the bishops say, with the prelates reporting "millions of dollars in pending, unpaid reimbursements for services already rendered to refugees," along with "millions more each week."

"USCCB has already been forced to initiate layoffs for 50 employees," the suit says. "It faces irreparable damage to its long-standing refugee resettlement programs and its reputation and relationship with its sub-recipients and the refugee populations it serves."

Downstream partners, meanwhile, have also been forced to lay off staff, the bishops say, while refugees already in the US "may soon be cut off from support".

The bishops argue that the funding freeze violates the federal Administrative Procedure Act, which oversees how federal agencies administer rules and processes. The freeze also violates the separation of powers under the US Constitution, the lawsuit says.

In their suit the bishops ask the court to strike down the funding suspension and block



A protester holds up a sign during an October 15, 2019, demonstration outside the US Capitol in Washington against the first Trump administration's cuts in the number of refugees to be admitted under the US resettlement program. (OSV News photo/Bob Roller, CNS file)

the federal government from implementing it.

In early February, the Jesuit Refugee Service argued that more than 100,000 refugees across the globe will be negatively impacted by the Trump funding freeze, with the pause bringing about a "total work stoppage" for the Catholic organisation.

The US bishops in January asked Catholics

to reach out to their members of Congress and request the resumption of foreign aid funding following the White House's freeze.

The pause "will be detrimental to millions of our sisters and brothers who need access to lifesaving humanitarian, health, and development assistance," the bishops said. **Daniel Payne, CNA**



Each year, Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent. This year, Ash Wednesday will be on March 5. Ash Wednesday centres on the Christian's focus on repentance and prayer, typically through personal and communal confession during 40 days of fasting and penance that lead up to Easter Sunday. Christ's faithful have the sign of the cross made on their foreheads with ashes to mark this holy day. While Ash Wednesday and Lent have been observed by Catholics and some Protestants for centuries, today, more Protestants also choose to observe the tradition.

### Biblical Roots

Though Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent, Lent is the older of the two. Lent was established and accepted only after the early Church sorted out how to calculate the date of Easter. At the Council of Nicaea in AD 325, "all the Churches agreed that Easter, the Christian Passover, should be celebrated on the Sunday following the first full moon after the vernal equinox." Since the spring equinox usually falls on Mar 21, the date of Easter can occur anytime between Mar 22 and Apr 25. Depending on when Easter is, Ash Wednesday can fall on any date from Feb 4 to Mar 11.

The Council of Nicaea established a 40-day fasting period for Lent, rooted in biblical writings. God sent rain on the earth for 40 days and 40 nights when Noah and his family went into the ark (Genesis 7:4). Moses sat atop Mount Sinai receiving instructions from God for 40 days (Exodus 24:18). Moses repented and fasted in response to the making of the Golden calf (Exodus 34:27-28). Elijah "walked forty days and forty nights to the mountain of God, Horeb" when he flees Jezebel's wrath (1 Kings 19:8). The 40 days of Lent, however, are primarily identified with the time Jesus spent in the desert fasting, praying, and being tempted (Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13, and Luke 4:1-13). However, though the length of Lent was set by the council, its start date in relation to Easter was still undecided.

In 601 AD, the start date of Lent was established. Pope Gregory I (540-604) moved the beginning of Lent to 46 days before Easter and simultaneously established Ash Wednesday. This allowed for 40 days of fasting, where only one full meal and no meat is to be consumed, with six Sundays counted as feast days, when fasting does not apply, for a total of 46 days. He also established the tradition of marking Catholics' foreheads with ashes in the shape of a cross.

### Why Ashes?

The practice of marking oneself with ashes has ancient origins. In the Old Testament, ashes are used liturgically to signify mourning, mortality, and penance. In Esther 4:1, Mordecai puts on sackcloth and ashes when he hears of the decree of King Ahasuerus of Persia to kill all of the Jewish people in the Persian Empire. In Job 42:6, at the end of his confession, Job repents in sackcloth and ashes. In the city of Nineveh, after Jonah preaches of conversion and repentance, all the people proclaim a fast and put on sackcloth, and even the king covers himself with sackcloth and sits in ashes, as told in Jonah 3:5-6. The prophet Jeremiah calls for repentance by saying: "O daughter of my people, gird on sackcloth, roll in the ashes" (Jer 6:26). The prophet Daniel recounted pleading to God: "I turned to the Lord God, pleading in earnest prayer, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes" (Daniel 9:3). Just before the New Testament period, the rebels fighting for Jewish independence, the Maccabees, prepared for battle using ashes: "That day they fasted and wore sackcloth; they sprinkled ashes on their heads and tore their clothes" (1 Maccabees 3:47; 4:39). Examples of the practice among Jews are found in several other books of the Bible (Numbers 19:9, 19:17, Jonah 3:6, Esther 4:1, and Hebrews 9:13). Jesus is quoted as speaking of the practice in Matthew 11:21 and Luke 10:13: "If the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago (sitting) in sackcloth and ashes."

In the early Catholic Church, Eusebius, a historian of the Church, wrote in his book, *The History of the Church*, that



an apostate named Natalis once came to Pope Zephyrinus, dressed in sackcloth and ashes, begging for forgiveness. By the Middle Ages, those who were dying lay on the ground on top of sackcloth and were sprinkled with ashes. The priest would bless the dying person with holy water, saying, "Remember, man, that thou art dust, and to dust thou shalt return" (*Memento, homo, quia pulvis es, et in pulverem reverteris*).

### Repent and Believe in the Gospel

Ashes symbolise our sinfulness and remind us of penance. They also remind us of our mortality; one day, our bodies will return to dust. The Liturgical imposition of ashes on Ash Wednesday is a "Sacramental", not a "Sacrament", so they do not have to be administered by a cleric. Some churches offer take-home packets for people who cannot attend in person due to ill health.

The ashes are blessed for Catholics using Holy Water or olive oil, following liturgical tradition. In the Catholic Church, ashes being a "Sacramental" may be given to anyone who wishes to receive them, as opposed to a Catholic "Sacrament", which is reserved for Church members, except in cases of grave necessity.

In the 1969 missal of the Roman Rite, an alternative formula (based on Mark 1:15) was introduced and given first place: "Repent, and believe in the Gospel." The older formula was translated as "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." The old formula, based on the words spoken to Adam

and Eve after their sin, reminds Catholics of their sinfulness and mortality and, thus, implicitly of their need to repent in time.

In the admonition given ("Repent and believe in the Gospel"), the connection of the ashes to the Gospels, which record the life of Jesus, comes from their preparation. The ashes used each year are created by burning the blessed palms from the previous year's Palm Sunday celebration, which commemorates Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem during the week of His death. Making the sign of the cross with these ashes connects the beginning of Lent, which starts 46 days earlier, to the commencement of Holy Week, the Sunday before Easter. Today, Ash Wednesday is one of the most heavily attended non-Sunday Masses, even though it is not a holy day of obligation in the liturgical year. Worship services are also held on Ash Wednesday in Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian churches, Methodists, Moravians and some other Protestant churches, which also sometimes observe Lent. Most importantly, however, Ash Wednesday and Lent lead up to the holiest day in the Christian calendar, Easter, which commemorates the resurrection of Jesus. Ashes and fasting, drawing on several biblical traditions, create a season of penitence and expectation as Easter approaches. In this way, the Bible's impact on our rituals and sense of sacred time becomes clear.

During Lent, the people do not sing hymns that include the phrase "Alleluia." Alleluia is a Hebrew word that means

"Praise the Lord." During Lent, the Church adopts the same spirit of exile experienced by Moses and the Israelites as they wandered in the desert for 40 years, saying, "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" (Psalm 137:4).

### Canon Law on Fasting and Abstinence

Can. 1252 of the 1983 Code of Canon Law prescribes that "the law of abstinence binds those who have completed their fourteenth year. The law of fasting binds those who have attained their majority until the beginning of their sixtieth year. Pastors of souls and parents are to ensure that even those who, by reason of their age are not bound by the law of fasting and abstinence, are taught the true meaning of penance." Can. 1253 stipulates that "the Conference of Bishops can determine more precisely the observance of fast and abstinence as well as substitute other forms of penance, especially works of charity and exercises of piety, in whole or in part, for abstinence and fast."

### Power of Fasting

There is great wisdom in the Christian practice of fasting — even though its benefits are largely forgotten! Fasting is a spiritual exercise and, as such, is primarily an act of the inner life. Authentic fasting draws us nearer to God and opens our hearts to receive His many gifts. Fasting is also a sharp reminder that there are more important things in life than food. Authentic Christian fasting helps to release us from our attachments to the things of this world. It is often these worldly attachments that prevent us from becoming the best version of ourselves. Fasting also serves as a reminder that everything in this world is passing and thus encourages us to consider life beyond death. Go without food for several hours, and you quickly realise how truly weak, fragile, and dependent we are. This knowledge of self, strips away the arrogance and fosters a loving acknowledgement of our utter dependence on God. Ash Wednesday is a powerful day to rediscover the power of fasting in your life!

### Conclusion

Repentance serves as a powerful invitation. When John the Baptist first appeared in the desert of Judea, his message was clear: "Repent, prepare the way of the Lord" (Matthew 3:2). Later, when Jesus began His ministry, He reiterated this message: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17). So, what does it mean to repent today, over two thousand years later? The essence of repentance remains the same for us as it was for those who walked the dusty paths, yearning to draw closer to Jesus as He made His way through their towns and villages. To repent means "to turn back to God." We all find ourselves in need of turning back to God numerous times throughout the day, in both minor and significant ways. Repentance is not about guilt, nor is it a source of shame; instead, it reveals the truth that we become better versions of ourselves when we take the step to return to His side!

Ash Wednesday is a wonderful opportunity to make yourself 100 per cent available to God! How available to God are you? 50 per cent? 75 per cent? 96.4 per cent? No matter what your answer is, Ash Wednesday is the perfect time to decide how you will spend this Lent increasing that number. **Fr Dr Merlin Rengith Ambrose DCL**

**Fr Dr Merlin Rengith Ambrose**, a priest from the diocese of Kottar is currently a professor of Canon Law at St Peter's Pontifical Institute in Bangalore and the Executive Secretary of the Commission for Canon Law in the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India.



(photo/John Ragai)



## Pope's prayer intention for March

# The heavy burden of brokenness

Over the years, walking alongside people in my priestly ministry, I have encountered countless families struggling with division, resentment, and wounds that refuse to heal. I have sat with parents estranged from their children, siblings who no longer speak, and spouses who carry years of unspoken hurt. I have witnessed the tears of those who long for reconciliation but do not know where to begin. And I have also seen the heavy silence of those who have given up, believing that some wounds can never be mended.

It is not that people are heartless; rather, their pain runs so deep that they feel incapable of moving beyond it. Over time, what began as a rift solidifies into a norm, and reconciliation seems impossible. Yet, beneath the silence, I have sensed an unspoken yearning for healing — the quiet suffering of those who wish they had reached out before it was too late. I have seen the sorrow of reconciliation that never came, the anguish of words left unsaid before one party passes away.

Pope Francis, in his prayer intention for families in crisis, highlights the urgent need for families to seek healing. His words resonate deeply, as he recognises how vital reconciliation is to human flourishing. Families carry the weight of history, love, duty, and, sometimes, unbearable pain. The journey towards healing is neither linear nor easy, but it remains one of the most vital and powerful calls of our lives.

In the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32), Jesus presents a deep image of reconciliation within a family. The father, though his son's actions led to a separation, chooses unconditional love and grace over judgment. He welcomes his son back with open arms, a powerful reminder that healing is not about erasing past pain, but about embracing one another despite it. True healing lies in the power of love to transcend hurt, showing that forgiveness is a choice that moves beyond the injury itself. This resonates with the words of Jesus in Matthew 18:21-22, where He teaches that forgiveness must be given



## PRAYER PRISM

Fr Fabian Dicom

generously, as the Father offers us His mercy.

### The struggle of filial piety and family expectations

In many Asian cultures, filial piety is deeply ingrained, shaping relationships between parents and children. While honouring one's parents is a commandment (Exodus 20:12), misunderstandings arise when this expectation demands unquestioning obedience, even when it leads to deep personal conflicts. Many children, even as adults, struggle between pleasing their parents and trusting their own wisdom in shaping their future. This tension can create wounds that linger for years, making reconciliation even more difficult.

One of the most painful examples I have encountered is when families reject a child's choice of spouse due to racial or religious differences. In our multiracial and multi-religious society, interfaith and interracial marriages are common, yet they often come with significant struggles. Many couples face rejection, sometimes outright disownment, because of their decision to marry outside their ethnic or religious background. Some parents see this as a betrayal, while the couple simply desires to build a life together in love and mutual respect. These divisions can last for years, with children caught in the impossible position of choosing between family and love.

Traditional family ideals emphasise the importance of mutual respect, where love

is understood not as control, but as the space for each person to grow in

**Families carry the weight of history, love, duty, and, sometimes, unbearable pain.**



(Hananeke Studio)

freedom and dignity. However, when filial piety is misinterpreted as blind obedience, it can lead to strained relationships rather than fostering stronger bonds. True love within the family should not seek to suppress the individuality of each person but rather help them mature and develop in a healthy, supportive environment. The Church teaches that true parental love leads children to maturity, not submission (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2222-2230). Reconciliation in such situations requires more than apologies; it calls for a deeper transformation in how love, respect, and autonomy are understood.

### The dark reality of domestic violence and abuse

The wounds of family brokenness become even more complex when they stem from domestic violence and sexual abuse. Here, the path to healing is far more difficult. Forgiveness cannot be simplistically prescribed; it must be approached with care, justice, and protection for the victim. Too often, survivors are pressured to reconcile for the sake of maintaining family unity, yet without true accountability and transformation, such reconciliation becomes another layer of suffering.

Healing in these cases must prioritise safety and justice. Pope Francis has spoken strongly against the tolerance of abuse, calling for a culture where the dignity of every person, especially the vulnerable, is upheld. In cases of deep trauma, forgiveness does not mean immediate reconciliation. Instead, it can be the long, arduous journey of reclaiming personal dignity and choosing not to be consumed by hatred. Some may never fully reconcile with their abusers, and that, too, must be acknowledged as a valid path toward healing.

### The long road to forgiveness

Forgiveness is often misunderstood as a moment of letting go, but in reality, it is a process — a difficult, messy, and deeply human journey. Some families find a way through their wounds, rediscovering each other's gifts despite their differences. Others struggle for years, never quite reaching full reconciliation, but perhaps

moving toward a place of peace within themselves.

One moving story I would like to share is about a father and son who had been estranged for decades. The father, set in his ways, could not accept his son's life choices. The son, hurt and angry, cut off all contact. It was only on the father's deathbed that the son returned, and in those final moments, years of silence and resentment melted into a single embrace. It was not a perfect resolution, but it was a step towards healing.

At the same time, I have seen families where reconciliation never came, and the grief of unresolved conflict lingered long after one party had passed away. These stories remind us that while forgiveness is possible, it is not automatic. It requires effort, grace, and sometimes, the willingness to take the first step even when the other is not yet ready. As St John Paul II wrote in *Dives in Misericordia*, forgiveness is both a human and divine act, requiring God's grace to be fully embraced. He emphasises that while God's mercy and forgiveness are freely given, humans are also called to extend that forgiveness to others, drawing strength from God's grace.

### A call to healing

Pope Francis' prayer intention for families in crisis is a call for all of us to reflect on the wounds within our own homes. Whether we have suffered division, misunderstanding, or even more, deep betrayals, we are invited to seek the grace to move toward healing. This does not mean forgetting or pretending that pain does not exist. Rather, it means choosing to confront it with love, courage, and faith.

For some, reconciliation will mean mending broken relationships. For others, it may mean finding peace within themselves, even if reconciliation with the other remains out of reach. But in all cases, the journey towards healing is one that can transform not just our families but our very souls.

May we find the strength, to take that first step, to seek the grace of forgiveness, and to walk, however slowly, toward healing together.

**Fr Fabian Dicom** is the National Director of Caritas Malaysia





## Nun makes history as Kerala's first medical officer

Sister Jean Rose, a member of the Sisters of the Destitute, has made history as the first nun to be appointed as a medical officer in a Kerala government hospital.

According to the "Voice of Nuns," an initiative of the Kerala Conference of Major Superiors and the Kerala Catholic Bishops' Council Jagratha Commission, Sr Rose is the first Catholic nun to serve as a medical officer in a government hospital in the southern Indian state.

Sr Rose, also known as Rosamma Thomas, did her MBBS and post-graduate studies in anaesthesia at St John's Medical College in Bengaluru.

She served for more than 10 years at a Church-managed hospital in Marayoor, a remote village home to several tribal communities.

She has successfully passed the Kerala Public Service Commission examination. Two years ago, she received her first appointment at the Kattappana Taluk Hospital.

She later sought a transfer to the Marayoor Family Health Centre, as she had worked in the region during her MBBS and National Health Mission service.

"While pursuing my MBBS and PG, and during my service with the National Health Mission, I worked in Marayoor," she explained her decision to return.

The Facebook page of the "Voice of Nuns" stated that she specifically requested the opportunity to serve tribal and underprivileged communities in the Marayoor region.

"As part of a community that works for the destitute, I prefer to serve the poor and underprivileged," she told Press Trust of India news agency. After completing her schooling in Chettuthodu, near Pala in Kottayam district, she participated in charitable services. **Matters India**



One morning in early 2003, Missionaries of Africa Bro Jacek Rakowski felt overwhelmed after he found a young boy lying down along one of the sprawling shopping corridors of Zambia's capital.

Rakowski, now the director of St Lawrence Home of Hope, had been in Zambia less than a week and was disturbed because he had never seen homeless children in his home country, Poland.

"I didn't know what to do next, but after I went back to my community, my conscience troubled me," he told *Global Sisters Report*.

The following day, Rakowski found the same boy lying in the same spot. Moved with compassion, he realised something was wrong and bought him a meal despite the language barrier. Despite his missionary calling, dealing with street children was never part of his plans.

"I took him by hand, and I went to an eatery along Lusaka's main Cairo road and bought him some hamburgers, and we parted," he said.

The Missionaries of Africa, an international missionary society of priests and brothers, established St Lawrence Home of Hope in 1998 for neglected, traumatised and abused children who require care, protection and therapeutic intervention.

In collaboration with the Zambia Association of Sisterhoods, the sisters of the Little Servants of Mary Immaculate have also been helping children at the facility to escape neglect, homelessness, physical and sexual abuse, and drug addiction.

"We want to withdraw them from the street before the trauma happens because kids reach a point of no return if they stay too long on the street. If left unchecked, it damages their psyche, body and identity, and later drug addiction kicks in," Rakowski said.

Just like other vulnerable kids who crowd Zambia's street corners for handouts, Amos Zulu (not his real name) was filled with fear. One frigid night, he lay awake on his thin sponge mattress wondering how to relocate to another township from Lusaka's notorious slum of Chibolya, a renowned hub for drug trafficking, alcohol abuse and burglary, among other illicit activities, where even the police do not dare to tread. "I fled from my uncle's house at the age of 12 after I endured physical and mental abuse. I then joined a gang of drug dealers in our neighbourhood to earn a living," Zulu told *GSR*.

Zulu, 15, eluded police arrest and realised how dangerous drug dealing was.



*Sr Catherine Mpolokoso of the Little Servants of Mary Immaculate conducts lessons for young learners at St. Lawrence Home of Hope in Lusaka, Zambia. (Derrick Silimina)*

The fierce anti-drug security crack squad made him quit drug trafficking and go to St Lawrence Home of Hope.

"I feel safe and liberated now after I came here through the child protection unit. With the sisters' therapeutic interventions and support from [the] management of this facility, I now live my life anew."

The Missionaries of Africa began the centre as a "Street Children Project" but later renamed it a "Children-in-Street Situation."

"Once you are labelled as a street kid, it doesn't matter how much you have changed, how good a person you are, or how many diplomas you have, as that name will follow you for the rest of your life," Rakowski explained.

The residential home for boys offers children a new start and reintegrates them into their families, homes and society while helping them regain their childhood, confidence and dreams.

"We undertake various counselling activities at this facility to help the boys understand who they are, where they come from and help them become resilient despite what they face in life," said Sr Catherine Mpolokoso of the Little Servants of Mary Immaculate.

Mpolokoso, the Zambia Association of Sisterhoods project coordinator, added that staff at the facility have benefited from capacity building through training to enable them to undertake their humanitarian work.

She explained that her congregation's charism, "To reach out to the vulnerable, the children and those who are rejected by society in ensuring that human dignity is upheld," is paramount to uplifting the lives of humanity.

Mpolokoso said that the Zambia Association of Sisterhoods has been pivotal in addressing challenges faced by vulnerable children at the facility through the Catholic Care for Children in Zambia program. The programme focuses on child neglect and poverty and has managed more than 40 child care facilities since 2017, including St. Lawrence House of Hope.

"We emphasise providing spiritual and emotional support tailored to each child's dignity. We actively work to trace families, communicate with them, and facilitate reintegration if suitable," she said.

Some boys resist the educational opportunities provided and return to the streets. Those who stay often progress to secondary and tertiary education, demonstrating the programme's long-term potential for positively influencing their lives.

"I help them to be resilient and understand that their circumstances are not permanent because any life crisis can be rectified," Mpolokoso concluded.

Rakowski said the organisation often reaches out to kids separated from their families. They also participate in a juvenile diversion programme [for] kids who committed crimes and went to court.

"The court sentences them to be here for therapy because [the] government recognises that juveniles who come in conflict with the law need help and not punishment," he said.

The facility receives an average of 10 children per month, and more than 1,200 children have passed through it since its inception. As of January 2025, 64 children have been reunited with their families. **Derrick Silimina, NCR**



During the festive season, when many cultural celebrations take place, the inculturation of faith within the Catholic Church often becomes a focal point of discussion among many Catholic faithful. With the widespread use of social media, videos of the cultural influences that permeate into the Catholic Mass have become more visible than ever before.

What worries people is the fear that cultural practices may be misrepresented as religious. Naturally, there are those who resist change, preferring to stick to established ways of worship and practice. I have received queries from individuals who mention feeling uneasy with such practices and not understanding why there is a need for them. Supporters argue that these are purely celebrations of cultural traditions and not religious practices. This exposure highlights the ongoing polemics between tradition and contemporary cultural practices within the Church. The argument made by both sides have merit, but in the end, we adhere to official Church teachings and practices.

Inculturation of faith is a profound and dynamic process that involves integrating the Christian faith with various cultural practices. This is especially true in Malaysia, where the rich traditions and cultures truly embody the essence of Asia with all its rich traditions and cultures. Positively viewed, inculturation is not merely about adapting religious practices to fit cultural norms but rather about fostering a deeper and meaningful dialogue between faith and culture. The engagement between the Gospel and a specific culture is a task entrusted to theologians. Their goal is to conceptually safeguard the Gospel's integrity



**Turun Padang**

CHRISTOPHER KUSHI

# Inculturation of faith

while fostering an awareness and sensitivity to diverse cultural contexts.

Pope Francis, in his Apostolic Letter appointing Cardinal Sebastian Francis, Bishop of Penang, to the Cardinalate, eloquently shares the beauty and universality of the Catholic Church. This Apostolic

Letter serves as a message to the Catholic faithful from our Holy Father, emphasising the importance of embracing the Inculturation of Faith. Pope Francis has enumerated the following points:

"The rich reality of the Church in her variety of languages and cultures; that is her universality, which has nothing to do with uniformity.

Universality was revealed on the morning of Pentecost by the symphonic unity of "Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs" (Acts 2:9-11).

The call to universality impels us to implant the faith in every culture, each with its own values and distinctive characteristics (inculturation of the faith). A faith incapable of inculturation is not a genuine faith, for it succumbs to the temptation of "uniformity", typical of a rigid way of thinking. At the same time, alongside the inculturation of faith, there is the evangelisation of cultures. These two aspects – inculturation of faith and evangelisation of cultures – are inseparable."

In reference to the event at Pentecost, Pope Francis emphasises the universality of the Church, celebrating its diversity, integrating and respecting various cultural practices, and avoiding the trap of uniformity. The three salient points our Holy Father forwards is the universality of the Church, the inculturation of faith and the evangelisation of cultures.

In this regard, Simon Wong, Head of the Penang Diocesan New Evangelisation Commission (PDNEC) has thoughtfully organised an Interactive Forum titled *Inculturation of Faith* to be held on March 30 at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Penang. The event will feature a distinguished panel comprising Fr Michael Cheah, Fr Arulnathan Joseph, Fr Desmond Jansen and Deacon Lazarus Jonathan. This panel will delve into and explain the blending of Christianity with local culture, Chinese inculturated Mass, ancestral veneration and the *Ponggal* festival, all within the context of the Inculturation of Faith. The forum promises to be an enlightening discussion that bridges and explains cultural traditions and faith practices. Simon mentions that many people want to question and understand from Church clergy on how the Church draws the line between cultural and religious practices.

The overall sentiment regarding inculturation is one of positive reception towards the integration of Asian cultural elements into Church practices, particularly during cultural celebrations. Malaysia's rich cultural diversity offers a unique opportunity for the Malaysian Church to celebrate this richness in unity with the Universal Church, both in liturgy and pastoral life. The Church's mission must always remain relevant to local

communities, recognizing that culture is an integral part of a person's identity.

Reflecting on my earlier years, I remember how commonly the term "Roman Catholic Church" was used. Today, however, I find myself more aligned with identifying as a member of the "Universal Catholic Church". This shift highlights a broader embrace of the Church's universal nature and inclusivity, signifying a deeper connection with its global and diverse community.

The Federation of Asian Bishops Conference (FABC) in 2023 have stated the FABC continues to engage in a three-fold dialogue: with Asian peoples (especially the poor) through efforts towards integral development, Asian cultures (inculturation), and Asian religions (interfaith dialogue). This vision of a "triple dialogue" has constructively guided the FABC for over the five decades. The local Asian Churches are committed to the challenge of inculturating the Christian faith in the Asian milieu. The FABC has expressed this vision in one of its early documents: "The decisive new phenomenon for Christianity in Asia will be the emergence of genuine Christian communities in Asia – Asian in their way.

*Christopher Kushi possesses experience across a diverse array of job portfolios both in government and private sector. He is happy to share his professional journey and is engaging with the principles outlined in Pope Francis' encyclical Fratelli Tutti to transcend border and embrace a culture of fraternity, social friendship and dialogue.*

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

## BE OUR GUEST

Interfaith marriages refer to unions between a Catholic and either a baptized non-Catholic or a non-baptised person. These marriages are often described as "mixed religion" or "disparity of cult." Parish priests commonly report performing more interfaith marriages than those between two Catholics. As this trend continues to rise, it raises the question: what pastoral responses can the Church offer to these couples? Ideally, priests and couples involved in marriage preparation programmes can explore new and meaningful ways to help prepare these couples for a lasting and harmonious marriage.

Why interfaith marriages? One might be quick to conclude that the Catholic partner who marries either a baptised Christian or a non-baptised person is somehow weak in their own faith. However, such a conclusion would be both simplistic and unreflective.

Many, especially from the older generation, argue that interfaith marriages were unheard of in the past, yet they now seem to be becoming more common. Historically, the Church used harsh language to describe the denominations to which non-Catholic Christians belonged — terms like "heretical" or "schismatic sect" (Canon 1060 of the 1917 Code of Canon Law). While the 1983 Code softened the language toward non-Catholic Christians and non-Christians, it still considers such marriages illicit (Canon 1124).

The teachings of Vatican II emphasised the importance of respecting a person's conscience and religious liberty, as well as acknowledging the seeds of truth present in other religions. This shift is reflected in the 1983 Code and has contributed to the rise of interfaith marriages in our country.

For many elderly Catholics, however, interfaith marriages remain absolutely forbidden. Their primary concern often centres around the faith of the future children, especially in marriages of disparity of cult. This concern remains a significant factor in the

ongoing debate surrounding such unions.

### The danger of faith

There is always a potential danger in interfaith marriages. As moral theologian Karl Peschke, who taught in the Philippines and whose two volumes on moral theology were once used as textbooks at College General Penang, noted, "Mixed marriages always present a problem, especially when the non-Catholic partner holds strong religious convictions."

### Mixed marriage and the Eucharist

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that "the Eucharist is the source and summit of Christian life." If we take this teaching seriously, then the importance of the Eucharist cannot be overlooked, especially for married couples who wish to live out their Christian faith within their families and share it with their children. Vatican II redefined marriage as a "covenant between two persons," contrasting the pre-Vatican II view, which saw marriage primarily as a "juridical contract."

In some dioceses, the Catholic partner must seek permission from the bishop in order to receive Holy Communion in a mixed marriage. However, Christians are already in communion with Jesus through Baptism and their relationship with Him, signifying an existing union. So, why does this become a point of contention when it comes to the Eucharist?

What can the local Church do? I believe the Church should approach this topic with greater depth, not only by examining Canon law but also by considering the social realities within our local community. Church leaders should consult theologians who have extensively studied marriage, as well as sociologists and experienced pastoral theologians, to help us understand the issue from multiple perspectives. Each of these experts can offer valuable insights. Too often, I have heard people turn to canon lawyers for answers. While their contributions are important, they

tend to focus primarily on the legal aspects, which may not fully address the complexities of the issue.

After being a priest for 45 years, I believe this topic should not be abandoned once we are ordained. Seminarians spend more years studying to be ordained than many other professionals, and they must delve deeply into the subject of marriage. However, we minister in a changing world, and our understanding must evolve.

Much is said after our ordination. In *Familiaris Consortio*, Pope John Paul II taught that "with regard to the sharing of the non-Catholic party in Eucharistic Communion, the norm issued by the Secretariat for promoting unity should be followed" (FC 78).

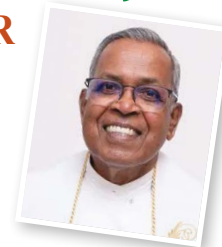
Marriage is a path to Christian perfection: "Those who administer the Sacrament to others are called to care for each other's spiritual welfare. God comes to each partner, and through the other, they both return to God, becoming a means of grace to one another in every detail of daily life" (V. Tirimanna, *A Few Theological and Pastoral Perspectives*).

Furthermore, as Karl Rahner long ago pointed out, it is difficult to divide the world, created by God, into the "sacred" and the "non-sacred." As he wrote, "The Spirit blows where He wills" (Jn 3:8).

This issue becomes even more complicated when we consider the historical fact that marriage was officially recognised as a sacrament only in the thirteenth century (L. Orsy).

Some of us priests view secularism, secularisation, and the secular world as enemies of the Church. This often leads to a tendency to react to these terms, seeing them as inherently anti-Catholic. However, the concept of the secular is actually rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition. It was Christianity

## By Fr Joseph Stephen CSsR



that gave people the power to shape and engage with nature. Jesus did not condemn those who made Jerusalem a secular city; instead, He wept over it.

The Church must learn to work and live within a secular world. We cannot afford to be a right-wing or left-wing Church; we must be a Church for all people.

Perhaps this is a topic we have not fully understood, and one that requires ongoing reflection and learning.

### How can people who are involved in marriage preparation help?

While it is true that they carry a significant responsibility in the parish or diocese, the question remains: how much support does the Church provide to help them become effective formators? Are we preparing them to understand the realities couples face today as they prepare for marriage? Do they grasp the theology of marriage, are they familiar with the latest teachings on marriage, the Holy Father's views on the topic, or the documents from the Council on interreligious dialogue? Have we ever considered inviting a Hindu teacher to contribute to Catholic marriage preparation by offering insight into their understanding of marriage and the meaning of their rituals?

Ultimately, priests strive to offer couples a meaningful and rich celebration of their marriage. We must continually pray for the couples for whom we serve as official witnesses, asking God to guide them in their journey together.

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

## Interfaith marriages in our country





Fr Ron Rolheiser

# Our struggle with love

Several years ago, a Presbyterian minister I know challenged his congregation to open its doors and its heart more fully to the poor. Initially the congregation responded with enthusiasm and a number of programmes were introduced to invite people from the less-privileged economic areas of the city, including a number of street-people, to come to their church.

But the romance soon died as coffee cups and other loose items began to disappear, some handbags were stolen, and the church and meeting space were often left messy and soiled. A number of the congregation began to complain and demand an end to the experiment: "This isn't what we expected! Our church isn't clean and safe anymore! We wanted to reach out to these people and this is what we get! This is too messy to continue!"

But the minister held his ground, pointing out that their expectations were naïve, that what they were experiencing was precisely part of the cost of reaching out to the poor, and that Jesus assures us that loving is unsafe and messy, not just in reaching out to the poor but in reaching out to anyone.

We like to think of ourselves as gracious and loving but, truth be told, that's often predicated on a naïve notion of love. We struggle to love as Jesus invites us to love, namely, to love

each other as I have loved you. The last clause in the sentence contains the real challenge: Jesus doesn't say, love each other according to the spontaneous reactions of your heart; nor, love each other as society defines love. Rather, love each other as I have loved you.

And, for the most part, we struggle to do that.

- We struggle to love our enemies, to turn the other cheek and to reach across to embrace those who hate us. We struggle to pray for those who oppose us.
- We struggle to forgive those who hurt us, to forgive those who murder our loved ones. We struggle to ask God to forgive the people who are hurting us. We struggle to believe, like Jesus, that they are not really cognizant of what they are doing.
- We struggle to be big-hearted and take the high road when we've been slighted or ignored, and we struggle then to let understanding and empathy replace bitterness and our urge to withdraw. We struggle to let go of grudges.
- We struggle to be vulnerable, to risk humiliation and rejection in our offers of love. We struggle to give up our fear of being misunderstood, of not looking good, of not appearing strong and in control. We struggle to set out barefooted, to love without security in our pockets.

• We struggle to open our hearts enough to imitate Jesus' universal, non-discriminating embrace, to stretch our hearts to see everyone as brother or sister, regardless of race, colour, or religion. We struggle to stop nursing the silent secret that our own lives and the lives of our loved ones are more precious than those of others.

• We struggle to make a preferential option for the poor, to bring the poor to our tables, to abandon our propensity to prefer the attractive and the influential.

• We struggle to sacrifice ourselves to the point of losing everything for the sake of others, to actually lay down our lives for our friends – and indeed for our enemies. We struggle to be willing to die for people who oppose us and are trying to crucify us.

• We struggle to love with purity of heart, to not subtly seek ourselves within our relationships. We struggle to live chastely, to fully respect and not violate someone else.

• We struggle to walk in patience, giving others the full space they need to relate to us according to their own inner dictates. We struggle to sweat blood in order to be faithful. We struggle to wait in proper patience, in God's good time, for God's judgment on right and wrong.

• We struggle to resist our natural urge to judge others, to not impute motives. We

struggle to leave judgment to God.

• Finally, not least, we struggle to love and forgive our own selves, knowing that no mistake we make stands between us and God. We struggle to trust that God's love is enough and that we are forever held inside God's infinite mercy.

Yes, love is a struggle.

After his wife Raissa died, Jacques Maritain edited a book of her journals. In the preface to that book, he describes her struggle with the illness that eventually killed her. Severely debilitated and unable to speak, she struggled mightily in her last days. Her suffering both tested and matured Maritain's own faith. Mightily sobered by seeing his wife's sufferings, he wrote: "Only two kinds of people think that love is easy: saints, who through long years of self-sacrifice have made a habit of virtue, and naïve persons who don't know what they're talking about."

He's right. Only saints and those who are naïve think love is easy.

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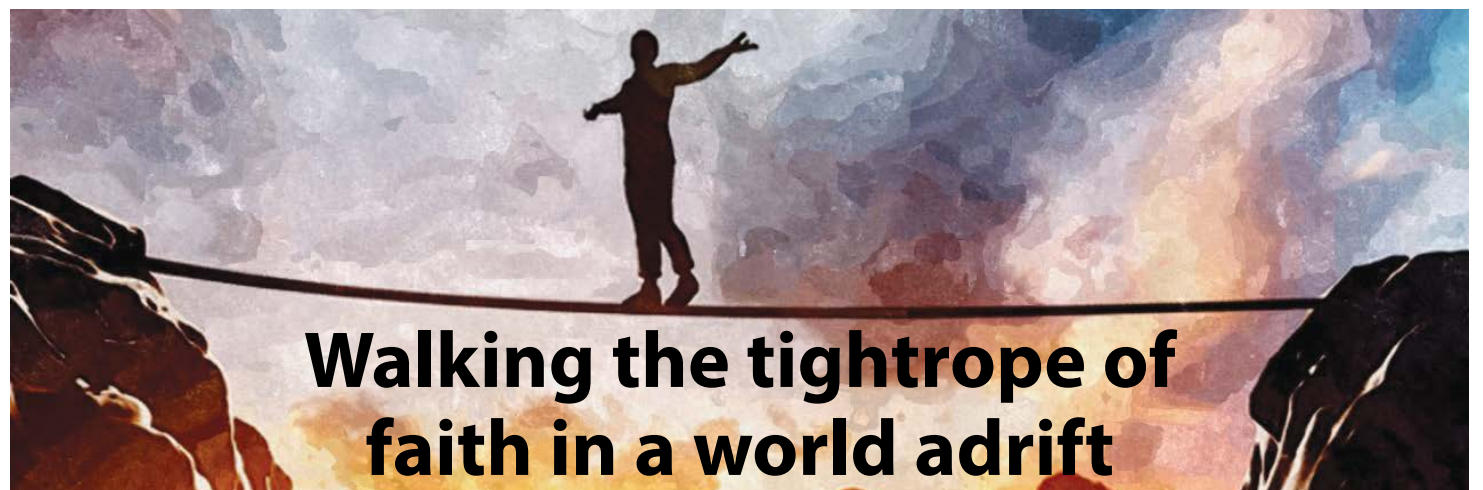
In the quiet moments of prayer, when the noise of the world fades and the heart turns inward, many of us confront the same haunting question: Is this worth it? The question lingers in the ache of lost friendships, the sting of mockery, and the weight of loneliness that settles like a shadow.

To be a young Catholic today is to feel suspended between two worlds, neither of which seems to fully understand you. You are "too much" for a culture that dismisses sacrifice as backwardness, yet "not enough" for those who wear faith like a badge of superiority rather than a mantle of love. This is the tightrope we walk—a path that feels precarious, isolating, but also mysteriously sacred. For those of us clinging to the Church's teachings on chastity, modesty, the sanctity of life, or the Real Presence, the world does not merely disagree with us; it often recoils.

To embrace biblical femininity in an age that conflates liberation with rejection of tradition is to invite labels like "brainwashed" or "submissive." To wear a veil at Mass, a silent act of reverence, becomes a spectacle in a world uncomfortable with visible piety. To speak of saving sex for marriage is met with incredulity, as if we have sworn off oxygen. The underlying message is clear: Your values are a threat.

Yet the greater wound often comes from within. We watch as friends and family drift from the faith, their once-vibrant belief diluted by the currents of relativism. We encounter fellow Catholics who treat tradition like a buffet, cherry-picking teachings that suit their politics or lifestyle. Online forums dissect our every stance: Why do you veil? Is not that oppressive? Why take issue with cohabitation? Do you not know mercy? The subtext is a quiet accusation: You are making this harder for the rest of us. And so the tightrope narrows. We are torn between grieving those who leave and resisting the urge to shout, "Come back — this is where life is!"

Loneliness compounds these struggles. It is in the empty chair at Sunday Mass



## Walking the tightrope of faith in a world adrift

where a friend once sat. It is in the family gathering where your convictions are met with eye rolls. It is in the ache of scrolling through social media, bombarded by posts celebrating choices that unravel the very fabric of human dignity. The isolation is not just emotional; it is existential. To hold fast to the truth in a world that worships autonomy is to become a living sign of contradiction. And contradictions make people uneasy.

But here, in the stillness, God whispers a reminder: This is not your home. The saints knew this. They walked the same tightrope, their lives a testament to the cost of discipleship. St Maria Goretti, a girl of twelve, chose death over sin. St Thomas More, a statesman, lost his head rather than betray his conscience. Maximilian Kolbe stepped forward to die in place of a stranger. They, too, were called extremists. They, too, were alone in their darkest hours. Yet their stories echo across centuries because they understood: The Cross is not a failure. It is the portal to resurrection.

This is the paradox of our faith. The tighter we cling to Christ, the more the world resists us — but the more deeply we encounter Him. In the sacraments, He nourishes us. In the Eucharist, He becomes our sustenance. In confession, He lifts the weight we cannot carry. These are not abstract rituals; they are lifelines. When friends vanish, He remains. When the culture ridicules, He whispers, I

endured this too.

And we are not as alone as we feel. For every post ridiculing tradition, there are quiet rebellions of love unfolding elsewhere: A college student praying a rosary outside an abortion clinic. A young couple attending Natural Family Planning classes, undeterred by sneers. A teenager is setting up an altar in her dorm room. These stories rarely go viral, but they are written into the fabric of the church. We are part of a hidden communion — saints in the making, scattered like embers in the dark, each of us glowing faintly but collectively holding back the night.

The world's rejection, then, is not proof of our irrelevance but of our purpose. Jesus warned, "If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world...the world hates you" (John 15:19). Our alienation is a badge of fidelity. Every time we choose the narrow road, we echo the martyrs. Every time we kneel to veil, we join the generations of women who embodied the Church as Bride. Every "no" to sin is a "yes" to the God who carved us from His own heart.

This does not mean the tension disappears. The tension remains. We will still cry when a loved one leaves the church. We will still wince at the jokes. We will still wonder in weak moments if compromise

might be easier. But ease is not the metric of a life well lived. The Cross was not easy. The Garden of Gethsemane was not easy. What sustains us is not the absence of struggle but the presence of meaning.

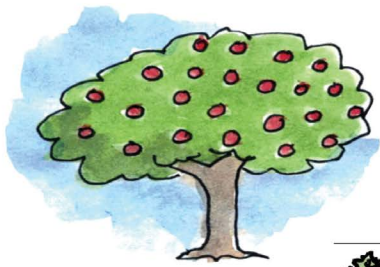
When loneliness grips you, remember: You are part of a story larger than yourself. You are surrounded by a "cloud of witnesses" (Hebrews 12:1) — saints, ancestors, and ordinary believers who refused to let the world dim their light. You are united to a global body, praying in languages you do not speak, in parishes you will never visit, yet bound by the same creed. Most of all, you are loved by a God who did not spare His own Son to claim you.

So keep going. Stay close to the Eucharist, where Heaven touches Earth. Cling to the rosary, your armour against despair. Forgive those who do not understand. Love those who leave. Trust that every small "yes" to Truth plants a seed — in others, in the culture, in your own soul. The road is hard, but it is not bleak. We walk it with the One who called Himself the Way. And at the end of this narrow path, a promise awaits: "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard... God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Heaven is your home. And every step you take — shaky, weary, but resolute — brings you closer. **Fr Dr John Singarayer SVD**



# Little Catholics' corner



In today's Gospel reading Jesus told a parable about trees. What did He say? Use the code to find out!



A B D E F G I N O R S T U

Answer: No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit.

Dear children,

Do you like fruits? What is your favourite fruit? Fruits are very nutritious, rich in vitamins, minerals, fibre and antioxidants.

Jesus had a lot to say about fruit. He told His followers that they were to bear fruit.

What do you think Jesus meant when He told His followers to bear fruit for Him?

When Jesus says that good people produce good fruit, He doesn't mean the kind of fruit that we eat.

He means that if we are following Him, we will want to do the things that make God happy.

We will do good things, we will help people, we will share what we have with others, and we will treat other people with respect.

Ash Wednesday

Children, this Wednesday, March 5, is the first day of Lent, Ash Wednesday. Lent is a special time when we prepare ourselves for Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

If you go to Mass on Ash Wednesday, the priest will make a little cross on your forehead with ashes.

The ashes remind us that people were made from the dust of the ground and that someday we will die and go back into the ground.

This helps us realise that God put us here and that we need Him all the time.

If we remember how much we need God then we will think of Him more and love Him more.

What is something you can do this Lent to remind yourself every day that you need God?

Love  
Aunty Eliz

## Psalm 92 Unscramble

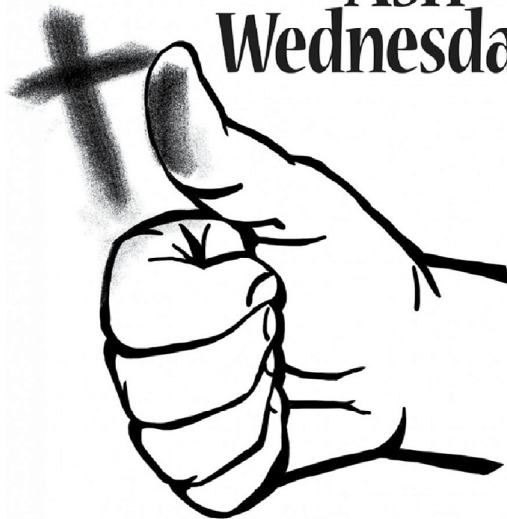
Unscramble the missing words •

It is good to give \_\_\_\_\_ (KNSHTA)  
to the Lord,  
to sing praises to thy \_\_\_\_\_ (MNAE),  
O Most High;  
to declare thy steadfast \_\_\_\_\_ (OVLE)  
in the morning,  
and thy faithfulness  
by \_\_\_\_\_. (HGNTI)  
The righteous flourish  
like the \_\_\_\_\_ (LMAP) tree,  
and \_\_\_\_\_ (ORGW)  
like a cedar in Lebanon.  
They are planted  
in the \_\_\_\_\_ (UOESH) of the Lord,  
they flourish in the courts  
of our \_\_\_\_\_ (DGO).  
They still bring forth \_\_\_\_\_ (UFIRT)  
in old age,  
they are ever full of sap  
and \_\_\_\_\_, (ERGNE)  
to show that the Lord is upright,  
he is my \_\_\_\_\_, (KCRO)  
and there is no  
unrighteousness in him.

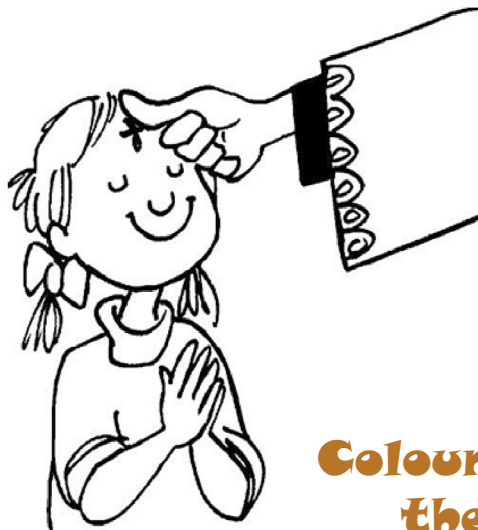


Answers: thanks, name, love, night, palm, grow, house, God, fruit, green, rock

### Ash Wednesday



Remember  
that you  
are dust  
and  
to dust  
you shall  
return.



Colour  
the  
picture





# Exciting preparations underway for MCYD



## MCYD

**KOTA KINABALU:** The 2025 Malaysian Catholic Youth Day (MCYD), co-hosted by the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart and several neighbouring parishes, is set to welcome approximately 1,500 delegates from nine arch/dioceses. The event will take place from March 31 to April 6 and serves as part of the preparations for the 2026 Malaysia Pastoral Convention, which will be held at MAJODI Centre in Johor Bahru.

Sr Terry Loukang FSIC shared that the preparations for MCYD are progressing smoothly, with the local organising team (LOT) working in close collaboration with the main organising team (MOT) to ensure that delegates experience God's love throughout the event.

Regarding the programme details, Sr Terry explained, "The first three days of the MCYD will take place across five parish centres, where delegates will be grouped according to their age. Participants will also stay with host families during the event." The five parish centres include the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, Church of the Holy Nativity (Terawi), Church of Stella Maris (TG Aru), Church of Mary of the Immaculate, and Church of St Michael (Penampang).

Sr Terry continued, "The opening Mass will be celebrated on the first day of MCYD, followed by a reception organised by the local teams in each of the five parishes."



A significant feature of the event will be the "Conversation in the Spirit," centred around the four key themes of the 2026 Malaysia Pastoral Convention: Church, Family, Society, and Ecology. This session aims to provide an opportunity to listen to and understand the contemporary issues

affecting young people in Malaysia.

The second phase of MCYD will include the Youth Festival, where all delegates will gather at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart. Sr Terry also mentioned that the event will feature mini sports, spiritual walks with the monks, and a vocation information counter.

The Malaysian Catholic Youth Day (MCYD) is the first national assembly of young Malaysian Catholics, conceived to listen to the voice of young people and to discover their needs as the NOW of God. This gathering is also designed to foster spiritual growth, dialogue, and community among young Catholics.

Through the assembly, our young people seek to walk in communion with the larger Malaysian Catholic Church in its journey towards the Malaysia Pastoral Convention (MPC) 2026.

### Primary Objectives:

- To invite young people to respond to the results of the synodal process in the Malaysian Church.
- To identify and update the needs and realities of young people in both urban and rural environments, particularly to young people on the fringes of the church.

### Secondary Objectives:

- To re-equip our youth ministers/leaders with the holistic skills necessary to accompany our young people in response to their needs in today's environment and realities.
- To promote effective and enduring national cooperation between the youth ministers of MCYMC as a Malaysian Team.

## Spiritual Preparation

**KOTA KINABALU:** The Local Organising Team (LOT) MCYD-25 gathered at the Catholic Archdiocese Centre for a day of spiritual renewal, preparing themselves for the journey ahead with strength — body, mind, and soul, on February 14.

Fr Terans Thadeus led the session with an inspiring message, reminding everyone that their service in MCYD is more than just an obligation — it's a calling toward holiness. But as he wisely pointed out, the path to holiness isn't always easy. It demands perseverance, an open heart, and the courage to face challenges. He encouraged each member of the LOT to approach every obstacle with unwavering faith, trusting that God would guide them.

Reflecting on the Gospel of Mark 7:31-37, Fr Terans shared the story of Jesus healing a deaf and mute man, urging everyone to open their hearts, just as the man did, so that God's transformative power could work within them. Only then, he explained, can our service truly bear fruit in love and faithfulness to God.



(Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu facebook)



# CDM servers inspired by THE LIFE OF SYBIL KATHIGASU

SHAH ALAM: The altar servers of the Church of the Divine Mercy embarked on a spiritually enriching and fun-filled mission trip to the Church of St Michael (SMC) in Ipoh on February 12, together with their parish priest Fr George Harrison. This journey from Shah Alam (Archdiocese KL) to Ipoh (Diocese of Penang) provided a unique opportunity to experience the universality of the Catholic Church while appreciating the distinct character of the northern region.

One of the most profound aspects of this mission trip was learning about the inspiring story of Sybil Medan Kathigasus (1899-1948), a Malayan Eurasian nurse whose cause for canonisation is being considered, potentially making her the first Malaysian saint. Sybil's story is one of extraordinary courage and unwavering faith.

Our journey began at the Church of St Joseph (SJC) in Batu Gajah, where Deacon Richard Wilson shared the first part of Sybil's remarkable story. Hearing of her suffering and torture during the Japanese occupation (1941-1945) brought us to tears. Upon her release from prison, her grave wounds and bleeding made Sybil unable to walk. Yet, with unwavering determination, she crawled to the altar at St Joseph's and prayed before she was sent for medical treatment in UK. The traces of her blood on the church floor became a powerful symbol of her profound faith, as Deacon Richard so movingly described. It was clear that her deep love for God fuelled her ability to reach out to so many in need. As Deacon Richard concluded his talk, we were warmly welcomed by the SJC altar servers with a specially prepared breakfast.

Our next stop was the clinic in Papan where Sybil and her husband, Dr Abdon Clement Kathigasus, courageously treated those persecuted by the Japanese, primarily members of the Chinese community who were falsely accused of being communists. The dilapidated remains of the clinic whispered stories of its past as a centre of healing and compassion. Despite the presence of a secret passage, to shield from the Japanese, their primary focus was on serving their patients with love and care, truly embodying the Christian ideal: "By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one



CDM Parish Priest Fr George and the CDM Altar Servers at the Clinic in Papan.

Session with Fr Patrick Massang CSsR at the Church of Our Mother of Perpetual Help, Ipoh.

another" (John 13:35). Sybil's selfless service drew immense admiration and respect, her works of mercy touching countless lives in Ipoh.

From Papan, we visited the unfinished Kellie's Castle, a fascinating historical landmark of Ipoh. Our pilgrimage then continued to the Church of St Michael (SMC) where Fr Aloysius Tan and the SMC altar servers welcomed us. Fr Aloysius seamlessly continued Sybil's story. It was a continuation, as if divinely orchestrated. Although she passed away in UK during her treatment, her body was brought back to Ipoh and interred at the cemetery at SMC.

Despite the midday heat, our altar servers patiently visited her tombstone to offer prayers and light candles. As Fr Aloysius later explained, Sybil is the only Malayan woman ever to be awarded the George Medal for bravery, a testament to her remarkable service during the Japanese occupation. Fr Aloysius encouraged us to pray for miracles, emphasising the importance of documenting such events for the Vatican's consideration in the canonisation process. He shared that many people visit daily to pray for her intercession. Eventually, Sybil was arrested and imprisoned, enduring immense torture. Yet, her faith remained unshaken. God gave her the strength and hope to persevere, surrendering her life as an instrument for Him. As the Bishop of Penang, Cardinal Sebastian Francis has opened her cause for canonisation, and we join in praying for her intercession.

After a delightful lunch at SMC, where we received keychains as a memento, the servers

enjoyed some games before we set off for our final destination: The Church of Our Mother of Perpetual Help (OMPH). We were warmly welcomed by Fr Patrick Masang, CSsR, and the OMPH altar servers. Fr Patrick's personal story, beginning with his humble journey as an altar server at the age of nine, where he first served at the Church of the Assumption, Petaling Jaya, was truly inspiring. He generously shared his vocation journey and explained his decision to join the Redemptorist order. "Sitting down with Fr Patrick and listening to his vocation story was very interesting and inspiring for me," said Jeremiah, a 13-year-old CDM altar server.

Later, Fr George Harrison and Fr Patrick celebrated Mass for the altar servers. Before Mass, Fr Patrick vividly described the beautiful iconography of the image of Our Mother of Perpetual Help. His description of Mother Mary's tender embrace of the infant Jesus, who was frightened by the premonition of his future suffering, highlighted the depth of her love and compassion. The artist's depiction beautifully illustrates Mary's maternal care and her role as our intercessor.

"This year's mission trip was a fun and interesting experience," said Olivia, a 13-year-old CDM altar server. "It was great to spend time with other servers from other churches, and seeing a girl as the head server at OMPH was inspiring. Visiting Kellie's Castle and learning about Sybil Kathigasus's history was also very interesting."

"My overall experience was great," shared Kevin, the head of CDM altar servers. "This was the first trip for our servers since MCO, so it was a new experience for them, with all the sightseeing, visiting the churches, and bonding. All the servers grew closer after spending the whole day together. I felt happy seeing them enjoy themselves and taking a break to have some fun and new experiences."

This pilgrimage to Ipoh was a journey of faith, history, and inspiration, leaving an indelible mark on all who participated. I feel so blessed to have been part of this journey, learning so much in just one day. This mission trip to Ipoh is significant for all of us, allowing us to learn the selfless love of Sybil Kathigasus and how we can all aspire to be saints someday. **Veronica Josephine Judeith Bateman**

## A transformative experience: My journey at TOB camp

Last year, I had the privilege of attending the Theology of the Body (TOB) camp as part of my preparation for Confirmation this year. This camp was not just an event; it was a transformative journey that strengthened my faith and deepened my understanding of God's immense love for me.



Throughout the camp, we delved into a variety of meaningful topics, including FTFF, finding our vocation, and understanding love as something we are created by and for. These sessions were eye-opening and truly inspired me to reflect on my life so far and my relationship with God.

FTFF, in particular, left a profound impression on me. It stands for Free, Total, Faithful, and Fruitful, these are core aspects that God shows us how we should love:

- Free: The greatest gift from God, freedom allows us to choose Him and others out of pure love, not obligation.
- Total: To dedicate our whole self — body, love, and spirit — to the relationships we cultivate, especially with God and our loved ones.
- Faithful: To remain loyal and devoted, fostering trust and security in our relationships.
- Fruitful: To spread joy and goodness by embodying God's love and light. Spreading His word as well as compassion to others.

We also explored challenging topics like the Church's views on LGBTQ and abortion. These discussions were conducted in a respectful, judgment-free environment, which I deeply appreciated as a safe space to explore and grow in understanding.

TOB camp was also a time for strengthening friendships and connections. I had the opportunity to grow closer to my catechism class companions. During the camp, we played games, ate, discussed topics and laughed together. Over the years, I've been shy about forming deeper bonds, but this camp helped me forge friendships that I believe will last a lifetime.

I'm incredibly grateful to my catechists and the camp facilitators who worked tirelessly to plan and prepare this wonderful experience for us. Their dedication and effort ensured the camp was not only educational but also deeply enriching and memorable. I could really see the effort and time they took to plan the sessions, yummy meals as well as entertaining games. They created a welcoming but productive atmosphere that allowed me to learn so much in just a short span of two days!

Attending the TOB camp has brought me closer to God and provided me with invaluable insights about my faith, love, and life. I feel so blessed to have been a part of this journey and look forward to carrying these lessons into the future as I continue preparing for Confirmation. I'll not only carry these invaluable memories till Confirmation, but for the rest of my journey in understanding and loving God. **Sarah Jasmine Tan**



Ice breaking activity with the altar servers from the Church of St Michael.



# Huge turnout for slain priest



MANDALAY: Thousands of Burmese bid their final farewell to Fr Donald Martin Ye Naing Win, the Catholic priest brutally murdered on February 14 in his parish of Our Lady of Lourdes in the Archdiocese of Mandalay.

More than 5,000 mourners gathered in the village of Pyin Oo Lwin, defying the dangers and prevailing violence, to honour the late priest.

Priests, religious figures, and the faithful assembled at the Catholic Church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, where Archbishop Marco Tin Win presided over the funeral Mass, offering condolences and prayers for the slain priest's family.

The moving ceremony included the reading of messages from the Apostolic Nunciature in Yangon and the Bishops' Conference of Myanmar, which expressed their deep solidarity with the grieving community.

According to sources, the overwhelming turnout at the funeral reflected the high regard in which Fr Donald was held among the local people.

During his homily, Archbishop Tin Win condemned the cycle of violence gripping the nation, saying, "Violence only brings death and destruction; it is always a defeat."

He called upon "all armed groups and actors involved in the conflict to lay down their weapons and take a path of peace and reconciliation."

The Archbishop also entrusted the late priest, his family, and the assembled congregation to the intercession of the Virgin Mary. "May Our Lady accompany him to paradise and protect all under her mantle, giving comfort and hope," he said.

Fr Donald, who was the first parish priest of Our Lady of Lourdes Church, was known for his dedication to the community, particularly in organizing educational initiatives for children and young people.

Due to the ongoing civil war, many schools in the region remain closed, leaving religious leaders and catechists to provide informal education.

Fr Donald had been at the forefront of these efforts, ensuring that children received some level of continuity in their schooling despite the instability.

His murder has raised pressing questions among the local community, demanding accountability for the senseless act of violence.

The area where Fr Donald served is controlled by the People's Defence Force (PDF), an armed group opposing Myanmar's military junta.

The PDF leadership has been urged to investigate the attack. According to *Fides*, the group has detained ten men from the village of Kan Gyi Taw, where Fr Donald was killed.

These individuals have reportedly been transferred to a court established by the PDF in areas outside government control, as the group seeks to identify and punish those responsible for the priest's murder.

Fr Donald's death is the latest tragedy in Myanmar's ongoing conflict, which has claimed countless lives and displaced millions. **ucanews.com**

MEMORIAM

10th Anniversary

**Dato Senara Bakti Robson Miranda**  
Departed: 3rd May 2015  
*"The very nature of grief has its own rhythm"*  
*"For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but have eternal life."* – John 3:16  
Dearly and sadly missed by: Wife Toh Puan Edith, Sons, Daughter and Grandchildren.

1st Anniversary

**Ann R. Miranda**  
Departed: 2nd March 2024  
*"I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death."* – John 8:51  
Dearly and sadly missed by: Mother Toh Puan Edith, Brothers, Sister, Nieces and Nephews.

14th Anniversary  
In Loving Memory of

**Mr Jagarow Rathinam s/o Anthony Rathinam**  
Departed: 06-03-2011  
To live is to love with all our heart. The greatest thing in all his life was serving you, Heavenly Father. Please grant him eternal Rest and Blessings.  
Deeply missed and remembered by Family & Loved ones.

In Loving Memory of

**MARY CLARA PEREIRA**  
Called to the Lord: 1 March 2016  
*We hold you close within our hearts and there you will remain until we meet again in the Lord.*  
Miss and love you dearly  
Sampson, Clifton & Ewan, Sharon & Ben.

In Ever Loving Memory of  
Our Dear Amma

**A. Agnes Rajaratnam**  
08-08-1929 ~ 17-03-2009  
*You left me beautiful memories, Your love is still my guide, And though I cannot see you I feel you by my side...*  
Fondly remembered by  
**Children / Spouse**  
Sylvester / Mary @ Queenie  
Isabel/Andrew  
Elias/Roseline  
Jude/Arasu  
**Grandchildren**  
Priscilla, Naomi, Aaron, Arnold & Trice, In-Laws & loved ones.

8th Anniversary  
In Precious Memory of Our Beloved

**SYLVESTER RAJARATNAM**  
26/10/1948 ~ 03/03/2017  
*Our Darling Athan & Anyah It has been eight years And we miss you so much. You were the most important Part of our life. And we treasure the memories Of everything we shared together.*  
Deeply loved and forever cherished by:  
Wife: Fatimah Mary @ Queenie Arokiasamy  
Children: Priscilla Ann Raj & Aaron Jeevan Raj, In-Laws, Grandchildren & Loved Ones.

LET'S REMEMBER MOTHER AND SON  
MEMORIAL

40<sup>th</sup>  
Day Year

24.01.2025

08.03.1985

*Philomena Savarimuthu*  
*Soosai Innazi*

Memorial Mass will be offered at  
Church of The Holy Family, Kajang 08 Mac 2025 at 6pm  
Followed by Dinner at the Church's Hall (Annexe)  
Please do treat this as the family's personal invitation

8th Anniversary  
In Loving Memory of

**F A Moses**  
15th June 1928 – 3rd March 2017  
*Eight years have passed, but not a day, That we don't miss you in some way. Your love still guides, Your light still stays, In cherished memories, always.*  
Deeply missed by family and loved ones.

*In loving memory of*  
**Wialamary Theresa Ratnam**  
(Sister of the Late Rev. Fr. Mari Arokiam)  
**1st Year with the Lord**  
Please join us in prayer for the peaceful repose of the soul of our beloved as we mark the first anniversary of her passing. Let us come together to honor the memory of a cherished wife, mother, mother-in-law, and grandmother  
**8 MARCH, 2025 @ 6.00PM MASS**  
**Church of the Divine Mercy Shah Alam**  
26 Jalan Pemaju U1/15 Seksyen U1 40150 Shah Alam  
followed by fellowship at the CDM cafeteria  
Kindly RSVP by 5th March 2025  
012-6343197 - Suren / 017-3505894 - Rajes @ Jesslynn / 012-6873749 - Rave

1st Anniversary  
In Loving Memory of

**Hilda Merline Gomez**

Psalm 23:6  
*"I dwell in the house of the Lord forever."*

**Arrived from the Lord: May 29<sup>th</sup>, 1950**  
**Returned to the Lord: February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2024**  
*You taught us grace in ink and word, Each stroke precise, each lesson heard. With gentle strength, you led the way, The heart that held our home each day.*  
*At Christmas, warmth and love shone bright, Fruitcake, cookies, gifts at night. Mutton stew upon the stove, A taste of home, a mother's love.*  
*And when the road grew steep and long, You bore the cross, steadfast and strong. Two days before, you asked for shoes – To walk with Him in light infused.*  
*"We'll be okay," we breathed, your cue to rest, The weight you carried laid to peace, now blessed. Your eyes, soft-closing, saw our souls grown whole, Yet held us forever, small in your soul.*  
*Mummy, you made our house a home, And home, in us, will always be you.*  
Dearly missed by Kenneth, Pauline, Felicia, Samantha and loved ones.



# Interfaith course in UAE offers model for religious coexistence

ABU DHABI: In a groundbreaking initiative aimed at fostering interreligious understanding, Catholic delegates from Italy and the Arabian Peninsula gathered in Abu Dhabi for a week-long programme on religious coexistence. The course, titled *Training and Exchanges in the Context of the Human Fraternity Document and its Receptions*, sought to provide firsthand experience of how different faiths can peacefully coexist in the United Arab Emirates.

"This was not just a theoretical exercise," said Capuchin Fr Stefano Luca, the course's creator and Director of the Interfaith and Ecumenical Dialogue Office of the Apostolic Vicariate of Southern Arabia. "Through training sessions and site visits, we wanted participants to witness the reality of interfaith harmony and learn best practices for dialogue."

The February 8-12 programme took place at the Church of St Francis in the Abraham Family House, a multi-faith complex inspired by the Human Fraternity Document signed by Pope Francis and Grand Imam Ahmed Al-Tayeb in February 2019, under the auspices of the United Arab Emirates. It brought together 15 regional delegates from 11 ecclesiastical regions of the Italian Bishops' Conference and five representatives from the Apostolic Vicariate of Southern Arabia, including the UAE, Oman, and Yemen. The vicariate, with its 100 priests of various religious institutes, 80 nuns, and hundreds of trained volunteer catechists, serves the more than two million Catholics in the Arabian Peninsula, primarily foreign workers from diverse nations and cultures.

Each day combined academic discussions with immersive experiences. Delegates attended presentations by theologians and experts before visiting key religious sites, engaging with leaders from Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, and Sikh communities.

"The special thing about this experience," said Fr Stefano, "was that in every religious site we visited, we met faith leaders, held interfaith dialogue sessions, and gained direct insight into the UAE's model of peaceful coexistence."

The itinerary included the four houses of worship in the Abraham Family House — a Catholic church, a mosque, a synagogue, and the interfaith workshop forum. Delegates also visited Sikh and Hindu temples, Greek Orthodox, Coptic, and Anglican churches, and the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, one of the largest

est in the world.

A highlight was a Sunday visit to the St Joseph Catholic Church, where delegates participated in Masses attended by thousands of faithful, and observed catechism classes.

"They were overwhelmed by the devotion, enthusiasm, and faith they witnessed," Fr Stefano explained. "Seeing over 25,000 hosts distributed at Masses each weekend in a migrant community of more than 100 nationalities was an eye-opening experience."

The programme also provided an opportunity to discuss the unique challenges of the Catholic Church in the Gulf, where all clergy and faithful are migrants.

"It was valuable to exchange experiences with those responsible for interreligious dialogue in Italy," said Italian Bishop Paolo Martinelli, Apostolic Vicar of Southern Arabia, who led several discussions. "At the same time, we shared what we have learned in this region, where peaceful coexistence is a daily reality."

One key session featured Armenian Orthodox Archbishop Mesrob Sarkissian, who outlined the ecumenical movement's progress in the region. The group explored how migration has shaped religious communities, the historical presence of Christianity in the Gulf, and the role of dialogue in maintaining harmony.

The success of the course has motivated its organisers to expand the initiative. The next assembly of the Italian Bishops' Conference will focus on ecumenism and interreligious dialogue, providing an opportunity to share insights from this experience.

"It will certainly be important to present this experience to the Italian bishops," said Bishop Paolo Martinelli. "We want to show them that a different perspective on being Church, engaging in dialogue, and understanding its significance for Italian society is possible."

Looking ahead, Bishop Martinelli hopes that the initiative will extend beyond Italy. "In the future, we would love to welcome representatives from other Episcopal Conferences," he said. Sharing experiences and, above all, strengthening interreligious and ecumenical dialogue is essential. Religious experience has a crucial role in promoting the common good in the world. He added, "This experience is not just about theory — it's about seeing what is possible when faiths genuinely engage with each other."

With religious tensions rising in many parts

of the world, the UAE's interfaith model offers a powerful counterexample — one that, according to Fr Stefano, demonstrates "that coexistence is not just an aspiration, but a lived reality."

Since its establishment, the United Arab Emirates has been trying to promote the concept of "tolerance" in all areas, inspired by the words of its founder, Zayed Al Nahyan. This is illustrated by its constant balance between an Arab and Muslim state, which is attached to traditions, and a certain intolerant conservatism that contrasts with the declared desire to welcome all cultures of the world for economic, financial, and tourist purposes.

This notion of tolerance has been part of the UAE's rhetoric since 2016 and manifested by a surprising openness to different customs while expressing a genuine attachment to the tribal traditions of the seven emirates that constitute the state. A decisive step in terms of action was taken in 2019 when Mohammed bin Zayed declared it the "Year of Tolerance." He wanted to ensure that the UAE exported the concept of religious tolerance regionally. Playing on the spirit of emulation and competition between the Gulf monarchies, he aimed to make his country a source of inspiration for its neighbours.

LCI (<https://international.la-croix.com/>)

# Kenyan bishops emphasise collective responsibility to transform nation




NAIROBI: Ahead of the 2025 Lenten season starting on March 5, Catholic Bishops in Kenya have called on Christians to work together and be agents of transformation in society. The theme for the 40-day journey is *The Kenya We Desire*, encouraging a focus on the collective good, justice, and compassion for all, regardless of background or status.

The bishops emphasised that the Christian call goes beyond spiritual reflection, urging practical action against corruption, inequality, and injustice. They also invited Catholics to reflect on five key areas: family unity, corruption, youth potential, education, and environmental care, with a focus on healing, unity, and actively seeking the nation's welfare. **Vatican News**



The participants during one of the sessions. (Interfaith & Ecumenical Dialogue Office IFEDO - AVOSA facebook)



## COLLEGE GENERAL'S

### 360<sup>th</sup> Anniversary



**CG 360: REMEMBERING WITH GRATITUDE, FIDELITY AND HOPE**

Greetings from College General  
Regional Major Seminary, Penang, Malaysia.

Inviting **ALL alumni of College General** to the  
**360th Anniversary celebration**  
on 29th Sept to 1st Oct 2025.

**Come participate in this auspicious event which marks the beginnings of our mission and journey.**

**Yours in Christ,**  
**Cardinal Sebastian Francis**  
**Bishop of Penang**  
**President of College General Regional Major Seminary**

Kindly scan the QR Code to register by Sun, 1st June 2025  
Email: [collegeneral360@gmail.com](mailto:collegeneral360@gmail.com) | Contact No: +60146613624